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# Reading "Moments of Being" Between the Lines of Bach's Fugue: Lyric Narrative in Virginia Woolf's "Slater's Pins Have No Points"

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## Articles

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### Reading “Moments of Being” Between the Lines of Bach’s Fugue: Lyric Narrative in Virginia Woolf’s “Slater’s Pins Have No Points”

by Cheryl Hindrichs

The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted.

(*Between the Acts* 220)

This epigraph provides an adroit map for reading Virginia Woolf’s lyric narrative experiments, particularly her short story “Moments of Being: Slater’s Pins Have No Points.” It captures Woolf’s fondness for a fugue’s exposition: one note’s call prompts the answer of an other. It expresses Woolf’s interplay of form and content. Here, as throughout her work, Woolf evokes metaphors of surface (“flower gathering”) and depth (“descending to wrestle with the meaning”) in order to give them a twist, privileging their productive tension rather than opposition. Woolf’s tune is the synthesis of these various rhetorical levels and the complex harmonies of multiple auditors. Moreover, her auditors are not mere passive receivers of the tune, but active participants who create the tune in their listening: “ourselves went forward [. . .] all comprehending; all

enlisted” (220). That this line from her last novel strikingly reflects the form and themes of many of Woolf’s works, particularly her short fiction, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*, attests to the centrality of lyric narrative—and the exemplary model of the fugue—in Woolf’s oeuvre, from 1919 to 1941.<sup>1</sup> As Patricia Laurence has noted, the rhythm of the fugue as “an aspect of feeling and form” has been “largely unexplored in Woolf’s work” (239). Woolf’s rhythm, according to Laurence, is an “undertow in language and might be defined as being composed of auditory, visual, or thematic counterpoint with different dimensions of mind and the novel being played off against one another in varying combinations” (240). This “undertow,” an alternate or counterposing progression to a conventional narrative progression, might also be defined as the lyric departures of her narrative experiments.

Of her short fiction, “Slater’s Pins Have No Points” offers an incisive look at Woolf’s innovation in lyric narrative form between *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. Reprinted in 1944 with some revision as “Moments of Being: Slater’s Pins Have No Points” in *A Haunted House*, the story first appeared in New York’s *The Forum* in January 1928.<sup>2</sup> The genesis of the story can be tracked to a diary entry in 1926, during a period that marks a new confidence in Woolf’s work as a modernist artist and theorist. By reading the story in the context of Woolf’s evolving narrative theories, I propose that the story represents Woolf’s

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<sup>1</sup>My use of “lyric” does not refer to verse poetry but the vertical of the poetic mode in contrast to the horizontal or linear progression of the narrative mode. In *Narrative as Rhetoric*, James Phelan modifies Susan Stanford Friedman’s definition of lyric, “a mode that foregrounds a simultaneity, a cluster of feelings or ideas that projects a gestalt in stasis,” by adding the clarification that lyric suspends “internal judgments of characters (and narrators)” (31, 33).

<sup>2</sup>Although citing *A Haunted House*’s edition, to avoid confusion with Woolf’s collection *Moments of Being*, I refer to the story’s shorter original title.

move toward the possibilities of the lyric moment in narrative for changing the direction and shape of fiction. It is a move in which Woolf shows how thematic content (love between women) and form (lyrical expansion rather than linear narrative progression) are in a dialectical tension.

The dialectics of form, rhetorical address, and content represented in the epigraph from *Between the Acts* are a focus of this story. As narrative progression develops according to a progressing lyric vision in "Slater's Pins Have No Points," Woolf enlists readers to examine two parallel structures. First, the relationship of the subject's perception and objects of perception in the construction of identity. Second, the reader's and implied author's rhetorical relationship in creating narrative. The two different levels on which readers go forward are the story's narrative dimensions: the mimetic (the characters Julia Craye and Fanny Wilmot) and the synthetic (its form transposes the form of a fugue). Taking Woolf's cues, I examine how the mimetic and synthetic dimensions (that is, the story world and the world of author and audience) work together to enlist readers in Woolf's lyric narrative innovation. This innovation enables Woolf to depart from conventional narrative progression and thus to explore epistemological questions, specifically in the portrayal of a young woman perceiving and composing alternative narratives not sanctioned by a patriarchal culture.

Following James Phelan's model of rhetoric, one can investigate the dual rhetorical dimensions of the story's progression by tracking the parallel between, first, Fanny's act of composing a vision from the form and subject supplied by her piano teacher, Julia Craye; and, second, the implied reader's parallel act of composing a vision from the form and content the implied Woolf has devised. Recalling Phelan's rhetorical definition of narrative—"the telling of a story by someone to someone on some occasion for some purpose" (8), the story not only accents the reader's relationship to the voices of Woolf's narrative, but also the "someone" who has heretofore been stationed behind

the curtain—the author. Woolf’s authorial identity is “seductive” (“Slater’s” 105) precisely because of its destabilization of the “authority” of the implied author and its invocation to the reader’s authority.

