

The beggar's song in Mrs Dalloway : an analysis, with some views on the poetics of empathy

Autor(en): **Peitrequin, Raymond**

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THE BEGGAR'S SONG IN *MRS DALLOWAY*
AN ANALYSIS, WITH SOME VIEWS
ON THE POETICS OF EMPATHY

Lorsqu'on a compris de quoi est fait un mystère, il redevient mystère chaque fois qu'on en fait de nouveau l'expérience directe.

Ernest Ansermet

En complément à une analyse linguistique attentive d'un passage clé de *Mrs Dalloway*, qui conduit à une nouvelle lecture du texte, cet article propose une interprétation d'un style, la représentation de la conscience. Ce style, marqué par une subversion de la deixis, est présenté comme une forme extrême d'empathie visant à une unité retrouvée.¹

Through most of the century Virginia Woolf has not stopped gaining in stature, the stature, above all, of a great novelist—a word unmarked for gender. And indeed her greatness lies more in her “humanitarian aesthetic”² than in any other aspect, more in what should unite than in what divides.

“Humanitarian aesthetic” nicely conveys that, in her work, *l'écriture* is inseparable from her philosophy, actually *is* her philosophy. The beggar's song, in *Mrs Dalloway*, can serve as an example of this fusion, of a narrative art that both generates and

1. This is a revised version of a farewell talk given in the English Department of the Faculty of Letters in Lausanne on June 25 1992, and touching on pragmatics and linguistic and literary analysis.

2. The term is used by William R. HANDLEY in *Virginia Woolf: The Politics of Narration*, Stanford: Humanities Honors Program, 1988, p. 36.

is generated by empathy and the sense of a common lot. This strange passage occurs in a section which is central both because it comes roughly in the middle of the book and because, through the characters of Peter Walsh and the Warren Smiths in Regent's Park, it links the pole of sanity, the world of Clarissa, with the pole of insanity or madness, the world of Septimus. The beggar's song is particularly seminal in the metaphysical dimension it creates, or rather reinforces.

On leaving Regent's Park, where he went to sleep on a bench and dreamed of "the death of the soul", Peter Walsh is interrupted by a sound. The passage that follows comes out somehow as a "purple patch", but plays an important part in the general significance of the novel. In a way that is far from being straightforward and univocal, it is related to some major themes, such as life and death, being and nothingness, separateness and oneness, the momentary and the eternal, time, memory, love, fertility and creativeness.

A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into

5 *ee um fah um so*
 foo swee too eem oo —

10 the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube Station, from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing

15 *ee um fah um so*
 foo swee too eem oo,

and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.

Through all ages—when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk

20 and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise —
the battered woman—for she wore a skirt—with
her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her
side, stood singing of love—love which
has lasted a million years, she sang, love which
25 prevails, and millions of years ago her lover, who
had been dead these centuries, had walked, she
crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages,
long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered,
with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's
30 enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills,
and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely
aged head on the earth, now become a mere
cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her
side a bunch of purple heather, there on her high
35 burial place which the last rays of the last sun
caressed; for then the pageant of the universe
would be over.

As the ancient song bubbled up opposite
Regent's Park Tube Station, still the earth seemed
40 green and flowery; still, though it issued from so
rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too,
matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still
the old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the
knotted roots of infinite ages, and skeletons and
45 treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the
pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and
down towards Euston, fertilising, leaving a damp
stain.

Still remembering how once in some primeval
50 May she had walked with her lover, this rusty pump,
this battered old woman with one hand exposed for
coppers, the other clutching her side, would still be
there in ten million years, remembering how once
she had walked in May, where the sea flows now,
55 with whom it did not matter—he was a man, oh
yes, a man who had loved her. But the passage of
ages had blurred the clarity of that ancient May
day; the bright-petalled flowers were hoar and
silver frosted; and she no longer saw, when she
60 implored him (as she did now quite clearly) “look in

my eyes with thy sweet eyes intently," she no longer saw brown eyes, black whiskers or sunburnt face, but only a looming shape, a shadow shape, to which, with the bird-like freshness of the
 65 very aged, she still twittered "give me your hand and let me press it gently" (Peter Walsh couldn't help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into his taxi), "and if some one should see, what matter they?" she demanded; and her fist
 70 clutched at her side, and she smiled, pocketing her shilling, and all peering inquisitive eyes seemed blotted out, and the passing generations—the pavement was crowded with bustling middle-class people—vanished, like leaves, to be trodden under,
 75 to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring —

