Style in the Novel:

Toward a Critical Poetics

Daniel Hartley

University of Leeds

Abstract This article outlines a systematic theory of style that aims to combine "social formalism" with narratology. Beginning with a reading of a little-known essay by Raymond Williams on the history of English novelistic prose, the article argues that Williams's insights into the social preconditions of modern style can be suggestively combined with Mikhail M. Bakhtin's theory of the inherent multiplicity of novelistic discourse and Richard Walsh's pragmatic theory of narrative "voice" to produce a core definition of *style*. *Style* is (1) a linguistic mode of social relation; (2) one of several subordinated, relatively autonomous linguistic operations or "substyles" (Walsh's instance, idiom, interpellation); or more properly, (3) the total mode of configuration of these substyles. The article then proceeds to embed this definition within a broader critical poetics. It argues that stylistic production in the novel is literally "in-formed" by several factors, for example, the "linguistic situation" (the state of language as a writer would have experienced it, including its inner tensions and social stratifications), "stylistic ideology" (the self-conscious stylistic projects that writers develop), and the linguistic proprieties of inherited novelistic genres, types, and forms (which are themselves mediations of sociality). These categories are exemplified through an analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

The history of the novel is inseparable from the rise of modern prose. If the true hero of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (2003 [1946]) is realism—a mode of representation of everyday life that is serious and tragic, that incorporates the dynamic and "problematic" nature of individuals and societies, and that is sensual and "creatural"—then its villain is the ancient separation of styles: the *Stiltrennung*. The *Stiltrennung* was a discursive regulation of what is sayable, by and to whom and how, immanent to rhetorical and poetic composition. Its distinction between high, middle, and low styles and the topics and speakers appropriate to each were broadly analogous to precapitalist social hierarchies: high style for the nobility, low style for the commoners. While the separation of styles was distinct from the separation of poetic genres, tragedy was always composed in the high style. By definition, then, the *Stiltrennung* was the enemy of a democratic, creatural realism capable of discerning the tragic seriousness of everyday life. *Mimesis* is the story of the gradual, faltering victory of this realism over the stylistic regulation of the *Stiltrennung* and of its uncertain future in the age of modernism and total war.

For Mikhail M. Bakhtin, too, novelistic discourse was inherently democratic. Unlike poetic discourse, which he saw as the artistic equivalent of the social forces of "verbal-ideological centralization and unification" (Bakhtin 1981: 272), the novel was the artistic organization of social "heteroglossia," a popular and conflictual cacophony of voices and sociolects. Bakhtin thus casts novelistic discourse as the populist hero fending off the stale homogenization and centralization of official (Stalinist) culture. Classical stylistics, however, was, according to Bakhtin, unable to account for this multiplicity of voices and styles. The unconscious propagandists of a hegemonic linguistic unity, scholars of stylistics only ever focused on one of several interrelated substyles (e.g., narratorial idiom at the expense of its internal relation to character dialogue), thereby systematically masking the single most significant feature of the novel. "Heterogeneous stylistic unities," writes Bakhtin (ibid.: 262), "upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it." The novel is thus a tenuous balance between heteroglossia and artistic organization, centrifugal and centripetal forces. The uniqueness of style in the novel is that it is inherently *relational*, the result of the artistically organized interrelation of substyles. Bakhtin developed this relational theory of style more fully in his well-known notion of double-voiced discourse.

Broadly speaking, then, the literary histories of Auerbach and Bakhtin are teleological, with a democratic multiplicity of styles gradually emerging from a hierarchized and monological stylization (though, of course, their accounts are never as simplistically linear as this generalization would suggest). Yet this productive mixture of literary critical analysis and political evaluation has until recently been alien to narratology. The latter originally was seen as a science of narrative with a universalizing intent. Its preference for structuralist and technicist objectivity led its practitioners to avoid overtly political pronouncements, all the while remaining bound to a strain of antihumanist thought that, in the context of the late 1960s, was nothing if not political (cf. Puckett 2016: 223–56). While Marxist critics, such as Fredric Jameson (1981) and Franco Moretti (1998), have occasionally drawn on classical narratology to articulate their theories of style and while certain narratologists, such as Susan Lanser (1992) and James Phelan (1996), have also periodically turned to social theories of the novel, no theory of style has yet been developed that unites "social formalism" with the conceptual rigor of narratology.[1] The present article suggests one way this might be done.

Beginning with a reading of a little-known essay by Raymond Williams on the history of English prose, the article argues that Williams's insights into the social preconditions of modern style can be suggestively combined with both Bakhtin's theory

of the inherent multiplicity of novelistic discourse and Richard Walsh's pragmatic theory of narrative "voice" to produce a narratological and relational definition of *style*. The article then embeds this definition within a broader critical poetics which attempts to go beyond previous social-formalist theories of style. Using the stylistic innovations of Virginia Woolf as an example, it argues that stylistic production in the novel is literally "in-formed" by several factors, including the "linguistic situation" (the state of language as a writer would have experienced it, with its inner tensions and social stratifications), "experience" (the dialectical process through which shifts in transindividual and authorial subjectivity are fused with the collective rhythms of social life), and "stylistic ideology" (the self-conscious stylistic projects that writers develop). The overriding aim of the article is to fuse the political insights of social formalism with the technical precision of narratology.