The fabula of the story seems fairly simple: Fanny Wilmot has been listening to her piano teacher, Julia Craye, play a Bach fugue, when a rose pinned to Fanny’s dress falls to the floor. As Fanny searches for the pin on the floor, she thinks about Julia Craye and composes the story of her life in short scenes and sketches from fragments of dialogue she has heard from or about Julia Craye. The story is completed when Fanny finds the pin and “sees” Julia. The telling of the story, however, is hardly simple. When, in the story’s opening, Fanny first stoops “with her ears full of the music,” that music includes, on the one hand, Miss Craye’s assertion and question—“Slater’s pins have no points—don’t you always find that?”—and on the other hand, “the last chord of the Bach fugue” struck by Miss Julia Craye (103). When the reader discovers that this line, “Slater’s pins have no points—don’t you always find that?,” becomes a recurring theme in Fanny’s thoughts, its initial introduction with a Bach fugue identifies the fugue-like structure of the story. Nonetheless, the function of the fugue is not simply a performer’s device.

Woolf’s use of a fugue-like pattern of theme and variation to structure the telling of the relationship between her two female characters suggests the possibilities as well as the limits of narrative form and its relation to an “ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (“Modern Fiction” 106). Fanny’s mimetic dimension—our sense of her as a “real” person—is realized in a progression of Fanny’s visions of Julia, a series of imagined portraits that turn upon a particular mimetic trait of Julia. The particular focus of Fanny’s vision includes the life choices that she sees as defining Julia. Thus, Fanny’s vision of Julia’s choice to live alone (how she reads Julia in fact, and imagines her in fiction) develops a thematic dimension of the story alongside Fanny’s own mimetic

dimension for the reader. The movement of the two characters' visions toward accord constitutes the progression of the story world.

For example, Fanny fabricates a courting scene from Julia's past: she "make[s Mr. Sherman] call for [Miss Craye], by appointment" and then row her across the Serpentine, to emphasize the disjunction in the visions of the rejected Mr. Sherman and the independent, attractive Miss Craye (107). Fanny composes a contrapuntal chord in imagination that her own moment in fact will then revise. In Fanny's sketch, Miss Craye and Mr. Sherman both experience "a moment of horror, of disillusionment, of revelation" when she rejects him, but their visions are radically discordant: Miss Craye focuses on beauty, "I can't have it, I can't possess it," and Mr. Sherman focuses on his bruised ego (108). In contrast, the final chord the reader registers, which marks Fanny's and Miss Craye's moment, will be struck in harmony as a moment of triumph, "of ecstasy," of revelation (110).

The implied author's choice of form, a "narrated monologue" (Cohn 14) in a pattern like that of a fugue, and emphasis on the process of vision and understanding creates the synthetic tension of the text. The participation of the implied reader in developing a vision of Julia, a process that simultaneously makes Fanny visible to the reader, turns upon this synthetic tension. This tension is particularly marked by the implied Woolf's choice of telling the story through a heterodiegetic (as opposed to first person) narrator whose distance from the implied author is undetectable and whose voice is generally difficult to distinguish from Fanny's vision.<sup>3</sup> The implied reader, then, is to progress like Fanny in an attempt to master the combinations necessary

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<sup>3</sup>In *Narrative as Rhetoric*, Phelan's definition of heterodiegetic draws on Gérard Genette's theories: "narration in which the narrator exists at a different level of (fictional) existence from the characters," as opposed to homodiegetic: "narration in which the narrator exists at the same level of existence as the characters" (217).

to “see,” or see with, the implied author composing the text; the accord of Woolf’s aesthetic vision and the implied reader’s is the consummation devoutly to be wished that underscores the lyric nature of the text.

### 1. *Reading the Fugue’s Rhetorical Call and Response*

Woolf’s evocation of the form of the fugue entitles readers to a well-tempered, ready vocabulary for describing the formal elements of the story’s pattern. Bach’s fugue supplies a form and subject for Woolf’s vertical departure from linear narrative progression. The fugue provides a ground for Woolf to figure her own self-conscious play on the limits of formal conventions and to perform there a lyric subversion—perhaps with camp or satiric connotations in that performance. Indeed, Woolf’s diary supports such a reading of the story’s use of form. In December 1926, Woolf finalizes her ideas about a story of “two women”: “No attempt is to be made to realise the character. Sapphism is to be suggested. [. . .] My own lyric vein is to be satirised” (*Diary 3*: 131). “Slater’s Pins Have No Points,” as Woolf noted in the margins of her diary, marks her progression from her first maturity of “method” in *To the Lighthouse* and her launch toward the “play-poem idea” of *The Waves* (*Diary 3*: 131). At the beginning of the decade, composing “Kew Gardens” had been pivotal in Woolf’s move from the more conventional narrative of *The Voyage Out* to the modernist *Jacob’s Room*; in the latter half of the 1920s, Woolf again tries out various combinations of narrative and lyric on the scales of her short fiction in order to understand what innovations had become conventional.