*ee um fah um so
 foo swee too eem oo.*³

1. Survey of secondary material

A quick and, inevitably, incomplete survey of secondary material seems to show that the old beggar was hardly mentioned until the early seventies. Then, apart from J. Hillis Miller's article,⁴ which will be dealt with later, only brief, impressionistic references to the passage, ranging from two to some forty lines, can be found, without any close reading and thorough analysis. They focus almost exclusively on the "ee um fah um so" refrain. The problematic relationship between "fact" and "vision", the contribution of intertextuality, the question of point of view, the significance of the archetypal geological dimension and its relation to metaphysical preoccupations in the characters, all these

3. Virginia WOOLF, *Mrs Dalloway*, London/New York: Granada Publishing, 1976 [1925], p. 72-74. Further references to *Mrs Dalloway* will be identified by page numbers in parentheses incorporated in the text.

4. J. Hillis MILLER, "Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs Dalloway*" in *The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature in Honour of F.J. Hofmann*, ed. Melvin Friedman and John B. Vickery, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970, p. 100-27.

crucial issues are never really faced. Among a dozen critics only two link the vision of "that eternal spring" with Peter Walsh. The others, most of them with a feminist slant, treat it as a narratorial interlude, and use the passage to illustrate one of "the voices of subjectivity" (Richter⁵), a symbol which "unite[s] the factual world with more visionary truth" (Kelley⁶) or a symbol for "the evolutionary idea" (McLaurin⁷), the relationship between the language of madness and the language of art (DiBattista⁸), the resort to "a Greek chorus," explained by "Woolf's adherence to classical models" (Transue⁹), Woolf's socialist and feminist politics—the beggar as charwoman and origin of art (Marcus¹⁰), "a feminist view of evolution" (Minow-Pinkney¹¹), counter-hegemonic narrative (Handley¹²), the collapse of accepted distinctions (Miller¹³), or finally, in contrast with Peter Walsh's "omnipotent and servile abstractions", a female "life spirit itself" (Dowling¹⁴).

Hermione Lee,¹⁵ in 1977, was probably the first critic to see the mythic figure as Peter Walsh's interpretation:

Peter Walsh, for example, is, on a public level, jobless, in love, aged fifty-three, and just back from India. Deeper down, he dwells

5. Harvena RICHTER, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 140-41.

6. Alice van Buren KELLEY, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact and Vision*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1973, p. 112-13.

7. Allen McLAURIN, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 151-52.

8. Maria DiBATTISTA, *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon*, New Haven, Conn./London: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 52.

9. Pamela J. TRANSUE, *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, p. 93-95.

10. *Virginia Woolf and the Language of Patriarchy*, ed. J. Marcus, Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 11, 14 and 15.

11. Makiko MINOW-PINKNEY, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987, p. 73.

12. William R. HANDLEY, *Virginia Woolf: The Politics of Narration*, Stanford: Humanities Honors Program, 1988, p. 39-40.

13. C. Ruth MILLER, *Virginia Woolf: The Frames of Art and Life*, London: Macmillan, 1988, p. 53-54.

14. David DOWLING, *Mrs Dalloway: Mapping Streams of Consciousness*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991, p. 114-15.

15. Hermione LEE, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, London: Methuen, 1977, p. 102-3 and 113.

on his past and present feeling for Clarissa; and beyond that, he is dimly aware of some kind of universal, shared life-force, suggested by the old woman singing outside Regent's Park tube.

Batchelor¹⁶ adopts the same view:

For Peter Walsh clock time is cancelled by an old woman who sings outside Regent's Park Tube Station. The old woman is timeless, she has sung there "when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth" and she will continue to sing until the sun dies, and "then the pageant of the universe would be over".

