

## Readers' Engagement with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*: From Knowing about Death to the Experience of Finitude

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article analyse l'expérience qu'éprouvent les lecteurs du roman *Mrs Dalloway* de Virginia Woolf, surtout en ce qui a trait aux thèmes de la mort et de la finitude. Par une lecture comparative de certains passages de *Mrs Dalloway* et d'*Être et Temps* de Martin Heidegger, nous montrons, dans un premier temps, que le roman de Woolf illustre bel et bien des concepts heideggeriens, dont « l'être-jeté », « l'angoisse », « l'inquiétante étrangeté », « l'appel de la conscience » et « l'être-pour-la-mort ». Ensuite, nous présentons les résultats d'une étude empirique dans laquelle ont été analysées (qualitativement et quantitativement) les réactions de quarante-six lecteurs à des passages jugés par ceux-ci comme étant frappants ou évocateurs. Celle-ci a permis de constater que certains lecteurs entretiennent un rapport de nature existentielle avec le texte, rapport qui sous-tend une réflexion ontologique sur la finitude. La définition que nous donnons des divers profils de lecture et du concept de « lecture existentielle » se fonde sur la phénoménologie (Husserl, Heidegger et Merleau-Ponty).

# READERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS DALLOWAY*: From Knowing about Death to the Experience of Finitude

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates readers' experience of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, focusing on the themes of death and finitude. In close comparative reading, we first argue that certain passages of the novel effectively explicate Heidegger's discussion of "thrownness," "anxiety," the "uncanny," the "call of conscience," and "Being-towards-death." We then report an empirical study of 46 readers' comments on passages from *Mrs Dalloway* that they found striking or evocative. A combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that a form of enactive and expressive attunement leads some readers to an existential engagement with the text that involves a form of ontological reflection on finitude. We draw on phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) to articulate several distinct reading profiles, emphasizing their relationship to what we call "existential reading."

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article analyse l'expérience qu'éprouvent les lecteurs du roman *Mrs Dalloway* de Virginia Woolf, surtout en ce qui a trait aux thèmes de la mort et de la finitude. Par une lecture comparative de certains passages de *Mrs Dalloway* et d'*Être et Temps* de Martin Heidegger, nous montrons, dans un premier temps, que le roman de Woolf illustre bel et bien des concepts heideggeriens, dont « l'être-jeté », « l'angoisse », « l'inquiétante étrangeté », « l'appel de la conscience » et « l'être-pour-la-mort ». Ensuite, nous présentons les résultats d'une étude empirique dans laquelle ont été analysées (qualitativement et quantitativement) les réactions de quarante-six lecteurs à des passages jugés par ceux-ci comme étant frappants ou évocateurs.

Celle-ci a permis de constater que certains lecteurs entretiennent un rapport de nature existentielle avec le texte, rapport qui sous-tend une réflexion ontologique sur la finitude. La définition que nous donnons des divers profils de lecture et du concept de « lecture existentielle » se fonde sur la phénoménologie (Husserl, Heidegger et Merleau-Ponty).

Virginia Woolf's writing has occasionally been discussed in relation to Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy. Heidi Storl, for instance, describes the proximity of Woolf's thinking in *To the Lighthouse*<sup>1</sup> to Heidegger's understanding that *Dasein* is embedded and embodied;<sup>2</sup> Lucio P. Ruotolo has commented on how Woolf's characters often experience a terrifying "nothingness" that has much in common with Heidegger's meditations on the same concept;<sup>3</sup> and Madeline Moore mentions how the Heideggerian anguish and wonder in Woolf's novels "put us in the presence of nothingness from which Being erupts."<sup>4</sup> The most in-depth discussion of this kind, however, is Suzette A. Henke's "Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: A Phenomenological Reading."<sup>5</sup> In that paper, Henke patiently explicates the parallels between Heidegger's existential philosophy and the themes expressed through the voices in Woolf's experimental novel.

Like *The Waves*, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*<sup>6</sup> portrays the existential struggles of its main characters. Already in the opening pages, we encounter the existential anxiety of the protagonist, Clarissa: "She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxicabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day."<sup>7</sup> Such passages have led critics such as Steven Earnshaw to hold that the novel "suggests a qualified existential outlook where Clarissa Dalloway is both blessed and cursed with epiphanies, and the sense of alienation and anxiety is ever-present."<sup>8</sup> What then are the themes that are comprised by this "existential outlook"? And, more importantly, how do readers of *Mrs Dalloway* engage these themes in the novel? This paper investigates readers' experiences of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, with a focus on the themes of death and finitude.