Williams's Theory of Prose

By 1969, over a decade before Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel" was first translated into English, Williams had reached a position which, while not identical to that of Bakhtin, has obvious elective affinities with the latter's fundamental insight concerning the inherent relationality and multiplicity of novelistic discourse. Williams first set out his theory of English prose in the introduction to his edited anthology, volume 2 of *The Pelican Book of English Prose: From 1780 to the Present Day* (1969). His basic argument was that "good prose and style are not things but relationships; that questions of method, subject and quality cannot be separated from the changing relations of men [*sic*] which are evident elsewhere in changing institutions and in a changing language" (ibid.: 55). He sees style as a linguistic mode of social relation immanent to the more general relations of a given social formation, and he illustrates this point in a detour through the political prose of the Age of Revolution. Williams (ibid.: 27) notes that in the writing of such figures as Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and William Cobbett, "the kind of experience being drawn on and the version of other men [*sic*] indicated by a particular way of addressing them are not only substantial but are crucial to the precise nature of a political argument." When Burke, for example, in one of his counterrevolutionary texts adopted the form of a letter addressed to "a very young gentleman at Paris," he "[assumed] what he could not prove: a representative quality, describing the English constitution *as if* to a foreigner, and thus enlisting behind him the feelings of a united patriotism. . . . Burke relied on a pretended unity of national feeling to which in fact he was trying to persuade his *English* readers" (ibid.: 28). Williams's immanentist understanding of style—here comprising tone and rhetorical construction— thus involves the sublation of the traditional separation of style and content. On this logic,

style is a constitutive element of an expanded, social substance in which style, content, and purpose form a dialectical unity.

Yet this is only the first sense in which style is relational. The second involves the interrelation of idioms and sociolects. Williams constructs an opposition between two main stylistic tendencies within modern political prose, which will become internalized in problematic ways in the discourse of the novel. I have named these tendencies (though he does not) "abstract universal style" and "particular style" (Hartley 2017: 80). The former is associated with the eighteenth-century philosophical essay, characterized by Williams (1969: 31) as the "climax of print": "a uniformity of tone and address; an impersonality, assuming no immediate relation between writer and reader, but only possession, in a social way, of this language; a durability, as in the object itself, beyond any temporary impulse or occasion." The "particular style," on the other hand, is primarily oral in nature and is associated with the immediacy of personal experience: "direct address to an ever-widening public, having the strengths of contact, of the sounds of actual voices and experience . . . but in danger, always, of declining to opportunism—the devices of flattery . . . —and to simplification" (ibid.: 29). Superficially, of course, the abstract universal style appears to be the linguistic embodiment of reason, moderation, and good sense, but Williams's point is that its social condition of possibility was the hegemony of the British ruling class within a profoundly unequal capitalist society. The particularistic tones of a radical like Cobbett may occasionally (and mistakenly) strike the velvet ear of the scholar as indecorous rants, yet they were coextensive with the drive for universal suffrage. What seems rationally to be the superior form of prose—the abstract universal style—"assumes the political forms of open and rational discourse which in fact it is trying to create" (ibid.).

Turning to the development of novelistic discourse, Williams (ibid.: 30) identifies four representational functions, each of which causes English prose to develop in different and often contradictory ways: description, "sustained analysis," narrative ("narrative continuity"), and speech ("spoken . . . rhythms and constructions"). There is a remarkable similarity between Williams's distinction of prosaic functions and Bakhtin's (1981: 262) list of "the basic types of compositional-stylistic unities into which the novelistic whole usually breaks down."[2] Yet it is the "elements of contradiction and tension" between sustained analysis and reported direct speech that especially interest Williams (1969: 30), for they constitute the novelistic internalization of the abstract universal and particular styles, respectively. Each of these substyles embodies "a community of language and sensibility" (ibid.); it is an affective-cognitive assemblage immanent to a specific set of social relationships. Drawing on a polemical passage in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Williams (ibid.: 35) notes that it is "not only the material life of 'good society,' but . . . its

associated tones of moderation and irony, which are a 'very expensive production.'" The style of sustained analysis is said to be based on a "small educated class" (ibid.) whose livelihood and modes of writing were ultimately premised upon the widespread exploitation and expropriation of the working class. In contrast, and in an argument that comes close to a reductive conflation of formal property and ideological intention, Williams (ibid.) holds that in realism reported direct speech attempted to express the "actual life of a hard-pressed, hard-driven, excluded majority." Thus the formal struggles that writers such as the Brontës, Eliot, or Elizabeth Gaskell faced when attempting to harmonize the abstract prose of sustained analysis with the more viscerally immediate speech of the working class is interpreted as a stylistic internalization of the experience of a class-divided society. It was also an index of writers' own class positions and of their variable degrees of alienation from the everyday life they were attempting to represent.

Williams subsequently distinguishes between so-called settled and unsettled prose. The epitome of the latter for Williams (ibid.: 44) is in the novels of Thomas Hardy, who experienced the distinction between the educated style of sustained analysis and the customary style of direct speech as a struggle internal to his very being:

> Hardy as a writer was mainly concerned with the interaction between the two conditions—the educated and the customary: not just as the characteristics of social groups, but as ways of seeing and feeling, within a single mind. And then neither established language would serve, to express this tension and disturbance. . . . An educated style, as it had developed in a particular and exclusive group, was dumb in intensity and limited in humanity. A customary style, while carrying the voice of feeling, was still thwarted by ignorance and complacent in repetition and habit. Hardy veered between them, and the idiosyncrasy of his writing is related to this.

Because of his ambiguous social position and biographical trajectory, Hardy was versed in both "communities of language and sensibility." Though he drew on the abstract style of sustained analysis for observational and analytic exactitude, he could not sympathize with its ways of seeing and feeling. Yet the customary speech of the particular style, with which he felt quite literally at home, was incapable of the conceptual and argumentative rigor and scope that was necessary to his advanced novelistic art. On Williams's reading, then, which is not my own (cf. Hartley 2016), Hardy was forced to try to negotiate between the two, leading to the stylistic unevenness for which he became renowned.[3] Hardy's prose was deeply "unsettled," yet the bulk of Victorian prose was "remarkably settled and solid: an achieved, confident and still powerful manner" (Williams 1969: 47). Writers like Anthony Trollope, Thomas Macaulay, and Walter Bagehot shared

so much with the imperial and socially supercilious ways of seeing and feeling intrinsic to the educated style that their prose bears none of the scars of Hardy's. On the contrary, they came to be seen as exemplars of modern English style: "While the ways of seeing and dealing last, that is English, and the schoolboys can be set to learn it: the attitudes and the style in a single operation" (ibid.: 48). Settled prose was thus an extension of the habitus of the ruling class. By learning to imitate it, schoolboys learned to incorporate themselves into the sensorium of dominance.