2. *Metaphysical preoccupations*

Hardly mentioned by critics, though heavily emphasized in the text, the reference to geological ages functions here and in other passages in the novel as a metaphor for infinite time and space, eternity and infinity. It is against these that are measured not only that day in June, the day of the party, but also human life, both the life of the individual and the life of the species. The "fate of man", to use Septimus's term (p. 63), or the human condition, anchor the consciousness in time and space, for an "adventurous voyage" leading up irrevocably to death, for "a short season between two silences", as Rachel defines life in *The Voyage Out*.¹⁷ Another image is of being on a rock—Septimus's body "was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock" and "he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock" (p. 62). Still another is of being "on the verge of things" (p. 154), "the farthest verge" (p. 30), in the imagery applied to Clarissa. Metaphysical awareness, and metaphysical fear, more than just "the dwindling of life" (p. 28), a pang, a kind of dizziness, are present in Clarissa as well as in Peter Walsh and of course, with fatal consequences, in Septimus. A couple of examples will be enough, which hint at Clarissa's awe, at the anguish raised by the irrevocable punctuation of her life in the leaden circles of Big Ben, and also sum up her stoic reaction to this anguish.

16. John BATCHELOR, *Virginia Woolf: The Major Novels*, Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 78-79.

17. Epigraph in Madelin MOORE, *The Short Season between Two Silences*, Boston/London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984.

... possibly she said to herself, As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship (her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall, and they were fond of these nautical metaphors), as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners (Huxley again); decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way—her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives, were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady. Later ... she thought there were no Gods; no one was to blame; and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness.

p. 70

In a car passing down Bond Street greatness is passing,

... the majesty of England ... the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth.

p. 16-17

That these lines convey Clarissa's reaction is made clear on p. 18: "... the pale light of their immortal presence fell upon them as it had fallen upon Clarissa Dalloway".

3. Analysis

Even though the final interpretation may call for reference to other passages, the beggar's song is, to a certain extent, self-contained. It comes after nine pages with the stream of Peter Walsh's meditation as, walking in Regent's Park, he thinks of the days at Bourton and of Clarissa.

The division into paragraphs could easily be justified in spite of the impressive homogeneity and cohesion of the whole text: the first paragraph—"the voice"—puts the emphasis on auditory perception and imagery; the second paragraph develops an interpretation of the battered old woman and her love song; the third paragraph focuses on the current moment, the current state of the earth, and the fertilizing effect of the song, and the last para-

graph turns the old beggar into a perennial figure: the "ancient spring" (l. 7) has become "that eternal spring" (l. 75).

The structure is circular and the inarticulate sounds of the first paragraph reappear at the very end.

But this apparent clarity of design is illusory, as the temporal dimension is all important and the text establishes distinctions that it finally destroys, creating a significant sense of instability. This will be revealed later, in further analysis of, mainly, the second and fourth paragraphs.

What is it that the first paragraph, through the emphasis on sounds, exactly performs? Its syntactic structure is relatively simple, though highly rhetorical, with as a kernel a simple clause with subject, verb and direct object, to which a series of appositions are attached. The effect of the first words is to explicitly relate the old woman's song to the character of Peter Walsh (the "him" of l. 1), at least as far as mere auditory perception is concerned. The link will be confirmed near the end: "Peter Walsh couldn't help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into his taxi". (l. 66). At the literal level, Peter Walsh hears an old beggar singing, and the passage is framed, as it were, by two narrative elements and corresponds, in story time, to Peter Walsh's "interruption". But in between the old woman is given a mythic and mystic stature and becomes a transcendental figure.

Among the main aspects of the first paragraph are increasing definiteness ("a sound" becomes "a voice", then "the voice") and increasing metaphorical significance, with the voice becoming "the voice of an ancient spring".

The voice does not yet sing a song, but produces sounds at a kind of pre-linguistic stage. It is given an unsafe quality by such words and phrases as "frail", "quivering"—applied both to the sound (l. 1) and its source (l. 10) —, "without direction, vigour" (l. 2), "weakly" (l. 3). Moreover "without ... beginning or end" (l. 2), "with an absence of all human meaning" (l. 4), "of no age or sex" (l. 7), and "ancient" (l. 7) introduce what is to become a dominant feature of the figure. As for the main metaphor, it is reinforced by "bubbling up" (l. 2), "running" (l. 3), "spouting from the earth" (l. 8) and "issued" (l. 8).