Woolf’s deliberateness in cultivating a lyric narrative form, which this story performs, is articulated in two contemporary essays, “The Art of Fiction” (1927) and “Phases of Fiction” (written between 1925 and 1929). In the former, Woolf calls upon the English writer to leave “the plausible and preposterous formulas which are supposed to represent the whole of our human adventure” in order for fiction to “become a work of art”

(55). This work of art, however, must not neglect “life” in pursuing too narrowly the “path of aesthetic duty” as Henry James has (53). In “Phases of Fiction,” Woolf writes that the pleasure of reading James comes from the absolution to “feel with his characters” since the reader is cut off from “the responses which are called out in the actual life,” and from the delight of the power of the implied author: “we are amused by [his mind’s] power to make patterns [. . .] It is a pleasure somewhat akin, perhaps, to the pleasure of mathematics or the pleasure of music” (82). However, this admirable presence is precisely the problem, since “readers resent” having to “feel” “the suave showman, skilfully manipulating his characters,” whereas “a writer of greater depth or natural spirits would have taken the risk which his material imposes” (82). Woolf writes her story, a scene of mentoring, at this point of departure from the “measure of Henry James’s greatness,” his gift of “so definite a world, so distinct and peculiar a beauty that we cannot rest satisfied but want to experiment further with these extraordinary perceptions, to understand more and more, but to be free from the perpetual tutelage of the author’s presence” (82–83).

Despite her critique of his style in “The Art of Fiction” and “Phases of Fiction,” Woolf’s story initially suggests James’s skillful manipulation, as the use of a fugue as a structuring device in the story reveals.<sup>4</sup> The reader finds a transposition of a fugue-like structure in the story’s elaborate sequence of nested episodes between the pin lost and regained. Opening with an initial tonic/dominant relationship, the story that follows is a series of

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<sup>4</sup>The definition of “fugue” in *The New Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music* states: “A composition, or compositional technique, in which a theme (or themes) is extended and developed mainly by imitative counterpoint” (274). In the “exposition,” “the main theme or ‘subject’ is announced in the tonic, after which the second ‘voice’ enters with the answer, i.e., the same theme at the dominant (or subdominant) pitch [. . .] while the first may proceed to a counter-subject” (274). See James Hafley for a reading of the text as a fugue.

proposed answers in counterpoint to Julia Craye's invitation—developmental episodes of Fanny's imagination.

In the primary exposition of the story, the first call or statement of the subject is the opening quoted line of Julia Craye's dialogue, "Slater's pins have no points—don't you always find that?" (103). Fanny's response to this call rhythmically parallels Miss Craye's rhetorical statement-interrogative form: "Did Miss Craye actually go to Slater's and buy pins then, Fanny Wilmot asked herself, transfixed for a moment" (103). The narrator's "transfixed" is significant in marking Fanny's psychic, fugue state departure from the linear narrative progression of the story world into the "timeless," lyric dimension of aesthetic creation. Indeed, Fanny's imagined scenes of Julia are generally in the present tense associated with lyric poetry. Fanny is provoked by the evocation of Miss Craye's possible ordinariness: "What need had she of pins?" (103). Fanny's answer is her observation of Julia Craye's character and a codetta pronouncement concerning the world of Julia Craye: "What need had she of pins—Julia Craye—who lived, it seemed, in the cool glassy world of Bach fugues," which transitions to a counter-subject seamlessly,

playing to herself what she liked, and only consenting to take one or two pupils at the Archer Street College of Music (so the Principal, Miss Kingston, said) as a special favour to herself, who had "the greatest admiration for her in every way." (103)

Thus, the call and answer that is the subject of the exposition and entire piece ("Slater's pins have no points" and Fanny's answer to the invitation of "—don't you always find that?") includes the counter-subject of Miss Kingston's "little character sketches" which Fanny recalls and develops in subsequent sketches of her own (104).

These early sketches in the exposition suggest a certain virtuosity of the implied author, a subtle "showman" as Woolf says of James, and thus a slight, though not ironic or critical, distance of implied reader and author from the character's vision. The

*Lyric Narrative in Woolf's "Slater's Pins Have No Points"*

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beginning of the next episode is marked by a restatement of the subject that incorporates Kingston's statement that none of the Crayes had married:

Perhaps then, Fanny Wilmot thought, looking for the pin, Miss Craye said that about "Slater's pins having no points," at a venture. None of the Crayes had ever married. She knew nothing about pins—nothing whatever. (104)

Having resolved Julia Craye's knowledge of pins in the exposition, here Fanny uses that resolution and Miss Kingston's counter-subject (Julia's single status) in order to interrogate further the meaning behind Julia's call. The expository episode (Julia's opening subject, Fanny's reaction, Fanny's voicing of Miss Kingston) is followed then by a sequence of Fanny's variations. In this sequence, fragments of dialogue (Miss Kingston's, Miss Craye's) serve as subjects for Fanny to counterpoint in developing possible portraits of Miss Craye. Each episode begins with a return to the lost pin, then follows a rhythm and elaboration of variations on the chosen theme, and then is capped by the codetta of a restatement of the original dialogue. The middle section of Woolf's fugue-like story, then, can be read as having three primary episodes.