Williams demonstrates convincingly that style is ultimately a linguistic mode of social relation. Style names the verbal relation of writer to (expected or desired) reader. This relation is mediated by the social contradictions internal to a given language. Because language for Williams (1977: 29) (after Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels) is "practical consciousness," the raw linguistic materials on which writers go to work is not simply neutral but is haunted by the still-dormant intentions of the divided classes who once spoke it. Ultimately, *style* in the singular denotes the (potentially agonizing) total mode of configuration of socially inflected substyles. Indeed, Williams shows that in the history of the novel the difficult interrelation of substyles—especially that of sustained analysis and everyday speech—constitutes a literary internalization and formalization of the class relations of capitalist society. What Williams fails to emphasize, however, is the transformative effect of the act of literary composition on linguistic raw materials (what I call the "linguistic situation"), not to mention what Meir Sternberg (1982: 112) has called the "Proteus Principle": "the many-to-many correspondences between linguistic form and representational function."

Where Williams emphasizes the social-formalist problem of relating narratorial idiom and analysis to everyday speech, Bakhtin tends to focus on double-voiced discourse. The latter is the third in a tripartite typology: (1) direct, unmediated discourse directed exclusively toward its referential object; (2) objectified discourse (discourse of a represented person); (3) discourse oriented toward someone else's discourse (double-voiced discourse), which can be "unidirectional," "varidirectional" or "active" (Bakhtin 1984: 199). In Bakhtin's terms, Williams was concerned with the interrelation of direct and objectified discourses, which involves the coming together of clearly distinguishable sociolects. Bakhtin (ibid.: 182), however, was drawn to techniques such as parody—those dialogical phenomena that nonpragmatic linguistics cannot account for, since they concern intention and context, not purely linguistic characteristics:

> For what matters here is not the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects, and so forth, a presence established by purely linguistic criteria; what

matters is the *dialogic angle* at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work. Yet this dialogic angle is precisely what cannot be measured by purely linguistic criteria, because dialogic relationships, although belonging to the realm of the *word*, do not belong to the realm of its purely linguistic study. (Emphasis in original)

The question now, however, is how the combined discoveries of Williams and Bakhtin might be fused with a narratological vocabulary to enhance a social-formalist analysis of style in the history of the novel.

Rhetorical Narratology: The Bridge to a Critical Poetics

Arguably the work of the rhetorical narratologist Richard Walsh best lends itself to such an endeavor. Walsh's theory of voice allows for the internal relationality of style in the novel, and his pragmatic approach to narrative is well equipped to account for precisely those dialogic phenomena that Bakhtin (1984: 181–82) named the object of "metalinguistics." Walsh's emphasis on fictionality is also a useful antidote to a further shortcoming in Williams's theory of style. Williams has a tendency to conflate the biographical author with the fictional narrator, part of his larger failure to account for fictionality as such.[4] Walsh's (2010: 35) rhetorical approach, however, begins from the position that narrative is "a real-world communicative gesture—which, in the case of fictional narrative, is offered as fictive rather than informative." Thus not only does he set out from a rejection of the classical structuralist notion that narrative is a structure (for Walsh it is an *act*), but he places the problem of fictionality at the heart of his theorization of narrative voice.

He does so because he identifies a key contradiction in classical narratology. Gérard Genette famously distinguished between narrative "persons" (heterodiegetic, homodiegetic) and "levels" (extradiegetic, intradiegetic). Yet as Walsh (ibid.: 41) rightly observes, "within the communicative model, the concept of level disallows ontological discontinuity, because it is understood as a chain of literally transmitted narratives; but the concept of person depends upon ontological discontinuity, because otherwise there can only be homodiegetic narration." Because the communicative model treats narrative mediacy as literal, irrespective of whether or not the narrative is fictive, "each act of narration, and the *diégèse* to which it belongs, must be part of one continuous line of narrative transmission" (ibid.: 40).[5] Yet the personal distinction between hetero- and homodiegetic narrators presupposes a break in this continuity. Thus level disallows ontological discontinuity, while person depends on it. This contradiction arises, argues Walsh, because the communicative model cannot account for fictionality as such. By

granting priority to the structural *products* of fictive representation rather than seeing it as an *act*, classical narratology was unable to account for what Walsh (ibid.: 41) calls "the real-world regime of fictionality."

Walsh proposes to resolve this problem by turning to Plato's ancient distinction between diegesis (the poet speaking in his or her own voice) and mimesis (the poet imitating the voice of a character). Such a model allows for the fictionality of a given real-world act of communication and generates the "recursive possibility that a narration may represent another narration" (ibid.). It distinguishes, in other words, between the category of extradiegetic heterodiegetic (diegesis) and all the others (mimesis):

> A typology of narration based on Plato's distinction, then, recognizes two hierarchical modes of fictive representation, which may be a matter of information (diegesis) or imitation (mimesis). In fictive diegesis the information is offered and/or interpreted under the real-world communicative regime of fictionality, in which an awareness of its fictive orientation is integral to its rhetoric. In mimesis the imitation is specifically of an act of narration, so accordingly the informative function of diegesis is performed at one remove. (Ibid.)

What, then, is the relation between diegesis, mimesis, and style? Walsh brings this question to bear on the narratological problem of "voice." He produces a suggestive combination of the Platonic diegesis-mimesis distinction and Bakhtin's three types of discourse (direct, objectified, double voiced). He delineates three subdivisions of voice as instance, idiom, and interpellation. These subdivisions traverse the informative (diegesis) and imitative (mimesis) modes of fictional representation.