We begin with a close comparative reading of a selected passage from *Mrs Dalloway* and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*.<sup>9</sup> This passage, we argue, *exemplifies* aspects of Heidegger's discussion of "thrownness," "anxiety," the

“uncanny,” the “call of conscience,” and “Being-towards-death.” We then discuss the results of an empirical study of forty-six readers’ responses to that same passage, especially to lines in it that they found particularly striking or evocative. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of their commentaries revealed five distinct reading profiles, each differently related to what we call “existential reading.” One profile involves a form of enactive and expressive attunement through which some readers went beyond *recognizing* existential themes to full *experiential* engagement with their ontological import. That is, they moved from knowing about death to the experience of finitude.

### Existential Themes in *Mrs Dalloway*

In the first excerpt from *Mrs Dalloway* selected for presentation to participants in the empirical study reported here,<sup>10</sup> Septimus Warren Smith experiences the once meaningful life of culturally embedded practical activity as distant, strange, and meaningless. He perceives it as an island surrounded by an engulfing and indifferent “nothing.” Together with the meaningfulness of culturally embedded practical activity, the sense of community and belonging has disappeared. Septimus is alone not *in* the world but in *facing* the world, as the following passage illustrates:

So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. [...] Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won. But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world.<sup>11</sup>

*Mrs Dalloway* portrays “shell shocked” Septimus’s decline through torment and despair to a state of resignation and eventual suicide. However, Woolf also presents Clarissa’s self-implicating, empathizing reflection on Septimus’s fate and her attempt to wring meaning from his death (as described in the second passage participants read).<sup>12</sup> The text invites readers

to follow her reflections on not only Septimus's but also her own mortality and finitude:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death. But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding his treasure? “If it were now to die, ’twere now to be most happy,” she had said to herself once, coming down in white.

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear.<sup>13</sup>

Could the “treasure” Clarissa refers to in the passage above be akin to Heidegger's “freedom towards death”?<sup>14</sup> The excerpt that describes how Clarissa prepares her party and then learns of Septimus's death effectively *explicates* Heidegger's discussion of “thrownness,” “anxiety,” the “uncanny,” the “call of conscience,” and “Being-towards-death.” To illustrate this parallel, consider first this passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time*:

In the face of its thrownness *Dasein* flees to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self. This fleeing has been described as a fleeing in the face of the uncanniness which is basically determinative for individualized Being-in-the-world. Uncanniness reveals itself authentically in the basic state-of-mind of anxiety; and, as the most elemental way in which thrown *Dasein* is disclosed, it puts *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world face to face with the “nothing” of the world; in the face of this “nothing”, *Dasein* is anxious with anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. *What if this Dasein, which finds itself [sich befindet] in the very depths of its uncanniness, should be the caller of the call of conscience?*<sup>15</sup>

Heidegger uses “anxiety” as a technical term for the “state-of-mind” during radical (ontological) reflection on one's own finitude. In the passage from

*Mrs Dalloway* quoted above, Clarissa experiences Heideggerian anxiety through her self-implicating empathy with Septimus. That is, she becomes experientially, not abstractly, aware of her own finitude. According to Heidegger, ontological reflection on (one's own) finitude is accompanied by the acute and uncanny experience of one's "thrownness" and by radical individuation. The experience of thrownness, roughly, is reflective awareness of the factuality of concrete life within one's own "skin," culture, and fate. Such reflective awareness, in turn, leads to experiencing self and world as utterly strange and un-homely. Heidegger calls this un-homeliness (*Unheimlichkeit*) the "uncanny." Clarissa's train of thought is a powerful description of the "uncanniness" that is revealed through reflection on having been "thrown *into existence* [and of existing] as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be":<sup>16</sup> "Then [...] there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity [...] this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear."<sup>17</sup>

The *Mrs Dalloway* passages describing Septimus portray the experiential character of "*Dasein's* Being-in-the-world [coming] face to face with the 'nothing' of the world"<sup>18</sup>. It is a (self-) alienating experience of nothingness and of a world utterly devoid of meaning. According to Heidegger, we usually flee from this stark moment's "potentiality-for-Being," into "the supposed freedom of the they-self."<sup>19</sup> That is, instead of remaining open to the uncanny and individualizing experience of coming face to face with the meaninglessness of the world and acting upon our conscience, Heidegger thinks we turn toward culture and community for meaning and sacrifice our capacity for living authentically (*eigentlich*).

