

“SOME LOVE OF ENGLAND”:

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND ENGLISH NATIONAL CULTURE

by

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Under the Direction of Adam Parkes

ABSTRACT

I examine Woolf’s complicated relationship with England through the lens of linguistic, postcolonial, gender, and nation theory. I argue that Woolf regarded the nation as created by its subjects’ active participation in and upholding of its defining rituals, traditions, symbols, and institutions, as later nation theorists would argue. Throughout her writing career, Woolf evaluated the meaning of membership in the “imagined community” of England, and sought to locate a position for Englishwomen within a national culture that often excluded them. The seeming conflict between Woolf’s appraisal of her Englishness as a “stigma” and admission that “some love of England” still remains typifies the reasons that she frequently criticized what she saw as an oppressive patriarchal discourse that has dominated English national culture and her response to this discourse in attempting to construct a more inclusive national culture. For example, in such novels as *Orlando* and *Between the Acts*, Woolf parodies writing styles associated with various eras of English history in order to demonstrate how literary texts are used to offer English readers models of national identity that are not only gendered but historically contingent, as well. By spotlighting the fictional nature of these models, Woolf looks hopefully to the mutability of English national identity. In other chapters, I examine Woolf’s responses to

the two world wars, which led her to challenge more anxiously and to articulate her sense of Englishness in the volatile climate of the first half of the twentieth century. These wars constituted for her the most significant threats to England's survival, causing her to criticize the patriotic discourses used to justify them and the oppressive, violent practices of England's patriarchal culture that generate a nation prone to war. More broadly, I consider Woolf's English national consciousness in a context of Modernism as a whole and suggest that national identity plays a crucial, although often overlooked or downplayed, role in the philosophies of Modernism more generally, a literary movement traditionally regarded as an "international" or even "supra-national" one that attempted to transcend national boundaries and allegiances. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus may have wanted to "fly by those nets" of "nationality, language, [and] religion," but no writer can escape his or her nationality. He or she can, however, rewrite it, and thus contribute to a *new* discourse of nationalism.

INDEX WORDS: Virginia Woolf, Englishness, English national culture, English literature, Gender, History, War, Literary history

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In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf writes, "Masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice." I hardly consider my dissertation a "masterpiece," but it is the product of a "single voice" articulated through the contributions and support of a "mass" of voices behind it, and "the outcome of many years of thinking," much of it "in common." My first debt is owed to the faculty, librarians, and resources at the University of Georgia. I especially benefitted from the many useful comments and criticisms from my doctoral committee members, Dr. Adam Parkes, Dr. Tricia Lootens, Dr. Kristin Boudreau, and, through much of the process, Dr. Simon Gatrell. Dr. Parkes was a dedicated dissertation director, and his knowledge of Woolf, English Modernism, and English culture, his diligent attention to my writing, and unfailing support of my project inspired me to conduct the best research and writing of which I am capable. I also owe a significant gratitude to my family (including my parents Brian and Jean Donovan, my sister and her husband Laura and Jim Bennett, my grandmother Mary Donovan, and my aunt Jeanette Bergeron) for their belief in my success. I have had more intangible, but necessary, support from my many friends, including Sandy Hughes through the beginning and long middle portions of this lengthy process, and Kevin Pullis for his support of me particularly through the extremely hectic endgame of it. If I make it out of this with both still speaking to me, I will be even more grateful—and I will owe one of them a chicken pot pie, and the other, multiple drinks. I am also indebted to the following friends for their uncompromising support and faith in me, including: Jenn, Jen, Lisa, Susan, Clark,

Elizabeth, Christoph, Greg, Billie, Jason, Rebecca, Amy, Joe, George, and Joy. I also acknowledge the love and support of those who are with me still, including my grandparents, Ann and Joseph Bergeron and Arthur Donovan, and Margaret Dickie, whose dedication to scholarship and teaching inspires me still. I dedicate this work to all of you.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The Full Stigma of Nationality”:

Virginia Woolf and Early-Twentieth-Century Englishness

In February 1940, Virginia Woolf commented in her diary on the effects of the Second World War on London, even before Germany’s most aggressive bombing campaign had officially begun. She notes the prevalence of Adolf Hitler’s and Winston Churchill’s “boom[ing]” speeches in the newspapers, the persistent reports of sunken ships with “no survivors,” rising prices for civilians, and a “Black Out”—a precaution against air raids—that “is far more murderous than the war.” Aware that England was under constant threat, Woolf admitted:

I cant even imagine London in peace—the lit nights, the buses roaring past Tavistock Square, the telephone ringing, & I scooping together with the utmost difficulty one night or afternoon alone. . . . Odd how often I think with what is love I suppose of the City: of the walk to the Tower; that is my England; I mean if a bomb destroyed one of those little alleys with the brass bound curtains and the river smell & the old woman reading I should feel—well, what the patriots feel. . . . (D 5:263)

Catalyzed by the war, which she later notes threatened to “wipe out London pretty quick” (D 5:292), this vision is one localized on London, Woolf’s native city, but generalized to include all of England. This England is typified by well known, public landmarks, such as the Tower of London, and also by the more private lives of its citizens—here, represented by “one of those little alleys” in London with its individual houses shielded by “brass bound curtains” and an “old

woman reading.” This picture of England, imagined at a moment of national crisis, leads Woolf to conclude that she feels “love,” “what the patriots feel,” for England—even as she deems this sentiment “odd” and identifies herself only grudgingly with those “patriots.”

Indeed, this admission of a love for England appears “odd” in relation to comments made in *Three Guineas*, a text published two years earlier and the speaker of which states assertively that “the law of England” denies women “the full stigma of nationality” (82). This speaker complains that as the “daughter of an educated man,” she “has very little to thank England for in the past; not much to thank England for in the present; while the security of her person in the future is highly dubious” (108). Comments like these from *Three Guineas* have led the critic Phyllis Lassner to deem Woolf’s late uses of “the sentimental language of national identity,” like that employed in the February 1940 diary entry, “a bit startling” (30). However, even as the speaker from *Three Guineas* asserts, ““As a woman, I have no country”” and ““as a woman, I want no country,”” she concedes immediately that “some ‘patriotic’ emotion,” “some obstinate emotion remains, some love of England . . .” (109). As these two late works suggest, Woolf considered carefully the meaning of the English nation, as well as her own, often precarious, relationship to that nation, in these final years of her life.

Lassner accounts for Woolf’s “sentimental” attachment to her nation by assuming that Woolf felt such patriotism only during World War II, when England was so directly under attack (31). But the meaning of Woolf’s Englishness and England concerned her throughout her writing career, as evident, for example, in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924). This essay is one in which Woolf not only explains her own writing techniques, but helps define those associated with Modernism more generally. Significantly, she does so in a manner which

indicates that an interest in national character and culture underlies those theories. In this essay, Woolf insists that “all novels” must “deal with character,” rather than “preach[ing] doctrines, sing[ing] songs, or celebrat[ing] the glories of the British Empire” (CDB 102), thus suggesting a lack of interest in typically nationalist and imperial concerns. But the ways that Woolf’s novels “deal with character” collapse the line between private and public concerns by demonstrating how the English national community helps shape them. Hence, when Woolf claims famously “that on or about December 1910, human character changed,” she explains further that when character changes, then “all human relations”—including “those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children”—adjust correspondingly. And “when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (96-97). That is, shifts in individual character precipitate shifts in private, domestic relations, and these lead to transformations in the public domain of the nation, as represented here with her references to religion, politics, and literature. In this sense, a wrestling with the “stigma” of national identity (particularly, although not exclusively, in regard to the Englishwoman) constitutes a, if not *the*, originating center of Woolf’s literary philosophy, both aesthetic and political. Woolf’s Englishness—her problematic and complex identification with the nation of her birth—is central to an understanding of the specific political and aesthetic theories she develops. As her promotion of the novel’s focus on character suggests, these concerns originate in her overwhelming desire to contend with and redefine *English* character, national identity, and England itself, while she simultaneously is defined by that national identity. Throughout her writings, Woolf repeatedly turns her gaze on the mechanisms by which English national culture is constructed, points out how this culture often excludes or marginalizes many of England’s

inhabitants, particularly its women, and proposes ways this culture can be reshaped in order to make it more inclusive.

Many of Woolf's critics have underestimated Woolf's focus on this precarious intersection between public and private concerns. In the decades following her death in 1941, most readers regarded her as a brilliant and difficult artist, but one who was insulated by her class, money, and psychological illnesses and therefore oblivious to the political turmoil in Europe that occurred around her as she wrote and published novels focused on the interior lives of her characters. Perhaps the instigator of such views, Leonard Woolf in his autobiography characterized his wife as "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (*Downhill All the Way* 27).<sup>1</sup> Woolf's nephew Quentin Bell typified this solitary image of his aunt in his biography of her, where he cites "her gift" as one "for the pursuit of shadows, for the ghostly whispers of the mind and for Pythian incomprehensibility" (2:186). Other readers have followed Leonard's and Bell's lead in finding Virginia Woolf's fiction to be centered on the "complex, manifold, tenuous" self, which acts as a passive receiver of impressions from the outside world, but does not function in this world "in any active, willed way" (Hochman 157-58; Naremore 152).<sup>2</sup>

When Woolf's readers acknowledge the influence of "reality" on her works, they most often recognize the author's interest in feminist politics. They note Woolf's involvement with

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<sup>1</sup>Carroll lambasts Leonard's remark not only the grounds that it underestimates Virginia's political concerns, but also in that it misrepresents Aristotle's definition of the *political* (101).

<sup>2</sup>See also Patricia Ondaek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence* (88).

various women's organizations<sup>3</sup> and commonly see Woolf as placing a feminine self in opposition to a hostile, masculine world, so that her texts constitute "an attack on the patriarchal family," as Jane Marcus, one of Woolf's most prolific feminist critics, states (*Virginia Woolf* 4, 6).<sup>4</sup> For various critics, then, even when they perceive Woolf as taking an interest in and commenting on public life in England, they see her doing so in an antagonistic manner and hence still positioning herself outside the national culture. However, what these readers often ignore is the extent to which Woolf's interest in and criticisms of women's positions in society constitute part of a broader project to help refashion English national culture, so it is no longer predicated on violence, exclusionary politics, and a rigid hierarchy that subordinates those deemed inferior, including women. Other readers have found Woolf's engagement with the outside world more nuanced, a critical trend exemplified, and largely instigated, by the 1986 publication of Alex Zwerdling's *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*. Drawing not only on Woolf's writings, but also those of her contemporaries, Zwerdling outlines Woolf's "social vision—her complex sense of how historical forces and societal institutions influence the behavior of the people she describes in her fictional and nonfictional works" (3). He delineates a Woolf, far from the isolated, pure aesthete "Lady of Shalott" in her ivory tower, who creates the "interior life" of her characters in a "complex relationship" with such "exterior" forces as class, economics, war, pacifist movements, domestic politics, imperialism, and various women's movements. Other critics have also explored these "real" or "outside" influences on Woolf's works. Susan Squier, Mary M.

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<sup>3</sup>See especially Black's "Virginia Woolf and the Women's Movement" for a useful summary of Woolf's engagement in such organizations.

<sup>4</sup>See also Schlack, "Fathers in General," Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land*, and Laura Marcus.

Childers, and Brian W. Shafer (among others) explore Woolf's views on class in English society, particularly as seen in *Mrs. Dalloway*.<sup>5</sup> Gillian Beer demonstrates the depth and breadth of an historical knowledge that Woolf drew upon when composing her works in order to "liberate" historical details, "so that they become elements in a discourse and an experience which, bound in their historical moment, they could not have foreseen" (*Virginia Woolf*94). And many critics—including Gilbert and Gubar, Lassner, Zwerdling, Claire M. Tylee, Sharon Ouditt, Mark Hussey, Tracy Hargreaves, Karen Schneider, Vincent Sherry, and Karen Levenback—examine the impact of war upon her writings.<sup>6</sup>

What this body of criticism has begun to flesh out is a picture of Woolf deeply engaged in the outside world, as well as with the inner lives of her fictional creations, and, indeed, it illustrates that the split between the interior and exterior is a false one. Analogous to the various approaches to Woolf's *oeuvre*, readers of Modernism have often underplayed these writers' recognition of a symbiotic relationship between the inner and the outer, the individuals and their surrounding cultures, and the public and the private, which lies not only at the heart of Woolf's version of Modernism, but that of other Modernist writers, as well. For example, in 1931, Edmund Wilson identified the writers later associated with Modernism as ones who positioned themselves outside "the utilitarian society which had been produced by the industrial revolution," who composed "esoteric" works that traced "the labyrinths of human consciousness" as "the

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<sup>5</sup>Squier, "The Politics of City Space in *The Years*," "The London Scene," and *Virginia Woolf and London*; Childers, "Virginia Woolf on the Outside Looking Down"; Shafer, "Civilization in Bloomsbury."

<sup>6</sup>Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land*; Tylee, "Verbal Screens and Mental Petticoats," "Maleness Run Riot," and *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*; Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*; Hussey, ed., *Virginia Woolf and War*; Hargreaves, "The Grotesque and the Great War in *To the Lighthouse*"; Schneider, *Loving Arms*; Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*; and Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*.

world bec[a]me more and more difficult for them,” and who were “indifferent” toward politics and “all attempts to organize men into social units—armies, parties, nations” (303, 320, 323-24). Similarly, Frank Kermode states that Modernist writers such as W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot tended to “insult reality, and to regress to myth” (109).<sup>7</sup> Marxist critics have routinely condemned Modernists for what they see as an “indifference” to politics in lieu of an elitist solipsism, aesthetic detachment, and introspection, as Georg Lukács argues in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (20). As recently as 2005, Terry Eagleton cited as a “modernist piety” the separation of the public and private world, of which he finds Woolf an exemplary practitioner (*The English Novel* 327-28). For these critics, then, Modernists responded to the chaos of their time—and that especially generated by the First World War, as Wilson points out—by turning away from that outside world and concentrating instead on their own, individual psyches.

Other critics interpret the Modernists’ focus on individual character as reflective of another significant theme in these writers’ texts—that of alienation, exile, and homelessness. Raymond Williams notes that political borders in Europe became particularly nebulous during the first decades of the twentieth century, and writers responded to this physical, geographical estrangement with literary and artistic works of “visual and linguistic strangeness,” “broken narrative[s] of the journey” that included “transient encounters with characters whose self-presentation was bafflingly unfamiliar,” and “restless and often directly competitive sequence of innovations and experiments” (*The Politics of Modernism* 34, 43). Hence, the stylistic experimentation and fragmentation of Modernist texts become proof of the authors’ distancing

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<sup>7</sup>See also Gamache (33), Brown (1), Berman (273-76), and Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (especially Chapters 1 and 5).



themselves from more localized, national concerns and allegiances and indicates instead their promotion of alienation as a universal, transnational human condition. Promoting this alleged Modernist disregard for nationalism, Hugh Kenner refers to the movement as “International Modernism,” in that it “helped establish a potential independence of literary ‘English’ from any nation” with its “durable writing [that] no national tradition can plausibly claim” (4).

But other critics have begun to point out that Modernist writers did not so emphatically abstain from national debates and concerns. Like Williams and Kenner, David Harvey has described Modernism as a movement that “ostensibly asserted the values of internationalism and universalism”; however, he also finds that it simultaneously “could never settle its account with parochialism and nationalism” (275-76). He thus invites other critics to explore the influence of national cultures upon Modernist writers, a task largely neglected by literary critics until recently. While the interpretation of Modernist texts as ones imbued with international, transnational, or universal concerns still holds considerable sway, various critics have begun to interpret these works in a national context. For example, in *Literary Englands: Versions of “Englishness” in Modern Writing*, David Gervais demonstrates that E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and other writers depict in their writings various Englands, each of which is predicated on some type of nostalgia for an English past, thus leading Gervais to ask, “Without [nostalgia], would there be any version of England at all?” (4). ““Englishness”” in these authors’ works and elsewhere, he concludes, “has become a name for the effort to bridge” the “gulf between [the English] past and [the English] present” (270). Emer Nolan argues that James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* Kenner claims rises above any “native Irish tradition,” as well as “England’s Great Tradition” (4), was equally concerned with national culture. She challenges those views of Joyce as “anti-national” and

contemptuous of the popular nationalist movement that occurred in Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and she deems his critics' tendency to "read their sacred texts in a spirit of benign multiculturalism" as a manifestation of their "blindness" to "Joyce's polyglot modernism," which encompasses both national and international themes, sympathizes with Irish nationalist causes, and acknowledges the nation, as exemplified by Ireland, as a distinctly modern community that links together "province and metropolis, [and] past and future" (2-3, 17-18, 11, 13). And in *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918*, Paul Peppis contends that movements such as Vorticism and Futurism "exploit[ed] popular nationalist sentiments to advance the cause of new literature and art," so that even when these writers "opposed in principle . . . state-controlled institutions of education and conventional forms of literature and art," they "offered their artistic products as an alternative mode for defining, transforming, and promoting national cultures," for they were deeply concerned with the status of English culture (6, 8). Peppis highlights the works of Wyndham Lewis, who manifested "a nationalistic desire to reconstruct Englishness and restore English culture" by promoting a version of Englishness that was "more instinctual and unconscious" and less "cultured and civilized" (50).

Although each of these studies deepens our understanding of Modernism and its relationship to national cultures, Woolf's critique of England calls for a different approach. As Eagleton observes, Woolf's version of Modernism was a "materialist" one, despite her derogatory use of that term in application to the Edwardian novelists John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett (*The English Novel* 329). In "Modern Fiction" (1919), she complains that such "materialists" will "write of unimportant things . . . the trivial and the transitory," while

ignoring “life or spirit, truth or reality . . . the essential thing” (CR1 148-49). However, other essays suggest that she finds this dichotomy between the “material” and “transitory,” versus “life” and “reality,” more precarious. In “The Artist and Politics” (1936), she notes that the artist “depends upon society,” both “materially”—here, meaning financially—and “intellectually,” and that “the practice of art,” rather than isolating him, “increases his sensibility” to “the passions and needs of mankind” (M 227). In “The Narrow Bridge of Art” (1927), she looks to the novel as the art form that can most adeptly “give the sneer, the contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life” by “tak[ing] the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things—the modern mind,” for the “freedom,” “flexibility,” and “fearlessness” of prose “can go anywhere; no place is too low, too sordid, or too mean for it to enter,” and the novelist should accumulate “the most minute fragments of fact and mass them into the most subtle labyrinths” (GR 19-20). Or, as she puts it in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), “fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly, perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” to “material things” (41-42).<sup>8</sup> Hence, for Woolf, the fault in Galsworthy, Wells, and Bennett lies not in their focus on the material, but in their failure to recognize the connections between the material and the more spiritual, the political and the artistic, the outer and the inner, and the public and the private.<sup>9</sup> Central to Woolf’s writings is a vision of English national culture as it is produced by material means through various traditions, institutions, and rituals, the participation in which enables English citizens to create their own Englishness, their identities within the national community.

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<sup>8</sup>Henry James similarly likens the mind of the novelist to “a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every airborne particle in its tissue” and “tak[ing] to itself the faintest hints of life” and “convert[ing] the very pulses of the air into revelations” (“The Art of Fiction” [1888]: 351-52).

<sup>9</sup>For a conflicting interpretation of Woolf’s rejection of materialism in this essay, see Whitworth (151).

Like Forster, Lawrence, and Eliot, as Gervais reads them, Woolf's representations of Englishness and England frequently engage with the nation's past; but her interest lies invariably in the mechanisms through which versions of this past are promulgated, the political and social concerns that motivate various historical accounts, and the ways in which perceptions of the past influence the present, as well as help shape a future, for, as she asked in 1925, "Is there no guidance nowadays for a reader who yields to none in reverence for the dead, but is tormented by the suspicion that reverence for the dead is vitally connected with understanding of the living?" ("How It Strikes a Contemporary" CR1 232).

Until recently, however, most readers have overlooked or downplayed Woolf's Englishness. A handful of critics have examined Woolf's relationship to national culture as it is manifested in individual novels, but none have considered her nationality in a more pervasive manner. For example, in a chapter on Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) in her *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, Jane Garrity argues that Woolf delineates "two distinctive forms of nationalism," a masculine, militaristic one associated with fascism and the Lacanian Symbolic order, and a more "authentic ancestral Englishness" linked to the Kristevan, feminine semiotic, "the recuperation of the mother/land, and primitive ritual" (243). According to Garrity, then, Woolf's presentation of the national culture is grounded in a mythic past that consists of "Avalon, the otherworldly island of Celtic myth that is associated with Arthurian legend and the Holy Grail" (286-87). But what this reading ignores is that Woolf's fictional practices and her assessments of England depend not solely on these "otherworldly" aspects of English culture and identity, but also, and more importantly, on the

more tangible and contemporary mechanisms with which England and Englishness are produced.<sup>10</sup>

Like Woolf, most historians stress that modern nations are produced through material means; moreover, they emphasize that nations are relatively recent inventions. Theorists of the nation tend to agree with Hans Kohn, who, in his important 1944 study *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study of Its Origins and Backgrounds*, asserts that “nationalism as we understand it is not older than the second half of the eighteenth century,” with the “first great manifestation” occurring during the French Revolution (3).<sup>11</sup> Other nation theorists date the inception of modern nationalism earlier. For example, Benedict Anderson locates its beginning with the invention of the printing press and the consequential creation of “print-as-commodity” around 1500 (37). He argues that printed materials, which became increasingly available after the invention of the printing press, helped galvanize national communities. Regardless of the exact date of its birth, my point here is that nationalism, and nations themselves, are *historical* constructs, designed, as Simon During argues, as “the battery of discursive and representational practices which define, legitimate, or valorize a specific nation-state or individuals as members of a nation-state” (138). For these historians, then, there is nothing natural or eternal about a nation; instead, it is created or invented by a group of people at a particular point in time, as Anderson observes (205). In his

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<sup>10</sup>For other studies of England and Englishness in Woolf’s works, see Hovey, “Kissing a Negress in the Dark’: Englishness as a Masquerade in Woolf’s *Orlando*”; Kaivola, “Revisiting Woolf’s Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation”; Johnson, “Giving Up the Ghost: National and Literary Haunting in *Orlando*”; Beer, “The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf”; and Esty, “Insular Rites: Virginia Woolf and the Late Modernist Pageant-Play,” in *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*.

<sup>11</sup>See also Seton-Watson (6), Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality* (3), and Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (14-15).

influential study of nations and nationalism, Anderson defines the nation as an “imagined community”—“imagined,” in the sense that “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear about them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”; and a “community,” in that its members perceive their nation as “a deep horizontal comradeship,” a “fraternity,” even “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail” within it (6-7). Virtually all national subjects, no matter what their occupations, classes, genders, or ages, will feel a sense of their membership in a national community, although there will be great variety in terms of how they regard their placement within that community. It is the belief in what Anderson calls a “deep, horizontal comradeship,” this sense of community, that creates the nation and simultaneously grants individual subjects their national identities through their acts of “imagining” it. And, as Antony Easthope states in tacit agreement with Anderson and During, this community is “imagined” through material means—that is, “through institutions, practices and traditions which historians and sociologists can describe” (12). Anticipating these later arguments in 1882, Ernest Renan defined the *nation* abstractly as “a soul, a spiritual principle,” but explained more concretely that “this soul or spiritual principle” is created through national subjects’ possession of “a rich legacy of memories,” a “present-day consent, the desire to live together,” and a common goal for the future, “a shared programme to put into effect” (19). Along with such historians and sociologists, Woolf as a novelist and essayist examines the production of England’s imagined community through such “institutions, practices, and traditions” as “religion, conduct, politics, and literature,” as she states in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” as well as the British Museum, the King’s Navy, Oxford, Cambridge, the Royal Academy, the Tate Gallery, and the law courts,

all of which a group of Englishwomen in her short story “A Society” (1920) visit and study (CSF 126).