The old woman is not yet mentioned as such: the source of the voice is "a shape", and more imagery (the comparison with "a tree for ever barren of leaves ... in the eternal breeze" (l. 11-17), echoes the timeless quality of the voice itself.

In the second paragraph, as in musical composition, some of the elements introduced in the first paragraph are developed into the theme of temporal vastness, with extension into past, prehistoric time (l. 18-30). There is already a good deal of instability, or even blurring, in the temporal relations, due to the basic ambiguity of the past tense. In the first part a vision of the history of the Earth is conveyed, while a parallel temporal dimension is given to the battered woman's love. The theme of remembering is sounded, at the same time as the symbolism of the red asters is introduced.

The pregnant temporal ambiguity increases in the second part of the paragraph (l. 31-37), providing a good example of how treacherous the absence of the expression of futurity in time clauses in English can be for readers of French mother tongue. What is more, because the order of clauses violates the syntactic hierarchy, it is not immediately evident that the "when"-clause depends on the infinitive clause and not on "she implored"—she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather when she died. So that even English readers will feel on unsafe ground until they get to the explicit future reference of the last verb "would be over", which makes clear the visionary nature of the final disappearance of both the figure and the whole universe.

The creating of the mythic figure owes a great deal to the instability, or again deliberate confusion, in the syntax, in particular the subtle change from direct style—"love which *has* lasted a million years" (l. 23)—to free indirect style—"her lover ... *had* walked, she crooned, with *her* in May" (l. 25, emphasis mine), with typical shifting of person and tense. Here, as often in Virginia Woolf, it is impossible to distinguish "represented speech" from the co-text in which it is embedded, so that what belongs to the song itself cannot be told with certainty from what belongs to its interpretation by the perceiving consciousness.

Although the third paragraph is clearly geared to the "here and now" of the narrative, opposite Regent's Park Tube Station, and the initial pre-linguistic sounds have now been firmly established as a song, the way the same phraseology is applied to it—"bubbled up" (l. 38), "issued" (l. 40), "bubbling" (l. 43), "soaking" (l. 43), "streamed away" (l. 45)—creates ambivalence, reinforced by explicit reference to the fertilising power of the song-spring, or spring-song (l. 47). The Janus-faced figure shares

the same ambivalence. In the first paragraph the spring was just said to be spouting from the earth. This is now developed and the song-spring comes out of "so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses" (l. 40-42), words which change the old beggar into a figure of fertility, a kind of Bona Dea.

It is in the last paragraph that the figure is endowed with her full stature, in a vision of the future achieved through poetic means that make it impossible to convey in rational prosaic terms. The vision, in a lyrical movement, supersedes the actuality of the experience and confuses present, past and future. Remembering is central in the vision, as it is in the Mass and the Requiem, in which one "makes memory". Even though barely and humbly, perhaps vulgarly human in what is given of the song, in direct speech, love becomes emblematic of a much higher value.

What mysteriously happens here in the language is that although the vision of the future is introduced by "would still be there" (l. 52), the expression of futurity is not maintained, so that we have "had blurred" (l. 57) and "she no longer saw" (l. 59 and 61), where we would have expected "would have blurred" and "would no longer see". A possible effect is to give more actuality to both the future remembering—"in ten million years" (l. 53), "where the sea flows now" (l. 54), with deictic projection—, and also to introduce transcendence, turning the lover with "brown eyes, black whiskers or sunburnt face" (l. 62) into an unnameable "looming shape, shadow shape" (l. 63). In the last few lines (l. 69-78) the smile is at the same time the beggar's, "pocketing her shilling", and, thanks to the fusion between "spring" and "song", the mysterious smile of an "eternal spring", a symbol both of eternal fertility, which outlives the passing generations, and of perennial creativity, perennial art.

— Le plus grand mystère n'est pas que nous soyons jetés au hasard entre la profusion de la matière et celle des astres; c'est que, dans cette prison, nous tirions de nous-mêmes des images assez puissantes pour nier notre néant.¹⁸

This is Walter's voice, in Malraux's *Les Noyers de l'Altenbourg*. Virginia Woolf's battered old woman is one of these images.