The first episode, described above, develops and restates the following themes: the "pane of glass which separated them from other people" (104); the same "look" that characterizes Julia and her brother Julius that seems to say of transitory beauty, "I can't reach you—I can't get at you" (105); and Julia's likeness to her "odd" brother, "the 'famous archaeologist'" (105).<sup>5</sup> As the story progresses and Fanny's musings rely less on others' observation, the note of satire no longer shadows the fore-

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<sup>5</sup>Since Woolf models Julia Craye on her Greek tutor in youth, Clara Pater, there is a probable likeness of Julius to Clara's brother, Walter Pater (*Diary* 3: 106). Julius's entrapment within the house, his aesthetic alienation, recalls the backlash to the publication of *The Renaissance* that led to Walter Pater's alienation from Oxford to live in London with his sister in 1885 (Meisel 32).

ground, and the tension between reader and implied author recedes. A smooth transition from a more authorial to a more figural third-person narration parallels Fanny's ascending powers of imagination.

The second episode is prefaced by a codetta of the previous episode's close. The statement, "But whenever she spoke of Julius, or heard him mentioned, that was the first thing that came to mind; and it was a seductive thought; there was something odd about Julius Craye" (105), moves to a restatement of the over-arching subject—"Fanny searched for the pin" (106)—by returning first to the present moment of the story-time.<sup>6</sup> In the codetta, Fanny associates Julius's "odd" look with Julia's look at the present moment, "as she sat half turned on the music stool, smiling" (105), and introduces the themes of the second episode. Fanny observes Julia's characteristic "clutch of the hand" holding the fallen carnation, which signifies a "perpetual frustration," in that the press of Julia's hands may "increase all that was most brilliant in the flower," "but she [Miss Craye] did not possess it" (105–06).<sup>7</sup> The second episode's three themes, which vacillate between Fanny's recollections of Julia's speech and Fanny's own musings, proceed: "It was the only use of men, she had said. Was it for that reason then, Fanny wondered, [. . .] that she had never married?" (106); "Much the nicest part of London—Kensington," Miss Craye's words which Fanny elaborates in imagining the attempted courtship of "young men" in Miss Craye's youth (107); and,

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<sup>6</sup>*The Forum* does not include the phrase "and it was a seductive thought" (105). The addition just at the codetta, a pause for reflection, further suggests an ambiguity of narrator's voice and Fanny's vision through stylistic contagion.

<sup>7</sup>Oddly, the fallen flower has changed from a "rose" to a carnation; it seems unlikely that Woolf's shift was unintentional, given that it appears both in the 1928 publication and in *A Haunted House*. Janet Winston, who writes tellingly of the Sapphic implications of the flower imagery in the story, does not address this change.

finally, a restatement of Julia's gesture which Fanny interprets as "I can't have it, I can't possess it" (108).

The beginning of the third episode is marked by Fanny's reflection on her own imaginative power in a return to the present of the narrative's story-time and a restatement of the expository subject: "The setting of that [courtship] scene could be varied as one chose, Fanny Wilmot reflected. (Where had that pin fallen?)" (108). This episode continues the fluctuating voices of the previous: Fanny muses on Julia's phrase about men/husbands—"They're ogres" (108)—and Julia's "It was so beautiful last Friday [. . .] that I determined I must go there" (109). In contrast to the previous episodes, Fanny's musings are imaginatively sharper, deeper, and even more eagerly sympathetic. Compare, for instance, the first episode's portrayal of Julia, "'Stars, sun, moon,' [Julia's look] seemed to say, 'the daisy in the grass, fires, frost on the window-pane, my heart goes out to you'" (104), with the third episode's vision of her deciding on a walk, "As it was, the tug-of-war was perpetual—on the one side the nightingale or the view which she loved with passion [. . .] on the other the damp path or the horrid long drag up a steep hill" (109). The faint resonance of a bad lyric poem's sentimentality, the satiric note of "these are a few of my favorite things" in the first example, derives from Fanny's imagination being positioned opposite, looking through the pane of glass at Julia. The second example marks Fanny's assumption of Julia's consciousness in order to narrate her hypothesis; she has taken up the role of composer and now takes up the freedoms of voicing Julia's vision which that role grants her: "When, therefore, from time to time, she managed her forces adroitly [. . .]" (109).

As she develops each portrait in the third episode through three image-plots (Lilienfeld 125)—Julia's relief in the refusal to endanger her independent habits by marriage, Julia's lifelong battle with headaches, Julia's passion for "views and birds" (109)—Fanny secures each vision with an affirmation, a "yes"

(108–09). The fourth portrait, which describes “one’s” view of Julia and posits “pity” as the appropriate answer to Julia’s theme of the determination “to visit Hampton Court—alone,” does not end in a “yes” (109). It thus sets up the final episode with a contrapuntal note. For, after trying on this answer of pity—“one pitied her for the thing she never asked pity for [her health . . .] one pitied her for always doing everything alone” (109)—the final episode, the coda, refutes that counter-subject of pity with a strong “No” and proposes instead an affirmation of Julia’s aloneness (110).