Voice as instance, like Bakhtin's direct discourse, is a representational act in which voice is not objectified[6] and carries out the task of narration. Voice as idiom, like Bakhtin's objectified discourse, refers to an object (rather than an act) of representation. It invites ethical evaluation of the character whose discourse it represents. For voice as idiom to be detectable it must constitute a substyle that is clearly distinguishable from the linguistic norm established by the dominant narratorial style or, in the case of a character-narrator, from the standard language of a given time and place (it being precisely the distance between the two that Williams argued became a social-formalist problem in the history of the English novel). In the case of a represented narrating instance, that is, a narrative told by a character, both senses of voice apply: "In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael's narration considered as idiom tells us about Ishmael; as instance it tells us about Ahab and the white whale" (ibid.: 50). In cases where the notional voice is not objectified, however, that is, in narrative diegesis, Walsh (ibid.) argues that "the discursive features commonly embraced by voice

are equally, and perhaps better understood as style: by *style* I mean discourse features understood in their relation to meaning . . . rather than as the expression of subjectivity." Style, for Walsh, is the idiom of diegesis, the noncharacter narrator. It is effectively the author's own voice under the regime of fictionality but in which "there is no inherent expression of authorial selfhood—no authentic self-presence" (ibid.). Finally, voice as interpellation—the third subdivision—has both a narrow and a general sense, each referring to the production of a subject position. In its narrow sense it refers to perceptual and cognitive focalization (the spatiotemporal, often character-aligned perspective through which the reader experiences the story and which is an implicit premise of the rhetorical focus of the representational act). In its general sense it is the overall ideological subject position implied by any discourse and to which the reader (either consciously or unconsciously) imaginatively aligns herself. Finally, techniques such as free indirect discourse are to be understood as "a synthetic product of distinct senses of voice" (ibid.: 52). They combine, to varying degrees, voice as instance, idiom, and interpellation.

Taken in its totality, Walsh's rhetorical and pragmatic theory of voice provides a rigorous narratological vocabulary that intersects with the social-formalist theories of novelistic discourse in Williams and Bakhtin. It also enables a more precise narratological understanding of style, a term I prefer to *voice* and which I understand in a more expansive sense than Walsh.[7] By synthesizing the approaches of Williams, Bakhtin, and Walsh, a succinct narratological definition of *style* can now be formulated.

Style, as it pertains to the novel, has three interconnected meanings.

1. It is a linguistic mode of social relation, mediated by historically variable regimes of fictionality, which operates on and through and is informed and internally limited by the available linguistic resources, the level of education of the writer, genre and form, the reigning literary conventions, and so on.

2. It is one of several subordinated, relatively autonomous linguistic operations featured in a given fictional narrative. These can be roughly divided into the three stylistic functions (which traverse the two principal modes of fictive representation, diegesis, and mimesis):

   a. style as instance

   b. style as idiom

   c. style as (narrow) interpellation (focalization).

3. It is the total mode of configuration of these subordinate linguistic operations, unidentifiable with any one of them. Depending on whether analysis is text-oriented or reader-oriented, this can be viewed as:

a. style as lexical configuration

b. style as (general) interpellation.

The increasing generality of stages 1 to 3 can be seen as a gradual dialectical totalization of the definition. One's sense of an author's style begins at the level of the individual sentences, but to understand style in the novel, which is by definition an artistically organized social heteroglossia, one must take into account the interaction of linguistic substyles and the functions of instance, idiom, and interpellation. This apparent transition from a monological conception of style to a multiaccentual one is then finally sublated in the sense of a given author's total configuration of substyles. In other words, when one speaks in commonsense parlance of an author's "style" in the singular (e.g., "Deborah Levy's style"), one is most likely referring to some prereflexive intuition of steps 1 and 3. A *theoretical* understanding of the singularity of an author's style, however, would see it as the totalization of individual sentences and substyles configured according to a discoverable *logic*. This logic is simultaneously social and formal.

Toward a Critical Poetics

At this point what began as a theory of style in the novel opens into a critical poetics. For in the classical Greek technical handbooks, the task of poetics was to describe or delineate that which was rational within the process and product of *poíēsis* (Greek for "making" or "producing").[8] In other words, its aim was to discover the informing *logic* of specific works with a view to describing and prescribing them. A contemporary poetics could be reconceived less as an attempt to proclaim new rules of composition than as a research program designed to discover the social-formalist logic of literary works. In the second half of this article I shall outline three concepts that could contribute to the critical repertoire of such a poetics.[9] I shall begin with a rhetorico-narratological analysis of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (2000 [1927]) then subsequently broaden the approach to embrace that of a critical poetics. Woolf's work is an intriguing object for such a poetics. On the one hand, it develops a self-conscious stylistic project whose execution and justification entailed a profound reckoning with a range of personal and social experiences, ideologies, and literary forms. On the other hand, the sheer existential intensity of Woolf's work points toward the potential outer limits of critical poetics as such.