18. André MALRAUX, *Les Noyers de l'Altenbourg*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 98-99.

Poetic fusion, or confusion, and semantic profusion are taken to an extreme degree. An example of what some critics have called, at least in French, the absorption of poetry in the novel. The elegiac, the epic and perhaps the rhapsodic tones can be heard. The fusion of the beggar standing outside the tube station and her interpretation as a mythic figure of fertility and creativity, the fusion of her song and its symbolic interpretation as fertilizer, the fusion between voice and song, between the woman and her song, the remembering self and the remembered self, all this makes the components impossible to puzzle out. Part of the song is quoted in direct style, part is in "represented" style, but all this is as it were embedded in a consciousness's responses and intricately intermingled with this consciousness's visionary interpretation. It is to this consciousness that the text owes its cosmic and metaphysical dimension.

4. *The song and the poem*

In an article published in 1970, "Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs Dalloway*", J. Hillis Miller¹⁹ revealed a source for the beggar's song, a *lied* by Richard Strauss on the words of Hermann von Gilm. J. Hillis Miller writes, "The old woman, there can be no doubt, is singing Strauss's song". Whether Virginia Woolf had in mind the original German version of the poem or the song, and translated a few scraps, or whether she used a current English version does not matter much. What *is* significant is what she made, in her own way, of a few elements of the poem.

Allerseelen

Stell' auf den Tisch die duftenden Reseden,
Die letzten rothen Aestern trag' herbei
Und lass uns wieder von der Liebe reden
Wie einst im Mai.

19. J. Hillis Miller, "Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day: The Omniscient Narrator in *Mrs Dalloway*".

Gib mir die Hand, dass ich sie heimlich drücke,
 Und wenn man's sieht, mir ist es einerlei;
 Gib mir nur einen deiner süßen Blicke,
 Wie einst im Mai.

Es blüht und funkelt heut' auf jedem Grabe,
 Ein Tag im Jahre ist den Todten frei;
 Komm' an mein Herz, dass ich dich wieder habe,
 Wie einst im Mai.²⁰

The elements which belong both to the German poem and the old woman's song or its interpretation by the perceiving consciousness are the meeting of the lovers *in May*: "with her in May" (l. 23), "once in some primeval May" (l. 42), "she had walked in May" (l. 46), "that ancient May day" (l. 49); then the woman's requests, in reverse order: "look in my eyes with thy sweet eyes intently" (l. 52) and "give me your hand and let me press it gently" (l. 56); the idea that it has no importance if they are seen: "and if some one should see, what matter they?" (l. 58); and finally heather and asters—but as a different motif: "Stell' auf den Tisch die duftenden Reseden" vs "she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather" (l. 29) and "Die letzten rothen Aestern trag' herbei" vs "ages ... flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters" (l. 24).

In the German poem, there is a reference to All Souls' Day as a day which is free to the dead ("Ein Tag im Jahre ist den Toten frei"). It is this element, missing in *Mrs Dalloway*, which Miller makes the basis of an interpretation of the novel as Virginia Woolf's All Souls' Day, an interpretation based on his version of the omniscient narrator and the idea of pastness of the events in relation to this narrator. The comparison above shows that the I-you relationship of the poem is retained in three short quotations from the song in direct style. But most of the song is appropriated as it were by the perceiving consciousness. There are elements which are present in the beggar's song or in the interpretation of it and not in the poem, and which Miller mentions just in passing. Above all, the cosmic dimension; ages: "love

20. Hermann VON GILM ZU ROSENEGG, *Gedichte*, Leipzig: Liebeskind, 1894, p. 107.

which has lasted a million years" (l. 20), "millions of years ago her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May" (l. 22), "in ten millions years" (l. 45); geological changes, the end of the universe (l. 27-32), "where the sea flows now" (l. 47).

There are other, less significant differences: the lover is dead (l. 22), which is only implied in the poem, the singer refers to her own future death (l. 27-32), and she remembers walking "with whom it did not matter" (l. 47).

The beggar is definitely not just "singing Strauss's song".