The final episode begins: “Fanny Wilmot saw the pin; she picked it up. She looked at Miss Craye. Was Miss Craye so lonely? No, Miss Craye was steadily, blissfully, if only for that moment, a happy woman” (110). A restatement of Miss Craye’s look within the narrative’s story-time unfolds from “Fanny had surprised her in a moment of ecstasy,” and a final chord unites Fanny’s lyric inner-time and the narrative story-time, as Fanny sees “back and back into the past behind her” and captures the being of Julia Craye “for a moment” (110). The final stretto answer closes the story, as the reiteration of Miss Craye’s initial question is a reiteration of Fanny’s silent affirmation: “‘Slater’s pins have no points,’ Miss Craye said, laughing queerly and relaxing her arms, as Fanny Wilmot pinned the flower to her breast with trembling fingers” (111). The purpose of the episodes, why Fanny develops possible portraits of Miss Craye, coincides with the purpose Fanny posits behind Julia Craye’s initial interrogative statement: in developing these portraits of life episodes, Fanny is ultimately composing an affirmative answer to Julia Craye’s invitation to sympathy and intimacy.

## 2. *A New Tempered Reading*

Critics have generally responded to Woolf's story in writing with two readings: a formalist reading (James Hafley, Dean Baldwin) and a lesbian reading (Susan Clements, Janet Winston).<sup>8</sup> Each response observes key elements of the text; however, separately, each closes off the dual vision Woolf's writing creates. James Hafley's reading of the story is an admiration of the author's amusing "power to make patterns" (Woolf, "Phases of Fiction" 82).<sup>9</sup> Hafley explains the effect of reading the story as "the shock that always attends the contemplation of perfection or near-perfection" (139). Similarly, Dean Baldwin describes the pleasant "shock" as the story's joining "manner and message" in a "perfect whole" (55). In contrast, I suggest that this ambivalent word chosen to describe these readers' experiences, and which replicates Fanny's initial "shock" (103), invites investigation of the uneasy element of the shock, how the implied Woolf's virtuoso construction and final twist guides the ideal reader to a recognition of the limits of such a perfect round. However, unlike Clements and Winston, I do not read the "shock" as Fanny's sudden revelation of a lesbian identity.

How is one to reconcile Woolf's charge that writers must reject James's formalism—"the series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged" ("Modern Fiction" 106)—with her composition of such a patterned, symmetrical story as "Slater's Pins Have No

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<sup>8</sup>See Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer's collection of essays, *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*. Anne Herrmann briefly summarizes the story in her reading of Orlando in *Queering the Moderns: Poses/Portraits/Performances*.

<sup>9</sup>Hafley usefully notes that Julia's restatement of the theme at its conclusion suggests that "the end of Fanny's fugue becomes the opening measure of any other person's" in its mirroring of the opening exposition (140). I would add to Hafley's observation that the double-edged quality of this realization is that the reader is open to develop the possibilities the theme suggests, but the reader is also granted the realization that the notion of finally resolving any theme is futile: any coda opens up into endless variation, combination, and possibility.

Points"? Woolf's effacement of the narrator in its figural narrated monologue and her use of repetition (the theme that sounds in the exposition and the coda, as Hafley notes) certainly offer a reading as Jamesian, parlor performance virtuosity. The story's nested episodes evoke the celebrated image at the conclusion of Woolf's "Kew Gardens" of "a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another" (36).<sup>10</sup> Although Woolf's fugue-like sequence suggests embedded boxes turning with the precision of parts of a music box, her insistence on ambiguity on the level of form as well as content distinguishes the complex permeability of her text from the "wrought steel" of James's work. Since Woolf blurs the distinctions of memory, fantasy, and the character's present surroundings in the figural mind, she demands an active reader in contrast to the passive reader of James's constructions in which his presence is an "obstacle" ("Phases of Fiction" 82). While the highly wrought pattern of James's construction fails by insisting on attention to the showman, Woolf's double-voiced pattern functions as an invitation to the reader to use the pattern as a net to capture moments of being.

According to Woolf, "[t]he longer the novelist pores over the analysis, the more he becomes conscious of something that forever escapes. And it is this double vision," which James lacks, that makes Proust's works (particularly the "Overture" to *Swann's Way*) "so spherical, so comprehensive" and yet "rivets [the] eyes" on characters ("Phases of Fiction" 97). For such authors who "set themselves to follow feelings and thoughts, there is always an overflow of emotion from the author" that serves as a backdrop, as if "characters of such subtlety and complexity" could be "treated only when the rest of the book is a deep reservoir of thought and emotion" (88). The author's presence weaves a residue of personal emotion that is the necessary pattern for the reader to capture the intensity of the mo-

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<sup>10</sup>Dorrit Cohn has described Henry James's nested narrated monologues as frequently employing "Chinese box effects" (130).

ment narrated, while the author's self-erasure through aesthetic refinement creates a sense of lyric timelessness and suspends readerly judgment. Woolf's delicate balance of the absence and presence of the implied author—we both are immersed in Fanny's imaginative productions and aware of the artistry of Woolf's lyric portrayal of those productions—produces a dual vision. The formalist mechanics of the “vast nest of Chinese boxes” in Woolf's short fiction spin within an envelope of contingent chaotic life, “on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air” (“Kew Gardens” 36).