Clarissa Dalloway's experience in the passage above, however, is an effective example of the contrary move away from the "they-self" lost in "idle talk" to an individuating experience of anxiety through the ontological reflection on finitude. Heidegger asks: "What could be more alien to the 'they', lost in the manifold 'world' of its concern, than the Self which has been individualized down to itself in uncanniness and been thrown into the 'nothing'?"<sup>20</sup> Clarissa hears the Heideggerian "*call of conscience*" "*in the very depths of this uncanniness*"<sup>21</sup> accompanying her ontological reflection on finitude, as the following passage illustrates: "A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had

preserved.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, *Mrs Dalloway* presents us with Clarissa’s experience of moving out of the “oblivion of being”<sup>23</sup> and death denial to an ontological reflection that simultaneously entails a sense of enlivenment and an acute experience of finitude and vulnerability.

According to Heidegger this ontological reflection on and confrontation with our own finitude and vulnerability, which he calls Being-towards-death, is simply the ground for any authentic human life (*Dasein*). Moreover, it may paradoxically be accompanied by joy. He writes: “Along with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized ability-to-be, there goes an unshakable joy in this possibility;”<sup>24</sup> Being-towards-death, in Heidegger’s words, thus brings us “*face to face with the possibility of being itself... in an impassioned freedom towards death—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, anxious.*”<sup>25</sup> Dreyfus provides the following gloss on Heidegger’s proposal: “this vulnerability is a necessary condition of the joy of being a world-discloser, so that, far from *fear* of my inevitable *demise*, *Dasein*’s authentic attunement to the world while disclosing it is anxious joy.”<sup>26</sup>

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa experiences precisely such anxious joy, that is, the paradoxical simultaneity of “awful fear”<sup>27</sup> and extraordinary joy.<sup>28</sup> The following passage captures the paradoxical affirmation that follows her individualizing, alienating, and acutely temporal experience of anxiety:

It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back.<sup>29</sup>

And, as if to underline the import of such radically ontological reflection in this existential novel, *Mrs Dalloway* closes with the character Peter similarly experiencing the paradoxical simultaneity of terror and joy: “What is this terror? What is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?”<sup>30</sup>

## Existential Reading

It is, of course, one thing to point out philosophical parallels between Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* and Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and quite another to argue that readers actually discern the philosophical import of her writing. We have suggested elsewhere<sup>31</sup> that some readers not only *recognize* the existential themes of such texts, but also are moved themselves toward ontological reflection on finitude. In the reflective and experiential attunement that literary reading invites, readers may relate themselves to the characters and world of the text in a way that brings them nearer to *their experience of the world* and enables freshly enlivened attunement to their own Being-in-the-world. As Merleau-Ponty writes: “The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.”<sup>32</sup>

The expressive and experiential quality of this form of reading is, as mentioned above, a sense of enlivenment and of seeing the world with fresh eyes. Šklovskij’s famous dictum about the role of art making us see the world with fresh eyes is dependent on such an expressive and experiential engagement:

[A]rt exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.<sup>33</sup>



Literary scholars referring to this passage have focused almost exclusively on the importance Šklovskij seems to ascribe to deviation (dehabituation, defamiliarization, deautomatization, foregrounding), which brings him into conceptual proximity with discussions of the “difficulty” of art.<sup>34</sup> However, the form of reading Merleau-Ponty describes is not adequately captured by defamiliarization-refamiliarization cycles, nor as a prolonged engagement with the “difficulty” of modernist or other literature. Rather, it is a form of conceptual uncovering that is disclosive and experiential.<sup>35</sup> The nod to Dilthey’s notion of *Lebensgefühl* in Šklovskij’s passage above (sensation of life) shows that Šklovskij, too, may have in mind an experiential attunement that goes beyond sustained attention.