6. *Figural subjectivity versus narratorial interlude*

Whose "interpretation" of the battered old woman does the text convey? In the article referred to above, J. Hillis Miller explains that he hears in these lines the voice of an omniscient narrator. As most of the novel consists in the "representation" of the various characters' consciousnesses and it can be shown that even conversations undergo a process of internalization, it seems that the attribution to a narrator would be difficult to justify and this narratorial interlude would seem arbitrary. Just "a purple patch". There is another passage that makes more explicit the same duality between the factual world and its interpretation by a character, Septimus's interpretation:

... an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still, came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus.

p. 62

Moreover, and more importantly, the text provides a linguistic clue. There is one word that is conclusive, the shifted "would" in l. 45 ("would still be there"). This "would", as a shifted "will", can only be figural, that is, anchored to a subject of consciousness, however indeterminate here, and a moment of consciousness. Vague ideas about an omniscient narrator will not do: a narratorial voice making a statement about the remote future ("in ten million years") would use a deictic, unshifted "will still be there".

In favour of the attribution to Peter Walsh there is the narrative framing: "A sound interrupted him" (l. 1) and "Peter Walsh could not help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into a taxi" (l. 57), two plot-advancing events which frame both the interpretation and the "interruption" in Peter Walsh's walk. The figure of the battered old woman is integrated in the story and explicitly linked, in terms of perception, with Peter Walsh.

But there are other clues in the novel. A few minutes before going out of Regent's Park, Peter Walsh, looking back on the Bourton years, remembered Clarissa's philosophy of life and also that her favourite reading was Huxley and Tyndall (p. 70). Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) was a friend and supporter of Darwin and wrote *Man's Place in Nature, Science and Morals*, about the relation of science to philosophical and religious speculation. John Tyndall (1820-1893) taught natural history and also wrote about the relation between science and theological opinion. Peter Walsh's awareness of this dimension in Clarissa's thinking makes it at least possible for him to see the beggar in her symbolic significance. It would be easy to show that these metaphysical preoccupations are shared not only by Clarissa and Peter, but also, as an extreme case, by Septimus, in whose characterization this awareness is of crucial importance, closely linked as it is with his insanity. Clarissa read Tyndall and Huxley, Septimus, whose brain is "made sensitive by eons of evolution", "devoured" Darwin and *The History of Civilization* (pp. 61 and 77). This is set in contrast with *Proportion*, Sir William Bradshaw's Goddess. Even the imagery used to convey Elizabeth's stream of consciousness echoes her mother's sense of a geological scale, in a passage that also evokes the unifying power of music, "triumphing", "consolatory"²¹:

... this voice, pouring endlessly year in, year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession; would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough

21. That the characters' universe of knowledge is included in Woolf's is obvious. Explicit evidence is easy to find. In *Granite and Rainbow*, for instance, in which she writes: "But for our generation and the generation that is coming ... the mind is full of monstrous, hybrid, unmanageable emotions. That the age of the earth is 3,000,000,000 years: that human life lasts but a second ..." (Virginia Woolf, *Granite and Rainbow*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1958, p. 12).

stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal,
some oak trees, and rolls them on.

p. 123

If it is right to attribute to Peter Walsh the kind of sensitivity that is able to turn the old beggar into a cosmic figure, this becomes an important element in his characterization, and an element which contrasts him with the man Clarissa chose to marry, Richard Dalloway, who would be closer to the "bustling middle-class people" hurrying along the pavement. The passage can then be seen as one that contributes importantly to creating the character who, on that crucial day in June, could still be Richard's rival.

7. *Mise en abyme, pseudo-deixis and empathy*

The novel as an artefact contains a character (Peter Walsh) who perceives another character (the beggar) who sings (as another artefact) a song. The beggar's song has the form of fake face-to-face discourse, but is embedded in a form which explodes the framework of communication and creates a subject of consciousness and a moment of consciousness with shifted tense and the absence of syntactic dependence. Significantly the empathy created by the language between Peter Walsh, or whoever the perceiving consciousness belongs to, and the beggar supersedes the love between the "I" of the song and her lover.