The modernist expansion of the technical range of heterodiegetic narration in fiction, such as quoted monologue, psychonarration, and narrated monologue, which Dorrit Cohn maps as authorial (distant and ironic tonality) and figural (empathetic and consonant tonality), creates a virtual “keyboard of consciousness,” which authors such as Woolf have played not merely for “virtuoso performances” but in order to press the “relation between technique and narrative situation” to create a more well-tempered scale for pursuing the something that forever escapes language (Cohn 138). In pushing the boundaries of her art, Woolf's aim is to develop fiction as “the instrument best fitted to the complexity and difficulty of modern life” (“Phases of Fiction” 102). “Phases of Fiction” further delineates the “danger” that the author must negotiate: the poetic power of the author in “style, arrangement, construction” that shapes fiction into a universal form is fundamentally at odds with the prosaic power “to bring us into close touch with life” (101). Since these “two powers fight if they are brought into combination,” the most complete writer must “balance the two powers so that the one enhances the other” (101). Likewise the virtuoso composition (which can subject the reader to a passive role) must be balanced by a relinquishment of authorial control, an authorial silence that produces a surplus desire that invites and provides room for the reader's creative response (101).

In the mid- to late 1920s, Woolf struggled with her desire for perfect aesthetic form and her recognition of aestheticism's solipsism, struggled with her desire for readers' praise and sympathy and her distaste for the limiting conventions that could secure an audience easily, and struggled with her place as an inheritor of such precursors as Henry James and her jealousy of such contemporaries as James Joyce. If Woolf desired to possess beauty as an artist and realized that the forms and readerly expectations she had inherited were inadequate for grasping beauty—for her, the transient moments of being in life—then she also realized that possession ultimately entailed harmonizing her readers' desires with her own, convincing them (and herself) that shattering the glass of convention (the Victorian looking-glasses and hothouses, the glass that separates the Crayes from the world) was desirable and that relinquishing the pursuit of the "perfect whole" was a triumph.

The dialectics of this struggle are represented in the story's mimetic and synthetic narrative dimensions. The two meta-fictional metaphors that form nodal points throughout Woolf's writing (often short-handed by critics as "granite and rainbow") characteristically are developed contrapuntally in this story. The dialectical metaphors of fabric (curtain, fugue pattern, Julia's cloak) and crystallized point (flower, transparency, the moment of possession) are composed not as an irreducible binary, not as an opposition to transcend, but in a productive tension. These image-plots are embedded in a web of discourses, modes of "seeing" (biographical, literary, historical, feminist, and so on) that the story invites the reader to examine as interconnected and open to manipulation. In "Phases of Fiction," Woolf explains that the "complete" work of fiction is a "union of the thinker and the poet," a "flight of imagery" and then a twist that gives the reader "a different view of the same object in terms of metaphor" (85). In "Slater's Pins Have No Points," Woolf's lyrical image-plots are not lyric for lyric's sake, but embedded in a young woman's engagement with a polyphony of

social discourses. Such a reading diverges from monologic formalist readings by attending to the envelope of voices, images, and influences surrounding it, for Woolf knows that her work is not “breaking the silence,” since after all “there was no silence” (“Kew Gardens” 35–36).

Nonetheless, reading Woolf’s suggestive narrative for its proclaimed “Sapphism” does lend itself to a drama of “breaking the silence.”<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, such a “seductive thought” (“Slater’s” 105), which draws the reader into a conspiracy with the elusive author, can produce another monologic reading that restricts the scope of the text’s rhetorical aims. In her essay “The Point of ‘Slater’s Pins’: Misrecognition and the Narrative Closet,” Susan Clements offers a useful discussion of misrecognition and sexual identity in narrative choice. However, Clements’s swift pinning of Fanny as the narrator and as a narrator who “continually shies away” from “perceiving her lesbian orientation” is problematic (16–17). Woolf’s story does represent the limits of narrative conventions in the context of “established heterosexual traditions” (Clements 16) and the immense difficulty of the writer, as a subject and a writer, in realizing and

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<sup>11</sup>Woolf refers to the story three times in her letters: to Vita Sackville-West around 8 July 1927, “I’ve just written, or re-written, a nice little story about Sapphism, for the Americans” (*Letters* 3: 397); to Vita on 13 October 1927, “Sixty pounds just received from America for my little Sapphist story of which the Editor has not seen the point, though he’s been looking for it in the Adirondacks” (*Letters* 3: 431); and, on 14 September 1928, to a Miss Harper who had sent a translation into French that would be published in Paris in 1929, a note that interestingly follows a letter to Vita relating how Woolf’s signing of a published letter protesting the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* has led her to seem “the mouthpiece of Sapphism, writ[ing] letters from the Reform Club” (*Letters* 3: 530). The story is indeed “Sapphist” in its affirmative vision of a women’s space of composition that can reject a patriarchal society; my objection is the “misrecognition” that reading (only) for a narrative of lesbian misrecognition creates.

moving beyond the “design that has been traced upon our minds which reading brings to light” (“Phases of Fiction” 56). However, that critique is the starting point already reached in Woolf’s previous work, particularly *To the Lighthouse*; in this story, Woolf is trying out alternative narratives and practicing perceptual variations that, to paraphrase Rachel Blau DuPlessis, extend beyond that ending.