This focus on what During calls “the battery of discursive and representational practices” that create the imagined community defines the nation as more of a cultural, rather than a geographical or territorial, entity. When Woolf in the final months of her life describes for her friend Ethel Smyth London Bridge, the Strand, and Oxford Street in London, and “a stallion being led, under the may and the beeches, along a grass ride” in Warwickshire, she declares that these land-based sights inspire her “patriotism” by leading her to think, “that is England”; however, what inspires this patriotism are the cultural associations she projects upon the land, for “its what, in some odd corner of [her] dreaming mind, represents Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens” (L 6:460). Most historians argue that a nation will traditionally occupy a finite geographical territory, but it is the cultural meanings that the members of the nation associate with that territory which “invents” the nation. As Eric Hobsbawm argues, subjects who identify with different nations “can live together in the same province, even a quite small one. If nations had an intrinsic connection with territory, the Wends in Germany would have to be called Germans, which they patently are not” (*Nations and Nationalism since 1780* 17). In his study of *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith softens this downplaying of the significance of land in the national imagination when he defines the *nation* as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (14; original emphasis). But for Smith, the nation’s land gains its importance from the values with which national subjects infuse it: “The nation is conceived as a territorial *patria*, the place of one’s birth and childhood, the

extension of hearth and home. It is also the place of one's ancestors and of the heroes and cultures of one's antiquity" (117). Renan similarly insists that "it is . . . more [than] soil . . . which makes a nation," in that "[t]he soil furnishes the substratum, the field of struggle and labour," while "man furnishes the soul" (18). Similarly, Ernest Gellner contends that "it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round" and that a common national consciousness "invents nations where they do not exist" (*Nations and Nationalism* 55; *Thought and Change* 169).<sup>12</sup>

These communal, cultural, and material definitions of the nation place particular importance on the roles of citizens within nations. Collectively, individuals are responsible for imagining or creating the nation simply by perceiving their membership within the national community. They must uphold, to some extent, the "discursive and representational practices that define, legitimate, or valorize" their nation. Or, as Montserrat Guibernau argues, individuals must recognize the significance of and identify themselves with national symbols (such as flags, monuments, or national anthems), national rituals (such as holidays or parades), and national institutions (such as governments and national museums) (84). Concurrently, the individual subject must play a specific role or roles within the national community in order to possess a national identity. Thus, while the nation's existence depends on its subjects' imagining of it, those subjects also gain national identities only when recognized by their national community as viable members. Arguing that the nation's social and political structures resemble those of

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<sup>12</sup>See also Seton-Watson, who states apologetically, "All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one" (*Nations and States* 5). And see Kristeva, who in *Strangers to Ourselves* notes briefly that the unified "we" of a nation "is a stirring mirage to be maintained . . . although illusive and lacking real strength . . . unless it be precisely the strength of illusion that, perhaps, all communities depend on" (23).



traditional, hierarchical families, George Mosse posits that the national community “assign[s] everyone his place in life—man and woman, normal and abnormal, foreigner and native” (*Nationalism and Sexuality* 16). In this manner, membership in a national community can necessitate the individual subject’s relinquishing of character traits that that community has deemed antithetical to its culture, as Homi Bhabha states.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, if individuals, regardless of the place of their birth, have no functional role in the public life of the nation, then those individuals lack a national identity—a set of circumstances that leads Woolf to declare herself and the other “daughters of educated men,” “outsiders” in *Three Guineas*, and which relegates a disturbed veteran like Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) to the outskirts of that community, as well.

Within this context of nations as distinctly modern inventions and as communities regarded as autonomous in relation to other nations, an assessment of the English nation and English national subjects raises several problems. First, most modern nations possess clear beginnings, as Anderson (205) and Renan (20) suggest. For example, most historians agree that the “birth” of the United States occurred in the late eighteenth century—although some may cite the specific year as 1776 (when the Declaration of Independence was written and signed), 1783 (when the British surrendered to the Americans, thus ending the American War for Independence), 1787 (when the former colonies ratified the American Constitution, thereby establishing the systems of federal and state governments still used today)—or as late as 1814, when the fledgling United States more convincingly defeated its former mother country in the War of 1812, a war that “enhanced American power” in North America by “set[ting] the stage for

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<sup>13</sup>See especially “The Other Question” in *The Location of Culture* (66-84).

westward expansion after 1815" and "boost[ing] American nationalism" (Weeks 814). In contrast, the "birth" of England is not as easily placed within such a relatively narrow historical period—at least, not with any consensus among historians. Events various historians cite as ones that helped galvanize an English national consciousness include the Wessex king Alfred the Great's unification of much of the territory now known as England against Danish invasions in the late ninth century; the later invasion of the Norman William the Conqueror in 1066, which led to the creation of "a unified [English] state with a common law . . . administration [and] . . . coinage" (Easthope 26); the development of a common and increasingly regulated English language starting in the fourteenth century; Henry VIII's 1534 break from the Church of Rome and establishment of the Church of England, of which he was the head, rather than a foreign pope (Greenfield 14); the 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada, which, as Raphael Samuel argues, led to a "discovery" or an "invention" of England by inspiring unprecedented national pride as attempts to promote a glorified English past (xiii); and the Glorious Revolution in 1688, which John Lucas cites as the event that precipitated the inception of "England as a distinctively modern state" (1).

While such events contributed to a growing sense of English consciousness among England's inhabitants, England became a nation in the sense that Anderson, Seton-Watson, Gellner, Smith, and Easthope define it, and as is most relevant to Woolf's materialist focus, during the second half of the eighteenth century, when "a serious idea of Englishness—a self-awareness of England and its people as a sharply separate and distinctive cultural identity" came into existence, "alongside the emergence of nationalism in general," as Stephen Haseler argues (11). Although for Haseler "an English consciousness" existed long before this period, most of

the aristocracy—whom he regards as the dominant class in pre-industrial England—identified primarily with a cosmopolitan culture and cultivated their attachment to other European cultures, particularly the French, while identifying less with a distinctly English culture across class boundaries (15-16). That is, they felt none of that “deep horizontal comradeship” which Anderson deems central to an awareness of a national community. However, in the early part of the eighteenth century, a “culture of Englishness” developed first among the landed aristocracy, who developed a “pre-modern” and “pre-industrial” Englishness based primarily on attachments to land and the importance of class—elements that Haseler cites at the “very DNA” of later “national sensibility” in England (17). And, according to Haseler, it was the industrial revolution of the later part of that century that helped create a more cohesive sense of community among all the classes and parts of England: improved means of publishing, communication, travel, and commerce in a “national mass market for goods and services” functioned as a “radicalizing, nation-state building agent” (25-26)—and thus made England into a more unified “imagined community” through these concrete means. Mosse also cites this era as that in which a more general sense of modern nationalism developed; as evidence, he notes that this period witnessed the first instances of mass volunteerism among military troops, indicating that individuals were willing to kill and die due to a belief that they “no longer fought merely on behalf of a king, but for an ideal which encompassed the whole nation” (*Fallen Soldiers* 18). Such a willingness to risk one’s life for one’s nation suggests a strong belief in a national community to which one belongs. Woolf offers a fictional example of an Englishman led to war by his belief in and love for the national community with Septimus Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway*; this novel also illustrates the

dire consequences that result from a too literal devotion to this community when it persists in the postwar era—as I will discuss in my second chapter.

Second, in addition to the disagreements as to the historical origin of England as a nation, the relationship between Englishness and Britishness makes defining a distinct English national consciousness difficult. In *The Making of English National Identity*, Krishan Kumar refers to the tendency among Englishmen and -women to conflate *English* with *British*, to assume consciously and unconsciously that England—unlike Scotland, Wales, and Ireland—possesses a “hegemony over the rest of the British Isles” (6). This conflation also indicates “the difficulty most English people have of distinguishing themselves, in a collective way, from other inhabitants of the British Isles” (2).<sup>14</sup> Kumar argues that this dominating use of the term *England* in reference to Britain arises from England’s inhabitants’ seeing themselves as “the mirror of the larger enterprise in which they were engaged for most of their history,” meaning that they “found their identity as constructors of Great Britain, creators of the British Empire, [and] pioneers of the world’s first industrial civilization” (ix). Great Britain and, eventually, the United Kingdom as political entities were slowly forged through Acts of Union that joined England first with Wales in 1536, with Scotland in 1707, and finally with Ireland—creating the United Kingdom—in 1801

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<sup>14</sup>In his 1938 Introduction to a collection of light-hearted and self-deprecating illustrations collected from *Punch* and entitled *The British Character Studied and Revealed*, E. M. Delafield complains that the book should refer to “the *English*, rather than the *British* Character,” as he believes that the drawings do not refer to “the Scottish, the Irish, the Welsh, nor the far-flung denizens of the British Empire”; he further suggests that the conflation of an English with a British character indicates a larger problem, for the English “are as ready as possible . . . to think—wrongly, no doubt, on the part of the Irish, whimsically—which is worse—on the part of the Scots, and unintelligibly on the part of the Welsh” (7-8; author’s emphasis). Kumar also points out that foreigners and, on occasion, the Scots and the Welsh will “sometimes say ‘English’ when they mean ‘British’” (1).

(Easthope 27).<sup>15</sup> And, as Kumar points out, many writers—whether English or not—find it difficult to distinguish England from Britain or the United Kingdom. For example, Edwin Jones in his 1998 study *The English Nation: The Great Myth* uses the terms *English* and *British* interchangeably because, as he argues, “the various Acts of Union with Wales, Ireland and Scotland were meant to assimilate these Celtic countries into the English hegemony of culture and power and they were meant to a great extent effective,” although, he concedes, “the situation is now changing” (xii). Similarly, J. G. A. Pocock noted in 1975 that any attempt to write a British history from a Scottish, Welsh, or Irish perspective is problematic because this history “is one of the steadily increasing dominance of England as a political and cultural entity” (610). This combination of problems—the difficulty in distinguishing *English* from *British*, the absence of a clear historical origin for either nation, and the trend among the English to disavow any sense of an English nationalism (Kumar 18)—makes defining an English nation difficult and, perhaps, accounts for the relatively small number of studies of Englishness, in contrast with the attention nation theorists have devoted to national consciousnesses in “new” nations, many of which are former British or other European colonies.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Although England had colonized Ireland centuries earlier, the 1801 Act of Union made the latter country an official part of the British nation, creating the “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.” With the creation of an Irish Free State in the southern counties, this United Kingdom became in 1921 one of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. For all practical purposes, Scotland united with England and Wales in 1603 when the Scot king James VI became James I of England. But the 1707 Act of Union made this union “more complete,” as Colls explains (*Identity of England* 34). In *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Linda Colley examines “the invention of Britishness” beginning with the 1707 Act of Union.

<sup>16</sup>As Hobsbawm noted in 1990, “The development of nations and nationalism within old-established states such as Britain and France, has not been studied very intensively, though it is now attracting attention. The existence of this gap is illustrated by the neglect, in Britain, of any problems connected with English nationalism—a term which in itself sounds odd to many ears—compared to the attention paid to Scots, Welsh, not to mention Irish nationalism” (*Nations and Nationalism since 1780* 11). For example, Seton-Watson asserts that “English nationalism never existed, since there was no need for either a doctrine or an independence struggle” (34), and Nairn similarly speculates on the “absence of popular nationalism among the English,” due to a modern lack of mass “political

Other historians differentiate Englishness from Britishness by pointing out that throughout most of Britain's history, "it was national feelings"—those for England, Scotland, Wales, or Ireland individually—"not British ones" that elicited "powerful emotional attachments" and appealed to "the heart and soul" of inhabitants (Colls, *Identity of England* 43). More generally, Seton-Watson defines a *state* as "a legal and political organisation, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens," and a *nation*, as "a community of people . . . bound together by a sense of solidarity [and] common culture" (5). This distinction suggests that Great Britain (which comprises England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, before 1922, or Northern Ireland, after 1922) is a more legal or political state, whereas England is more a cultural nation. Similarly, Ian Baucom contends that Englishness, as distinguished from Britishness, is tied closely to the "*English* soil of the 'sceptered isle'"—a celebrated phrase from Shakespeare's *Richard II* that itself elides Scotland's and Wales' presence on that same "isle"—"or, more regularly, certain quintessentially English locales" as "authentic identity-determining locations" (12; original emphasis). Baucom adds that this localization of English identity and culture was a response to the growth not only of Great Britain, but the British Empire, as well: "As England conquered Ireland, crowned a Scottish king, united with Scotland, and established colonies in North America, the Carribean, the Pacific, the Indian subcontinent, and Africa, the recourse to a

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upheavals and regeneration" (294, 296). See also Breuilly (87), Kohn, "The Genesis and Character of English Nationalism" (91-92), and Welsh (144, 157).

Some useful studies of "new" nations include Said's *Orientalism*; Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*; Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* and "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question"; Spivak's "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" and *In Other Worlds*; RadharKrishan's "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narratives of Identity"; Balibar and Wallerstein's *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*; Minh-ha's *Woman, Native, Other*; Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*; Michael's *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*; Bev and Saville-Smith's *Gender, Culture, and Power: Challenging New Zealand's Gendered Culture*; True's "Fit Citizens for the British Empire? Class-ifying Racial and Gendered Subjects in 'Godzone' (New Zealand)"; and Rushdie's *Imaginary Homeland: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*.

territorial definition of collective identity meant that Britishness, at least as a legal concept, was to become as elastic as the nation's imperial boundaries" (8). In order to maintain a separate English identity and culture, one that did not include the inhabitants of these disparate colonies or even others in the British Isles, the English increasingly defined their Englishness according to notions of racial purity and an English heritage that they attempted to identify with specific localities within the borders of England.<sup>17</sup> In this manner, then, their increasing colonial pursuits and ever-expanding sense of "Britishness" rather paradoxically strengthened the English's sense of their own Englishness. Thus, as Baucom continues, whereas "'British' space was . . . read as homogenous, interchangeable, everywhere alike . . . 'English' space remained unique, local, differentiated: a formula which permitted the empire to be that which was simultaneously *within* the boundaries of Britishness and *outside* the territory of Englishness, that which, relative to the sovereign nation, was at once identical and different" (10; original emphasis).<sup>18</sup> Woolf's writings support this distinction of *English* from *British*, in that she typically uses the latter term in reference to broader political and colonial concerns, and the former, in regard to cultural and localized concepts. For example, in a pivotal moment in *Orlando*, the protagonist decides to

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<sup>17</sup>In 1907, Woolf's near-contemporary Ford Madox Ford stressed the fictionality of this belief in a "pure" English race, then he observed that the English are "mixed in its origin," so that "there is . . . hardly a man who can point to seven generations of purely English blood" (*The Spirit of the People*, in *England and the English* 256).

<sup>18</sup>T. S. Eliot makes a similar point when he argues, "It would be no gain whatever for English culture, for the Welsh, Scots and Irish to become indistinguishable from Englishmen—what *would* happen, of course, is that we should all become indistinguishable featureless 'Britons,' at a lower level of culture than of any of the separate regions" (*Notes towards the Definition of Culture* [1948] 55; original emphasis). The American-born Eliot's use of the pronoun "we" here is intriguing, since it presumably indicates that he considers himself one of these "Britons." However, a few paragraphs earlier in the same essay, Eliot describes the "largely unconscious" loyalty that individuals feel for a particular region in which they were born, while newcomers to the region will experience a "devotion" to that place which is "artificial" or "a little too conscious," even if these individuals "may develop the warmest devotion to a place in which he was not born" (52).

return to her homeland after an extended sojourn with a group of gipsies upon envisioning an idealized English landscape—as I will discuss in my third chapter.

As various critics have noted, other Modernists generally and Woolf specifically responded in their works to the decline of the British Empire through the first half of the twentieth century. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said interprets the definitively Modernist juxtaposition of fragments from Western cultures and those of colonized territories (as seen most notably in Eliot's *The Waste Land* [1922]) as a practice that “very clearly bear[s] the mark of imperial enterprise,” in that it reflects the anxiety of empire and yet simultaneously creates a literary and metaphorical empire, held together through the consciousness of the Western artist, even as Britain's and other European countries' literal empires deteriorated (189-90).<sup>19</sup> In her book-length examination of Woolf's reactions to Britain's colonial interests, Kathy J. Phillips argues that Woolf throughout her *oeuvre* belittles the strength Britain derived from its colonial holdings and intimates that this imperialism led to World War I—as indicated by her pervasive use of fragmented references and allusions both to the British Empire and to older, fallen imperial powers (vii-xl). On the other hand, Marcus finds the views on the British Empire manifested in Woolf's works more ambivalent, reading *The Waves*, for example, both as offering a “critique of imperialism” and as “mourn[ing] the loss of empire” (*Hearts of Darkness* 13).<sup>20</sup> However, these readings underplay the close relationship between the more broadly British and imperial concerns, and the more narrowly English ones that Baucom identifies as central to Englishness in

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<sup>19</sup>See Boehmer (especially 172-76) for an examination, largely influenced by Said, on the relationships between nationalism, imperialism, and Modernism—as demonstrated in works by Eliot, Joseph Conrad, and Ezra Pound. However, this study largely neglects Woolf.

<sup>20</sup>See also Marcus's “Britannia Rules *The Waves*” (149-50).



this era. In Woolf's presentations of English culture and identity, the ruling patriarchy in England appropriates an imperial discourse in order to dominate those they deem subordinates, both at home and abroad, as I argue in my analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Additionally, the Empire provided England with a useful ground in which its male subjects could perform their English masculinity, manifested through acts of violence and oppression, as I suggest in my argument on *Orlando*.

For critics such as Colls, Baucom, and Kumar, and a novelist such as Woolf, however, as much as Britain's reliance on its empire influenced perceptions of England, the nation of "Great Britain" in the minds of the English, as well as the Scots, Welsh, and Irish, exists as a primarily political entity, one that united its members especially in their shared imperial interests throughout much of their modern history. In contrast, for the English, "England" appears to be a nation to which they feel more personally and locally attached.<sup>21</sup> According to Kumar:

"England" is a highly emotive word. When intoned by, say, an Olivier (as in [Shakespeare's] *Henry V*) or a Gielgud (as in [Shakespeare's] *Richard II*), it can produce spine-tingling effects. It has served, in a way never sustained by "Britain" or any of the British derivatives, to focus ideas and ideals. It has been the subject of innumerable eulogies and apostrophes by poets and playwrights. From Shakespeare to Rupert Brooke it has been lauded as the font of freedom and the standard of civilization, a place of virtue as well as of beauty. (7-8)

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<sup>21</sup>In her influential study of the development of Great Britain, Colley uses the term *British* in a slightly, but significantly, different way than does Baucom. She distinguishes a British national community, one that includes the inhabitants of the British Isles, from the broader British Empire, and she contends that the former community became more solidified after 1707 "not because of any political or cultural consensus at home, but rather in reaction to the Other beyond their shores" (6). My argument will focus on Woolf's Englishness, rather than her Britishness.

English nationalism, an identification with the English nation, arises from the desire to acknowledge England as a unified community, one that appears to its subjects as “the standard of civilization” and which inspires strong emotions. Thus, when Rupert Brooke’s speaker refers to himself, after dying in “a foreign field,” as “a dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware, / Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam, / A body of England’s, breathing English air, / Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home,” he professes faith in an England not only of which he is a member by virtue of his birth there, but one that “shaped” him, fashioning him into a part of England as organic as the land itself. Consequently, the plot on the “foreign field” in which he will be buried will become “forever England,” with all the idyllic rural imagery that that phrase evokes for him (“The Soldier” [1915] 2050). English inhabitants’ upholding of and belief in specific institutions, traditions, and character traits and roles that appear to them somehow uniquely English are what render England’s fields, rivers, and cities into places of emotive significance, as well as what makes England into a national community and simultaneously those inhabitants into English national subjects. Hence, after Woolf’s speaker unpatriotically insists, “as a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country,” it is the images of “cawing rooks . . . in elm trees,” “the splash of waves on a beach,” and “English voices murmuring nursery rhymes” which lead that speaker to admit “some obstinate emotion remains, some love of England,” and this “irrational emotion . . . make[s] . . . her to give to England first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world” (TG 109).

During Woolf’s lifetime, various writers also evinced a primal “love of England” that led them to regard conditions within the nation far more critically than did Brooke in his celebrated poem. Many saw this national community as one in a state of decline—even before the two World

Wars that would most literally threaten it and largely contribute to the decline of Britain and England as imperial powers. For example, in *The Condition of England* (1909), the Liberal cultural critic C. F. G. Masterman characterized his contemporary Edwardians as people who “see [them]selves painted as a civilization in the vigour of early manhood, possessing contentment still charged with ambition; a race in England and Europe full of energy and purpose, in which life, for the general, has become more tolerable than ever before” (2).

However, he complains, while the English in “the thirteenth century gave [Edwardian England] the Cathedrals” and “the sixteenth gave [it] the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge and the noblest of English country houses[. . .] these tiny Englands, with populations, in the aggregate, less than that of London to-day, and wealth incomparably smaller, have left us possessions which we can admire but cannot equal” (25). Masterman deems his contemporary England a place where his countrymen have reaped material gains from technological and medical advances, as well as from lucrative imperial investments, but he foresees this nation becoming one with “little superfluous energy or wealth” to expend in conducting “Social Reform” at home, where too much “vigour and intellectual energy” is devoted to “irrelevant standards and pleasures” (62-63). But as the later historian Samuel Hynes points out, Masterman’s assessment of his contemporary England “reveals . . . a passive mood of bafflement and regret,” while offering few concrete suggestions on how to fix the problems he recognizes (*The Edwardian Turn of Mind* 67).

Masterman calls for “Social Reform” to eliminate the apathy he sees in his countrymen at home, but he never specifies the nature of this “Social Reform”; instead, as Hynes explains, although “Masterman could write movingly about the things that moved him, and his deep sympathies for the poor sometimes made him sound like a radical reformer . . . his emotions were not directed

toward action; they were, apparently, sufficient in themselves” (68). Hynes attributes Masterman’s failure to call for action to the latter’s nineteenth-century evangelical Liberal background, which led him to look “not at the social problems but *behind* them”—as shown by his repeated emphasis on a “need for religious revival” that would endow English citizens with a faith that would soar above material concerns (*The Edwardian Turn of Mind* 69; original emphasis).<sup>22</sup>

Commenting less on social issues and more on the activities of the Liberal Party politicians who dominated British politics in the years leading up to the First World War, George Dangerfield in *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935) characterized “the Englishman of the [18]70s and [18]80s” as “something of a Liberal at heart” who “believed in freedom, free trade, progress,” “reform,” and “peace”—meaning that “he liked his wars to be fought at a distance and, if possible, in the name of God” (20). In the Epilogue to his study, Dangerfield cites Rupert Brooke as the apotheosis, albeit a naïve one, of this Liberalism: to Dangerfield, Brooke’s poems evince “a deep love of the country, a real national pride,” grounded in an unequivocal faith in the Englishman’s inherent “goodness” and affection for a rural England “where passion perspires roses” and “sorrow dies with sunset and even despair is crowned with new-born hay” (346-47). But while Brooke’s death preserved his innocence while also

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<sup>22</sup>For Masterman’s comments on the need for a more intensified religious faith, see especially Chapter IX, entitled “Religion and Progress,” and also 75, 81, 89, 115-18. However, he also notes that even as traditional religious faith—which he defines as “a conception of life dependent upon supernatural sanctions or as a revelation of a purpose and meaning beyond the actual business of the day”—has declined, the English can still manifest virtues such as “tolerance, kindness, [and] sympathy”; but as the prevalence of religious beliefs declines, so does “affirmation of any responsibility, beyond that to self” (*The Condition of England* 266). That is, for Masterman, individual subjects’ religious faith was an essential component in their imagining of the national community. Without such faith, communal identity declines. I will discuss the resemblance between religious faith and a belief in the national community, as seen through Woolf’s *Clarissa Dalloway*’s vision of England, in my second chapter.

representing the demise of this more innocent England, the Liberal Party “was reduced to ashes,” as Vincent Sherry observes, by conflicts among politicians that stemmed from nothing more noble than “individual whim, clique concern, or some random calculation of the demands of local situations” (Dangerfield 20; Sherry 21). Dangerfield blames these politicians not only for the “strange death” of their own political party, but for diplomatic bunglings and mismanagements of domestic problems that led to the decision to declare war on Germany on August 4, 1914, to distract British voters from their political representatives’ mistakes. In his examination of *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*, Pericles Lewis adds that “the idea of the nation . . . had played an important but unexamined role in the liberal positivist tradition,” which regarded “the nation-state as the unit of human society appropriate to representative democracy,” one that “could forge solidarity in an era marked by competition among individuals” and thus one that could “encourage the process of civilization.” Whereas “states smaller than a nation risked being held back by provincialism” and “multinational states . . . encouraged ethnic rivalries and the suppression of minority groups,” nations facilitated “a form of fraternity that permitted people to live in terms of legal equality with one another without destroying the social order,” by expecting the individual to “recognize their fellows as free and equal members of the national community” (59-62). However, as Dangerfield’s analysis makes clear, Britain’s Liberal politicians in the prewar era were not solely motivated by a faith in individual nationalist subjects’ ability to “recognize their fellows as free and equal members of the national community”; rather, their power was undermined by their own, more petty concerns.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Dangerfield focuses specifically on political crises among Liberal politicians concerning the Irish Home Rule debate, the women’s suffrage movement, and the increasing demands from the working classes. Their inability

Also dissatisfied with her nation's political structures and dominant institutions, Woolf considered abandoning her national identity altogether—as indicated in remarks such as, “We don't belong to any ‘class’; we thinkers might as well be French or German” (D 3:198). Williams cites comments such as this one—along with Woolf's brother-in-law Clive Bell's declaration that “nationalism is a terrible enemy to civility” (*Civilization* [1928] 84) and Tibby Schlegel's self-description as a cosmopolitan in Forster's *Howards End* (166)—as indicative of a type of anti-national cosmopolitanism he finds prevalent among Bloomsbury members (“The Bloomsbury Faction,” in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*). However, immediately after speculating that “we thinkers . . . might as well be French or German,” Woolf states she is “English in some way.” Her brother-in-law may eschew his national identity, and Woolf's speaker in *Three Guineas* may disavow “the full stigma of nationality,” but this latter essay is deeply concerned with English national culture and its subjects' identities within that culture. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf closely examines national traditions, institutions, and beliefs and scathingly criticizes what she sees as England's proclivity for violence, noting especially that this national culture excludes women. However, she concurrently promotes not an overthrow of this culture, but

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to reach an accord on the types of rights that should be granted to these under-represented groups within the United Kingdom suggests their inability to uphold their own, fundamental philosophies.