Coincidentally, Heidegger similarly speaks of uncovering the “stoniness of the stone” (*das Steinige des Steines*)<sup>36</sup> and argues that the sense of enlivenment accompanying such aesthetic experience opens onto ontological or, in Merleau-Ponty’s term, “radical”<sup>37</sup> reflection, and thus inevitably onto an acute experience of finitude and vulnerability. The vulnerability that comes with the existential experience of finitude is precisely what Virginia Woolf captures in *Mrs Dalloway*. Heidegger, as we have seen, describes this experience as “anxiety.” Paradoxically, however, for Heidegger anxiety is also of the essence of what it means to be human (*Dasein*). Within it, he holds, we “initiate our own nature.”<sup>38</sup> As Farrell Krell puts it: “Thinking proceeds—if it is to proceed at all—within anxiety.”<sup>39</sup>

But do readers of *Mrs Dalloway* actually go beyond merely acknowledging Clarissa and Septimus’s struggle with finitude and engage in the anxious and radical reflection through which they reflectively *experience* their own finitude? Do they themselves take up their own “anxiety” and perform the ontological turn that constitutes existential reading? In the remainder of this paper we present an empirical study that attempted to address this possibility.

# **An Empirical Study of Readers' Engagements with *Mrs Dalloway***

## ***Participants***

Forty-six undergraduate psychology students participated for course credit in the present study. Thirty-four were women (mean age = 19.89 yr), and 12 were men (mean age = 20.00 yr). Students were eligible to participate only if they scored above average on the insight orientation scale of Miall and Kuiken's Literary Response questionnaire<sup>40</sup> and Kuiken's Attitudes Toward Poetry questionnaire,<sup>41</sup> both administered during mass testing in introductory psychology courses. Students were unaware of this eligibility requirement.

At the beginning of each research session, participants were given an oral briefing, a brief overview of the research tasks, information regarding anonymity and confidentiality, and an indication of the time required for participation (a maximum of two hours). Also, participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time without loss of credit, provided they completed an alternative educational activity.

## ***Methods and Procedures***

Participants were asked to practice the research tasks by reading a passage from *Mrs Dalloway*.<sup>42</sup> After confirming that the procedures were understood, we distributed the primary text and related research materials. In these materials, participants were asked to (1) read the primary text twice and, during the second reading, mark a passage that they found particularly striking or evocative; (2) describe in their own words (into an audio recorder) their experience of this marked passage ("Describe any thoughts, feelings, images, impressions, or memories that were in any way part of your experience"); and (3) describe their experience of the text as a whole in the same manner.

The analysis of the transcribed commentaries provided by participants in this study applied a category system developed in a study that Sopčák conducted of readers' responses to Maurice Blanchot's short story, "The Instant of My Death."<sup>43</sup> The results of this "Blanchot" study are reported in

detail elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> However, a brief summary of its methods and results will provide the necessary backdrop for the study of readers' engagements with *Mrs Dalloway* discussed here.

The methods by which this classification of reading profiles was originally established are taxonomic and phenomenological.<sup>45</sup> They are taxonomic in that the classes of reading profiles were derived using quantitative algorithms that maximize similarity among instances within a class and maximize dissimilarity between classes (i.e., hierarchical cluster analysis).<sup>46</sup> They are phenomenological in that these cluster analytic algorithms were applied to reading attributes derived from a form of qualitative analysis in which recurrent expressions within a set of experiential narratives (commentaries) are identified.<sup>47</sup> The original study, then, was designed to be systematically classificatory and to reflect distinctions that readers themselves make when describing reading experiences. The table in appendix presents the attribute profiles for five distinct clusters of readers: (1) Interpreting Death and Injustice, (2) Compassion for Victims of Injustice, (3) Existentialist Echoes, (4) Existential Resignation, and (5) Existential Affirmation.

## **Synopses of these Reading Profiles**

### ***Interpreting Death and Injustice***

Readers in this cluster (cluster 1) remain at an interpretative distance from the world of the text. The lack of self-implication apparent in their commentaries makes their superficially “empathic” engagement with the protagonist resemble intellectualized speculation about mental states. Moreover, theirs is a thematic encounter with what is present-at-hand in an “objectively” present textual world; there is no indication that these readers themselves are imaginatively “transported into a narrative world.”<sup>48</sup> Reflection thus remains thoroughly Cartesian in its abstract and “objective” consideration of the themes available in the texts.

### ***Compassion for Victims of Injustice***

Although readers in cluster 2 begin their engagement with the text from the same interpretative distance as those in cluster 1, they gradually move

toward a self-implicating reading in which they feel compassion for those suffering from injustice. However, these readers do not project themselves into the protagonist's situation as proposed in Mar and Oatley's theory of simulative empathy,<sup>49</sup> and neither do they engage in a fully involving form of empathic engagement that blurs the boundaries between themselves and the protagonist. Instead, these readers react to (but do not feel with) the protagonist; their compassionate reflection remains objectifying, abstract, and inferential.