A more open reading of the text, emphasizing the importance of the multidimensional elements of an author’s invitation, is found in Janet Winston’s “Reading Influences: Homoeroticism and Mentoring in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘Carnation’ and Virginia Woolf’s ‘Moments of Being: Slater’s Pins Have No Points.’” However, like Clements, Winston interprets Fanny’s reading as “heterocentric” and clouded by “patriarchal notions of reality” that obscure “an awareness of Julia’s lesbianism” (69). Winston quotes the invented “heterosexual seduction scenario in which a supposedly staid and frigid Julia rebuffs a male suitor” as evidence (69–70). Both readings ignore the sympathy and identification that Fanny, as an embedded narrator composing scenes of Julia’s life, evidences toward her protagonist and not the pathetic Mr. Sherman. Fanny contrasts his insensitive frustration, as he splashes his oars at his wasted time and bruised ego, with the profundity of “graceful” Julia’s revelation as she steers them clear at the “critical moment” (107–08). Rather, Winston concludes that Fanny’s composition evidences that she “reads Julia’s spinsterhood as a pitiful ‘problem’” and Fanny’s scene “represents Julia’s failure to respond appropriately to the man’s desire to propose marriage” (69–70). Winston’s aim is to read the story’s progression as a dynamic linear narrative rather than as lyric’s vertical blossoming. She argues that it is only at the conclusion that Fanny’s perspective on “her teacher’s inability to connect physically and passionately with another person” changes (70). In contrast, I would argue that this is the climax in a series of Fanny’s compositions of Julia’s triumph.

Both Clements and Winston translate Fanny's last name, Wilmot, as "Will not" in order to emphasize her resistance to seeing Julia's and/or her own lesbianism.<sup>12</sup> However, the name could also suggest the will of words (French '*mot*' = 'word'); such a translation makes room for a reading of Fanny as a willing apprentice, a perceiving and desiring subject that wills into being the vision Julia has provided her the form (the model of the fugue, the model of her life choices) to possess. By recognizing Woolf's move from a narrative toward a lyric progression in the story, we see that the critical moment is not a change in Fanny's mis-recognizing vision that sees Julia as a failure until the conclusion. Indeed, Fanny reveals from her first composition of Miss Craye that "she is infatuated with her" (Hussey 164). Rather, the critical moment may be "hopelessly undramatic" (*Diary* 3: 106). However, in inviting the reader to see through Fanny's eyes impartially, since lyric narrative leads the reader to suspend judgment of a character, Woolf's story invites the reader to participate in the creation of a moment of being that possesses beauty in crystallizing a moment of dual vision.

In reading the story to pin Fanny's, Julia Craye's, and Phoebe Kingston's lesbianism, we risk missing the finer points of Woolf's broader goal of exploring human interactions not codified by established subject positions (pinned as proper or perverse by dominant discourse). The thread of "misrecognition" and a lesbian subtext should be understood in its intersections with Woolf's manipulation of narrative form to resist reductive readings.<sup>13</sup> Her story is all the more subversive for taking the mutual attraction of Fanny and Julia as a priori. The progression of the narrative is driven less by the reader's desire

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<sup>12</sup>Perhaps not coincidentally given the prominence of the fallen flower, Anne Herrmann's brief description of the story twice misprints her name as "Fanny Wilt" (76).

<sup>13</sup>As Susan Stanford Friedman has argued, Woolf's use of lyric disrupts "narrative patterns that inscribe the social order," authority, and desire (164).

to see Fanny finally realize that she feels erotic love for Miss Craye, than by the reader's desire to see Fanny meet Miss Craye's embrace by their mutual recognition of their sympathetic, artistic vision of each other. Given this emphasis on reciprocity, Clements's assertion that "Miss Craye attempts in vain to pass her wisdom on to Fanny" who "remains blinded by the language and traditions of her culture" (22) suggests a failure in the implied Woolf's aim. Woolf's "point" seems, in contrast to Clements's analysis, the construction of a love lyric about two women seeing through and moving past the glass enclosures of "the language and traditions" of their culture, that ends with the success of both women. Miss Craye succeeds as a mentor in providing a medium to broaden Fanny's vision, which already desires to embrace alternatives, and Fanny succeeds as an apprentice artist and would-be lover in mastering the play of vision and desire of the other that Julia models.

### 3. *Binary Stars*

Lyric narrative form enables Woolf to balance art and life, to negotiate solipsism and the formulas of easy sympathy. In "The Art of Fiction," Woolf challenges both reader/critic and artist to screw up their courage and "cut adrift from the eternal tea-table and the plausible and preposterous formulas which are supposed to represent the whole of our human adventure" (55). The result—"the story might wobble; the plot might crumble; ruin might seize upon the characters"—carries as triumphantly anarchic a tone as is echoed in the toppling masonry of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*; the detection of a "wobble" that leads to the ruins of novelistic linear space and time enables a deconstruction and reappropriation of terms: "The novel, in short, might become a work of art" (55).