To the Lighthouse was Woolf's fifth novel, the second of the "more and more poetic" tendency that characterizes the major novels of her middle period (Woolf diary entry, 21 June 21, 1924; cited in Goldman 2010: 49). Her style consists here for the most part of a carefully controlled syncopation between diegesis with internal focalization and free indirect discourse.[10] By never entirely surrendering herself to the idiom of her characters and by incorporating only the most limited range of formal English sociolects (an index of the novel's sociologically limited range of representation), Woolf is everywhere able to maintain control over the range and intensity of the style.[11] Thus although generally tending to narrate via internal focalization, she constantly switches registers between unidirectional (largely sympathetic) and varidirectional (mildly parodic) free indirect discourse and a more lyrical, figurative, impressionistic prose. The result is a beautiful, sometimes bewildering admixture of psychological nuance and extreme sensitivity to the colors and textures of the external world. Indeed, it has been claimed that Woolf's realism—contra the ideology of modernism that casts her as the arch antirealist—consists in an equal sensitivity to inner subjectivity and the external, empirical world: "Woolf's sense of the political necessity to be true to the objective material world, as well as to the imaginative vision, dictates her preference for free indirect speech over interior monologue and stream of consciousness. The narrative may 'look within' but it never stays within. None of her novels is without a third-person perspective; none are centred wholly in a subjective self" (Morris 2012: 42). Note the way Pam Morris's connection of style to politics already exceeds the parameters of narratology sensu stricto, entering the realm of what I call "stylistic ideology," to which I shall return below. While Morris's general argument is persuasive, however, the particulars are disputable. It is arguably not free indirect speech per se that ensures Woolf's dual allegiance to material world and psychological vision but the idiomatic license Woolf allows herself within internal focalization and her rhythmically and carefully crafted shifts between focalizers.

Yet the novel also contains passages where this attempt to navigate a course equidistant between subject and object becomes radicalized. This results, on the smallest scale, in such dramatically impersonal passages as those of which Auerbach (2003 [1946]: 531) famously asked, "Who is speaking in this paragraph?" Not logically attributable to the voice or perspective of a character or narrator, such passages irrupt into the narrative fabric like sudden epiphanies:

"It's too short," she said, "ever so much too short."

> Never did anybody look so sad. Bitter and black, half-way down, in the darkness, in the shaft which ran from the sunlight to the depths, perhaps a tear

formed; a tear fell; the waters swayed this way and that, received it, and were at rest. Never did anybody look so sad. (Woolf 2000 [1927]: 33)

Classical narratology struggles to account for such passages. By treating narrative as a literal communicative transmission, it is forced into a wild-goose chase for a covert narrator or an implied author (cf. Patron 2010). Where this proves hermeneutically untenable, it squares the circle with "unnatural narratology" (Alber and Heinze 2011). Yet Walsh's rhetorical approach allows precisely for such passages. In them the author speaks in her own voice or writes in her own style under the regime of fictionality. In other words, *To the Lighthouse* is a real-world communication undertaken within the framework of a historically specific regime of fictionality (a regime that Woolf was instrumental in questioning and, in doing so, newly constituting) according to particular poetical-rhetorical intentions. The pertinent critical question is not who is speaking? but how does it work and what does it mean?[12] Here we can turn to the expanded conceptual repertoire of a critical poetics. I hope it enables not only a more nuanced sense of the texture of Woolf's style but also a way of delineating her larger literary vision and its ideological constellation.

Following Paul Ricoeur (1984: 54), I understand literary production to consist of three stages: prefiguration (a "pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character"), configuration (the process of emplotment and literary composition), and refiguration (the process of reading). The concepts I shall outline align with stages one and two of Ricoeur's model:[13] "linguistic situation" and "experience" (prefiguration) and "stylistic ideology" (configuration). When a writer sits downs at her desk, perhaps in a room of her own, she inhabits and confronts a language consisting of a multiplicity of socially determinate elements. If she is to write, she must determine these social determinations. I call this phenomenon the "linguistic situation." It is a hypothetical reconstruction of the state of language as a writer or set of writers would have experienced it, including its inner tensions and social stratifications. Rather than an indifferent linguistic background, it denotes the objective linguistic field which informs and limits writing. It is a field of linguistic enticements and constraints. A given writer's linguistic situation consists of several subsituations. These include the geopolitical status of the language in which she writes (e.g., English as an imperial language), the national context (e.g., Standard English versus dialect), the geosocial trajectory of the author, situations of immigration, and histories of (post)colonialism.[14] These multiple scales structure and intensify a writer's linguistic situation. They generate the fundamental forces with, through, and against which she writes. Finally, these force fields are populated by a constantly shifting mass of words, tones, and phrases, each with its own ideological or semantic valence, marked by the residual intentions of those who

once spoke them. Together with the subsituations, these constitute the totality of the linguistic situation.

What were the coordinates of Woolf's linguistic situation? At the most general, geopolitical level, language was coming to predominate over the image as an instrument of class rule. Literacy rates were rising rapidly, newspapers were growing, radio spread the word of rulers across the vast expanses of the nation and the empire. In such a situation, language was intimately imbricated with power and the fabric of social mores. As a result, linguistic experimentation assumed the force of a taboo. It involved questioning the entire social and political fabric of the day. In this broad situation the "Bloomsbury fraction" (Williams 2010 [1980]) to which Woolf belonged insisted on a new critical frankness and candor, rejecting the rigid, repressive formalities of the Victorian era that were ingrained in the English language. As her husband Leonard Woolf remarked, "It was this feeling of greater intimacy and freedom, of the sweeping away of formalities and barriers, which I found so new and so exhilarating in 1911" (cited in ibid.: 153). Finally, there is Virginia Woolf's (2008 [1937]: 87) well-documented sense of the English language's insidious connection to patriarchal social structures and a rigid utilitarian philosophy, to which she counterposes her project of multiperspectival composition and the art of suggestion: "[Words] combine unconsciously together. . . . In reading we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of a river."