Lewis further places the decline of Liberalism in the intellectual context of the increasing influence of writers like Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx, “who treated the ethical self as no more than an illusion,” and Henri Bergson, “who perceived a realm of ultimate freedom that was above all determinations” (58). Liberalism—at its most basic level, a political philosophy that supported the rights of the individual and assumed that these individuals are “rational” and therefore capable of “tolerance and the encouragement of free inquiry, among independent, respectable and religious men,” as one critic defined it in 1840 (qtd. in Sherry 15)—was challenged by the rising influences of those philosophies which emphasized that the individual, as well as groups of individuals, is not primarily motivated by rational thought and “tolerance” for the ideas and concerns of others. In his study, Lewis considers the French writer Marcel Proust's, the Italian writer Gabriele d'Annunzio's, the Polish-born, naturalized British citizen Joseph Conrad's, and, to a lesser extent, the Irish writer James Joyce's questionings of the Liberal concept of the nation. In *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, Sherry focuses on British and American writers' responses to the decline of Liberal philosophies as a consequence of World War I.

rather a reshaping of it, in a manner that is less despondent than that of Masterman, less mournful of a lost past than that of Dangerfield, and less dismissive of national allegiances than that of Bell. She depicts an England in which the violence and tyranny committed in the domestic sphere has helped create a violent and tyrannical national culture, one that is prone to war. Although it is evident throughout her works, this connection between domestic and public oppression became increasingly relevant to Woolf throughout the 1930s, the decade in which she researched and wrote the essay and as Britain and the rest of Europe clearly prepared for the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* from the perspective of “the bridge which connects the private house with the world of public life,” and she argues that “the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected,” in that “the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (18, 142). That is, for Woolf, there is no clear distinction between the public and the private in England: these two realms inform and shape each other.

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<sup>24</sup>As George Orwell recalled in 1940, although “I don’t quite know in what year I first knew for certain that the present war was coming[,] after 1936, of course, the thing was obvious to anyone except an idiot” (538).

Woolf initially conceived the idea for what became *Three Guineas* in January 1931 (D 4:6). Black explains that many of the arguments presented here stemmed from “specific beliefs and policy demands” of various women’s and peace organizations with which Woolf was involved in the 1930s and earlier (“Virginia Woolf” 190). As Woolf researched newspapers and books as support or ammunition for her argument—for, as she wrote in her diary in 1932, she had “collected enough gunpowder to blow up St. Paul’s” (D 4:77)—she originally intended to publish together as a “novel-essay,” tentatively entitled “The Pargiters,” what eventually became the novel *The Years*, published in 1937, and the polemic *Three Guineas*, published the following year. Although she conducted the research and informally worked out the points for the argument of *Three Guineas* throughout the 1930s, Woolf began actively writing the essay after finishing the manuscript of and publishing *The Years* (D 5:52). She finished the essay manuscript in January 1938, and the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press published it in Britain in June of that year (D 5:125, 147). See Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A-Z* (291-94) for a fuller discussion of the composition of *Three Guineas*, and see Marcus, ““No More Horses”” (277) for some comments on Woolf’s reasons for separating her projected “novel-essay” into two texts.

Pawlowski assesses the scrapbooks of newspaper articles and photographs that Woolf collected through the 1930s as the “gunpowder” the latter used to support her indictment of England’s patriarchal culture. Pawlowski asserts that “the clippings suggest not only Woolf’s passion for the history of the present moment captured in the immediacy of newsprint but also her conscious formation of the fragments of news into cultural history” (119)—what Woolf in *Three Guineas* calls “history in the raw” (TG 7, 115).

The analysis of English culture and identity found in *Three Guineas* is particularly class-sensitive, as indicated by the status of both the essay's ostensible reader and its speaker. The essay is presented as a long letter addressed to a "prosperous," middle-aged barrister who has asked Woolf's speaker to contribute to his society for the prevention of war and defense of "liberty . . . [and] culture" (3, 33). This barrister occupies "an office in the heart of London" (3)—literally and figuratively, in that, for Woolf, he as an "educated man" and a professional who acts as a synecdoche for England's dominant patriarchal culture. In contrast, Woolf's speaker identifies herself as the "daughter of an educated man," which she insists is a class affiliation distinct from that of the barrister. Indeed, she claims that "a precipice, a gulf . . . deeply cut" lies between herself and her addressee, since the "sons of educated men" regularly receive expensive formal educations at England's public schools and universities, while the "daughters" were required merely to contribute to what she calls "Arthur's Education Fund"<sup>25</sup> by sacrificing not only their own educations, but those "luxuries and trimmings which are . . . an essential part of education," such as "travel, society, solitude, [and] a lodging apart from the family house." As the speaker explains, their educational and experiential differences result in her and her male correspondent's "look[ing] at the same things" but "see[ing] them differently," so that the "sons of educated men" recognize "traditions" and "nobility" when gazing upon their schools and the courts, whereas their "sisters" see an England that consists of "petticoats with holes in them, cold legs of mutton, and the boat train starting for abroad while the guard slams the doors in their faces" (4-5)—imagery she had used almost a decade earlier in *A Room of One's Own* to illustrate

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<sup>25</sup>Woolf borrows this phrase from *Pendennis* (1848-50) by William Makepiece Thackeray, her father's first father-in-law.



the differences between men's and women's colleges. In an endnote, Woolf's speaker explains that she employs the admittedly "clumsy" phrase "educated man's daughter" because the more mellifluous term "bourgeois" does not describe accurately the status of these Englishwomen: while the latter term may "fit her brother," the "daughters of educated men" lack "the two prime characteristics of the bourgeoisie—capital and environment" (146 n. 2). Hence, Woolf invents a speaker and a reader who would seem to occupy the same class as a rhetorical strategy to emphasize the importance of gender in shaping national identity.

Since its publication in 1938, many readers have found the essays's narrow focus on the plight of the "daughters of educated men" troubling and indicative of an elitism evident throughout her writings. These readers frequently indict Woolf's speaker's assertion that the "daughters of educated men" are "weaker than the women of the working class" because the latter class can help promote peace by "'refus[ing] to make munitions or . . . help[ing] in the production of goods"; in contrast, since the "daughters of educated men" usually do not perform occupations outside the home, they cannot influence decisions concerning war, and therefore "their class is the weakest of all classes in the state" (TG 12-13). Noting Woolf's focus on such a small subsection of Englishwomen, Q. D. Leavis, one of the essay's earliest reviewers, belittled *Three Guineas* as the "bad-tempered," "ill-informed" product of a "self-righteous" woman "quite insulated by class" (409-11). More recently, Mary Childers has complained that *Three Guineas* fails to promote solidarity among Englishwomen across class boundaries and is "not concerned with organizing women in general to take action as much as it is with articulating a vision of resistance to forms of professionalism that Woolf presents as inextricably connected to the

mechanisms for creating war” (72-73).<sup>26</sup> Other critics have attributed the narrow focus on England’s “daughters of educated men” not to a disregard for working-class women, but instead to Woolf’s class consciousness. As Christine Froula argues, Woolf writes “pragmatically from within the limits of her own class” (“St. Virginia’s Epistle” 41). Similarly, Anna Snaith concludes that Woolf “thought carefully about her class position, its benefits and drawbacks, and how it affected what and whom she could write about.” Therefore, Woolf considers the predicament of the “daughters of educated men” because it was of this class “which she ha[d] first-hand knowledge”; attempting to write from the perspective of other Englishwomen would have been presumptive (116-17). Indeed, Woolf’s endowing the essay’s speaker with the same economic and social status she held—that is, that of financially comfortable “daughter of an educated man”—indicates her class consciousness, and it enables her to stress the significance of gender as a component of national identity. But it also indicates her discomfort with her own class position and that of working-class women—a discomfort that is never adequately resolved in her writings. Woolf, like her speaker, insisted on seeing herself as an “outsider” to England’s dominant culture, whereas, for most, she was a member of the nation’s ruling establishment—as Leavis points out. This discomfort with her “insider” status is evinced in Woolf’s delineation in *Mrs. Dalloway* of Doris Kilman, whose ““grandfather kept an oil and colour shop in Kensington”” (131). As I discuss in my second chapter, Woolf makes Miss Kilman unsympathetic and leaves her out of Clarissa Dalloway’s unifying vision of England. As I argue, this dismissal of Miss Kilman more directly points to the flaws in Clarissa’s imagining of the

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<sup>26</sup>See also Latham (113-17).

national community, but it also suggests Woolf's queasiness in reaction to her own class and that of less privileged Englishwomen.

What the readings of Childers and Snaith overlook, however, is that Woolf's purpose with *Three Guineas* is not to promote organizations focused only on women's rights or to unite Englishwomen in some battle against Englishmen. Rather, she seeks more inclusively to examine and criticize those institutions, practices, and traditions within English culture that are based on oppression and which have made England throughout its history prone to war—in the hope that highlighting the means through which such a culture is produced will instigate change. Given her own status as a disenfranchised “daughter of an educated man,” Woolf's speaker finds the barrister's plea for assistance simultaneously flattering, surprising, and ironic. She fulfills this request for a donation to his pacifist society by agreeing to give a guinea not only to him, but also one to a women's college and one to an organization that aids the “daughters of educated men” in finding professional employment, since enabling these Englishwomen to enter the dominant institutions within their nation will help transform the national culture and therefore prevent war.<sup>27</sup> Hence, “the three guineas . . . though given to three different treasurers are all given to the same cause, for the causes are the same and inseparable” (TG 144). Through her carefully researched and aggressively articulated argument, Woolf adumbrates a plan to alter England—which nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Liberal philosophers had regarded as based on a “legal equality,” but one that, as Woolf stresses, has not applied to Englishwomen—by

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<sup>27</sup>The speaker's decision to donate *guineas* also bears class connotations, since “the guinea was . . . used until 1917 in place of the mundane pound to state professional fees, rents for better premises, and similarly impressive purposes” (Rainey 16). For other comments on Woolf's references to the guinea, see Andrew John Miller (43).

pointing out the prejudices and faults of England's dominant institutions and traditions, finding new ways to redefine the relationships between male and female English subjects, and encouraging Englishwomen to assume more active roles in the public life of the national community. That is, she demonstrates how the barrister's concerns for the public life in England are inextricably related to private concerns.

Woolf made this argument during a particularly volatile period in British and European history. First, as she researched and wrote the essay through the 1930s, fascistic ideologies increasingly dominated politics on the Continent and, more indirectly, those in Britain. In "Formations of Discipline and Manliness: Culture, Politics and 1930s Women's Writing," Kate Holden emphasizes Woolf's responses to the rise of fascism, as well as to the reactions both in support of and against the manifestations of this political ideology in Europe generally and Britain more specifically.<sup>28</sup> Holden refers to the historian Peter Fritzsche, who argues that "fascist ideology is built on the same premises as those democratic, progressive, European political structures, associated with early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernizing imperatives" (Holden 142): fascism was a logical extension of, rather than a reaction against, existing democratic governments and policies. Similarly, in his psycho-historical study of fascism, Klaus Theweleit argues that the political and social structures promoted by Hitler and Mussolini represent "a segment within the continuum of bourgeois patriarchy" and not an aberration from it (1:362). Writing in 1940, the socialist and feminist Englishwoman Ethel Mannin agrees when she refers to fascism as a "convenient scapegoat," for "Western civilization . . . had entered upon a period

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<sup>28</sup>See also Bradshaw's examinations of Woolf's involvement in anti-fascist societies ("British Writers and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s," Parts One and Two).

of decadence long before Hitler's rise to power"—a "decadence which goes back to the Industrial Revolution" and of which "Hitlerism is merely an offshoot" (*Christianity—or Chaos* 189). Moreover, fascist regimes sought control over all aspects of their subjects' lives, so that "disciplining both workers and women . . . [became] part of a drive to manage, through strategic planning and 'scientific' method, all areas of life, including the most intensely private" (Holden 142). Holden notes that although "fascist ideology did not gain popular support in England," striking similarities exist between it and "reassertion[s] of masculine dominance" among male English writers of the 1920s and 1930s, even when these writers did not officially support fascism—particularly in a shared fear of a "feminization" of culture (143). As support, she cites comments made by F. R. Leavis, D. H. Lawrence, and Wyndham Lewis—though only Lewis openly supported fascism (144 *passim*).<sup>29</sup> Like Holden and Mannin, Woolf in her 1940 essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" refers to "Hitlerism" as "the desire for aggression; the desire to dominate and enslave" and recognizes these desires also in "the young Englishmen," who must be taught "to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism" in order to defeat fully the fascist mentality in England (DM 245, 247).

Second, Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* in response to the Spanish Civil War, which Hynes describes as "the first battle in the apocalyptic struggle of Left and Right that the 'thirties generation had been predicting for years" (*The Auden Generation* 242). Although Britain did not

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<sup>29</sup>See also Hewitt's *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*. In "Fascism, Violence, and Modernity," Forgacs cites Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, first published in 1947, as the "most celebrated example of [the] position" that "Fascism, and its controlled violence, is a culmination of enlightenment rationality developing along its 'dark side.'" However, Forgacs contends that this thesis "goes too far because it makes it impossible to disentangle modernity from Fascism"; rather, he continues, other forms of modernity—such as that found in democratic states—offer "various discourses of individual and collective rights and freedoms" not found in fascist ones (20-21).

officially support either the right-leaning, fascist “Nationalist” insurgents or the more left-leaning, pro-Loyalist “Republicans,” many Britons publicly supported the latter side, and many members of what Hynes calls “the Auden generation” enlisted in the Republican army. Among these British volunteers was Woolf’s nephew Julian Bell, who openly supported the war, then enlisted as an ambulance driver, and finally was killed by a shell in July 1937 (Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 686).<sup>30</sup> A few weeks after learning of her nephew’s death, Woolf wrote in her diary that she would “often argue with him on [her] walks [and] abuse his selfishness” in going [to Spain] but mostly fe[lt] floored by the complete muddle & waste”; and in March 1939, she noted the British House of Common’s official recognition of General Franco as the leader of most of Spain, but bitterly declared, “And Julian killed for this” (D 5:108, 206). Additionally, in a memoir written about Julian shortly following his death, Woolf wonders “what made him do it” (*i. e.*, enlist in the Spanish Republican Army) and concludes only vaguely that her nephew had “the fever in the blood of the younger generation,” which she and her generation—most of whom had been “C[onscientious] O[bjectors] in the Great War”—“can’t possibly understand.” She concedes that the “cause” Julian’s actions supported was that of “liberty & so on,” but states that “still [her] natural reaction is to fight intellectually,” and “if [she] were any use, [she] should write against it” by “evolv[ing] some plan for fighting English tyranny” (qtd. in Quentin Bell 2:258-59). As Elena Gultieri points out, Woolf then “carried on her argument with [Julian] after his death” not only by imaginatively arguing with him during her walks, but also through *Three*

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<sup>30</sup>Lee adds that Julian Bell was persuaded by his mother’s “desperate anxiety” to enlist not as a soldier, but as an ambulance driver. However, although Julian regarded this concession as a “compromise,” the risks an ambulance driver on the front would take equaled those of a combat soldier (*Virginia Woolf* 686). See also Zwerdling’s discussion of Julian Bell (265-66). For a conflicting assessment of Bell’s significance in *Three Guineas*’ argument, see Black, Introduction (xlix).

*Guineas*, for, as Woolf wrote in her diary, “I was always thinking of Julian when I wrote” the essay (Guiltieri 84; D 5:148). While Julian Bell chose to battle the encroaching influence of fascism in Europe by volunteering for military duty in Spain, his aunt, barred from such participation both by her gender and her political beliefs, decided to “fight English tyranny” by “fight[ing] intellectually.”<sup>31</sup> This historical context—a simultaneously European, English, and personal one—indicates that Woolf with *Three Guineas* attempted to explain the resemblances between English national culture and the fascism pervasive in other nations, as well as the reasons why so many young men, like her nephew, willingly killed and died to preserve and protect particular national ideologies.

Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* explicitly in response to the rise of fascism in Europe in general and in Germany and Spain in particular, the consequential and growing threat of war, and what she saw as an oppressive patriarchal culture in England that, ironically, more resembled than differed from the fascist regimes in the other European countries that her own nation’s government and citizens feared. In the second chapter of the essay, she illustrates these similarities by juxtaposing two quotations—one from a 1936 letter to the editor written by an Englishman in *The Daily Telegraph*, the other taken from a speech delivered by Adolf Hitler that was translated and printed in the *Sunday Times* in the same year<sup>32</sup>—in which both writers insist that “homes are the real places of the women” and that while “Nature has . . . entrust[ed] the

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<sup>31</sup>Similarly, in “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” she implores the Englishwoman to “fight, so far as she can, on the side of the English” by “fight[ing] with the mind” (DM 243-44).

<sup>32</sup>In *Three Guineas*, Woolf provides a source for the first quotation in an endnote (161 n. 13). However, she does not identify Hitler as the author of the second quotation; instead, she refers to him only as “a German” (53). Pawlowski identifies Hitler as this anonymous German (“Exposing Masculine Spectacle” 125). Woolf probably assumed that her readers would recognize this passage from one of Hitler’s speeches.

man with the care of his family and the nation,” “the woman’s world is one of her family, her husband, her children.” She then states that “the dictator” inhabits and controls not only Germany, but “the heart of England,” as well, and that the Englishwoman who fights a culture which keeps her confined to the domestic sphere is “fighting the Fascist or the Nazi as surely as those who fight him with arms in the limelight of publicity.” As a result, Woolf asks, “Should we not help [the Englishwoman] crush [the dictator] in our own country before we ask her to help crush him abroad?” (TG 53). For Woolf, England’s discouraging its female citizens throughout most of its history from participation in public life by neither allowing them to vote nor by receiving a formal education, nor by entering the more lucrative and powerful professions, has rendered Englishwomen into, at best, “step-daughter[s] of England,” ones without “the full stigma of nationality,” like Englishmen (14). Although most of England’s female population gained the vote in 1918 and 1928,<sup>33</sup> Woolf explains in a lengthy endnote that Englishwomen still remained “step-daughters, not full daughters, of England” because they, unlike their male counterparts, automatically “change nationality on marriage,” so that “a woman, whether or not she helped to beat the Germans, becomes a German if she marries a German” (148-49 n. 12).<sup>34</sup> That is, for Woolf, England possessed a national culture that virtually excluded its female

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<sup>33</sup>After a decades-long struggle, British women over the age of 30 were enfranchised in 1918, and the minimum age was lowered to 21—the same age for male citizens—in 1928. A 1969 Act of Parliament lowered the minimum age for all citizens, excluding felons and those deemed mentally unfit, to 18.

<sup>34</sup>In their study of “The Englishwoman,” Mackay and Thane also argue that “the Englishwoman remains a more shadowy figure than the Englishman, because . . . women were believed to possess transnational qualities,” in that nationality as defined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused more on masculinity, while “women . . . *had* no fixed nationality.” As support, they cite Woolf’s discussion of an Englishwoman’s loss of her English status upon marrying a foreigner, discussed above (191-92, 224 n. 1; authors’ emphasis).



subjects by keeping them confined in the private, domestic sphere and by making their national identity dependent on that of their husbands.

As Woolf states near the conclusion of the second chapter, “the law of England” denies these “step-daughters of England” “the full stigma of nationality”; however, she “hope[s]” it “will long continue to deny” them such an identification with the national culture (82). In *Three Guineas*, she characterizes England’s dominant patriarchal culture as one permeated by violence. She speculates that men may possess more violent natures than women, since “scarcely a human being in the course of human history has fallen to a woman’s rifle” (6). But she contends also that English national culture cultivates and promotes these violent tendencies among its male members through its institutions and rituals. In Chapter 3, she laments the loss of the “private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect,” when his “mind” is “deform[ed]” by a national culture that fashions him into a “monstrous male,” who is “loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially” (105). Marcus argues that Woolf in *The Waves* “examines the role of childhood friendships and schooling in the formation of individual, group, and national identity” (“Britannia Rules *The Waves*” 146). Analogously, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf suggests not only that tyrannical behavior is primarily learned, rather than natural, but she also reduces men’s proclivity toward territorial disputes to activities akin to “childish” playground squabbles. And Woolf is not alone in discerning a connection between school-boy bullying and adult politics. In 1931, the English writer Aldous Huxley attended a parliamentary debate that the next morning’s newspapers described as an “historic occasion,” but which this particular spectator saw as little more than an “exchange of virulent abuses between

the two sides of the House” that reminded him of the squabbles in which he and the children of his school would engage. Until witnessing this debate, Huxley had believed only “little boys” capable of such behavior, but then realizes he “was mistaken,” for “prep-school scolding-matches are apparently in the great parliamentary tradition”—a tradition he wishes to see “altered” (“Greater and Lesser London” 48-49). The later historians Jane Mackay and Pat Thane argue that the brand of aggression Huxley saw in the House of Commons was, in fact, actively taught to English boys. They examine volumes of *Boy’s Own Paper*—a weekly British periodical, published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which recommends that English boys undertake activities to prepare them for lives of “active struggle and competition” in the support and defense of the nation (193, 195). In contrast, *Girl’s Own Paper*, distributed by the same publisher, emphasizes that “the essence of girlhood” lay “in spiritual qualities rather than actions” and that the “goodness” girls should aspire toward as woman consisted of “working for other people . . . in the home” (196). Hence, these periodicals—along with, as Mackay and Thane further point out, the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and other newsletters such as the *Boy’s Friend* and the *Girl’s Realm*—indoctrinated English boys and girls into the sharply divided roles England expected them to play as functioning national subjects.<sup>35</sup>

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf focuses not on children’s literature, but instead the uses of ceremonial costumes, processions, and other rituals performed by academics, soldiers, and other professional men in producing a national culture. The first editions of the essay contain five photographs of men of various professions in full uniforms, including a general, royal heralds, a

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<sup>35</sup>Ruderman adds that more than 150 children’s periodicals were published in England between 1880 and 1918, all of which “intended to reinforce in leisure reading across classes the notions of gender, race, and nationalism that children encountered in their schoolbooks” (56). See also Castle (5-8).

university procession, a judge, and an archbishop.<sup>36</sup> Together, these photographs suggest, as Eveline Kilian explains, the “cohesion, uniformity and . . . sense of community” that is “created by respective gowns worn by different professional groups,” as well as “the notion of unbroken tradition . . . expressed by the presence of older and younger men [and] by the old and venerable buildings” in the pictures’ backgrounds (144). That is, the images emphasize the rituals’, ceremonies’, and costumes’ creation of a masculine discourse within England that appears backed literally by centuries of tradition, is predicated on displays of superiority, and thus generates a national culture prone to war. Woolf emphasizes this point by referring in each chapter to photographs of “dead bodies” and “ruined houses,” the products of the Spanish Civil War (10-11, 40, 95, 141, 142).<sup>37</sup> She chose not to include these latter photographs in *Three Guineas*, but the repeated references act as what Merry Pawlowski describes as a “recurring refrain” (137) that links those photographs she does present and the death and destruction wrought by war, evinced for her contemporary reading audience in any English newspaper.

More specifically, Woolf purports to demonstrate a “connection . . . between the sartorial splendours of the educated man” and the destruction wrought by war (21). In an essay published a year after *Three Guineas*, she cites a “love of beauty” as the source behind the “[l]ove of Royalty” and the “love of pageantry” (“Royalty” M 229). But in *Three Guineas*, she finds the “splendour” of academic and royal costumes akin to the “hygienic splendour” of military ones,

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<sup>36</sup>Although the first American edition of *Three Guineas* included these photographs, they were not again included in any American edition until the 1992 Oxford University Press edition, edited by Morag Shiach, and then the 2001 Shakespeare Head Press edition, edited by Naomi Black.

<sup>37</sup>See also “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,” where Woolf describes “the young [English] airman . . . driven not only by the voices of loudspeakers,” but additionally “driven by the voices in himself—ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition,” which lead him to “the love of medals and decorations” and thus the “fighting instinct” these traditions require to accumulate them (DM 246-47).

which were “invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers.” The historian David Cannadine examines the elaborations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the ceremonies surrounding the British monarchy and points out that whereas these rituals had been “inept, private, and of limited appeal” throughout most of the nineteenth century, they “became splendid, public and popular” in the final third of this century (“The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual” 120). Cannadine argues that these elaborations were a reaction to Britain’s “unprecedented developments in industry and in social relationships,” “massive expansion of the yellow press,” and “preeminent dominance as an imperial power,” all which “made it both necessary and possible to present the monarch, in all the splendor of his ritual . . . as a symbol of consensus and continuity to which all might defer” (133)—a pair of symbolic associations that Woolf’s Conservative politician Richard Dalloway also attributes to Buckingham Palace (MD 117). Additionally, the “increasingly tense” international relations of this period “further induc[ed]” Britain “to the ‘invention of tradition’—here, the ensconcing of royalty in seemingly ancient, but actually recently invented, traditions—“as national rivalry was both expressed and sublimated in ceremonial competition,” which included other nations, such as France, Germany, Russia, and the United States (Cannadine 133). These rituals that glorified the monarch “as a symbol of consensus and continuity” both endowed this individual with all the import of Britain’s illustrious history and asserted the nation’s superiority over other nations in a form of ceremonial competition or even symbolic warfare.