### ***Existentialist Echoes***

Members of cluster 3, on the other hand, exhibit the form of simulative empathy posited by Mar and Oatley. These simulations are interpretative inferences from a third-person perspective made in order to understand both themselves and the protagonist. That is, despite the "experiential" input that simulative empathy provides, these readers remain at an objectifying and inferential distance. Whereas in cluster 2 reflection is focused on injustice and compassion, readers in cluster 3 are concerned with the inevitability of death and whether life is worth living or not. However, their reflection on these themes lacks the experiential and ontological reflection that Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger have in mind. Their reading might be characterized as existentialist (or "existentiell" in Heidegger's distinction of this form of engagement from an "existential" one)<sup>50</sup> since it rehearses or acknowledges existential themes without *experiencing* an ontological turn.

### ***Existential Resignation***

Readers in cluster 4 also reflect on death and whether life is worth living in a way that has implications for their own death and their own life. Rather than rehearsing these themes from a safe interpretative distance, however, their own mortality and human finitude is *experienced* as overwhelming and as threatening the meaningfulness of life. These readers are reflectively attuned to what is actualized in their own immediate experience. There is a radical ontological reflection that is accompanied by the experience of vulnerability, anxiety, hopelessness, and despair in the face of an indifferent universe. They do not merely experience a temporary loss of an objectified sense of self as in full empathic engagement, but also experience themselves and the

world as somehow strange. Phenomenologists have called this “wonder:” “Wonder sees the world of everyday as suddenly strange and mysterious, obtrusive, standing out. The question has been opened up by the momentary experience.”<sup>51</sup> For readers in cluster 4, however, this experience of the uncanny (*Unheimlichkeit*) undermines the meaningfulness of life and engenders hopelessness. Heidegger describes a similar experience: “Uncanniness reveals itself authentically in the basic state-of-mind of anxiety; and, as the most elemental way in which thrown *Dasein* is disclosed, it puts *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world face to face with the ‘nothing’ of the world.”<sup>52</sup>

### ***Existential Affirmation***

The reading profile of members of cluster 5 shares with cluster 4 the non-Cartesian form of (self)reflection characteristic of existential reading. That is, their experiential, enactive, and expressive reading of the protagonist’s struggle with death and finitude moves them toward an *experience of their own* mortality and finitude. In their reflective explication, which involves personal, death-related memories, they gain a fresh and embodied understanding of death and finitude. However, the individualizing and alienating experience of the nothingness evokes in these readers not the resignation found in members of cluster 4, but rather a shift from sadness and suffering to a kind of “knowingness.” Their radical reflection moves them toward an existential affirmation.

## **Applying the Existential Reading Category System to Commentaries on *Mrs Dalloway***

Because the original study relied upon quantitative algorithms, those results facilitate a similarly quantitative classification of commentaries in the present sample of readers. That is, the attribute profile of each commentary in the present sample can be compared with the attribute profiles established for each of the reading types identified in the “Blanchot” study. To that end, we assessed the similarity between the attribute profiles of each commentary in the present study and the attribute profiles of each previously established reading type. Using a similarity metric that takes into account both level and pattern profile information, the degree of resemblance between each new commentary and each of the established reading types was determined.

Roughly, the established profile that the new commentary most nearly resembled determined the class to which it belongs.

Thus, to examine readers' responses to passages from Mrs Dalloway, the commentaries of 46 participants were scored for the presence, "1," or absence, "0," of each of these constituents listed in Table 1. The resulting profiles of constituents for each reader were then compared to the five reading profiles established in the "Blanchot study". In this way, 18 readers were classified as (1) Interpreting Death and Injustice; six showed (2) Compassion for Victims of Injustice; 17 most nearly resembled the (3) Existentialist Echoes profile; four fell into the (4) Existential Resignation cluster; and only one into (5) Existential Affirmation. Approximately ten percent of the participants were existential readers. That is, of the 46 participants who read Mrs Dalloway, five were existential readers, namely, the four in the Existential Resignation cluster (4) and the one in the Existential Affirmation cluster (5).