Deixis is that part of language that can only be decoded by taking into account the situation in which the language is being used. The deictic elements are linked with a situation of utterance, involving a "here and now" (temporal and spatial co-ordinates), a speaker and an addressee. Consequently, it could be tentatively argued, deixis is also that part of language which confines individual consciousness within the walls of a prison-cell. Omnipresent, deixis makes language radically egocentric. Not only waking up, but becoming articulate begins by saying "I", "here" and "now". By doing so man becomes, in Isherwood's words, "a prisoner for life"²². More generally, the grammatical category of person creates the human being's separateness by

22. Christopher ISHERWOOD, *A Single Man*, London: Methuen, 1964, p. 7 and 12.

distinguishing speaker from addressee and subject of discourse (it is perhaps significant that at least in most languages the first person is gender-free). The category of tense then forces upon the frail, quivering consciousness an inevitable anchoring in time and space, for "a season between two silences". The signs of the most basic aspect of the human condition are present at the heart of language. Incontrovertibly so?

The terms "representation of consciousness" and "represented thought" are misleading. It should be clear that what they refer to is not a device that would make it possible to represent some external consciousness. The "represented consciousness" is an artefact, something created by language. It should be clear too that if it can be, and *has been*, argued that in this case there is no narrator²³, it does not mean that the text was born *ex nihilo*. The concept of the implied author—"paring his nails" perhaps, though responsible in the last analysis for everything in the text—this concept seems more adequate for a text which breaks some of the most basic rules of communication, doing away with the most basic contrasts in person and tense.

The "representation of consciousness" is a style which can perhaps be felt as one of the most elaborate efforts made by the modern mind to come to terms with the tension between separateness and oneness, a style which creates an analogue of empathy or of an all-embracing world of ultimate unity. Pseudo-deixis is an attempt to pull down the walls of the prison-cell: whereas in narratorial deixis the deictic elements create a narrative situation, involving a "here and now" (temporal and spatial coordinates) and an I-narrator, in figural pseudo-deixis the deictic elements create a subject of consciousness and a moment of consciousness with a "here and now". Paradoxically, subjectivity can be attached to this third-person subject of consciousness and the "here and now" co-occurs with the past tense. The first and second persons disappear, both of them shifted to a third person which negates the "I" vs "you" relationship. The tense contrast vanishes too, with the shifting to a singular past tense which takes on various values, either cotemporal with a now-in-the-fiction or with the characters' past, blurs temporal distinctions or

23. See Ann BANFIELD, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction*, Boston/London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

even explodes the very concept of time. But the subjectivity normally associated with the speaking subject is kept alive, the frail, quivering consciousness is still there in the guise of a third person subject of consciousness. Far from being a solipsistic closure, this mysterious metamorphosis can be seen as a form of empathy, credited to the implied writer.

In this passage Virginia Woolf takes the style a stage further. A few lines in free indirect speech are used for the rendering of scraps of the old woman's song. But they are embedded in what must be construed as a subject of consciousness's vision of that old beggar as a cosmic and eternal figure. Whether the subject of consciousness is Peter Walsh is perhaps questionable, though there are good reasons to endow him with this visionary sensitivity. Anyway, what is specific in this part of the text is the absence of any shifted third person pronoun, any reference to the subject of consciousness, who is still present as point of view, but as it were entirely given to his vision, in an extreme form of empathy, in a strange meeting.

Such a meeting is also the meeting of a writer, an implied author, fictional characters and a reader. In "this late age of the world's experience" (p. 10), it suggests a sense of community—neither fraternity nor sorority, but a sense of shared humanity, which could be a safeguard against all varieties of fanaticism, religious or nationalistic. Metaphysically, it might be seen as an image of recovered unity, this "centre which, mystically, evades [us]" (p. 163). Finally, as a work of art, the beggar's song is also emblematic of an offering:

... an offering; to combine; to create; but to whom?

An offering for the sake of offering perhaps. ...

After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end ...

p. 109²⁴

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24. The talk ended with the reading of another appeal to a sense of common humanity, a poem called precisely *Strange Meeting* and incorporated by Benjamin Britten in his *War Requiem*, among other poems by Wilfred Owen. It was proposed as one of those powerful images, able perhaps to negate "human nothingness".