Similarly but more harshly, Woolf damns the “splendour” of academic ceremonies as “ridiculous” and “barbarous,” in that it stems from the desires among “educated men to

emphasize their superiority over other people, either in birth or intellect, by dressing differently, or by adding titles before, or letters after their names” through “acts that rouse competition and jealousy,” emotions that “encourag[e] a disposition towards war” (TG 21). In her earlier novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the doctoral candidate Charles Tansley, in awe of Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty, wishes she could “see him, gowned and hooded, walking in a procession” (11). As in the case of Charles Tansley, the English and British use costumes and ceremonies—whether those of the monarchy, military, or academics—to display their “superiority,” as Woolf explains in *Three Guineas*, and to invent or imagine a national culture predicated on tyranny and violence. As a self-proclaimed outsider to this masculine national culture due to her gender, Woolf claims she can recognize the “wearing of pieces of metal, or ribbon, coloured hoods or gowns,” the “daub[ing] in red and gold” and wearing of “feathers,” as acts of “barbarity,” ones she “ridicule[s]” as comparable to the “rites of savages” (20, 105). As Terence Hewet exclaims sarcastically in Woolf’s first novel, ““What a miracle the masculine conception of life is—judges, civil servants, army, navy, Houses of Parliament, lord mayors—what a world we’ve made of it!”” (VO 197).

Consequently, Woolf insists, the Englishwoman should avoid in the future those national rituals that create a national culture based in violence and superiority by “absent[ing] herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose ‘our’ civilization or ‘our’ dominion upon other people” (109). However, as Bernice A. Carroll states, Woolf sought to show “the intricate ways in which all of the privileged class of ‘the educated men’ (and their daughters) served to maintain Empire and government and participated in their crimes” (108). Throughout much of her essay, Woolf emphasizes the

support Englishwomen have for centuries given indirectly given such a culture and thus, ironically, have colluded in their own oppression. She would soon subtly make this point in *Between the Acts*, written immediately after *Three Guineas*, when Mrs. Mayhew, the wife of a retired colonel, expresses her hope that Miss La Trobe's village pageant, an exploration of English history, will conclude "with a Grand Ensemble" that valorizes the "Army; Navy; [and] Union Jack" (BA 179). But in *Three Guineas*, Woolf emphasizes more directly the support given to such a national culture through her focus on marriage as the only profession open to the "daughters of educated men": these women have been compelled "to use whatever influence [they] possessed to bolster up the system which provided [them] with maids; with carriages; with fine clothes; with fine parties"; and if this "system" within the national culture persists, then these Englishwomen will have to "exert all their influence both consciously and unconsciously in favour of war" (38-39, 37).<sup>38</sup> Whereas Englishmen use intimidating costumes and participate in ceremonies and rituals that display and help create a masculinity predicated on domination and violence, Englishwomen are trained to wear cosmetics and dresses that create "beauty for the eye" in order to "attract the admiration" of men and lure them into marriage (20). As subordinates "restricted to the education of the private house" and dependent on their husbands, fathers, or brothers for financial support, the "daughters of educated men" have had no choice but

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<sup>38</sup>Masterman makes a similar point with a different emphasis. In *The Condition of England*, he states that middle-class Englishmen "are busy making money in order that their idle women may attain supremacy in [a] mad race for display" of wealth (33). And in 1896, Edward Carpenter argued that the dependency of Englishwomen upon Englishmen weakens both sexes: "The long historic serfdom of women, creeping down into the moral and intellectual natures of the two sexes, has exaggerated the naturally complementary relations of the male and female into an absurd caricature of strength on the one hand and dependence on the other," as seen especially in "the ordinary marriage-relation of the common-prayer-book type." Carpenter regards this type of male-female relationship as "a death-struggle . . . in which either the oak must perish suffocated in the embrace of its partner, or in order to free the former into anything like healthy development the ivy must be sacrificed" (*Love's Coming of Age*, qtd. in Dyhouse 149-50).

to support, “consciously and unconsciously,” the prevailing patriarchal culture of violence and oppression—even as that culture oppressed them. Woolf’s speaker adds that these women “even more strongly perhaps” supported the First World War, as indicated when many of them “rushed into hospitals . . . drove lorries, worked in fields and munition factories, and used all their immense stores of charm, of sympathy, to persuade young men that to fight was heroic, and that the wounded in battle deserved all [their] care and all [their] praise—due to the opportunities this war afforded them to escape the private house. The “daughter of an educated man” would “undertake any task however menial, exercise any fascination however fatal that enabled her to escape. Thus consciously she desired ‘our splendid Empire’; unconsciously she desired our splendid war” (39).<sup>39</sup> Here, then, Woolf explains how the identities of Englishwomen have been shaped by English national culture—even as that culture appears to exclude them.

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<sup>39</sup>In *Women and the Revolution* (1939), Mannin concurs that Englishwomen felt liberated by their nation’s need for their labor during World War I. She adds that “it is a sardonic thought that women had to be faced with the grim shadow of death before they could overthrow the tyranny of shames which held them in bondage, but the fact remains that this grim shadow served that purpose and forced some radical readjustments in the unwritten moral laws”—specifically, for Mannin, the “unwritten” restrictions on respectable women to engage in sexual intercourse only within the confines of marriage (83). In *Sexchanges*, the second of the three volumes of *No Man’s Land*, Gilbert and Gubar include various photographs of the British women to whom Woolf refers; these photographs from the “Woman at War” collection in the Imperial War Museum show “trousered ‘war girls,’” “liberated from parlors and petticoats alike . . . beam[ing] as they shovel coal, shoe horses, fight fires, drive buses, chop down trees, make shells, [and] dig graves” (271). Gilbert and Gubar, like Woolf in 1938, note that for these women, the war enabled them to “literally and figuratively r[ise] to the occasion” by assuming the occupations usually occupied by the men who had “went off to the trenches”—a situation that led one Englishwoman to write a memoir in 1934 entitled “We Enjoyed the War” (271-72). In 1938, however, Woolf’s retrospective consideration of these women’s “enjoy[ment]” of the war is more critical of their direct support of it. Gilbert and Gubar find this later criticism indicative of the “guilt of the female survivor,” since her triumphs had been built upon the deaths of so many men and women (264). Further, *Three Guineas*’ dark assessment of Englishwomen’s entries into the work force during World War I should be read in the context of the impending Second World War: in the late 1930s, Woolf probably realized that another war would again call for more women’s participation in England’s workforce, but she did not believe that this method of obtaining liberation from the private sphere balanced the losses generated by war. Instead, she wants war to be avoided altogether. For responses to Gilbert and Gubar’s arguments, see Tylee, “‘Maleness Run Riot,’” and also Higonet, “Not So Quiet in No-Woman’s-Land” (210) and “Women in the Forbidden Zone” (203).

Woolf's hopes for England's future lies with Englishwomen, more specifically, the "daughters of educated men" among that group. As she attempts to prove with her extensive research of newspaper articles and texts written by Englishmen and -women, the "daughters of educated men" must be given the opportunity to participate more fully in public life in order to reshape the English national culture that has existed for centuries by rebuilding it in order to help prevent future wars. She considers the possibility that, if women entered such professions, then they would, like their male counterparts, actively uphold the type of national culture based on violence, oppression, and war. As she asks in the second chapter:

If we encourage the daughters to enter the professions without making any conditions as to the way in which the professions are to be practiced shall we not be doing our best to stereotype the old tune which human nature, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is now grinding out with such disastrous unanimity? "Here we go round the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree, the mulberry tree. Give it all to me, give it all to me, all to me.

Three hundred million spent upon war." (59)

Upon gaining full entry into the nation's professions, governmental offices, and schools, Englishwomen, like Englishmen, could become fully indoctrinated in the discourse of these dominant institutions and consequently perpetuate those traditions that, as Woolf argues, lead to war.<sup>40</sup> What will prevent Englishwomen from dancing to the same tune on the gramophone is, ironically, the lesson taught to them by their long-term position as subordinates. She explains

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<sup>40</sup>Analogously, Masterman argues that many of the disgruntled members of the working classes who may have become "Labour leaders and Socialists"—advocates for social change—have been "swept into" "the huge sieve-net of the new scholarship system," which locates these individuals into public schools and universities, thus rendering them into "clerks in great businesses" and "Government employ[ees]" who are "firmly cemented into the fabric of the present social order" (*The Condition of England* 285).



that, even if she and other Englishwomen are permitted to participate more fully in public life within the national community, “our brothers will provide us for many centuries to come, as they have for many centuries past, with what is so essential for sanity, and so invaluable in preventing the great modern sins of vanity, egotism, and megalomania.” Because England’s dominant culture has regularly and openly regarded them with “censure and contempt”—“even,” as she points out in an endnote, “at a time of great political stress like the present”—these women have become accustomed to ridicule, and thus from what Woolf calls their “outsider’s perspective,” they are better prepared than their male counterparts to voice unpopular opinions as they slowly enter the professions and thus help reshape the English national consciousness (82, 170 n. 41).<sup>41</sup> Consequently, she instructs the “daughters of educated men” to “refuse to be separated from [their] four great teachers . . . poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties,” but rather to “combine them with some wealth, some knowledge, and some service to real loyalties” as they “enter the professions,” while “escap[ing] the risks that make them undesirable” (79-80). Further, she rejects “military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose ‘our’ civilization or ‘our’ dominion upon other people” (109). By remaining simultaneously perpetual “outsiders” *and* participants in English public life, Englishwomen could help prevent war, as the barrister had asked Woolf to help him

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<sup>41</sup>Woolf throughout *Three Guineas* refers to “the sacred year 1919,” when Parliament passed the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. This Act, as Woolf indicates in Chapter 1 and Childers further explains, “unbarred the professions” by disallowing employers from “disqualify[ing]” potential employees “by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function” (TG 16; Childers 65). Its purpose was to open professions for women; however, as Childers emphasizes, it “did not live up to its promise”: Englishwomen in 1938 were still regularly barred from those professions to which the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act theoretically granted them access. Childers contends that Woolf’s repeated invocations of the year in which the Act was introduced as “sacred” thus function ironically in the text.

to do, not by joining his pacifist society, but “by remaining outside [his] society but in cooperation with its aim” (143).

Thus, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf focuses her argument on the uses of prevailing institutions to inculcate male national subjects in a patriarchal culture that excludes or denigrates women; the role of costumes, symbols, and rituals in creating both a national culture and national identity for individual subjects; and the ability of marriage to grant Englishwomen a “profession” or role within that culture. Although she made this argument late in her life, Woolf investigated how her contemporary English national culture was produced through such means throughout her writings, which the following chapters examine. In selecting texts by Woolf on which to focus, I have drawn primarily from her mature writing—texts written after her fortieth birthday—and ones that represent a range of her writing styles and modes, including her expository writing, her experimental combinations of literary genres, and her reliance on free indirect discourse. My analysis of Woolf’s considerations of English culture and identity frequently stress gender, since Woolf held it as the most important, although certainly not the only, influence upon the subject’s relationship to his or her national culture. That is, for Woolf and as illustrated in *Three Guineas*, an individual’s gender most overtly shapes his or her relationship to the other components of English culture—including history, education, literature, class, war, and imperialism.

I begin with a chapter that addresses her responses, primarily in essays, to the structuring of England’s illustrious literary history, since such a topic helps illuminate Woolf’s positioning of herself in the national community as a writer. Additionally, her critique of the dominant national literary tradition emphasizes that she saw it implemented as a means to exclude Englishwomen from full participation and membership in that community. In the next chapter, I

turn to Woolf's responses to World War I, that event in England's recent history which she described in 1940 as a "chasm in a smooth road" ("The Leaning Tower" M 136). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, set in 1923, she shows how the national community reacted to this war by creating a national language that held together that community, but only through the exclusion of the more troubling reminders left from that war. The novel's spotlighting of those lingering, disturbing results highlights the flaws inherent in the national discourse that reputed to bind and heal the nation. By focusing on *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) in my third chapter, I begin to explore the historical forces within the national culture that led to the World Wars of Woolf's lifetime. Through *Orlando*, Woolf spotlights the close relationships between gender and national identity, and she delineates English masculinity as based on a proclivity for violence, whereas English femininity is enacted to support that violent male performance. As the mock-biography demonstrates, not only is gender performative, but the nature of the particular performance is historically and culturally contingent, as well. That is, the nature of the performance depends upon the time period and place in which the subject enacts it—hence making the national identity of Orlando, who not only lives through several centuries of English history, but changes his physical sex at the novel's midpoint, a precarious one. In her final novel *Between the Acts* (1941), the focus of Chapter Four, Woolf revisits the themes of her earlier works—including English literary history, national symbols and rituals, war, and gender roles. In a novel set on the eve of the Second World War, Woolf's juxtaposition of an historical pageant and the interactions among a group of contemporary Englishmen and -women enables her to develop an argument stated but more generally supported in *Three Guineas*: since the origin of an English consciousness, the national culture has been predicated on violence and oppression, the

culmination of which was the impending war. However, even as she herself regarded the war as potentially apocalyptic for England, Woolf offered some hope for the nation's future by suggesting tentatively that that nation's history can be rewritten to de-emphasize the seemingly inherent violence and that new works of art can help create a new national discourse.

Eagleton cites as the English novel's most salient traits its focus on the middle classes, its "relish for the material world," its "impatience with the formal," its "insatiable curiosity about the individual self," and its faith in its ability to represent and thereby give meaning to an inherently chaotic outside world (*The English Novel* 11, 16)—all traits evident not only in *Between the Acts*, but in Woolf's other writings, as well. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915), Joyce's Stephen Dedalus longs to "fly by" the "nets" of "nationality, language, [and] religion" (469); however, as Edward Said comments, while those who consider themselves intellectuals may "protest," "no one . . . is above the organic ties that bind the individual to family, community, and of course nationality" (*Representations of the Intellectual* 40). As an English novelist, Woolf believed she could not only represent England, but also help to reconstruct it.

## CHAPTER 1

## “All England in a Song or Two”:

## Virginia Woolf, Shakespeare, and England’s Gendered Literary Histories

The Englishman who, without reverence—a proud and affectionate reverence—can utter the name of William Shakespeare, stands disqualified for the office of critic.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Shakspeare’s Judgment Equal to His Genius” (1818): 225

[N]o one should write about Shakespeare without a special licence. Heaven-born critics or thorough antiquaries alone should add to the pile under which his “honoured bones” are but too effectually hidden.

—Sir Leslie Stephen, “Shakespeare as a Man” (1901), *Studies* 4:1

Churches and parliaments, flats, even telegraph wires—all, she told herself, made by men’s toils, and this young man, she told herself, is in direct descent from Shakespeare.

—Virginia Woolf, “The Introduction” (1925): CSF 187

As she begins her contemplation of the complex, ambiguous, “unsolv[able]” nature of the relationship between “women and fiction” in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf’s speaker shifts swiftly into a complaint regarding the alienation of women from the libraries of “Oxbridge” (AR 3-8). The speaker, aware she is “audaciously trespassing” on the neatly groomed “path” leading to the college’s library, nevertheless grows mesmerized while “strolling through those colleges past those ancient halls [where] the roughness of the present seemed smoothed away,” and “the mind became freed from any contact with facts”; as she draws nearer the library, she recalls the location within of the manuscripts of an essay by Charles Lamb, Milton’s “Lycidas,” and Thackeray’s *History of Henry Esmond* (6-7). Wishing to examine this

last text, the speaker reaches the threshold of the library, but she is greeted by “a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman,” who politely but emphatically informs her “in a low voice as he waved [her] back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction,” presumably from a Fellow (7-8).

What this anecdote and digression suggest is that Woolf cannot posit an argument involving “women and fiction” in England—that is, English women’s literary history—without addressing the dominant English *male* literary tradition that has virtually excluded female participation. Indeed, though “women and fiction” is the official topic of *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf devotes much of the essay to England’s masculine literary history, since a “woman writing unavoidably thinks back through her fathers as well,” as Elaine Showalter argues (“Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” 265). Woolf not only considers the ways in which the dominant history has portrayed or characterized Englishwomen, but also expresses her admiration for several male authors—most prominently Shakespeare, whose “mind” she praises as the most “incandescent, unimpeded,” and “complete” of all writers (AR 57). Like the speaker in her opening anecdote, Woolf venerated England’s predominantly male literary history, and yet felt excluded from it, unable to enter its hallowed halls not “accompanied” by a member of that club. England’s literary past—that of Milton, Lamb, Thackeray, Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare—had the power to mesmerize her, to allow her to escape the “roughness of the present” and its “facts,” and enter, if only briefly, as a “thought” in the mind or “huge bald forehead which is so splendidly encircled by a band of famous names,” as she subsequently describes the domed ceiling of the Reading Room at the British Library, that other bastion of the

male-dominated English literary tradition (AR 26).<sup>1</sup> For Woolf, the greatness of Milton, Spenser, Marlowe, and, most emphatically, that of Shakespeare, were unquestionable: the last “has had the light on him from his day to ours” (“Notes on an Elizabethan Play” [1925] CR1 48).

Additionally, she would, along with the New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield, “hold religious meetings praising Shakespeare,” as she related to a correspondent in 1919 (L 2:382-83).

However, while she would uphold Shakespeare, even “praise” him as the most prominent among England’s revered writers, she questioned her own relationship to him and both his exalted position in England’s masculine literary history and with the England that, as she wrote in a 1936 letter, he can encapsulate “in a song or two” (L 6:33).

In recent years, critics have begun to examine Woolf’s responses both to Shakespeare and to the literary history he dominates. Most argue that she felt excluded, as a woman, not only from the library of Oxbridge, but from the primarily masculine, patriarchal literary history it housed. For example, Jane Marcus depicts Woolf as a “guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt” who, in her “alienation from British patriarchal culture,” “sought . . . the overthrow of male culture [and] a return to the oppressed of their rightful heritage” (“Thinking Back Through Our Mothers” 1-2). For Marcus, Woolf places a suppressed feminine literary tradition at odds with a

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<sup>1</sup>The narrator in the earlier *Jacob’s Room* (1922) similarly describes the British Museum as “an enormous mind”: “Consider that Plato is there cheek by jowl with Aristotle; and Shakespeare with Marlowe. This great mind is hoarded beyond the power of any single mind to possess it. . . . Stone lies solid over the British Museum, as bone lies cool over the visions and heat of the brain. Only here the brain is Plato’s brain and Shakespeare’s . . .” (108-09).

Fernald argues that both Woolf’s descriptions of the British Library and its domed structure itself were based on models of Renaissance memory. She draws upon these models to explore Woolf’s ambivalent relationship with cultural memory. In a review of this article, however, Eggert points out that Fernald offers no evidence that Woolf possessed any familiarity with Renaissance mnemonic systems (184). Regardless, Woolf often did conceptualize England’s literary history—particularly its masculine one—as a “mind”: for example, in a letter of January 1929 (two months before she began the drafting process of “Women and Fiction,” which became *A Room of One’s Own*, and several months after she gave the lecture on this subject that formed the seed of the novel), she refers to the history of English literature as “one brain . . . [that] wants change and relief” (L 4:4).

dominant, national male one. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend similarly that through her literary criticism, Woolf embarked on “a voyage ‘forward’ into the geography of an unprecedented female past,” thereby tracing a “female literary inheritance” in opposition to the more thoroughly explored male heritage (*No Man’s Land* 1:196).

However, while these critics regard Woolf as a writer embattled with England’s patriarchal literary history, they argue concurrently that Woolf exonerates Shakespeare by excluding him from that dominating, exclusive tradition of great male writers. According to Marcus, Shakespeare, for Woolf, “saves us from sexism” (*Virginia Woolf* 173). Further, Beth C. Schwartz suggests that throughout her writings, Woolf “re-engendered” and “regendered” Shakespeare, “transform[ing]” him, “one of the most preeminent fathers of English Literature, into a mother figure,” “the cornerstone of the incipient tradition of women writers” (723). Hence, for Marcus, Gilbert, Gubar, and Schwartz, Woolf attempts to dethrone England’s male-centered literary history by outlining a female literary past through the “greatest” of English male writers, William Shakespeare, whose “androgynous . . . man-womanly mind” lies above censure in that realm that “surpass[es] literature altogether” (AR 99; D 3:301). According to these critics, Woolf imagines herself as dismantling England’s patriarchal literary tradition from within by re-fashioning its “father” into a covert mother-figure, one whose “anonymous” voice paved the way for later, anonymous female writers.

But these critics have overlooked or downplayed a crucial distinction in Woolf’s evaluation of “Shakespeare,” his place in England’s dominant literary history and national culture, and the structure of that literary history, culture, and national identity. For Woolf, “Shakespeare” plays two prominent but distinct roles. First, as a poet and dramatist, he can—as



she states in her diary and *A Room of One's Own*—“surpass literature altogether” with the power of his “man-womanly mind” (D 3:301, AR 99). Second, as he and his writings have been conceived and portrayed by England’s great male writers in their “direct descent from Shakespeare” (“The Introduction” [1925], CSF 186), Shakespeare appears also as a revered monument to the dominant national literary tradition. In both instances, Woolf regards Shakespeare as great—but, while in the first, she locates his greatness in his abilities as a writer, in the second, his greatness is a construction of a national discourse, a definitive cultural position granted to him by other great men, literary critics, who have deemed themselves in “direct descent” from him. This club she can only alternately admire, question, and criticize from the outskirts. In this second role, “Shakespeare,” metonymic for all English national cultural memories, complicates Woolf’s own national identity and leads her to propose an alternative one for herself and other English women writers. In *A Room of One's Own*, she proposes this as “supplement[al],” separate from, though a necessary complement, to the dominant literary history (AR 45). However, in this and other essays, Woolf also attempts to heal this gendered rift in England’s literary history by demythologizing the nation’s great writers—those whom, like Shakespeare, the national discourse has portrayed as existing outside of time—by placing them in their historical contexts. Ultimately, it is through the “androgynous . . . man-womanly mind” (AR 99) of Shakespeare the writer that Woolf proposes to unite England’s bifurcated, gendered literary histories and reconstruct English national culture. It is by these means that she proposes both to debunk the nation’s dominant, patriarchal literary history, and remodel it around an alternate female history predicated on historical contingencies.

“In Direct Descent from Shakespeare”: Woolf, Shakespeare, and English National Culture

In the last few decades, a plethora of criticism evaluating the role and view of Shakespeare in English national culture has been published.<sup>2</sup> Jean I. Marsden discusses the pervasive cultural “appropriation of Shakespeare,” drawing upon Terence Hawkes’s “equation of Shakespeare with English culture” (*That Shakespeherian Rag* 1), and contending that *because* “little is known of the man, his life, his personality, his faults,” Shakespeare has become a national myth: “Shakespeare [has] evolve[d] into more than a literary figure, becoming established as an icon of western culture. Such idealisation has created The Bard, a near mythic figure who is poet and cultural artefact all in one” (Marsden 2). Hence, “Shakespeare” as a cultural icon, or, as Hawkes puts it, “quintessentially English goods” (*That Shakespeherian Rag* 1), figures as a cultural manifestation separate from Shakespeare the man and author. Michael Dobson emphasizes the particular role of “Shakespeare” in English and British national cultures. Focusing on the Restoration and eighteenth century, he sharply divides Shakespeare the writer from “Shakespeare” the national figure:

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<sup>2</sup>Particular attention has been paid to Romantic perceptions of Shakespeare. Building upon and largely rewriting Bloom’s famous and infamous positioning of Shakespeare as *the* “giant” of English literature, an awesome precursor himself unaffected by, though the originator of “the anxiety of influence” in later “strong” poets (*The Anxiety of Influence* 11), Bate argues that the “Romantics worshiped Shakespeare” and that this era first saw Shakespeare made into a national myth, a “god of our idolatry” (*Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* 3, 159). In 1985, Dollimore and Sinfield published a landmark collection of essays under the title *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*; here, they and other writers emphasized Shakespeare’s role as “a powerful cultural token” appropriated by both conservative and radical interests in order “to add . . . authority to [their] political standpoint”: “Shakespeare’s plays constitute an influential medium through which certain ways of thinking about the world may be promoted and others impeded, they are a site of cultural struggle and change” (154-56). Recent trends in Shakespearean criticism hence do not devalue Bloom’s argument that, in the English literary tradition, Shakespeare is regarded by subsequent writers as their strongest and most influential predecessor; rather, these critics seek to evaluate the range of political and cultural values attributed to Shakespeare by writers and critics.