This river returns in the following element of literary prefiguration: "experience." A potentially vague term (cf. Jay 2005), the latter is understood here as an ongoing, prearticulate process through which transindividual subjectivity is constituted and formed. Williams (1977: 133–34) developed the notion of "structure of feeling" to describe precisely those "social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated*."[15] "Structure of feeling" conceptualizes the living present of a given society. It is that which can be *felt* in determinate ways but which has not yet been consciously thematized or articulated. Williams also connects structures of feeling to subtle generational changes in language, which would suggest that there exists an intrinsic relation between structures of feeling and the linguistic situation. Past structures of feeling can be reconstructed through the identification of certain recurring motifs, tensions, or topoi (a "structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions" [ibid.: 134]) whose very recurrence in a given historical period results from the *structural* constellation of the *feeling*. "Experience" can then be understood as the lived process through which constant micrological shifts in individual subjectivity dialectically interact with the collective rhythms of social life. It works its way into a writer's style not

necessarily via self-conscious volition on the part of the author (though it may well become that, as it does with Woolf) but through a process Helen Vendler (1995: 4) has described as "a cloning of the kinesthetic perceptions of [the] poet." The socioaffective rhythms of a writer's daily life (to variable degrees) insinuate themselves into the very fibers of her style.

In Woolf's case one gets a sense of this phenomenon in the opening pages of *A Room of One's Own* (1977 [1929]). Seated beside the river, Woolf is in the process of developing a thought, which she compares to a small fish—"it darted and sank, and flashed hither and thither" (ibid.: 9)—when, finding herself walking across a grass plot as if locomotion were necessary to its logical development, "instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me" (ibid.: 10). It is the college beadle: only fellows and scholars, who are exclusively male, are allowed on the grass. By the time she reaches the gravel, the thought has disappeared. The allegorical structure of this carefully constructed anecdote exemplifies Woolf's daily experience. At every juncture the sociospatial structures of early twentieth-century England are designed to enable the fluent, logical development of *men's* thoughts, whereas women's thought processes are constantly interrupted and fragmented. If we assume a minimal relation between such social and phenomenological structures and the types of literary and philosophical forms they inculcate, it should come as no surprise that Woolf chose to craft this everyday fragmentation into a powerful multiperspectival, feminist narrative mode.

I write *craft* because the "linguistic situation" and "experience" do not simply persist, unadulterated, into the literary work. There is no sociological reductionism at work here. On the contrary, it is one of the crucial points of a critical poetics that it recognizes literary composition as the proactive and productive *shaping* of this prefigurative linguistic and experiential material (*poïēsis*, after all, meant "producing"). The operation of poetic shaping is informed by specific, discoverable logics. It ranges from verbal to stylistic to formal and generic levels. At the verbal level, as Woolf well knew, words come charged with affective and cultural associations. The narrativization of these words is not the pristine invention of meanings but the particularization and artistic guidance of preexisting meanings. Words and phrases are stylized, their meanings, tones, and timbres put to work within the purview of the author's organized artistic totality. Woolf, with her extreme sensitivity to the semantic and sociological nuance of specific words and tones, is an expert in the artistic exploitation of their hidden "suggestions." Yet this verbal level of poetic shaping is subordinated to those larger stylistic *projects* that writers develop.

Such projects are self-reflexive variants of what I call "stylistic ideologies." Stylistic ideologies are ideas about what style is and how one should write. They range from spontaneous to self-reflexive. Spontaneous stylistic ideologies tend to reproduce the codified and noncodified linguistic norms prevailing in a given linguistic situation, which are themselves integral to the dominant ideology of a social formation. In literary terms, they tend to result in writing that conforms to preexisting generic expectations, even where it introduces subtle stylistic refinements. Self-reflexive stylistic ideologies, however, tend toward an awareness of their positions in literary history such as they conceive it and are motivated by an explicitly political desire to overcome modes of writing which they associate with social and artistic conservatism, obsolescence, or outright degradation. The critical reconstruction of a stylistic ideology involves a combination of theoretical extrapolation from the literary style itself and an interpretation of the terms in which the writer justifies that style. The former involves "close reading," whereas the latter requires an ideological analysis of authorial paratexts, essays, and manifestos. It is important to note that style and stylistic ideology do not always concur. Inherited styles possess a material resistance—an ingrained tone or implicit worldview—that can potentially obstruct a writer's stylistic intentions. More importantly, there is no necessary homology between authorial ideology (the personal political views of an author (cf. Eagleton 1976: 58)), stylistic ideology, and style. It is quite possible for an author's own political stance to be at odds with the implicit politics of either her stylistic ideology or her empirical stylistic practice.

In Woolf's case we have already seen that Walsh's pragmatic approach provides a precise narratological vocabulary with which to extrapolate the idiomatic and rhetorical logic of her style. This can now be supplemented by an attention to the verbal texture of Woolf's prose. The following is the climax of an extended passage of diegetic internal focalization (where voice is not objectified) and free indirect discourse from the perspective of Lily Briscoe, who is trying to understand her confused feelings toward William Bankes and Mr. Ramsay:

> All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net—danced up and down in Lily's mind, in and about the branches of the pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind, until her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand, and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive, tumultuous, a flock of starlings. (Woolf 2000 [1927]: 30)

The passage is remarkable in many respects. The syntax is hypotactic, yet the brevity of the subclauses lends it the rushed, additive sensation of parataxis. The assonance of "danced" and "gnats," the repetition of "danced up and down," and the consonance of *n* and *p* sounds in the opening line lends the prose a compressed lyricality of expression. The sentences, chasing Lily's thought, dash headlong toward the explosion which, in a touch of Woolfian genius, coincides with a gunshot in the "outside" world. Just as Lily's thoughts, in the preceding passage, have become entwined with the bark and branches of the pear tree, so her epiphany is expressed in the "frightened, effusive, tumultuous" flock of starlings, as if her mind has scattered in a burst of oblivion across the seascape. By imbuing thought with the physical activity and sensory vitality usually attributed to plot, Woolf's prose at its most extreme constitutes a threefold operation. It seeks the indifference of inside and outside, deconstructs the subject-object opposition, and strives to attain a purely impersonal realm in which multiperspectivity gives way to an absolute beyond all perspective.