To Heidegger the kind of radical ontological reflection on and confrontation with their own finitude and vulnerability that these existential readers show is the ground for an authentic engagement with one's life. Incidentally, he considers the function of art to initiate such an ontological reflection that unconceals Being,<sup>53</sup> and that "puts Being to work in a being."<sup>54</sup> We have tried to show in this paper that not only are there clear parallels between Heidegger's philosophy and some of the key themes in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (published two years prior to *Being and Time*), but also that the novel in fact moved some of the readers in our study to the kind of ontological reflection that initiates authentic thinking within anxiety and that "turns our unprotected Being into the Open."<sup>55</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927; San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1989).
- <sup>2</sup> Heidi Storl, "Heidegger in Woolf's Clothing," *Philosophy and Literature* 32 (2008): 303–14.
- <sup>3</sup> Lucio Ruotolo, *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 145–46.
- <sup>4</sup> Madeline Moore, *The Short Season Between Two Silences* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984), 119.
- <sup>5</sup> Suzette A. Henke, "Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*: A Phenomenological Reading," *Neophilologus* 73 (1989): 461–72.
- <sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925; New York: Penguin Books, 1992).
- <sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 9.
- <sup>8</sup> Steven Earnshaw, *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 11.
- <sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962 [1927]).
- <sup>10</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 93–102. This first passage participants read begins with "Something was up, Mr. Brewer knew; Mr. Brewer, managing clerk at Sibleys and Arrowsmiths, auctioneers, valuers, land and estate agents," and ends with "A voice spoke from behind the screen. Evans was speaking. The dead were with him."
- <sup>11</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 101–2.
- <sup>12</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 200–4. This second passage presented to participants begins with "There were the Bradshaws, whom she disliked," and ends "But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room."
- <sup>13</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 202–3.
- <sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 311.
- <sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321.
- <sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321.
- <sup>17</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 202–3.
- <sup>18</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321.
- <sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321.
- <sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321–22.

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- <sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321.
- <sup>22</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 202.
- <sup>23</sup> David Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 37.
- <sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 358.
- <sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 311; original italics.
- <sup>26</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, foreword, in *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* by Carol J. White (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), xxxv.
- <sup>27</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 203.
- <sup>28</sup> The coincidence of terror and joy has often been considered a characteristic of the sublime (see for instance R. Jahan Ramazani, "Yeats: Tragic Joy and the Sublime," *PMLA* 104, no. 2 (1989): 163–77. For a discussion of how Heidegger's concepts of "wonder" and "anxious joy" differ from the sublime, see Brad Elliott Stone, "Curiosity as the Thief of Wonder: An Essay on Heidegger's Critique of the Ordinary Conception of Time," *KronoScope* 6, no. 2 (2006): 204–29.
- <sup>29</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 204.
- <sup>30</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 212.
- <sup>31</sup> Paul Sopčák, "A Numerically Aided Phenomenological Study of Existential Reading," in *De Stralende Lezer: Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Naar De Invloed Van Het Lezen*, edited by Frank Hakemulder (Den Haag: Stichting Lezen [Dutch National Reading Foundation], 2011), 123–52; Paul Sopčák, "Epiphanies of Finitude: A Phenomenological Study of Existential Reading" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 2011).
- <sup>32</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 212.
- <sup>33</sup> Viktor Šklovskij, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, edited by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.
- <sup>34</sup> See, for instance, George Steiner, *On Difficulty and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).
- <sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Don Kuiken, Paul Campbell, and Paul Sopčák, "The Experiencing Questionnaire: Locating Exceptional Reading Moments," *Scientific Study of Literature* 2, no. 1 (2012), in press.
- <sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1977), 36.
- <sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 280.



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<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1950; New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 148.

<sup>39</sup> Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality*, 43.

<sup>40</sup> David S. Miall, "Aspects of Literary Response: A New Questionnaire," *Research in the Teaching of English* 29 (1995): 37–58.

<sup>41</sup> Kuiken's Attitudes Toward Poetry questionnaire was developed in our laboratory at the University of Alberta, Canada. Don Kuiken (Psychology) and David Miall (English and Film Studies) lead a team that conducts reader response research funded by the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada](#).

<sup>42</sup> Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 92–93. This practice text passage immediately precedes the first primary passage. It begins with: "London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith" and ends with: "and fasting one day, drinking another, devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilisation*, and Bernard Shaw."