By the 1760s Shakespeare is so firmly established as the morally uplifting master of English letters that his reputation no longer seems to depend on his specific achievements as a dramatist: a ubiquitous presence in British culture, his fame is so synonymous with the highest claims of contemporary nationalism that simply to be British is to inherit him, without needing to read or see his actual plays at all. (214)<sup>3</sup>

“Shakespeare” hence becomes “a powerful cultural token,” as Alan Sinfield states (“Introduction: Reproductions, Interventions” 154), in both British and English national culture, a name “synonymous” with a national identity to which British and English subjects can claim heritage without even reading or seeing the plays on which his fame is grounded. Shakespeare the national icon has been unmoored from Shakespeare the writer.

Woolf also recognized Shakespeare’s virtually unequivocal position in England’s national culture—literary and otherwise. Throughout her writings, she closely aligned Shakespeare’s voice with that of England and all its inhabitants. Indeed, many of her novels’ characters intimate that they “equat[e] . . . Shakespeare with English culture,” as Hawkes states. Mr. Grice in *The Voyage Out* (1915) cites Shakespeare’s Henry V as “the model of an English gentleman” (46); in *Night and Day* (1919), William Rodney believes “himself admitted . . . to the society of the civilized and sanctioned by the authority of no less a person than Shakespeare himself” when he can answer Mrs. Hilbery’s question about *Hamlet* (425); in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the patriotic Lady Bruton, “without reading Shakespeare,” feels nevertheless “this isle of men, this dear, dear land . . . in her blood” in a seemingly unconscious echo of Shakespeare’s John of Gaunt’s praise

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<sup>3</sup>Dobson’s uses of the terms “English” and “British” in this essay are rather slippery. See my Introduction for a discussion of the problems in various authors’ uses of these terms.

of “this scepter’d isle” and in a manner that demonstrates Dobson’s claim that one “inherit[s]” Shakespeare by virtue of an English birth, “without . . . read[ing] or see[ing] his actual plays at all” (180); Orlando in Woolf’s 1928 mock-biography hears in the clanging of the bell of St. Paul’s, that iconic symbol of London and England, “the glory of poetry . . . of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, [and] Milton” (O 164); and Bernard in *The Waves* (1931) describes his sense of “our English past” by declaring, “I too know what Shakespeare knew” (227). Woolf also emphasizes Shakespeare’s preeminence. In a review of 1919, she refers to the “English descent from Shakespeare” (“A Real American” E 3:86-87); in 1934, she suggests that “the last relics of Shakespeare’s soliloquies” still exist in “some of the old peasants speeches” (L 5:335); and in a letter written in May 1936, she scoffs at what she sees as T. S. Eliot’s claim to be “the titular head of English-American letters,” “where he fails . . . when he takes on him to be a burly Englishman, with our gift for character drawing” without “a touch of Dickens or Shakespeare in him” (L 6:32-33).<sup>4</sup> For Woolf, the American-born Eliot stands forever outside full initiation into “our” literary and national tradition. Seemingly in response to Eliot’s claim, as she reports, she immediately read *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “Well, there you have it—all England, all May in

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<sup>4</sup>Woolf makes a similar indictment of Henry James, whom she describes in “Phases in Fiction” (1927) as “the American ill at ease” in the “strange civilization” of England (GR 123). Similarly, in both “The Russian Point of View” (1925) and “American Fiction” (1925), she faults James as a writer in that he, as a “foreigner,” often sets his novels in England and Europe, while he obviously wrote as a “man who had [not] grown up in the society which he describes”; further, his criticism of English authors suggests he “had read Shakespeare [with a] sense of the Atlantic Ocean and two or three hundred years . . . separating his civilisation from ours” (“The Russian Point of View” CR1 173). In her early review of his *Portraits of Places* (1906), she similarly draws attention to James’s status as an “American stranger,” but more positively describes his perspective as one of “advantage” in that “he comes to most of our sights and institutions with an eye that is unblunted by custom”; however, she in the following paragraph proceeds to call James an “irresponsible guest” (E 1:125). Additionally, to Woolf, James displays a rather crass “obsession with...the age of old houses, the glamour of great names,” and when he writes about England and Europe, he “exaggerat[es] English culture, the traditional English good manners, and stress[es] too heavily or in the wrong places those social differences which, though the first to strike the foreigner, are by no means the most profound” (“American Fiction” M 124). Thus, Woolf suggests that James fails as a writer in that he writes about England, but, as an American, he cannot comprehend the subtleties of English national identity and social structure.

a song or two” (L 6:33). Woolf argues in a draft of an essay she intended to publish in a third “Common Reader” that Shakespeare’s greatness lies in his ability to transcend boundaries of time, class, and gender—and to speak for the “many nameless workers . . . and private people” of both England’s past and present (ATR 430 n.).

However, Woolf never forgot that Shakespeare’s works occupy the center of England’s patriarchal literary tradition, as well as its culture in general. For example, in her 1925 short story “The Introduction,” she places that which is “made by men’s toil,” “churches and parliaments, flats, even the telegraph wires”—synecdoches for modern English culture in its religious, political, social, and technological aspects—“in direct descent from Shakespeare” (CSF 187). Further, while the story’s Oxbridge-educated, “dominan[t],” “self-assur[ed]” Bob Brinsley typifies this lineage, the heroine Lily Everit feels “yoke[d],” “crushed” by what Brinsley seems to accept so naturally (186, 188).<sup>5</sup> In this sense, *Shakespeare* himself may have embodied the “man-womanly mind” Coleridge regarded as necessary for poetic creation. But for Woolf, the *Shakespearean tradition*, the “direct descent from Shakespeare” that stands as an originating center for modern England, constitutes an oppressive force, part of the patriarchal tradition that has excluded women from England’s national literary traditions and, ultimately, full participation in its national culture.

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<sup>5</sup>Jacob Flanders is another Woolfian character who appears in this “direct descent”: in Chapter Nine of *Jacob’s Room*, Jacob studies in the Reading Room of the British Museum and through his reading, engages in a “dialogue” with “great” writers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Marlowe and Shakespeare (JR 107-10). *The Waves*’ Neville also assumes his own standing in this “direct descent” when he vows to “become a don; and go with schoolmasters to Greece; and lecture on the ruins of the Parthenon,” and even the Australian-born Louis declares that he, Neville, and Bernard “have inherited traditions” as he gazes upon “the names of men of war, of statesmen, of some unhappy poets” inscribed on a chapel wall and anticipates that “[his] shall be among them” (71, 58). Hoberman points out that the British ruling classes establish their “cultural superiority” and “national identity” through their knowledge of classical literatures and cultures (103).

This assumption of a “direct descent from Shakespeare” for those who associate themselves with the patriarchal literary history stems from the virtual deification of him and has its roots in Ben Jonson’s recommendation on the title page of the first folio: “Reader, looke not on his Picture, but his Booke” (qtd. in Gopnik, “Will Power” 90). That is, readers should disregard Shakespeare’s biography and focus solely on his writing. Following this trend late in her life, Woolf dwells on Shakespeare’s “anonymity,” his simultaneous fame and obscurity in that he “could say everything . . . more at least than has been said before or since, through the mouths of his characters, [and] he is at once the best known and the least known of all writers” (ATR 431 n.). This greatness operates independently of any personal familiarity with the writings of Shakespeare—as Woolf illustrates with Lady Bruton’s comments on him. Jonathan Bate traces the major trends in Shakespearean criticism (as well as those of all English literature) back to the conflicting techniques of William Hazlitt, with his political focus on the plays, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “the father of twentieth-century apolitical ‘practical criticism,’” in their virtually contemporary lectures on Shakespeare. Bate contends these critics were “grateful for the lack of biographical information precisely because it reinforced [their] own conception[s] . . . to some extent another myth, of Shakespeare as the impersonal genius . . .” (*Shakespearean Constitutions* 174; *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination* 164). And, as Tricia Lootens points out, the tradition of deifying or sanctifying what she calls “Saint Shakespeare” persisted in Victorian England, where writers such as Thomas Carlyle praised Shakespeare as ““a blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light”” and ““an ornament of our English household”” (qtd. in Lootens 28).

Hence, within the English national discourse, “Shakespeare” becomes a virtual divinity, “a God-like author whose hidden meaning remains to be revealed or ‘explained’ by a priestly critic,” who descend directly from him by virtue of education (Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* 76). Such “heaven-born critics,” as Woolf’s father Sir Leslie Stephen explains, are the only ones in possession of the “special license” that empowers them to “write about Shakespeare” (*Studies* 4:1). And the ways that these “heaven-born critics” write about their Shakespeare render him a touchstone in the dominant English literary history. Sinfield notes Shakespeare’s “construction in English culture . . . as the great National Poet whose plays embody universal truths” and the “keystone which guarantees the ultimate stability and rightness of the category ‘Literature’” (“Give an Account” 159). In this sense, English Literature cannot exist without “Shakespeare,” a “stable” presence who presides over the dominant literary canon with his “greatness” unquestioned in the wars of literary criticism. It is this view of the mythic Shakespeare that has led Harold Bloom to declare that “Shakespeare belongs to the giant age before the flood, before the anxiety of influence became central to poetic consciousness” (*The Anxiety of Influence* 11): alone among poets, Shakespeare rises to deific heights above the petty squabbles of the more human and fallible writers. “Shakespeare” becomes, as Dobson asserts “synonymous with the highest claims of contemporary nationalism that to be British is to inherit him, without needing to read or see his actual plays at all” (“Introduction” 214). Perhaps it is the “heaven-born critics”—or, more accurately, the Oxbridge-educated ones—who determine how Shakespeare’s writing are to be interpreted; but simply inheriting English blood is tantamount to

inheriting Shakespeare as a cultural figure. “Shakespeare” the English cultural icon becomes in the national discourse an entity separate from Shakespeare the writer.<sup>6</sup>

Near the conclusion of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf considers the problems of women's literary and cultural exclusion: “You are . . . disgracefully ignorant,” as she tells her female readers, “You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilisation” (AR 112). Women have not fully participated in English culture—in its creative and destructive, artistic and political, aspects—and thus are not integrated fully into it. In this manner, then, Woolf intimates that the barring of Englishwomen from this culture has rendered them an underprivileged class, which the dominant, patriarchal ruling class keeps undereducated and

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<sup>6</sup>Although much of Shakespearean criticism in recent years is devoted to reevaluating Shakespeare's position in English literary history, few critics actually attempt to dethrone Shakespeare. A notable exception is Gary Taylor in *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (1989); Taylor questions the automatic assumption that Shakespeare is the “greatest” of English writers: he contends that “by overestimating Shakespeare's importance and uniqueness, Shakespearian critics . . . glorify one writer by denigrating many”; further, he complains that these critics simultaneously “harm Shakespeare himself” by refusing to tamper with or evaluate the “sacred grounds” of the plays and poems themselves: “It is safer to praise than to think” (407). Unsurprisingly, Taylor's study has been met both with praise and criticism: in the *London Review of Books*, Hawkes deems the study “a genuine contribution to our knowledge of how [our] culture works” (“Bardbiz” 12); but more critics regard Taylor's mode of scholarship as akin to that of a rabble-rouser. An anonymous reviewer in *The Economist* sardonically notes, “Being proactive, as Mr. Taylor is perfectly aware, gets a writer noticed [while] respectful scholarship does not” (“Shakespeare and Company” 101). Other critics point out the inherent irony of Taylor's scholarship: whereas he on the one hand seems to question Shakespeare's value and skill as a writer, he himself on the other hand has devoted his career to the study and editing of “the Bard's” plays and poems (see, for example, Anne Barton's review in *The New York Review of Books* 17). Taylor's project thus stands in stark antagonism to that of Bloom, a self-confessed “aesthetic critic” who labels the endeavors of Gary Taylor, along with those of Hawkes, Bate, Sinfield, and Dollimore, as the “School of Resentment” and who contends not only that Shakespeare is “central” to the Western Canon, but further that “Shakespeare is the Canon” (*The Western Canon* 25, 50; *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* 16-17). Taylor's attempt to debunk Shakespeare's assumed “greatness” is, of course, not a new phenomenon. T. S. Eliot, for example, decreed famously in 1919 that *Hamlet*, perhaps the most revered of Shakespeare's works, “so far from being [a] masterpiece . . . is most certainly an artistic failure,” and further, “more people have thought *Hamlet* a work of art because they found it interesting, than have found it interesting because it is a work of art. It is the ‘Mona Lisa’ of literature” (“*Hamlet*,” in *Selected Prose* 47). However, while for Eliot, Shakespeare's greatness as a whole remained unquestionable: in the same essay, he praises Shakespeare's work in *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* (47-48). Taylor offers a more comprehensive reevaluation of the assumed greatness of this literary Father.



inactive in public life. However, rather than seeking “the overthrow of male culture,” as Marcus contends, *A Room of One’s Own* offers a less aggressive solution, for, as Woolf here states, “It would be ambitious beyond my daring . . . to suggest to the students of those famous colleges [of Oxbridge] that they should re-write history” (45). She more subtly suggests that a new history of women’s literature should be added as “a *supplement* to history” (45; emphasis added). She both acknowledges that the writings of Englishwomen have not been included in the nation’s patriarchal literary tradition and proposes that they remain so, forming instead an auxiliary history that emphasizes the Englishwoman’s rather ambiguous relationship to the dominant national culture.

Woolf illustrates the dual roles of Shakespeare in *Orlando*, a book written immediately before *A Room of One’s Own* and described by Maria DiBattista as “a fanciful vindication of the rights of literary women” (147). Here, Orlando encounters first Shakespeare the poet. Early in the text, the young, male Elizabethan Orlando catches serendipitously a glimpse of Shakespeare, “a rather fat, rather shabby man,” apparently in the act of writing a poem; tellingly, Orlando at this moment does not know the identity of the man, but recognizes immediately that he is a poet, for his “eyes were globed”—a possible punning allusion on the part of Orlando’s playful biographer to the Globe Theater—“and clouded like some green stone of curious texture [and] fixed” (O 21). Orlando, himself an aspiring poet, silently wonders in awe, “Was he writing poetry?” and wants to implore of him, “‘Tell me . . . everything in the world.’ . . . [B]ut how to speak to a man who does not see you? who sees ogres, satyrs, perhaps the depths of the sea instead?” (21-22). Even in—or, perhaps, as a consequence of—his present anonymity, Shakespeare appears a gifted poet, one who in a brief glimpse displays his ability to transcend his “shabby”

human exterior to “see” beyond into a mystical realm, as well as “everything in the world.” Orlando only realizes the import of this encounter several centuries later, long after Shakespeare has ascended the heights of the English literary tradition. In the last pages of the text, Orlando, now a married, twentieth-century woman who has finally published her long poem “The Oak Tree,” contemplates the benefits and drawbacks of literary “fame” and recalls suddenly the “shabby” figure: “He sat at Twitchett’s table. . . . [W]as it Sh-p-re?’ (for when we speak names we deeply reverence to ourselves, we never speak them whole)” (312-13).<sup>7</sup> Orlando reacts with shock to the memory, for “she gazed for ten minutes ahead of her,” unable to reconcile the picture of the “rather fat, rather shabby man” with his “fixed” poetic gaze, with the cultural myth of “Sh-p-re” in England’s literary history. The exalted name of “Shakespeare” thus holds connotations in addition to those of a gifted writer: the unspeakable “Sh-p-re” signifies not only the man who long ago wrote poetry, but the “fame,” the renown granted to him by virtually all subsequent English writers, as well as that of England’s national culture in its broadest sense.<sup>8</sup>

These dual roles of Shakespeare—the writer and “Sh-p-re”—suggest Woolf’s simultaneous attraction to and alienation from England’s dominant literary history. The former she can praise as a writer. In a diary entry composed while writing what would become *The Waves*, Woolf approaches Shakespeare as another, although a superior, writer:

I read Shakespeare *directly* I have finished writing, when my mind is agape & red & hot.

Then it is astonishing. I never yet knew how amazing his stretch & speed & word coining

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<sup>7</sup>Woolf indicates clearly that the “shabby” man was indeed Shakespeare by listing the page on which the young Orlando sees the great poet under the heading “Shakespeare” in the mock-biography’s index (332).

<sup>8</sup>Incidentally—but perhaps tellingly—Woolf in her diary frequently abbreviated Shakespeare’s name as “Sh-p-re” or “Shre.” See, for example, D 2:223, D 3:104, 182, D 4:309, and D 5:345.

power is, until I felt it utterly outpace & outrace my own, seeming to start equal & then I see him draw ahead & do things I could not in my wildest tumult & utmost press of mind imagine. . . . Indeed, I could say that Shakespeare surpasses literature altogether, if I knew what I meant. (D 3:300-01)

And yet “Shakespeare” and the English literary tradition to which he is central represent concurrently the English culture from which Woolf feels excluded. In a journal entry of 1903, the young Virginia Stephen wistfully looks forward to reading Shakespeare, as well as the Bible, Homer, Dante and the speeches of Edmund Burke, but she hesitates, expressing her sense of alienation from this masculine literary club and wonders, “what right have I, a woman to read all these things that men have done?” (PA 178). And later, in a letter to another English female writer and the model for Orlando, Vita Sackville-West, she refers to “the torrent of [her] emotions about Shakespeare” and explains, “for many years I have not dared to say anything about poetry” (L 3:227). Here, she blames “the professors” who “hem one down in their hen-coops,” thus limiting her understanding of English poetry, for “their replies to questions have kept me dumb.” She asks Sackville-West, “Shall we write a little book of poetry together?” In this exchange, Woolf reveals her alienation from England’s dominant literary history, as constructed and guarded by “the professors” and proposes that she and Sackville-West should form their own, alternative history, rather than attempting to break into that exclusive club. For Woolf, “the dominance of the professor” in England is undeniable, for, as she notes in *A Room of One’s Own*, “his was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. . . . With the exception of the fog he seemed to control everything” (33-34).

This view of England's dominant culture and literary history is thus tied closely to its dominant educational institutions—most importantly, Oxbridge. In his essay on “Englishness and National Culture,” Philip Dodd emphasizes the roles of such cultural and literary critics as Matthew Arnold, Bernard Darwin, and later Sir Sidney Lee (Shakespeare's biographer and Leslie Stephen's successor as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*) in establishing the “equation of Englishness with certain institutions . . . the ancient universities” (3). Dodd cautions that “one should not underestimate the power of these institutions to define for other universities what constituted knowledge,” and further, “that during 1880-1920 the conviction that English culture was to be found in the past was stabilised,” particularly “through the establishment of a national literary tradition within the emergent discipline of English literature” (23 n., 22). Although the actual proportion of the English population that attended these institutes of learning may have been small, this minority greatly influenced English national culture. As Woolf indicates in *A Room of One's Own*, “patriarchy” itself is grounded in the “dominance of the professor” (33).<sup>9</sup>

Woolf initially learned of this Oxbridge version of English culture through her father and, later, her brother Thoby—both Cambridge-educated men. In particular, Woolf's relationship with

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<sup>9</sup>Woolf offers another view of this restricted “club” of England's privileged literary scholars in an early draft of *The Voyage Out*. In the third chapter of this draft later published under the title *Melymbrosia* (written 1909-12), Helen Ambrose reflects on the exclusive nature of the scholarship of her husband Ridley—a character whom Jean Wheare suggests resembles Woolf's father, Sir Leslie Stephen (VO 355 n.). In *Melymbrosia*, Helen concedes that she “knew quite well that there were only twenty-four people who enjoyed Ridley's books”—focused on his study of the classical Greeks—while Ridley has gained his rather limited “fame” through the “wider rings” who “read because they had to; and those who knew that such books were important without reading them” (Mel 17). These concentric “rings” that surround Ridley, Helen realizes, render her husband “an egoist” and lacking in any “sympathy” for those whom he regards as existing outside his domain—including “fat women and stupid men,” and even Helen, who considers herself “illiterate” because although she has “read Hamlet,” she has no knowledge of the “lesser plays of Shakespeare,” much less Greek (Mel 17).

Leslie Stephen, a literal literary father, renowned critic, historian, and biographer, and a “great man” of the mid- to late-Victorian era, has drawn much critical attention. For example, in what Hermione Lee dubs “the most damaging and sensational reading of Virginia Stephen’s family life” (*Virginia Woolf* 101), Louise DeSalvo depicts Leslie as a “bullying,” “stressed,” unstable, even suicidal figure, largely the result, she suggests, of psychological and emotional damage incurred during his childhood as a student at Eton College, where she points out he was beaten and, she contends, possibly sexually abused by older boys (30-31, 135-36, 114-15). Further, DeSalvo cites Leslie as a direct cause in Virginia’s first major psychological breakdown in 1897 and argues the latter read precociously as a child in order to avoid any possible identification in her father’s mind with his “perverse,” “mad,” barely literate daughter Laura (215-16, 34). For DeSalvo, then, Woolf’s introduction to literature and reading appears to be less an act of rebellion and more a little girl’s pitiful attempt to avoid madness and to garner a brutish father’s affection. Most critics and biographers, however, regard Leslie Stephen as a more positive, although somewhat conflicted, influence upon his daughter, one varying from an attentive father who read the novels of Sir Walter Scott and the poetry of Milton to his children, to one whose own scholarship significantly shaped not only his brilliant daughter’s writing career, but, indirectly, that of other Bloomsbury writers, as well.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Stephen’s influence on his daughter is well-trodden ground within the large body of biographical and critical works on Woolf. Quentin Bell confines his remarks on Woolf’s relationship with her father to the surface, noting that Stephen regularly read aloud to his children and thus introduced them to literature (*Virginia Woolf* 1:26-27, 50-51). Gordan more extensively assesses Stephen’s role in Woolf’s education and his reverberations in the latter’s writing career, arguing that “Leslie Stephen was Virginia’s first and most enduring intellectual model” (77). In “The Metamorphosis of Leslie Stephen,” Hyman refutes the general assumption that Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* is modeled directly on Leslie Stephen and his philosophies and argues instead not only that both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay express beliefs Stephen had argued in his *Science of Ethics* (1882), but that Woolf herself subscribed to a philosophy similar to that her father there expressed. Similarly, Hussey in *The Singing of the Real World* notes an “opposition in Woolf’s thinking between the symbolical, inclusive, intuitive, and nondiscursive mode of thought that seems particularly feminine, and the masculine style of rationality and logic, which tends to exclude”; he locates

Woolf herself paints a similarly conflicted—or, as she describes her emotions in her late autobiographical piece *A Sketch of the Past*, “ambivalent” (MB 111)—picture of Leslie Stephen and his influence upon her in her own written reflections on him. In her 1932 essay “Leslie Stephen,” written for the *London Times* to honor the centenary of her father’s birth (L 5:100), she depicts him as a rather heroic figure who lived an adventurous life before his children were born in which he “won . . . feats on the river and on the mountains” and who had written such “masterpieces” as *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* and the *Science of Ethics* (CDB 69). However, in a letter to Ethel Smyth dated July 4, 1931, she describes Stephen as a “demand[ing]” figure who “needed perpetual sympathy and was apt to fly into violent rages and despairs in what [she and her siblings] thought a most unreasonable way if anyone spoke a careless word about his work, or his life” (L 4:353). Two years earlier, Woolf had further speculated in her diary that her father’s demands for “perpetual sympathy” and care from his daughters “would have entirely ended” her own life as a writer, if he had continued to live (D 3:208).

Woolf offers her most extensive assessment of her father’s character and his influence upon her in her late autobiographical piece *A Sketch of the Past* (1939-40). Here, inspired as she claims by a recent reading of Sigmund Freud, she characterizes her sentiments toward her “eccentric” father as “ambivalent”: over thirty years after his death, she recalls the father of her childhood as “godlike, yet childlike,” a “curious figure” prone to “violent outbursts,” and yet one

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“the roots of this fundamental opposition” in the philosophies of Leslie Stephen (97 ff.). Dahl suggests that Woolf modeled her method of biography and autobiography—especially that seen in her *Sketch of the Past*—upon those of her father. And Rosenbaum broadens Stephen’s influence to suggest that he acted not only as Woolf’s literal and literary “father,” but further that he “can be seen as the father of that extended family of writers and artist which formed around his children and is now known as the Bloomsbury Group” (“An Educated Man’s Daughter” 35). See also Hill.

who held for her a certain “attractiveness” and “dominated” her as “the tyrant father—the exacting, the violent, the histrionic, the demonstrative, the self-centered, the self pitying, the deaf, the appealing, the alternately loved and hated father” (MB 108, 110, 111, 116). Woolf identifies her father with the “great men of [his] time, Carlyle, Tennyson,” “those who had genius in the Victorian sense [who] were like the prophets; different, another breed” (109). As a product of the English educational system—specifically, that of Eton and Cambridge—he “took to writing for papers, went to America,” and generally played the part of the Victorian “man of genius”: he “wore long hair, great black hats, capes, and cloaks.” And yet he broke from this mold of the “great men” of his time in that he possessed “more idiosyncrasy, more character as a man” than the rigid, “fine steel engraving of the Cambridge type.” For example, she fondly recalls here that he had a “power to breed stories[,] to create a legend” (MB 110).