With this in mind, let us return to one of the key critical texts on which Woolf's reputation as critic is based, her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919, 1925).As is well-known, Woolf rejects the dominant literary style she associates with H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy. She refers to these writers as "materialists" (Woolf 2008 [1937]: 7), by which she means that they focus on naturalist, physical, and corporal details at the expense of the "spirit" and that they "spend immense skill and industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (ibid.: 8). What is perhaps less remarked on is that the word Woolf uses to name her counterideal is "life" (ibid.) or "life itself" (ibid.: 10). *Life* is an ambiguous term precisely to the extent that it escapes any stark opposition between subject and object, inside or outside. Life, taken to its extreme, is entirely impersonal (cf. Esposito 2012: 137). The question then becomes what mode of representation would be adequate to absolute impersonality? Woolf is clear on what it would *not* be: "There would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style." Instead, one might "record the atoms [or impressions] as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall" (Woolf 2008 [1937]: 9). Thus Woolf rejects the organic, implicitly patriarchal totalities of plot, calling for a new, atomic mode of representation.[16] The latter entailed a reinvention of prose. "If you free it from the beast-of-burden work which so many novelists necessarily lay upon it, of carrying loads of details, bushels of fact—prose thus treated will show itself capable of rising high from the ground, not in one dart, but in sweeps and circles, and of keeping at the same time in touch with the amusements and idiosyncrasies of human character in daily life" (ibid.: 83). In a remarkable move, Woolf simultaneously rejects the "materialist" bias of realist prose,

releases it from the yoke of the Protestant work ethic, and sets out an original technical innovation combining prose with lyric and drama. This stylistic innovation is implicitly connected to an ideological critique of alienated labor, yet all the while this critique is internally limited by its location within the specific class fraction of Bloomsbury (cf. Williams 2010 [1980]: 148–69).

We are now in a position to formulate a hypothesis as to the central contradiction of Woolf's style in *To the Lighthouse* (though to test its validity and its pertinence to the rest of her oeuvre would require a far more detailed analysis). Narratologically Woolf's style is characterized by two opposing forces: a centrifugal force that fragments the diegesis into multiple focalizers and a centripetal force of lyrical unification toward which the prose gravitates. While Woolf's style entails a definite rejection of the rigid formalities associated with a patriarchal ruling class, her urge to weaponize her fragmented experience as a woman and to break open stylistic conventions to allow in the rain of the atoms of "life" is always checked by the necessity of poetic and rhythmic control. Her novels, despite rejecting the conventional narrative wholes of the "materialists," are nonetheless informed by a lyrical and "poietical" logic and a system of symbolic unification (in *To the Lighthouse*, the recurring figure of the lighthouse itself). Yet this logic, which literally *in-forms* impersonal life—that life which the second section of *To the Lighthouse* attempts to capture in all its anonymous glory—can only ever be felt by Woolf as artistic death. For if "everything is the proper stuff of fiction" (Woolf 2008 [1937]: 12) and *everything* is a synonym of *life*, then to set limits to fictional representation is logically to court death. At the same time, to fail to find a sufficient form is to succumb to the refrain of Mr. Tansley that haunts Lily Briscoe: "Women can't paint, women can't write" (Woolf 2000 [1927]: 54). A woman's success at challenging patriarchy is thus her potential artistic failure to allow life to live: that pressure is both artistic and existential. In a final dialectical twist, however, it seems that death itself is internal to Woolfian life. *To the Lighthouse* is replete with elegiac longings for "an earth entirely at rest" (ibid.: 25), where the only traces of human habitation are the remnants of a now-dead everyday existence: "What people had 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" (ibid.: 141). This elegiac tone and content is in many ways a compromise formation. It opens up the novel to impersonal life by mourning the *personae* of realism. Although Lily ultimately completes her painting, it is not before she realizes that "it would be hung in the attics . . . it would be destroyed" (ibid.: 225). The paradoxes of Woolf's style dictate that art is not open to life without first being open to death.

Conclusion

If style in the novel has often been associated with the struggle for democracy, Woolf's stylistic innovations renew and deepen that struggle at a critical historical juncture. A strictly narratological theory of style is unable to articulate the social and political dimensions of such innovations. If combined with a critical poetics, however, narratology could become integral to a sophisticated social formalism. As we have seen, this involves the critical reconstruction of the historical and literary situation to which the work responds, seeking that elusive point at which the "inner" necessity of the work coincides with the "external" necessity of the situation. In cases like that of Woolf, however, where the writer pursues her artistic vision to its extreme limits, social formalism encounters limits of its own. A critical poetics remains critical only to the extent that it can stay true to the intensity of the vision it seeks to explain. Where that vision broaches the absolute, the task of the critic becomes less that of explaining the logic of a singularity than that of thinking the truth of an event.[17]

I conclude by briefly noting what distinguishes a critical poetics from narratological approaches to style. First, by combining an attention to verbal texture, tone, and rhythm with an emphasis on structural narrative organization, the present theory of style overcomes the problematic divide Dan Shen (2005) identifies between the (nonverbal) "discourse" of narratology and the (verbal) "style" of stylistics. Second, the emphasis on dialectical totalization of distinct stylistic levels, an aspect that is largely absent from Walsh's tripartite theory of voice, echoes Richard Aczel's (1998: 483) Bakhtin-inspired understanding of voice as a "*composite* entity; a specific *configuration* of voices." Where Aczel locates the ultimate unity of this configuration in "a set of identifiable rhetorical principles" (ibid.), however, I hypothesize that the source of unity of a literary work is the dynamic operation of "poietic" mimesis itself. This operation is informed by techniques of literary composition, which are themselves crystallizations of forms of practical consciousness, implemented by a writer who is their host and practitioner. Third and by extension, I acknowledge and account for the singularity of an author's style but disarticulate it from any individual or authorial essence of which it would be the "expression."[18] This is a strictly *transindividual* theory of style. Individual styles are *singular conjunctions* of transindividual social, political, and literary processes carried out under the experiential pressures of specific historical conjunctures. Finally, by attempting to identify the informing logic of the operation of literary composition, critical poetics is primarily a theory of literary *production*. Literary works and their paratextual apparatuses are the material "traces" of this operation (cf. Dawson 2013: 482–84). Like the "trace" itself, however, style can never be reduced to the retrospective projection of an originating instance. Its materiality enables new

encounters in the present—an opening to further singular conjunctions and myriad unforeseeable futures.