<sup>43</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "The Instant of My Death" [*Instant de ma mort*], (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> Sopčák, "A Numerically Aided Phenomenological Study of Existential Reading," 123–52; Sopčák, "Epiphanies of Finitude: A Phenomenological Study of Existential Reading."

<sup>45</sup> Don Kuiken and David S. Miall, "Numerically Aided Phenomenology: Procedures For Investigating Categories of Experience," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 2, no. 1 (2001), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/976/2128>; Michael J. A. Wohl, Don Kuiken and Kimberly A. Noels, "Three Ways to Forgive: A Numerically Aided Phenomenological Study," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 45 (2006): 547–61; Shelley Sikora, Don Kuiken, and David S. Miall, "Expressive Reading: A Phenomenological Study of Readers' Experience of Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 5, no. 3 (2011): 258–68.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth D. Bailey, *Typologies and Taxonomies: An Introduction to Classification Techniques* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Kuiken and Miall, "Numerically Aided Phenomenology."

<sup>48</sup> Melanie C. Green, Timothy C. Brock, and Geoff F. Kaufman, "Understanding Media Enjoyment: The Role of Transportation Into Narrative Worlds," *Communication Theory* 14 (2004): 317.

<sup>49</sup> Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley, "The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3 (2008): 173–92.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32–35.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Kingwell, "Husserl's Sense of Wonder," *Philosophical Forum* 31 (2000): 104.

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 321.

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<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 84.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 170.

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 137.

## Appendix

Table 1. The proportions of cluster members reporting each of the differentiating constituents

Cluster	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Weight</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
1. Self-implicating	0	1	1	1	1
2. Interested/engaged-implicit	0.16	0.56**	0.1	1***	1***
3. Reflection on death/not generative	0.47***	0.11	0.5***	0	0
4. Reflection on death/not self-implicating	0.47***	0.11	0	0	0
5. Reflection on injustice	0.58**	1***	0.4	0.38	0
6. Interpretation to self-implication	0	0.44***	0.2	0.13	0
7. Personal memory/other	0.05	0.56***	0.1	0	0.4***
8. Negative feelings/depressing	0	0.44***	0	0.5***	0
9. I feel for/with	0.32	0.89***	0	0.75***	0.2
10. Indifference towards death	0	0	0.1	0.38***	0
11. Indifference/other	0	0	0.1	0.38***	0
12. Life's meaningfulness disappears	0	0.11	0.1	0.5***	0
13. Negative feelings/hopelessness	0	0.11	0.3	0.5***	0
14. Relate to protagonist's feelings/other	0.05	1	0.4**	0.75***	0.4
15. Paradoxical feelings/other	0	0.11	0	0.38***	0.6***
16. Personal memory/death related	0	0	0	0.38***	0.4***
17. Reflection on death/generative	0.05	0	0.2	0.5***	0.8***
18. Thought-provoking/explicit	0.16	0.44	0	0.63***	0.8***
19. Vulnerability	0	0.11	0.1	0.63***	0.8***
20. What's happening is in the plan	0	0	0	0.13**	0.4***
21. Stranger to myself and world	0	0.44	0.3	0.63***	0.2
22. Resigning to inevitability of death/fate	0	0	0.2**	0	0.8***
23. Powerless before fate	0.05	0	0.4***	0.38***	0.6***
24. Reflection on death/self-implicating	0	0	0.7***	0.88***	0.8***
25. Life worth living/self-implicating	0	0	0.4***	0.38***	0.4***
26. Life and death beyond the realm of justice and meaning	0.05	0	0.1	0	0.6***
27. The edge of nothingness	0	0	0	0.13	0.8***
28. Relate to death as always forthcoming	0.11	0	0.1	0	0.6***
29. Paradoxical feelings/finitude-infinity	0	0	0	0	0.8***
30. Meaning of life	0	0	0.1	0.13	0.6***
31. Inevitability of my death/self-implicating	0	0	0.2	0.13	0.6***
32. Inexpressibility	0	0.22	0	0	0.6***
33. From Sadness/suffering to knowingness	0	0	0.1	0	0.4***
34. Affirmative connection	0	0	0	0	0.8***

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\*\*\* The largest proportion (or a proportion no smaller than the largest) that also is larger than the proportions in at least two other clusters.

\*\* A proportion smaller than the largest that also is larger than the proportion in at least one other cluster.

\* A proportion smaller than the largest that is designated \*\* and that is larger than at least one other cluster.

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