Further, Woolf recollects that, when she was a child, Leslie Stephen appeared “godlike” to her and that she read “book[s] that no child of [her] age [sh]ould understand” in order to “make him think [her] a very clever little brat”: through these acts of pleasing him, she became an admitted “snob” about “great books” (MB 111-12). Consequently, she associated her father with English literary history. Just after Stephen’s death in 1904, she was asked by F. W. Maitland, a Fellow at Cambridge, to contribute to his biography on her father; the result was her first published reflection on her father entitled “Impressions of Sir Leslie Stephen” (1906), in which she recalls vividly evenings she and her family passed in their drawing-room where Stephen would read aloud from the “classics” of English literature—such authors as Scott, Carlyle, Austen, and Shakespeare—and recite poetry from memory (E 1:127-28). These readings and recitations, as Virginia Stephen makes clear, became inextricable from those authors

themselves: “We felt that he was speaking not merely the words of Tennyson or Wordsworth but what he himself felt and knew. Thus many of the great English poems now seem to me inseparable from my father; I hear in them not only his voice, but in some sort his teaching and belief”(129).<sup>11</sup> For Woolf, then, Leslie Stephen was not merely another “great” writer of England’s past, nor simply a representative of the Cambridge “type,” but the voice of England’s dominant patriarchal tradition itself.

Thoby Stephen, Virginia’s revered elder brother who died of typhoid in 1906, also profoundly influenced his sister’s early education in Western and English culture. Like his father, Thoby attended Cambridge and therefore, to his young sister, seemed to be an “insider” in England’s dominant national culture. Further, Leslie enlisted his son’s support by soliciting his “invaluable advice” in conducting the education of Virginia, who relays in a letter to Thoby, then at Trinity College, her father’s request for a list of proper Greek plays for her (L 1:42). Additionally, while Leslie Stephen influenced his daughter’s view of English literary history, Thoby shaped even more strongly her early view of Shakespeare in particular and hence to Virginia became associated closely with the “greatness” of that author.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Christine Froula argues that Woolf’s scholarly relationship with Shakespeare began as a means through which to “act out a covert sibling rivalry” with her brother (“Virginia Woolf as Shakespeare’s

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<sup>11</sup>Similarly, in a letter to Sackville-West written in 1929, Woolf states that she is “pleased to think that [she] read English literature when [she] was young,” and further that she “like[s] to think of [her]self tapping at [her] father’s study door, saying very loud and clear[,] ‘Can I have another volume, father? I’ve finished this one.’ Then he would be very pleased and say[,] ‘Gracious child, how you gobble!’” (L 4:27). She recalls also how he instructed her, “‘But my dear, if it is worth reading, it is worth reading twice.’” Woolf reports that she had “a great devotion for [her father],” but also hints at her “ambivalent” daughterly emotions: “[W]hat a disinterested man, how high minded, how tender to me, and fierce and intolerable.”

<sup>12</sup>Fox makes a similar observation (*Virginia Woolf* 7).



Sister” 125). Significantly, one of Woolf’s earliest sustained written responses to Shakespeare appears in a letter she sent to Thoby, dated November 5, 1901. Here, she writes proudly that she has read *Cymbeline* and that, though she had wanted to find in it evidence that Shakespeare’s greatness was overestimated, she was “now let in to [the] company of worshipers,” “though [she] still feels oppressed by his–greatness” (L 1:45). Then she defers to what she sees as Thoby’s more authoritative knowledge of the subject: “I shall want a lecture when I see you; to clear up some of the points about the plays.” She offers subsequently a tentative point of criticism, implying that the characters of the play seem inhuman, as if “cut out by a pair of scissors.” However, she suggests also that the fault does not lie with the play itself, but with her own “feminine weakness in the upper region.” To the nineteen-year-old Virginia Stephen, Shakespeare seems a domain to which women have no natural claim: she had what Froula in her analysis of this letter calls an “outsider’s perspective” (“Virginia Woolf as Shakespeare’s Sister” 124).

Woolf’s letter to Thoby illuminates some of her early, ambivalent reactions not only to Shakespeare, but to her brother, as well. Much later in her life, Woolf describes the aggression she felt toward her brother as a battle largely enacted through discussions of Shakespeare. In *A Sketch of the Past*, she associates her early exposure to Shakespeare with the university-educated Thoby, but this exposure resembles less an idyllic, domestic scene than an antagonistic one in which, as the sister saw it, the brother forces his privileged view on her. Woolf recalls that she and Thoby “were, of course, naturally attracted to each other,” in that he saw her as “a shell-less little creature . . . so sheltered, in [her] room, compared with him,” whereas she in turn was “an ingenuous, eager listener to his school stories” (MB 138). Woolf remembers that Thoby would

especially talk to her about Shakespeare, which “he had consumed . . . by himself”: “he would sweep down upon [her]” and aggressively “asserted that everything was in Shakespeare.” Woolf, however, recalls that she would not acquiesce in playing the role of the obedient, admiring pupil, but instead “revolted.” In resisting Thoby’s “assertion” that “everything was in Shakespeare,” Virginia was immediately “defeated,” for her brother “was ruthless; exasperating; downing [her], overwhelming [her].” Similarly, in a diary entry of 1924, she describes how “when [she] was 20, in spite of Thoby who used to be so pressing & exacting, [she] could not . . . read Shakespeare for pleasure” (D 2:310).

In *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf attributes her antagonism to a hostility centered not on Shakespeare himself but rather on the tradition that Shakespeare typifies—the tradition to which Thoby seemed the rightful “inheritor” and in relation to which she was an outsider. This reaction springs from the same impulse that led her in 1903 to ask, “What right have I, a woman[,] to read all these things that men have done?” Like her relationship with her father, that with Thoby was similarly fraught with ambiguity. Thoby, like Leslie Stephen, attended Cambridge University, while his younger sister Virginia (as well as his elder sisters Vanessa and Stella) were denied such high-caliber formal education. Thoby was thereby indoctrinated into the ruling Oxbridge establishment and groomed for an occupation in the law. Although she held a sincere affection for her elder brother, Woolf always resented her exclusion from the type of education that was assumed to be Thoby’s birthright. Like the title character in *Jacob’s Room*, for whom he served as a model,<sup>13</sup> Thoby seemed to live within England’s dominant national culture—a far cry from

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<sup>13</sup>Ruddick in “Private Brother, Public World” examines perhaps most extensively Woolf’s relationship with Thoby and the impact of this relationship on her works. She points out that “Woolf fairly worshiped Thoby, mourned him after his death at twenty-six, then attempted to understand and recreate him in her fiction”—most

Woolf's female speaker's reaction to the ancient library at the fictionalized Oxbridge campus in the opening pages of *A Room of One's Own*. Hence, the young Virginia Stephen resented her brother's "insider" status within England's national culture while she remained on the outskirts: his seemingly natural assumption that Shakespeare was a part of his world indicated to her that he had a "place" within England, that he "relished his inheritance," and "was already, in anticipation, a law maker[,] proud of his station as a man [and] ready to play his part among men" in England's dominant patriarchal culture (*A Sketch*, MB139). These "battles" with her brother typified Woolf's lifelong struggle with England's masculine tradition, as embodied in the perception of Shakespeare within that tradition—a struggle that illustrates not only Woolf's problematic relationship to English national culture, but the precarious sense of an English national identity possessed by herself and other Englishwomen.

Perhaps unlike her adolescent counterpart, however, the mature Virginia Woolf did not desire to become another cog in the wheel of what she describes as the "factory" and "machine" of Oxbridge culture (AR 26)—that culture and "type" which, for her, her father and brother represented. Indeed, by the end of the first chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's female speaker, having recovered from her earlier outrage over her banishment from the University's library, reflects on those "shut doors" and not only on "how unpleasant it is to be locked out," but "how worse it is perhaps to be locked in" (24). In the remaining chapters of *A Room of One's*

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notably, in *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves* (186). She further notes, however, that Virginia and Thoby's relationship, though affectionate when they were children, became more awkward, stilted, and formal—especially after the latter left the Stephen household to attend school (188). Ruddick argues that Thoby, for Woolf, became an ambivalent figure—both one she revered and one who symbolized the perpetuation of a brutal, oppressive patriarchal culture in England (188-89); Woolf expresses these ambivalent emotions, Ruddick contends, through the complex portrayal of Jacob Flanders (191 ff.). Other critics, such as Gordon (168), Fleishman (48), Hermione Lee (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 73 n.), Bazin and Lauter (15), and Zwerdling (82), similarly cite Thoby Stephen as a model for Jacob.

*Own*, Woolf's speaker then embraces her "outsider's perspective" in order to reevaluate Shakespeare, the national literary history—or histories—that he dominates, and, finally, English national culture.

"Why didn't they leave room for an Eliot or a Brontë?": Masculine and Feminine Models of English Literary History

In May 1934, Virginia and Leonard Woolf made a pilgrimage to Stratford, where they visited the very room in which they were told that Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, as well as the church in which he is buried. In her diary, Woolf seems enraptured by these sights, mesmerized by what she is told is the very scene on which the great playwright gazed as he wrote: "everything seemed to say, this was Shakespeare's," and yet, "he is serenely absent-present," simultaneously "in the flowers, in the old hall, in the garden[,] but never to be pinned down" (D 4:219). She then describes her experience in visiting Shakespeare's grave in even more exalted tones, praising it as "a roomy, spacious place . . . an impressive place[,] still living," in which "all air & sun smil[e] serenely." She notes that she had anticipated the "florid foolish bust," but is touched by the slab that marks the grave and bears the lines, "Blest be ye man yt spares thes stones, / And curst be he yt moves my bones" (219, 219 n.) Like a pilgrim, Woolf reflects in awe that she now has the privilege of standing above these "little bones," "the little bones lying there" "down there one foot from" her and to which Shakespeare's living body have been reduced. She concludes that "the solidity of [Stratford] was comfortable," one in which she can imagine Shakespeare "writing *The Tempest* looking out on that garden," where the writer's "genius [could flow] out of him" with "no impediment" and, further, that it "is still there, in Stratford" (220). In an almost mystical way, then, Shakespeare appears deeply ingrained in the town in

which he lived, still a living part of it; similarly, the town becomes an embodiment of him and his work. Just as the grave of Rupert Brooke's soldier, although it lies in a "corner of a foreign field," "is forever England" (2050), Shakespeare's grave becomes the heart of England itself.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, it is through the preeminent figure of Shakespeare that Woolf begins to contemplate a female English literary history. In the third chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, as she attempts to determine why the lives of Elizabethan women remain virtually unknown and unwritten, and she addresses the contention of "an old gentleman," "a bishop," who asserts "that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare" (46), she invents a mythical, pseudo-historical figure: Shakespeare's sister Judith, a sister who, like Woolf herself, possesses a degree of talent and intelligence comparable to that of her more socially privileged brother. Woolf emphasizes the sister's exclusion from England's dominant masculine culture by delineating this fictional character in tandem with her brother: the brother learns some Latin, grammar, and logic at the local grammar school, while the sister slips secretly into the family's barn to read Horace and Virgil; the brother is forced to marry an older local woman at a young age because, as Woolf hints, the woman is pregnant, while the sister is beaten and cajoled by her father into a marriage she does not want; and each sibling leaves Stratford for London to seek a life on the stage, the male one driven by his "taste for the theatre" and the female, by her "own gift" and similar "taste for the theatre" (46-47).

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<sup>14</sup>Mrs. Hilbery's visit to Stratford in *Night and Day* prefigures the one Woolf later undertook and describes in her diary. Mrs. Hilbery plans this trip as that of a "pilgrim to a sacred shrine." She has hypothesized that Anne Hathaway wrote the sonnets attributed to Shakespeare—a theory held by Woolf's step-aunt Anne Thackeray Ritchie, upon whom the character of Mrs. Hilbery is partially based—and hopes to find "the buried man uscripts" in the latter's tomb, a discovery she fears will "menace . . . the safety of the heart of civilization"; hence, she implies that she equates the assumed greatness of Shakespeare with "civilization" (364, 447 n. 2). See Novy for a brief discussion of the "gently feminist rewriting of" Shakespeare's comedic plots in Woolf's *Night and Day* (145-46).

These parallels enable Woolf to highlight the disparity between the respective positions and values in the world—and, more specifically, England—for male and female genius: while William lives “at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits on the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen,” his sister Judith surreptitiously leaves her father’s house and, after facing ridicule from various managers when she attempts to join the then-exclusively male acting troupes, is finally pitied by Nick Greene, who makes her his mistress (47-48). Hence, Woolf suggests, while male genius may “live at the hub of the universe,” even the queen’s palace, its female counterpart becomes a joke, an outcast, for, she concludes, “any woman born with a great wit in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at” (49). Finally, if the brother William Shakespeare is worshiped not only symbolically in his exalted position in the English literary canon, but also in his “impressive” tomb, then Judith, “his wonderfully gifted sister,” who “killed herself one winter’s night,” now ignominiously and anonymously “lies buried at some cross-roads where omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle” (AR 46, 48). Thus, within the English national tradition, William is elevated to the position of a revered, almost sacred figure, while his “gifted” sister Judith lies at the ambiguous crossroads of the national consciousness, the negation of space signifying her elision by England’s literary history. Never “inside,” but always “outside” the national memory and lacking a “room,” even in death, Judith Shakespeare and other ignored female writers never seem to gain positions in English national culture and thus national identities.

*A Room of One's Own* criticizes rather forcefully the displacement of women from England's literary history and its national consciousness. In this essay and in other writings, Woolf delineates two distinct literary histories operating within England: the dominant, patriarchal one of revered authors that centers on the Shakespearean tradition, and the more suppressed or undervalued feminine one. Inextricably tied to access to wealth and "a room of one's own" (that is, the privileges of social and economic class), England's feminine literary history seems to lack a "tradition" altogether. At the conclusion of the first chapter, Woolf's speaker reflects on "the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer" (24). In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), T. S. Eliot defines a transnational and masculine literary tradition that "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (*Selected Prose* 38). Woolf's depiction of England's dominant literary history, too, includes a version of patrilineal inheritance, passed from literary father to son, in which "masterpieces are not single and solitary births [but] . . . the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (AR 65). But Woolf finds conflict within this tradition of "masterpieces"—a conflict which, to her, is clearly gendered and in a way that is ignored by Eliot.

The gendered nature of Woolf's perception of literary history can be illuminated further by a closer look at the differences between Eliot's "tradition" and the type of literary history explored in *A Room of One's Own*. Eliot disparages as "blind and timid" those literary histories

that evaluate a writer by seeing him solely in a linear fashion and hence focusing on that writer's "differences from his . . . immediate predecessors." Rather, for Eliot, the greatness of writers is determined by the degree to which they manifest this "historical sense," which results in their abilities to recognize "the timeless as well as . . . the temporal and . . . the timeless and . . . the temporal together." That is, great (or "traditional") writers should produce works that evince an awareness of the past and the present as if they were occurring concurrently. Consequently, literary history consists of a collection of "monuments [that] form an ideal" and "simultaneous" "order among themselves" and which "is modified by the introduction of the new . . . work of art among them" (38)—assuming that that work of art was generated by an author with the "historical sense."<sup>15</sup>

Unlike Eliot, Woolf does not denigrate the more linear and historically contingent model of literary history. For example, in the fifth chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, she suggests that the only way to create a literary history of women's writing is to evaluate these works as direct responses to predecessors. Here, she offers the fictitious example of the contemporary novel *Life's Adventure*, written by Mary Carmichael (one of the possible names she offers for her speaker at the start of the essay [5]). Woolf suggests that in assessing the work, "one must read it as if it were the last volume in a fairly long series, continuing all those other books" written by

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<sup>15</sup>In this sense, literary history and those who study it form a pseudo-religious order, its most revered writers literally mythologized or canonized. Indeed, Terry Eagleton attributes the rise in the study of English literature evident in the mid- to late-Victorian era to the "failure of religion": "As religion progressively ceases to provide the social 'cement,' affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together, 'English' is constructed as a subject to carry this ideological burden from the Victorian period onward" ("The Rise of English" 44-45). In an increasingly secular age, literature becomes a means through which to instill various morals and values—those previously in the domain of religion—in the masses, accomplished through the privileged "priests" of this new "religion"—specifically, scholars like Eliot. Further, as Eagleton argues, the study and instruction of *English* literature in particular can encourage "pride in [the] national language and literature" for English subjects (46).



women in the previous chapter (80). Further, she argues, one “must also consider her—this unknown woman—as the *descendent* of all those other women whose circumstances [she] has been glancing at and see what she *inherits* of their characteristics and restrictions” (emphasis added). While Woolf does not completely reject Eliot’s more “timeless” approach to literary history, neither does she reject what he saw as the “blind or timid” linear structure; indeed, she implies that this structure, when paired with an examination of events contingent to each writer, is integral to an understanding of feminine literary history.<sup>16</sup>

What most distinguishes Woolf’s constructions of a feminine English literary history (and that history more generally) from Eliot’s “tradition” is her focus on what Terry Eagleton calls her “materialism” (*The English Novel* 329), as I discussed in my Introduction. As she states in *A Room of One’s Own*, “fiction is like a spider’s web, attached ever so lightly, perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners” to “material things” (41-42). Because the living conditions, cultural teachings, and the “material difficulties” of the lives of Englishwomen differ markedly from those of Englishmen, literary critics and historians should not apply the same criteria to evaluate novels with no regard to these material differences. Consequently, in order to begin to construct the “supplemental” literary history of English women writers, one must “think back through [one’s] mothers” (76)—literary and otherwise—and take into consideration the historical contingencies of their lives in the ways these conditions affect their writing; that is, a feminine

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<sup>16</sup>In “A Modernism of One’s Own: Virginia Woolf’s *TLS* Reviews and Eliotic Modernism,” Michael Kaufmann examines the different types of “Modernism” each author promoted. He argues that while the criticism of Eliot tended to be exclusive, aimed at a “small and select” group of intellectual readers, Woolf “spoke to a much wider audience, as a reader to other readers,” creating a Modernism far less elite (137). Moreover, he cites similar passages as I do here in both “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and *A Room of One’s Own* and contends that Eliot encourages the contemporary artist to develop a sense of his relationship to dead poets and artists, whereas Woolf more broadly emphasized the importance of a further sense of “unexplored lives” (147-48). See also Michael Tratner’s *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*.

English literary history should be constructed as a decentered, historically contingent one that takes material influences into account when assessing individual authors.

Woolf clearly delineates these opposing historical methods—the one in which masterpieces are grouped together in a timeless space, and the linear or contingent one—in “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” an early short story, written in 1906, that anticipates the argument more fully developed in *A Room of One’s Own* and other later writings. The narrator, Rosamond Merridew, presents herself to the reader as a woman “aged forty-five” and as an historian who “ha[d] won considerable fame among [her] profession for the researches [she] ha[d] made into the system of land tenure in mediaeval England.” Further, Merridew “ha[d] exchanged a husband and a family and a house in which [she] may grow old for certain fragments of yellow parchment[,] which only a few people can read and still fewer would care to read if they could” (CSF 33). Inhabiting the outskirts of England’s national culture in her lack both of a stable domestic situation and official academic position, she is a charter member of the “Outsiders Society” Woolf proposes over thirty years later in *Three Guineas*. In the story, Merridew meets John or Jasper Martyn,<sup>17</sup> the master of an ancient, though now decrepit, Hall in Norfolk, who proudly shows her portraits of his many “grandfathers” and papers that pertain to his family history. Martyn and Merridew thus propose variant historical methods. The latter asserts proudly that she has “a remarkable gift . . . for presenting them”—“the system[s] of land tenure in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries”—“in relation to the life of the time” by predicating her work on what “the sterner art of the Historian” may call “digressions” into “certain pictures of the family life,” its seemingly mundane aspects of daily existence (34-35). Contrastingly, Martyn

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<sup>17</sup>As Susan Dick points out, the character’s name is inconsistent in the manuscript (CSF 296 n.).

regards history as a collection of “Grandfathers and Grandmothers, and Uncles and Aunts,” not existing in some distant, dead past nor living in the present, but rather in a realm outside the confines of time, in which “all generations seemed bathed . . . in the same clear and equable light”: “They are, he would have told me, all flesh and blood like I am; and the fact that they have been dead for four or five centuries makes no more difference to them, than the glass you place over a canvas changes the picture beneath it” (43-44). Thus, while for Martyn, historical figures exist independently of their specific historical circumstances, in what T. S. Eliot may have called the “present moment of the past” (*Selected Prose* 44), for Merridew history is a contingent, complex genealogy in which people or events become comprehensible only through their relations to other events and authors, both contemporary ones and those that precede and succeed them.

In his examination of “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,” Bernd Engler contends that Woolf delineates the story’s narrator as “an embarrassingly incompetent woman historian” whose unconventional approach to historical data enacts “the failure of any attempt to fictionalise historical truth for the purposes alien to the documents used as a source” (9, 20). However, Engler misreads Woolf’s use of the story and its narrator as vehicles by which she began to flesh out her own historical method and examine “the Lives of the Obscure” (D 3:37).<sup>18</sup> For Woolf, those seemingly rigidly separated categories of “fiction” and “history” are inextricable. For example, in a draft of *A Room of One’s Own*, she portrays her first-person speaker as a “peddler, the sort of person who went in the middle ages from village to village,” selling from “a hidden

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<sup>18</sup>For more generous evaluations of Merridew, see Hotho-Jackson (294, 296-97), Cuddy-Keane, “Virginia Woolf and the Varieties of Historicist Experience” (76-77 n.), and Snaith (59-60).

basket of odds & ends for you to buy or reject” and simultaneously acting as a source and gatherer of “news” and “gossip”—perhaps like Rosamond Merridew—for her clients (WF 3-4).

Woolf offers her lecture or essay on the nature of “women & fiction” as an analogous conglomeration of history and fiction:

I want to use all the liberties of fiction, drawing scenes, telling stories, making up dialogues, because I believe that when . . . one is talking about a subject that is in dispute <it is a help to> have the whole scene before one . . .to be able to visualise the . . . circumstances, & surroundings <of the person who is giving his opinion> so as to get . . . the . . . supplement [to] what he is saying <wh[ich] is sure to be only partly true, with what he is not saying, & may indeed scarcely [suspect?].> from other sources. (4)

Woolf indicates that the roles of the historian and the fiction writer may be remarkably similar: because no history ever tells the complete “truth,” and because anyone’s version of events is slanted by his or her “opinion,” the historian always creates a work of fiction. This fiction “supplement[s]” the story in order to help the reader “visualise” the history’s “circumstances and surroundings.” But what *type* of “history of England” can one “tell” through these “infinitely obscure lives [that] remain to be recorded” (AR 89)? How will this version of England compare with that already told through the “Lives of the Famous”?

In a diary entry written a few years before she began composing the drafts of *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf bemoans her alienation from England’s patriarchal culture. Here, she refers to a trip to the British Museum, not unlike that undertaken by her speaker in *A Room of One’s Own*, “where all was chill serenity, dignity & severity. Written up are the names of great men; & we all cower like mice nibbling crumbs in our most official discreet impersonal mood beneath”

(D 3:80). Woolf suggests that she feels herself virtually insignificant, a “cower[ing]” mouse, in the presence of these names of great writers. However, “this dusty, bookish atmosphere” appeals to her, although it points to a literary tradition, history, and cultural identity that exclude her. As “Miss Julie Hedge, the feminist,” from *Jacob’s Room* laments in looking at the male names memorialized on the British Library’s domed ceiling, ““Oh, damn . . . why didn’t they leave room for [a George] Eliot or a Brontë?”” (106).