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1. *Social formalism* is a term Raymond Williams (1983 [1976]: 139) ascribed to the work of Jan Mukařovský and Valentin Voloshinov. Paul Jones (2004: 92–126) has extended it to the work of Williams himself. I use it here as an umbrella term for those often Marxist-inspired theories of literary and cultural forms which emphasize their inherent sociality and intrinsic (albeit highly variable) relation to ideology.

2. These are direct authorial literary-artistic narration, stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration, stylization of the various forms of semiliterary (written) everyday narration, various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech, and stylistically

individualized speech of characters (Bakhtin 1981: 262). Strictly speaking, of course, Williams refers to discourse types, whereas Bakhtin deals with modes of voice.

3. Henry James famously wrote that "the good little Thomas Hardy has scored a great success with *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which is chock-full of faults and falsity, and yet has a singular charm" (cited in Leavis 1962 [1948]: 33). F. R. Leavis concurred.

4. Walsh's critique of the category of the narrator should not be read as a simplistic return to the biographical author. Walsh (2007: 130–47) understands the novelist as a "medium." In what follows I understand the author to be the individualized result of what Michel Foucault (1998 [1969]: 108) has called the "author function."

5. Arguably even James Phelan's (2005: 18) notion of a "doubled communicative situation" ("the narrator tells her story to her narratee for her purposes, while the author communicates to her audience for her own purposes both that story and the narrator's telling of it") suffers from this problem, since it is not used as a criterion to distinguish fiction from nonfiction. "The doubled communicative situation of fictional narration *and even much non-fictional narration* . . . is itself a *layered* ethical situation" (ibid.: 20; first emphasis added).

6. Bakhtin (1984: 189) distinguishes between direct and objectified discourse: "Unmediated, direct, fully signifying discourse is directed toward its referential object and constitutes the ultimate semantic authority within the limits of a given context. Objectified discourse is likewise directed exclusively toward its object, but is at the same time the object of someone else's intention, the author's."

7. In the following definition I replace the term *voice* with *style*. I hold that much of the confusion generated by the concept of "voice" when referring to written texts—precisely the confusion it was Walsh's task to dispel—could be limited by referring instead to "style." *Style* invites a primarily scriptural problematic which the dubious vocal metaphor—with its Derridean specters—does not. I accept John Frow's (2014: 149–80) and Peter Boxall's (2015: 19–38) arguments that "voice" can never be entirely eradicated from the experience of reading novelistic prose, but I hold that a focus on style would limit potential philosophical confusion.

8. Stephen Halliwell (1998) explains that such handbooks were systematically developed for didactic purposes by the Sophists in the fifth century BCE. He notes that proof of their existence and types can be found in Aristophanes's *Frogs*. He distinguishes Aristotle's *Poetics* from such didactic handbooks by the coherence of its overarching philosophical argument and "the abstract character of the principles and injunctions which the didactic phrasing is used to introduce" (ibid.: 38).

9. These are selected from a more expansive critical repertoire developed in Hartley 2017.

10. Free indirect discourse combines internal focalization with voice as idiom (objectified discourse), the author speaking in the voice of another, whereas diegesis with internal focalization presupposes no such idiomatic imitation, the author continues to speak in her or his own voice under the regime of fictionality. Free indirect discourse is a form of discursive mimesis, whereas focalization pertains to narrative diegesis (Walsh 2010: 51).

11. Lanser (1992: 119) reads this in terms of fictional authority: "Woolf collectivizes authoriality without ceding it, giving a different shape to authorial imperatives rather than refusing them. . . such female authority is still marked by the privileges of race and class."

12. Catherine Gallagher (2006) argues convincingly that fictionality arose with the novel in the eighteenth century. There are then two possible ways of conceptualizing what I have called "historical regimes of fictionality." The first, inspired by certain positions Boxall (2015) puts forward, might conceive of such regimes as so many returns to the foundational paradoxes of the discourse of fictionality itself (cf. Gallagher 2006: 340), with each historical regime pursuing its own practical and theoretical solutions to the same fundamental paradoxes. Alternatively, drawing on Jacques Rancière's (2007: 15) distinction of "regimes of identification of art," which are "system[s] of relations between practices, the forms of visibility of these practices, and modes of intelligibility," regimes of fictionality could be conceived as reconfigurations of such relations *internal* to what Rancière calls the "aesthetic regime," which includes both realism *and* modernism.

13. For reasons of space I have limited myself to Ricoeur's "mimesis$_1$" and "mimesis$_2$." For concepts pertaining to "mimesis$_3$," see Hartley 2017: 239–57.

14. I expand on each of these subsituations in Hartley 2017: 209–19.

15. Williams (1977: 106–7) developed the concept of structure of feeling partly through his rejection of orthodox Marxist "base-superstructure" theories of culture, which depended on "a *known* history, a known *structure*, known *products*," that is, on internally complete systems of thought with an assumed fully achieved articulation. Such theories do not allow for the often frustrating and painful *lived* experiences of the present whose affective valences defy immediate articulation.

16. On precisely this point, see Rancière 2014: 56–69. It is no coincidence that the subtext of Woolf's *Waves* is Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.

17. Alain Badiou develops this idea in *Petit manuel d'inesthétique* (1998). Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2010) provides a powerful example of how social formalism might be productively combined with Badiou's philosophical approach.

18. To that extent, my theory of style belongs to the post-deconstructionist lineage Paul Dawson (2013) identifies.