The double-voicing of the story's penultimate paragraph underscores the relationship of the implied author and Fanny's vision and belies a discernable "wobble." This section is particularly interesting for the changes from its appearance in *The*

*Forum* to *A Haunted House*. In both publications, the second to last paragraph follows Fanny finding the pin and the final unfinished sentence, "She saw Julia—" (63, 111). However, in *The Forum*, the next paragraph appears: "She saw Julia open her arms; saw her blaze; saw her kindle. Out of the night she burnt like a dead white star. Julia kissed her. Julia possessed her" (63). The short story collection includes significant changes: "Julia blazed. Julia kindled. Out of the night she burnt like a dead white star. Julia opened her arms. Julia kissed her on the lips. Julia possessed it" (111). In both, the metaphor of a "dead white star" is a great imaginative improvement for Fanny in aesthetically grasping Julia as compared to her earlier visions of Julia—her "driving look" seems to say "Stars, sun, moon" (104). The paragraph's "possessed her/it" underscores the progression of Fanny's imaginative power to create this moment of accord in their visions. Further, the passage's double-voicing creates a simultaneity of vision in implied author and reader.

The second version, disencumbered from the tags of free indirect speech ("she saw"), and changing the report of the action from a vague "Julia kissed her. Julia possessed her" to the more precise gesture of opened arms, the placement of the kiss, and then the change from "possessed her" to "possessed it," achieves two things. First, the second passage emphasizes the double-voicing; the voice of Fanny seeing Julia as a "dead white star" harmonizes with the artistry of the implied author by reducing the distance further by removing the emphasis on Fanny's vision. Second, the three sentences that follow beginning with "Julia" more precisely express the double movements of the story: now that Fanny has mastered the art of seeing (possessing) Julia, Julia has mastered her role as mentor; now that the ideal reader has come to this moment of vision and recognizes the power of the implied author's vision, the implied author has mastered her maieutic role as a writer pushing the boundaries of modern fiction. The "it" that is ultimately possessed, then, signifies not only Julia's possession of Fanny as beloved, not only

Julia's and Fanny's possession of beauty in their simultaneous moments of being, but also the reader's and writer's possession of that same beauty in creating that moment. The ambiguity of the moment of possession, whether it can be said that Julia, Fanny, or the reader possesses an understanding of the other, is the absent point to which Woolf draws readers.

The "moment of ecstasy" is a four-voice coda: Fanny, Julia, the implied author, and the implied reader (110). The compounded pleasure of the implied reader comes from the attenuated presence the implied author achieves by allowing the reader to feel with Julia and Fanny while also seeing the pattern in which the moment is embedded. Here, Woolf gives her readers and "characters that little extra push which frees them" ("Phases of Fiction" 93). It has been, then, a double fugue from beginning until the end, in which the second subject is the relatively subdued call of the implied author to the reader—that is, until the last lines of the story, when the reader is encouraged to take up an answer to the first subject's theme. The ambiguities, stabilized tensions, that produce the ecstasy of the final moment empower the implied reader to take up the theme and begin imagining and unraveling his or her own response. The density of the line "dead white star" to describe Julia is a seductively suggestive thought in its evocation of binary stars, for example. The white dwarf star drawing light and heat from a star caught in synchronous orbit (discovered in the 1920s as a result of the "wobble" of Sirius B around Sirius) is introduced as a new metaphor for the relationship of the two women in the story, as well as the author and reader in plotting the collapse of the conventions of fiction (Tucker 125).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>In the 1920s, the emergence of quantum mechanics enabled astronomers to describe the relationship of Sirius and its companion star; the gravitational force of a collapsing star (a white dwarf) may create a binary element of two stars in which the greater dead white star contracts until its inner core is exposed while it accretes matter from the star that it has drawn into its orbit and with which it then remains in synchronous rotation (Tucker 126–27).

The deconstructive move of the text is particularly poignant, since in finally exposing the limits and falsity of ever truly “seeing” an other and thus possessing that other, the text manages nonetheless to seduce the reader to continue the attempt, to accept the invitation to the attempt to see an other, to grasp the ever elusive matter of beauty and subjectivity. The implied reader can revel in the “moments of being” and at the same time recognize the voice of the implied author suggesting that the poignancy of those moments is founded foremost on the “moments of non-being,” the “cotton wool” or patterning of daily life and conventional fiction (“A Sketch of the Past” 70–73). The implied reader ends the story with a sense of ascendancy, a willingness and joy in pursuing the paradox, particularly as a result of the implied Woolf’s ability to reveal in the course of the text that she has called to the implied reader as to a beloved, the “favourite pupil” (105). Thus, the implied reader is embraced by the final lines, caught in a synchronous orbit.

To return, then, to judging the practical success of Woolf’s story according to the standards she has defined in her own theory: is Woolf’s story successful if, as my challenge to Hafley’s and Clements’s readings suggests, I must argue for a broadened understanding of the story? Like Fanny, I say “yes.” Woolf succeeds precisely because her ideal reader is an active reader. As readers who then write, each engages with the text precisely from a feeling that he or she is the implied Woolf’s ideal reader, the beloved the text posits that will come with the vision that can “see” the text rightly. Woolf’s call for a new direction for fiction is thus nearly always already consummated in this lyric romance—between the implied author and ideal reader—and whatever the departures readers take, they answer the call in the affirmative, since it is ultimately the reader’s engagement that the text desires. Don’t you always find that?

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