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf writes a feminine literary history not based on the model of the dominant patriarchal tradition, but one predicated on historical contingencies and linear development. Building upon her contention propounded in the third chapter that “it would have been impossible . . . for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare,” Woolf argues that women in the last few centuries have lived under the restraint of too many “material difficulties” to realize fully their intellectual development (52). This is especially so in an England built upon the culturally ingrained belief that women should focus on their roles in the domestic sphere, rather than pursue education and artistic interests. In this sense, Woolf’s critique of England’s gendered literary traditions and her formulation of a “supplemental” feminine one stems not so much from a direct response to Shakespeare as a writer, but from the elision of women from the larger tradition of great men, in which Shakespeare occupies a central role.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Such critics as Fox, Showalter, Rosenman, and Laura Marcus point out that this argument was made by Woolf’s friend and fellow Bloomsbury member Desmond MacCarthy; in 1920, MacCarthy favorably reviewed *Our Women*, in which Arnold Bennett, Woolf’s longtime critical nemesis, argues that women are inherently inferior to men, both intellectually and creatively. To Woolf’s chagrin, MacCarthy, under the pseudonym “Affable Hawk,” here agrees that “on the whole intellect is a masculine speciality”; he concedes that while “some women undoubtedly have genius”—and includes “Mrs. Woolf” as an example—he finds that this “genius” exists “in a lesser degree than [that of] Shakespeare, Newton, Michael Angelo, Beethoven, Tolstoi” and that “the average intellectual power of women also seems a good deal lower” (“Books in General” 704). A dialogue acted out through a series of letters to

In the third and fourth chapters of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf offers several examples of female writers—both actual and imaginary—that illustrate her argument that “material difficulties” and “external restraints” affect the works of women writers; further, she suggests that the literary history of female English writers can only be represented and understood properly by taking into consideration these writers’ historical contingencies and predecessors. For example, Woolf argues that Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) contains awkward breaks due to her lack of a “room of her own” in which to write, the “indignation” and “rage” she may have experienced as a result of the pressure to perform domestic duties, her inability through much of her life to travel beyond the isolated moors of northern England, and thus the potential lost due to her lack of an opportunity to expand her “genius” beyond her “solitary visions over distant fields” (69-70). That is, Brontë’s writing suffered from the pressure to play the role of the “Angel in the House,” which undermines the Englishwoman’s ability to write, as Woolf argues in “Professions for Women” (1931; DM 236-37).<sup>20</sup> In *A Room of One's Own*, she offers similar

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*The New Statesman* then ensued between Woolf and MacCarthy in which each assumed opposing sides in accounting for the virtual absence of female writers for hundreds, if not thousands, of years of Western history: while the latter continued to argue that this lack stems from women’s inferiority to men, the former drew attention to a few revered female writers—most prominently Sappho—and attributed the seemingly larger number of great male writers, artists, and thinkers to some “external restraint upon their [women’s] powers” (“The Intellectual Status of Women,” *The New Statesman*, 16 October 1920: 45; rpt. as Appendix III, D 2:340). She suggests moreover that the brevity of the list of revered women writers is caused directly by the lack of a women’s tradition: “My point is that you will not get a big Newton until you have produced a considerable number of lesser Newtons” (341). Finally, she argues that women historically have not been as free as men to pursue intellectual or artistic pursuits because of their assigned roles or “occupation[s]” as child-bearers (341-42). MacCarthy at this point withdrew from the debate, saying, “If the freedom and education of women is impeded by the expression of my views, I shall argue no more” (rpt. in D 2:342). As Fox notes, this exchange clearly led to the ideas that later formed the basis for the argument in *A Room of One's Own* (“Literary Allusions” 200). In *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, Zwerdling describes *A Room of One's Own* “as though [it were]” a response to “the taunts of Bennett” (224); the history behind its arguments suggests the essay indeed was a response to Bennett, albeit an indirect one. See also Laura Marcus (213-14).

<sup>20</sup>In this essay, Woolf exorcizes the “phantom” of the “Angel in the House,” a term coined by Coventry Patmore in his mid-Victorian poem of that name, because “killing the Angel in the House [is] part of the occupation of a woman writer” (DM 238). Woolf, like Patmore, characterizes the “Angel in the House” as an “intensely sympathetic,” “immensely charming,” and “utterly unselfish” woman who “sacrifice[s] herself daily” for her

examples from the Victorian and other eras in English history with, for example, the fictional Judith Shakespeare, as well as Aphra Behn, Jane Austen and George Eliot. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman cites the last writer as an especially startling example because of the rather unique circumstances of her life, in that she acted as de facto editor for the *Westminster Review*, ran away to the Continent with the married George Lewes, and lived in a common law—although never legally sanctioned—union with him for the remainder of his life (51). However, Woolf chooses not to emphasize these rather liberal and scandalous aspects of Eliot’s life, but rather points out that even this seemingly liberated writer led a cloistered life when compared with a contemporary, revered male writer: while George Eliot, similar to Charlotte Brontë, “escaped . . .

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household (237). Woolf, of course, knew the “Angel in the House” personally—for she describes her mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, using similar imagery. For example, in *Reminiscences* (written in or around 1908 for the occasion of the birth of Vanessa Bell’s first son, Julian), Woolf reflects on the pivotal role her mother played in the large Stephen family and the impact the latter’s death had on their seeming domestic tranquility: “While she was there the whole of that interminable and incongruous procession which is the life of a large family, went merrily” (MB 35). Overall, Woolf paints her mother as a woman who seemed to live solely to help others—for she taught her children and “soothed, cheered, inspired, nursed, [and] deceived” her husband Leslie Stephen (34). Similarly, *To the Lighthouse*’s Mrs. Ramsay, a character based at least partially on Woolf’s self-effacing mother, appears as an “Angel in the House”: she finds “self-satisfaction” through her ability “to help, to give, [so] that people might say of her, ‘O Mrs. Ramsay! dear Mrs. Ramsay . . . Mrs. Ramsay, of course!’ and need her and send for her and admire her” (41). Quentin Bell creates a similar picture of his grandmother in his biography of Woolf (1:35). Moreover, “any one coming for help found her invincibly upright in her place, with time to give, earnest consideration, and the most practical sympathy.” Like Patmore’s “Angel in the House,” she upheld, as Woolf recalls, the gendered roles of men and women: “She delighted to transact all those trifling businesses which, as women feel instinctively, are somehow derogatory to the dignity which they like to discover in clever men” (37). In many respects, Woolf both admired her “sympathetic” mother and worked simultaneously to rid herself of that “phantom.” For an examination of Woolf’s relationship with and responses to her mother, see, for example, Stemrick, Gordon (197-98), DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf* (113 ff.), and Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (127-35).

In her 1931 speech delivered to the London National Society for Women’s Service, the transcript of which she later shortened into the essay “Professions for Women,” Woolf more explicitly describes the Angel in the House as a symbol used to promote imperial ventures: “The Angel in the house was the ideal of womanhood created by the imaginations of men and women at a certain stage of their pilgrimage to lure them across a very dusty stretch <of the journey>. They agreed to accept this ideal, because for reasons I cannot now go into—they have to do with the British Empire, our colonies, Queen Victoria, Lord Tennyson, the growth of the middle class and so on . . . <a real relationship> between men and women was then unattainable” (TP xxx). In *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf further comments on the significance of women as symbols for domestic tranquility through the character Bart Oliver, an ex-Victorian colonial—as I will discuss in my last chapter. In *Lost Saints*, Lootens locates the roots of Patmore’s “Angel in the House” in idealized images of the Virgin Mary, who in Victorian English discourse, appeared a “definitively feminine” “symbol of chastity and of maternity,” and the Victorian “Angel in the House,” then, “a middle-class Mary” (52-53).

to a secluded villa in St. John's Wood," Tolstoy traveled freely, lived alternately with gipsies and "great ladies," and fought in wars (AR 70-71). In evaluating these writers, then, literary critics and historians should account for these material circumstances.

Due to his revered position not only in England's literary history, but also in its dominant national culture, William Shakespeare became a central figure in Woolf's evaluation of English literary history. By re-approaching him not as the revered "Sh-p-re"—the central icon in a dominant national literary history and culture from which she, like Lily Everit, cannot claim "descent"—but instead as a writer gifted with an androgynous, "man-womanly mind" and an ability to speak to and for the "many nameless workers . . . and many private people" throughout England, Woolf begins to construct a blueprint for a new English literary history and culture.

"Make that country our own country": Rewriting English Literary History

In *Melymbrosia* (an early draft of *The Voyage Out* written between 1909 and 1912), Rachel Vinrace recalls a conversation with her aunt Clara during which she had struck "a very cruel blow at her Aunt's world" by referring to England in the days before it became a beacon of civilization. Rachel has asked "what [her aunt] supposed Kensington High Street was like in the days of William the Conqueror." Then she looks back even further into England's past: "'Didn't they dig up a mammoth under Pontings the other day?'"<sup>21</sup> Woolf's narrator does not reveal Clara Vinrace's response, but she indicates that Rachel was not simply motivated by a desire to irritate her aunt: Rachel "felt that if only one could begin things at the beginning, one might see more clearly upon what foundations they now rest" (22).

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<sup>21</sup>This prehistoric imagery in the heart of modern England reappears in Woolf's last novel *Between the Acts*—specifically through Lucy Swithin's reading of English history (see Chapter Four).



Throughout her career, Woolf sought to “begin things at the beginning,” in order to speculate, rather paradoxically, on the future of English literary history. In “The Narrow Bridge of Art” (1927), Woolf prescribes that the critic not only demonstrate the connection between the present of literature with its past, but, more importantly, “look into the future” and “tell us, or at least guess, where we are going.” In her role as a critic, Woolf looks into a future in which the novel “which we see upon the horizon may serve to express some of those feelings which seem at the moment to be balked by poetry pure and simple and to find the drama equally inhospitable to them” (GR 11, 18).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924), she assesses briefly what she regards as the strengths and weaknesses of her fellow “Georgian” writers—most notably, Joyce, Eliot, Lawrence, Forster, and Strachey—and declares that their innovative methods have placed English literature in a necessary “season of failures and fragments,” though one that will lead ultimately to “one of the great ages of English literature” (CDB 117, 119).<sup>23</sup> And in “The Leaning Tower” (1940), an ambitious late essay that examines the historical relationship between politics, class, education, and English literature from the Romantic era and to the present, she looks optimistically to a time after the end of the Second World War when classes will no longer exist and the exclusive domain of English literature will become more open: “Very likely that will be the end of the novel, as we know it. Literature, as we know it, is always ending, and beginning again” (M 150-51).

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<sup>22</sup>Several critics argue that this essay anticipates the experimental combination of literary genres—most notably, fiction and drama—seen in *Between the Acts*, written over a decade later. See, for example, McWhirter (790), DuPlessis, and Wilkinson (54-56).

<sup>23</sup>Two years earlier, Woolf provided a comparable assessment of contemporary English literature in a letter to Gerald Brenan: “This generation must break its neck in order that the next may have smooth going. . . . [N]othing is going to be achieved by us. Fragments—paragraphs—a page perhaps” (L 2:598).

Woolf appeals to the “common reader”<sup>24</sup>—a category in which she includes herself and all those excluded, due to gender or class, from the “small aristocratic class [crammed] with Latin and Greek and logic and metaphysics and mathematics”—and declares that a personified “England” now cries out to him or her, “saying, ‘It is time that even you, whom I have shut out from all my universities for centuries, should learn to read your mother tongue. I will help you’” (M 152). She separates the voices of revered writers from that exclusive, “aristocratic” club that has seemed to appropriate them—that is, from the literary history that can seem the exclusive property of England’s educated classes: “Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Virgil, and Dante . . . would say, ‘Don’t leave me to the wigged and gowned. Read me, read me for yourselves’” (154). Employing metaphorical language similar to that used in the opening anecdote in *A Room of One’s Own*, she concludes that “literature is no one’s private ground[, but] literature is common ground” that should be “trespass[ed] freely,” and “it is thus that English literature will survive this war and cross the gulf—if commoners and outsiders like ourselves make that country our own country, if we teach ourselves how to read and to write, how to preserve, how to create.” It is time to “begin things at the beginning” in order to create the future of England’s literary history. In this sense, Woolf does not flatly “reject [the] male literary tradition,” as Marcus argues; instead, she implores her fellow readers to “cross the gulf” between the privileged, dominant tradition and that of the “outsiders”—those excluded by, most prominently, class and gender—as a means to settle a new “country,” a new national culture for England.

Woolf argues that the key to this reconstitution of English culture—and the means by which to bridge the “gulf” that separates its bifurcated, gendered literary history—resides in a

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<sup>24</sup>For an extensive exploration of the meanings of this ubiquitous Woolfian term, see Friedman.

reassessment of individual identity. As she argues in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” when “human character” changes, “all human relations” shift, and “when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (CDB 96-97). Hence, the private and the public, individual and collective national identity, are inextricable. Woolf attempts to incorporate the ignored or subverted women’s voices found throughout England’s history, by reevaluating the nation’s literary history, and by centering it not on the assumed greatness of revered male (or female) writers, but on the more obscure and complex voice of “Anon”—a point of intersection between the individual identity and a communal one, as well as one that embodies the “woman-manly or man-womanly” androgyny of the poetic mind she promotes in the final chapter of *A Room of One’s Own*.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf looks tentatively to the elusive figure of “Anon” as a starting point for a reevaluated English literary history. In the third chapter, after examining her fictional example of Judith Shakespeare, she reflects that “genius of some sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes,” those excluded from the nation’s dominant patriarchal tradition and phrasing which suggests again that Woolf regards Englishwomen as members of the same class. She posits an alternative or supplementary tradition that may exist above, beyond, or between the lines of the dominant one:

When . . . one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet or some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to. (48-49)

Woolf seems to bemoan that lost tradition, the lost potential of the women of genius in England's past whose talents either found an unconventional outlet—through reputed witchcraft or amateur sorcery—or whose voices remained silent, those of “a lost novelist” or “a suppressed poet.”<sup>25</sup> However, through her tellingly altered allusion to Thomas Grey's “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), in which the melancholic speaker famously mourns the lost potential of “some mute inglorious *Milton*” (line 59; emphasis added), Woolf hints at an alternative national literary history. Substituting Austen for Milton in her allusion to Gray, Woolf suggests the need for a new literary history that accounts for the writings of women while simultaneously deflating “Milton's bogey” (AR 114).<sup>26</sup>

However, Woolf also contends that a female literary past does exist in England: “I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman,” one who “made ballads and . . . folk-songs, [who] croon[ed] them to her children, beguil[ed] her spinning with them, or the length of the winter's night” (49). She subtly begins to create a place—albeit a covert one—for women within England's dominant, patriarchal national literary discourse. Specifically, she conjectures that many unsigned ballads, songs, and poems—especially those that date far back into England's past—were composed by women, for while male writers, she argues, have tended to seek “fame” and cannot “pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it,” conversely, for women,

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<sup>25</sup>Indeed, Olsen regards *A Room of One's Own* as an elegy for those forgotten female writers lost to the historical record (10).

<sup>26</sup>For an assessment of Woolf's use of this phrase, see the section entitled “Milton's Bogey: Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers” in Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar observe that the term remains in *A Room of One's Own* “curiously enigmatic,” in that “the allusion has . . . no significant development” (188).

“anonymity runs in their blood[, and] the desire to be veiled still possesses them” (50). Hence, while most men will write at least partially in order to achieve individual notoriety, to make their names famous through an association with the great texts they produce, most women will suppress their own names in writing—either leaving their works “unsigned,” or perhaps—as in the case of the Brontës or Mary Ann Evans—pay “homage to the [male] convention” by publishing their works under masculine pseudonyms. In *A Room of One’s Own* and other essays, Woolf attempts to reconfigure England’s literary history by emphasizing the role of this often feminized “Anon.”

Paradoxically, however, Shakespeare becomes a central figure in this new national literary history: first, because as a writer he could overcome personal emotion and thus, second, abandon his own identity and become “Anon,” an individual voice able to speak for the national community—perhaps even create one. Shakespeare, as she states in *A Room of One’s Own*, possessed a mind that “had consumed all impediments” (68), thus ascending above the confines of his individual identity.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, she here suggests that Shakespeare the writer transcends—or, more accurately, *combines*—gender categories, as well. Significantly, she cites him as an illustrative example of “the androgynous . . . man-womanly mind,” drawing explicitly upon Coleridge’s description of the “creative mind” as one which “is resonant and porous” and that “transmits emotion without impediment” (98-99). Here, Woolf continues a trend evident among Shakespeare’s earlier female readers, who, as Marianne Novy argues, frequently identified Milton as “the first of the masculinists,” and Shakespeare, “as androgynous”

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<sup>27</sup>A recent study of Shakespeare by Stephen Greenblatt entitled *Will in the World* works against this traditional view of the playwright by arguing that much of his biography is evidenced in his plays.

(6). For Novy, Woolf, like these earlier authors, “maintains a Shakespeare myth but uses it . . . to empower rather than disempower less canonical writers” (147).

Here, a crucial distinction in Woolf’s assessment not only of Shakespeare, but all writers, needs to be made. For Woolf, while ideal writers have creative forces that are androgynous, merging both masculine and feminine energies, only the male authors have had the material means to separate themselves from the interruptions of daily life in “rooms of their own,” and thus *write* in isolation, critics should assess the abilities and historical or literary relevance of any writer based on that writer’s contingencies, those daily interruptions that invariably affect any writer’s body of work. This second point in particular forms the basis for Woolf’s proposed model of English literary history—one that attempts to incorporate an extensive variety of English voices—both masculine and feminine, great and obscure, famous and “anon.”

As noted, Raphael Samuel has cited the Elizabethan period as one which saw a “discovery” or “invention” of a modern English national consciousness—especially evident in the 1590s after the celebrated defeat of the Spanish Armada, an event that inspired unprecedented national pride (xxiii). Similarly, Woolf routinely intimated throughout her writings that the Elizabethan age constituted a turning point in English literary history. As Alice Fox notes, “Every single one of [Woolf’s] nine novels treats the English Renaissance in some way,” either as a setting or through references and allusions (*Virginia Woolf*2). For example, she begins *Orlando*, an examination of literary history seen through the perspective of one gender-changing individual, late in the reign of Elizabeth I. She begins “The Strange Elizabethans” (1932) with, “There are few greater delights than to go back three or four hundred years and become in fancy at least an Elizabethan,” and considers it a “prelude” to *The Second Common Reader*, an essay

collection in which she moves chronologically through various writers and texts in English literary history (D 4:50, CR2 9). And in *Between the Acts* (1941), a novel in which she imitates literary styles seen throughout English literary history, she includes a lengthy “Interval” that splices apart the pageant immediately preceding the Elizabethan-esque play (93 ff.). Here, the gramophone chants ominously to the audience, “*Dispersed are we*”—a phrase that intimates the shift in English literary history instigated by the conclusion of the Elizabethan era. For Woolf, as for many writers and critics, this period in English history was not only a golden age of what one character refers to as “Merry England” (BA 81), but also a pivot in the national discourse. In “Anon,” written concurrently with the later portions of *Between the Acts*,<sup>28</sup> Woolf argues that during the Elizabethan era, “a new art comes upon us so surprisingly that we sit silent recognising before we take the measure” (ATR 395). The pronouns (“us,” “we”) in this line lack antecedents, but one can assume they implicitly refer to the English in general—the audiences to whom the “new art,” that of the play, is presented.

With “Anon,” Woolf develops her critiques of English literary history and English culture evinced in *A Room of One’s Own*. This late essay constitutes an ambitious project in which she attempts to re-envision England’s literary history by beginning not with such revered, male figures as Chaucer, Malory, Spenser, and Shakespeare, but with the much more ambiguous “Anon,” that voice she had associated with the ostracized and forever-silenced witches and wise women in *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf commences “Anon” by providing a brief meta-history of the construction of England’s literary history. As Brenda R. Silver points out, Woolf

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<sup>28</sup>For some perspectives on the relationship between “Anon” and *Between the Acts*, see, for example, Eisenberg and Zwerdling (317-18).

delineates here an English history in response to both a respected contemporary source—George Macaulay Trevelyan’s *History of England*—and an Elizabethan one—William Harrison’s contributions to the *Chronicles* (1577), edited by Raphael Holinshed (ATR 401 n. 1, 408 n. 22).<sup>29</sup> Woolf indicts Harrison specifically as the first English historian who, like most of his successors, disparages his “degenerate” present in relation to a revered and, from his perspective, a literally mythologized past: that of King Arthur and Camelot (385).<sup>30</sup> Thus, he ignores simultaneously the voice of Anon—the multifaceted and unnamed conglomeration of voices that have sung ballads and performed plays for centuries—while founding the tradition of English historians, literary and otherwise, who have venerated and virtually worshiped those figures from the national past. These historians have deemed certain writers and other figures significant by removing them from the linear timeline that includes the “degenerate” present. For Woolf, this tradition is riddled with gaps that speak more of Harrison’s own sense of inadequacy than of the insufficiency of England’s national and cultural past:

He [Harrison] does not see the mummers and the wassailers; he does not hear the voice of Anon; he scarcely listens even to the song of Chaucers Canterbury pilgrims. For the English past as Harrison saw it, served only to show up the material change—the change that had come over houses, furniture[,] clothing. There was no English literature to show up the change in the mind. Anons song at the back door was as difficult for him to spell out as for us. & more painful. [F]or [it] reminded him of his lack of intellectual ancestry.

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<sup>29</sup>The last is now, of course, primarily known as being one of Shakespeare’s main historical sources for his plays.

<sup>30</sup>Woolf later in *Orlando* embodies this brand of literary critic in Nick Greene, whom Orlando first meets in the Jacobean era. Katharine Hilbery in *Night and Day* makes some similar comments (8-9).



His intellectual pedigree only reached back to Chaucer, to Langland[,] to Wycliffe. (385-86)

For Harrison, English literary history stretched back no more than two hundred years—and those two centuries were represented by only a handful of disparate texts. Further, his present England offered little hope for a venerable national tradition: he represents the present as a period that has contributed only unimportant “material change[s]” in houses and clothing, while all great accomplishments beyond material advancement occurred in the past. Ironically, while “we . . . prove our [nobility of mind by] quot[ing] the Elizabethans” (writers like Shakespeare and Marlowe whom Harrison disparages), Harrison created illustrious “ancestors” by turning to classical Greek and Roman writers and, to a lesser degree, Arthurian myths (385-86). In this sense, the foundation of national English literary culture rests on a dual base of monumentalized non-English writers and a mythical past—turned to largely due to the historian’s own sense of “his lack of intellectual ancestry.” The voice of Anon, meanwhile, drifts into oblivion.

Like her early fictional creation Rosamond Merridew, Woolf attempts to fill in the gaps of England’s history and to re-conceptualize its structure by reinstating (or, perhaps, simply instating) the “outsider” voice of Anon in its various incarnations. Throughout the essay, Woolf locates the voice of Anon at the periphery of the established houses: Anon “is the common voice singing out of doors,” without a house, “roaming” and “crossing the fields, mounting the hills, lying under the hawthorn to listen to the nightingale”; or Anon “sing[s] at the back door (382, 383; see also 389, 392). However, far from a limitation, Anon’s “outsiders privilege” enabled him or her “to mock the solemn, to comment upon the established,” and to speak from not an individual identity, but a communal one. Unbounded by gender, “Anon is sometimes man;

sometimes woman” and, moreover, “was a simple singer, lifting a song or a story from other peoples lips . . . letting the audience join in the chorus” (382). Here, the true nature of Anon becomes apparent: this voice, in its lack of social status, gender, and even residence, exists solely in the texts it creates, singing for its multifaceted audiences and thus representing a communal identity:

Anonymity was a great possession. It gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality. It gave us ballads; it gave us the songs. It allowed us to know nothing of the writer; and so to concentrate upon his song. Anon had great privileges. He was not responsible. He was not self conscious. He can borrow. He can repeat. He can say what every one feels. (397)

Anon, for Woolf, is everyone and no one; he or she—and I believe that Woolf in this passage uses masculine third-person pronouns in a generic manner, as shorthand for “he or she,” as is suggested elsewhere in “Anon”—is the voice of England’s “silent centuries” (383), that period in English history which historians like Harrison and Trevelyan virtually ignore. As she had earlier written in *Orlando*, “While fame impedes and constricts, obscurity wraps about a man like a mist; obscurity is dark, ample and free; obscurity lets the mind take its way unimpeded . . .” Woolf muses that “Shakespeare must have written like that . . .” (104-05).

For Woolf, the Elizabethan era is pivotal in English literary history. For by the end of that period, “Anon is dead” (398): the text becomes inextricable from the author. Woolf attributes this shift to the invention of the printing press, which relocated the forum of the text from the communal theater to “the theatre of the brain.” Now, the printed word is read individually, in a medium that gives a prominent place to the author’s name and “the audience is

replaced by the reader” (384, 398). Even on the stage, that forum for communal art, “the individual becomes more and more differentiated” (398). Consequently, the focus shifts to individual, rather than communal, identity.

Shakespeare becomes a central figure in this definitive shift in English literary history. Significantly, as Woolf announces the death of Anon, she refers to prominent Shakespearean title-characters: “The curtain rises upon Henry the Sixth; and King John; upon Hamlet and Anthony and Cleopatra and upon Macbeth” (398). “There comes a point,” Woolf explains, “when the audience is no longer master of the playwright,” and that “point,” she continues in one version of the essay, was reached with Shakespeare, who “comes into being when the . . . dramatist is separate, & yet is still united by a common life with the audience” (422 n.). Hence, as a writer, Shakespeare represents for Woolf that precarious balance between the audience, who dominated the literary scene before him, and the writer, who has dominated literary history after him. Shakespeare constitutes a model for a future literary history that will strike a balance between the two genders.

