

## ABSTRACT

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“The Creative Moment: The Ethics of Understanding in Virginia Woolf and Hermann Broch”

(Under the Direction of DR. THOMAS CERBU)

Much of Modernist literature is a consideration of the way the self is perceived, and of the way the self is related to the world of others—that is, whether the self is isolated or reflected and present in others. My thesis attempts to show how the British author Virginia Woolf’s novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* and the Austrian author Hermann Broch’s trilogy of novels *Die Schlafwandler (The Sleepwalkers)* are examples of this Modernist tendency. I attempt to show that the understanding of the self in relation to others is profoundly an issue of ethics. Broch’s theory was that ethical questions were formerly the domain of philosophy, but had fallen away from the considerations of the discipline because mathematical logic had replaced metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical concerns. Yet literature, to Broch, was free to consider ethical questions because its language could punctuate the disparate spheres of life. Virginia Woolf’s novels *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway* likewise explore the ethics of the understanding of the self; the works of both authors touch issues of language, spheres of reality (material, social, and interior), and aesthetic thinking. I conclude that both Broch and Woolf support the idea that a creative and reflexive transformation of thinking allows one to grasp an immanent understanding that shows how the self and the world of others are connected and reflected in each other.

INDEX WORDS: Virginia Woolf, Hermann Broch, *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Die Schlafwandler*, *The Sleepwalkers*, Modernism, Literature and Ethics, Spatial Form, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Brief an Lord Chandos*, The “Lord Chandos” Letter.