Woolf had begun to make this argument in the sixth and final chapter of *A Room of One's Own*. After examining the dominant masculine and the more neglected feminine aspects of England's literary history, she looks to what she regards as a possible future for English writers, a means to heal finally that gendered bifurcation. In an argument that anticipates *Three Guineas*, her speaker suggests it is “the dominance of the letter ‘I’”—indicative of a focus on “pure . . . self-assertive virility”—in much current male writing that can lead to autocratic, oppressive fascist regimes like that she in Mussolini's Italy (100, 102-03). As an alternative, she proposes that writers cultivate the “androgynous mind” which Coleridge attributed to Shakespeare. This

“androgynous mind,” she is quick to say, is not a masculine one “that has any special sympathy with women,” but rather one that allows a “fusion” or “fertilization” between its own masculine and feminine aspects (98). Using rather Lawrentian imagery, she likens the creative process to a sexual act: “Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated” (104). And it is based on this criteria—the ability to attain this “marriage of opposites”—that readers should evaluate a text. Like Coleridge, Woolf throughout this chapter turns to Shakespeare as the ideal example of the “androgynous mind” and judges other great writers based on their respective abilities to accomplish that “marriage of opposites.” She deems Proust, Keats, Coleridge, Lamb, Cowper, and Sterne also “androgynous,” whereas she finds that Milton, Jonson, Wordsworth, and Tolstoy each “had too much of the male in them” (103). The future of English literary history, then, lies in the critic’s consideration of the degree to which a particular writer, male or female, succeeds in utilizing this “androgynous mind” in his or her writing.

In her later essay *Three Guineas*, Woolf’s speaker considers sending the donation of a guinea to be used either to rebuild a college for Englishwomen, or to be used to destroy this college to eliminate the possibility that such an institution would eventually grow to resemble their oppressive, exclusionary male counterparts: “Shall I ask them to rebuild the [women’s] college on the old lines? Or shall I ask them to rebuild it, but differently? Or shall I ask them to buy rags and petrol and Bryant & May’s matches and burn the college to the ground?” (33). She finally decides to make her donation on the grounds that it be used to rebuild the women’s college only if that college is one of a very different type:

It must be built not of carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetuate traditions. Do not have chapels. Do not have museums and libraries with chained books and first editions under glass cases. Let the pictures and the books be new and always changing. Let it be decorated afresh by each generation with their own hands cheaply. (33-34)

Here, then, Woolf looks hopefully to a college and a library that neither excludes women nor “perpetuate[s] traditions” that inculcate in students “the arts of dominating other people . . . the arts of ruling, of killing, of acquiring land and capital,” but instead “teach[es] the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding people’s lives and minds.” The goal of such a college, Woolf emphasizes, “should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine” (34). In this manner, Woolf projects a future in which England’s higher educational system will become less exclusive of the nation’s subjects and in which its literary traditions will no longer be preserved “under glass cases”—a future in which English national culture will be instead “new and always changing.”

## CHAPTER TWO

## MRS. DALLOWAY'S LOVE OF POSTWAR ENGLAND

In 1919, Woolf commented that among the most difficult histories to write are those of recent events, a problem that became evident to her immediately after the First World War: “No one who has taken stock of his own impressions since 4 August 1914, can possibly believe that history as it is written closely resembles history as it is lived” (“The War from the Streets” E 3:3). However, as challenging as writing such an account might be, Woolf, even when the war was still ongoing, recognized the war’s effects on the daily lives of the inhabitants of the South Downs in Sussex. In “Heard on the Downs,” a brief, contemplative piece published in the *Times* in August 1916, she notes that from the Downs, one can hear the guns across the English Channel and likens this sound to that of “the beating of gigantic carpets by gigantic women” or “a phantom horseman dash[ing] by with a thunder of hoofs.” Woolf notes further that the locals have constructed myths about the war: due to the disturbing sounds of gunfire, the chickens lay fewer eggs, the sky is unseasonably cloudy, and the church bell has fallen from the belfry. As the article’s subtitle, “The Genesis of Myth,” suggests, the village stories indicate that for these villagers, “the desire to be somehow impossibly, and therefore all the more mysteriously, concerned in secret affairs of national importance is very strong at the present moment.” What Woolf detects is the way in which the war has begun to enter the national consciousness: hearing, if not seeing, the battles daily, these civilians find connections between their lives and the war and therefore construct what she calls “narratives” that “impossibly” and “mysteriously” involve these English subjects “in secret affairs of national importance” (E 2:40-41).

The impact of the war upon the English national consciousness, briefly examined in “Heard on the Downs,” is a topic that Woolf explored throughout her career and specifically in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), a novel she began to write three and a half years after the war ended.<sup>1</sup> In this novel, set precisely in London on a day in mid-June 1923,<sup>2</sup> Woolf considers the various ways in which Englishmen and -women strove to rebuild their nation after the devastations of the First World War. But these attempts to reconstruct England rested on a seeming contradiction evident in Woolf’s diary, where in 1920 she lamented that her “generation is daily scourged by the bloody war,” while in 1918, a month after the Armistice, she noted that that same war “is already almost forgotten” (D 2:51, 1:227). Most of the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* attempt to heal postwar England by eradicating, neutralizing, or forgetting the most disturbing memories of the war. However, as Woolf illustrates through her portrayal of the troubled war veteran Septimus Warren Smith, the wounds and losses caused by the war cannot easily be “shovelled together” and “half forgotten,” as the Conservative Member of Parliament Richard Dalloway imagines them (MD 115). The novel suggests that the war acts as a “scourge” because the national community wants to forget it, leading its ignored effects to threaten its vision of England, particularly by undermining its national language and their understanding of their recent national history.

Although most see it as a pivotal event in much of her writing, critics disagree on the manner in which Woolf responded to the war. Some readings delineate Woolf reacting to the

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<sup>1</sup>For a chronology of the production of *Mrs. Dalloway*, see Wussow’s Introduction to *The Hours* (xxix-xxx). See Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A-Z* for a more detailed discussion of the novel’s genesis and background (172-74).

<sup>2</sup>Based on references in the novel to, for example, cricket match results and the Gold Cup Day at Ascot, Beja concludes that the events in *Mrs. Dalloway* occur on June 20, 1923 (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. Beja n. 6, 13).

war in a primarily symbolic manner, where references to and imagery from the war are used as tropes for the oppression and death caused by a powerful patriarchal society both abroad and in the domestic sphere, as Nancy Topping Bazin and Jane Hamovit Lauter argue (19). Other critics, such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, contend that Woolf “derive[d] surprising strength from the collapse of the old order, from the sacrifice of the dead good soldiers, and from the consequent empowerment of women” in post-World War I England (*No Man’s Land* 2:314). But what these readings underestimate is Woolf’s evaluation of the more literal and broader effects of the war upon the English national community. Two other important readings do consider Woolf’s contemplation of the more literal and cultural effects of the war. Karen Levenback’s *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* focuses on “how representations of the Great War in the popular press and official histories affected the people [Woolf] describes in her personal, nonfictional, and fictional writings” (5): in texts written both during and after the war, Woolf questions the language used by the government to characterize it. More specifically, *Mrs. Dalloway* criticizes the manner in which these “official histories” delineate the war by “present[ing] a picture of a postwar world whose reality is implicitly ironic” and “portray[ing] the tension that exists between veterans and civilians and, more especially, between life and death, memory and denial” (47-48). In *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, Vincent Sherry argues that Woolf’s “perception of the war as a political event reveals an intellectual discrimination . . . which draws specifically and necessarily on her intimacy with the attitudes and practices of English Liberalism,” embodied for her by her father, Leslie Stephen, and her brother, Thoby Stephen (253, 236-39). Sherry finds that *Mrs. Dalloway* represents the “institutional language in the culture of Liberal Britain” through the philosophies of the



domineering doctor Sir William Bradshaw and then “unravel[s]” this “rationalist syntax” by contrasting it with the thoughts and writings of “the psychologically tortured veteran of war, Septimus Warren Smith” (288-89, 293). For both Levenback and Sherry, then, Woolf criticizes England’s “official” or “rationalist” prewar discourse as a language that is no longer applicable to a postwar world where logical, sharp distinctions between “veterans and civilian . . . life and death, [and] memory and denial” no longer exist.<sup>3</sup>

But these readings overlook *Mrs. Dalloway*’s delineation of the rebuilding of England. In this novel, Woolf highlights not only what was destroyed and what was rendered ineffective by the Great War, but also the steps taken by national subjects to fabricate a new England out of the ashes of the old one. This reconstruction depends intimately upon the type of language used to bind a national community still reeling from its wartime losses. Characters such as Lady Bruton, Richard Dalloway, and Sir William Bradshaw undertake the reconstruction of England by employing a national language, inflected by an imperial rhetoric of conquest and assumed superiority, that seeks to remove or marginalize the more disruptive memories and consequences of the war. But by including Septimus Warren Smith in the novel, Woolf emphasizes that these disruptions are not so easily eradicated or forgotten: this character reveals the fundamental flaws and inconsistencies of the symbolic language used to hold together the postwar national community. By juxtaposing Septimus’s linguistic alienation from the national community with Clarissa Dalloway’s perpetuation and creation of a symbolic national discourse that venerates

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<sup>3</sup>Other critics who have evaluated Woolf’s responses to World War I include Zwerdling, Tylee, *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness*, Wussow, *The Nightmare of History*, Ouditt, Hargreaves, Allyson Booth, Tate, Froula, “*Mrs. Dalloway*’s Postwar Elegy,” Clewell, and the various authors whose essays are collected in Hussey’s *Virginia Woolf and War*.

“sacrifice” and the strength gained by the sufferings of others, Woolf emphasizes the problems entailed in the reconstruction of an English culture. Clarissa, perhaps more than any other character in the novel, exhibits a deep, loving belief in the English national community; moreover, she engages actively in the reconstruction of this community. But this reconstruction results only from her willful misunderstanding of the sufferings caused by the First World War, signified in the novel with those of Septimus Smith. In the novel’s climactic scene, Clarissa pursues a one-sided union with the dead Septimus, whom she has never met, in order to reincorporate him into the English national community from which he has been estranged; but this problematic union relies on her fundamental misinterpretation of the reasons for Septimus’s suicide. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf examines the consolidation of postwar England’s national community due to the grief resulting from the losses of millions and of a prewar culture. Woolf demonstrates in this novel that it is only through misapprehension that Septimus—and others whose lives were most devastated by the war—is reintegrated in the English nation.

#### Half-Forgetting the War: Rebuilding the National Community in Postwar England

In the first chapter of *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), written a few years after *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf’s speaker reflects on some of the effects of the First World War upon English literature. She laments that one cannot currently “name two living poets now as great as Tennyson and Christina Rossetti were” in the Victorian age (14). These earlier poets, she elaborates, could “excite one to such abandonment, such rapture,” in that they celebrated “some feeling that one used to have,”—a “feeling” of “familiarity” that they could inspire in the reader without the need to “check the feeling, or to compare it with any that one has now” (14). This “familiarity” rested on an assumption that the authors’ uses of romantic words like “love” and

references to hope signified emotions that their readers, too, would feel—that is, that the language the poets used came from a common cultural or national language. In contrast, contemporary English poetry is more alienating, its terminology evoking more unknown emotions: “One does not recognize it in the first place; often for some reason one fears it; one watches it with keenness and compares it jealously and suspiciously with the old feeling that one knew.” Woolf attributes the cause of this linguistic disconnection in modern poetry to World War I: “Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other’s eyes that romance was killed?” (14-15). However, she asks, “Why say ‘blame’? Why, if it was an illusion, not praise the catastrophe, whatever it was, that destroyed the illusion and put truth in its place?” (15). Similarly, in a 1917 review, Woolf speculates that if the war has taught “the old ladies” and “greengrocers’ boys” to “give a plain answer to a plain question, we shall have something to thank it for” (“Sunset Reflections” E 2:199). Together, these two passages suggest that Woolf believed that the ability English readers previously had to associate romantic language with romantic emotions was, in actuality, an illusion; the war had undermined this illusory belief in romantic language and the romance it signified and, in its stead, initiated an era of more alienating but simultaneously more “plain” speech—a result that she is not at all certain is catastrophic. Although most writers do not doubt that this event was a “catastrophe,” the view of the Great War as a destroyer of illusions has become commonplace in assessments of its impact upon England and Europe—an argument made most extensively in such studies of the war’s cultural impact as Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Eric Leed’s *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (1979), and Samuel Hynes’s *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1990). In her biography

*Roger Fry* (1940) and after the Second World War had begun, Woolf herself reflects on the consequences of this “monstrous massacre of human beings who prayed to the same God”: after World War I, “[i]t was no longer possible to believe that the world was becoming in general more civilised” (213).

And yet not all illusion died with the end of the war. A decade before she wrote *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf commented in her diary on the July 1919 Peace Day festivities in Richmond. Here, she describes despondently the town counselors “dressed up to look dignified & march through the streets” and a parade of “generals & soldiers & tanks & nurses & bands” (1:292). This pageantry leaves her merely “desolate, dusty, & disillusioned,” aware that “there’s something calculated & politic & insincere about these peace rejoicings.” However, she notes that in contrast to her unenthusiastic reaction, “the servants had a triumphant morning,” declaring the parade “the most splendid sight of their lives.” Woolf cites this enchantment as “the reason of [her] disillusionment,” for it proves the celebration merely “some thing got up to pacify & placate ‘the people’ . . . these docile herds” (292-93). This account of the Peace Day celebration indicates Woolf’s class bias—she calls the parade a “servants [*sic*] festival” (292)—but it also illustrates her awareness of the means by which a sense of English nationalism was still constructed through rituals that celebrated and created communal solidarity, even after the war that supposedly “destroyed . . . illusion.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Both Fussell and Leed, while arguing for the disillusionment that resulted from the horrors of war, comment on the seemingly paradoxical prevalence of myth on the battlefield during World War I: “That such a myth-ridden world,” the former writes, “could take shape in the midst of a war representing a triumph of modern industrialization, materialism, and mechanism is an anomaly worth considering” (115; see also Leed 115 *passim*). Both, however, do not fully consider the role of myth or illusion in postwar England and Europe—that is, off the battlefield. In *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Mosse examines what he calls the “Myth of the War Experience,” prevalent particularly in nations such as Germany, “which had lost the war and had been brought to the edge of chaos by the transition from war to peace” and which centered on “tangible symbols” such as

Most theorists of the nation recognize symbols and rituals—such as the Peace Day parade Woolf describes—as operating in a discourse or language that helps create the national community and culture. As Antony Easthope states, “National cultures . . . are produced through institutions, practices and traditions which historians and sociologists can describe” (12).<sup>5</sup> Each element within this cultural discourse metaphorically represents for national subjects the nation of which they are a part. In his study of *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith deems “national symbols, customs and ceremonies . . . the most potent and durable aspects of nationalism,” since “they embody its basic concepts, making them visible and distinct for every member, communicating the tenets of an abstract ideology in palpable, concrete terms that evoke instant emotional responses from all strata of the community” (77). That is, these “national symbols, customs and ceremonies” operate in a process of signification that national subjects understand implicitly; they “evoke instant emotional responses” by embodying the “abstract ideology” used to define the nation. An understanding of “national symbols, customs and ceremonies” grants membership to subjects within the nation and creates concurrently the “imagined community,” in Benedict Anderson’s phrase.

Other writers emphasize the centrality of language in granting subjects their identities, national or otherwise. Just as the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan insists that the subject attains an

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“military ceremonies, war monuments, and commemorative ceremonies of for the dead” (7, 9). Although an important study of the effects of World War I on national culture, Mosse’s *Fallen Soldiers* focuses predominantly on Germany and France while largely neglecting Britain, a significant exception being his brief discussion of the design of English war cemeteries (82-84).

<sup>5</sup>See also Hobsbawm, “Inventing Tradition” (1-2), *During* (138), and Guibernau (3, 76, 79), for example. In *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith quotes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom he cites as the writer “who made the idea of ‘national character’ central to the political life of a community” and who argues, “It is neither the borders nor the people that make the country; it is the laws, the morals, the customs, the government, the constitution, the manner of being that results from all of these. The country is in the relations of the state to its members: when these relations change or are destroyed, the country will vanish” (my translation; qtd. in Smith 88).

identity only through his or her immersion in and understanding of language's symbolic discourse (68, 148), the historian Paul Gilbert defines the nation as a community whose members share what he calls a "language culture" that is "capable of handling a shared body of information relevant to [the subject's] membership [in] the state" and that elicits "a common understanding of the features of their way of life which are subject to regulation by the state" (115-16).<sup>6</sup> The ability to communicate in the national language is thus integral to the construction and perpetuation of a national identity. Although Woolf denigrates the "calculated & politic & insincere" Peace Day celebrations of 1919, she intuits the elements of the national discourse upon which they draw, as well as the emotions that the displays were meant to evoke, and recognizes rather grudgingly that "it will play a great part in . . . history" (D 1:292). The First World War may have changed England, as D. H. Lawrence asserted in 1921 (*Movements in*

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<sup>6</sup>Gilbert further emphasizes that this "shared language culture" does not necessitate a common language: that is, nations in which the members speak multiple native languages still possess a language culture. Here, Gilbert offers the example of Switzerland and quotes Karl W. Deutsch, who points out, "The Swiss may speak four different languages and still act as one people," since each Swiss can "communicate more effectively with other Swiss than with the speakers of his own language who belong to other peoples" (qtd. in Gilbert 115). My discussion of the national language in England refers not to the English language—as in, that language often spoken by the inhabitants not only of Great Britain, but the United States, Canada, Australia, and India—but instead the common cultural language of England. In *A Passage to India* (1924)—which Woolf read as she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway* (D 2:304)—E. M. Forster offers a brief incident that comments on the differences between the English language in its broadest sense and the various cultural or national versions of the English language. In their first conversation, the Muslim Indian Aziz misunderstands a remark the English Fielding makes not due to a deficient English vocabulary, but rather because he misunderstands the "true meaning" or the more subtle connotations of Fielding's remark. The narrator thus concludes that "a gulf divided" the two characters, although both speak English fluently (70).

While the sharing of a common, native language is not required in the formation of a national identity—the example of Switzerland illustrates—most historians agree that the common use of the English language by most English subjects helped solidify a national identity. According to Haseler, for example, the "emergence of an increasingly popular and standardised English [during the Middle Ages] was crucial to a consciousness of being English" (14). See also Kumar (220-21) and Ackroyd (84). For a conflicting view, see Colls, *Identity of England* (351-52). Anderson conversely points out that the seventeenth-century decline of the use of Latin as a universal language due to the increasing uses of various vernacular languages, helped galvanize individual, disparate national consciousnesses (18-19, 40 ff.).

*European History* 313), but even supposedly disillusioned postwar England possessed a common cultural, symbolic language through which a national community was constructed.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf examines the various means by which English subjects participate in and create the national community through their engagement in its language culture, even after the “chasm” of the First World War, as she characterized it in 1940 (“The Leaning Tower” M 136). For most of the characters, the England of this novel, represented by London, “is not a Waste Land” as it was for T. S. Eliot (Littleton 37).<sup>7</sup> Rather, it is a virtually living, breathing entity, created “every moment afresh” and undulating in “waves of . . . divine vitality” to Clarissa Dalloway, as she gushes in the opening paragraphs (MD 7). This London “murmur[s]” to Lady Bruton, appears an “enchanted” place to Peter Walsh, and bustles in an “uproar” that speaks of “brotherhood” to Elizabeth Dalloway (112, 71, 4, 138). This enchanting, murmuring, uproarious brotherhood is held together by the more official, structural regularity of a clock—the chiming of Big Ben, heard throughout the novel and that acts as a keeper of a “history . . . associated with the public world, masculinity, technology, and . . . war” (Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land* 3:23)—and newspapers, which, as Anderson argues, aids in instilling a sense of “simultaneity” within the imagined community of the nation. In *The Voyage Out* (1915), the English vacationers in South America regularly read the London *Times* as it arrives from England, but they “scarcely consider the news read . . . as news” (101), which suggests a disconnection between the events reported in the newspapers and their own lives across the Atlantic. In contrast, the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* read newspapers enthusiastically and, moreover, actively engage in writing them. Edward Said argues that prominent newspapers such

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<sup>7</sup>See also Whitworth (153-54).

as the London *Times* and *The New York Times* “aspire” and are “generally considered . . . to be the national newspaper[s] of record, [their] editorials reflecting not only the opinions of a few men and women but supposedly also the perceived truth of and for the entire nation,” since “any article in [them] carries with it a sober authority, suggesting long research, careful meditation, [and] considered judgment” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 28-29): that is, anything included in a national newspaper not only reflects but helps to create a national culture through its use of the common language of that nation. As the narrator in Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* (1922) states, newspapers “take the impression of the whole” by reporting events “from all parts of England” simultaneously (98).

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, various national newspapers feature prominently: Peter Walsh equates the opinions of Richard Dalloway with those of the *Morning Post*, which he reads regularly each morning (MD 77). Hugh Whitbread may be a fool; yet he also possesses “nothing but the manners and breeding of an English gentleman,” in Clarissa’s view. According to Peter Walsh, he epitomizes the “English public school man,” and evinces his concern for the national community by frequently writing letters to the *Times* that appeal “to the public to protect, to preserve, to clear up litter, to abate smoke, and stamp out immorality in parks” (MD 7, 103).<sup>8</sup> And Lady Bruton, “a well-set-up old woman of pedigree” who expresses her love of England in

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<sup>8</sup>Later in the novel, Peter Walsh ridicules Hugh Whitbread’s “admirable letters” in the *Times*, which he had read “thousands of miles across the sea” in India. Peter’s comments suggest that he, like *The Voyage Out*’s characters who were similarly distanced from England in Santa Marina, had also felt alienated from the England described by the newspapers: as Peter recalls, upon reading Hugh’s letters, he “had thanked God he was out of that pernicious hubble-bubble if it were only to hear baboons chatter and coolies beat their wives” (173). Forster, however, offers a different perspective on the view of the “English public school man”: in *A Passage to India*, the narrator comments that “the Public School attitude” among the ruling Anglo-Indians “flourish[ed] more vigorously than it can yet hope to do in England” (40).



unconsciously Shakespearean language,<sup>9</sup> and whose name, as Beverly Schlack suggests, connotes “*brute and Briton*,” enlists Richard Dalloway’s and Hugh Whitbread’s help in composing a letter to the *Times* (MD 105-06, 180; Schlack, *Continuing Presences* 56). This epistle concerns the livelihoods of “the young people of both sexes bom of respectable parents”—in deference to these male characters’ “masculine command over the language of civil discourse,” as Sherry argues (MD 110; Sherry 283).<sup>10</sup> From the removed perspective aboard a ship in *The Voyage Out*, England appears only “a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned” (24); however, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, England, as represented by its capital city, is a glorious place, teeming with activity and yet scrupulously ordered, as aided by its newspapers. Additionally, as Clarissa states, “the King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere . . . there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it” (5). Similarly, Peter Walsh, recently returned from a five-year colonial post in India, admires the ways in which “life struck straight through the streets,” “like the pulse of perfect heart” (MD 54).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>See my first chapter.

<sup>10</sup>In regard to this letter-writing scene, Sherry argues that Lady Bruton’s respect for this “masculine . . . language of civil discourse” functions subversively in the novel: “The gestures of subjection that Lady Bruton makes . . . are offered with the slyer obeisance of her author’s compliance with reverential attitudes toward masculine command. A reverse mastery of cross-talked convention emerges as the subtler conceit of this piece” (284).

<sup>11</sup>Squier deems *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf’s “most celebrated London novel” (*Virginia Woolf and London* 91). One of the earliest reviewers of *Mrs. Dalloway* finds that in this novel, “London is made, for the first time . . . to exist. It emerges, shining like crystal, out of the fog in which all merely material universe is ordinarily enveloped in his mind . . .” (Hughes 158). Similarly, Forster declares in response to the novel, “How [Clarissa Dalloway] loves London!” (“The Novels of Virginia Woolf” 174). As various critics note, the exuberant descriptions of London in *Mrs. Dalloway* closely resemble ones Woolf wrote in her diary and letters during the time period in which she wrote the novel (see, for example, Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 467). When Woolf began drafting the novel in April 1922, she and her husband occupied a house in the London suburb of Richmond in what Squier deems their “ten-year suburban exile” (*Virginia Woolf and London* 91). However, they relocated in mid-March 1924 to London, where Woolf completed the novel in January 1925 (the Woolfs’ Hogarth Press published it in May 1925). Woolf celebrated her return to her native city with many exhilarated delineations of it in her diary and letters. For example,

Further indicating that not all illusions died with the war, Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates the importance of commonly held beliefs in national symbols and participation in communal rituals in two scenes early in the novel that together demonstrate what Homi Bhabha calls the “double-time of the nation” (“DissemiNation” 294). This phrase refers first to the subject’s synchronic sense that he or she belongs to a national community that includes all of England’s inhabitants, past, present, and future, or dead, living, and unborn—a view of the nation perceived through subjects’ comprehension of a national discourse consisting of seemingly eternal national symbols. This perception of the nation, then, is one that exists outside or above calendrical time. Additionally, subjects possess a second, diachronic sense of the national community that is based on an imagined union with their current fellow citizens who, they assume, participate concurrently in the same national rituals—an argument that Anderson also makes in *Imagined Communities*. This perception of the national community, then, relies on a language that operates within calendrical time, that creates the sense of “simultaneity” which, as Anderson argues, the reading of daily newspapers promotes. Referring both to the nation’s synchronic and diachronic symbols and rituals, Anthony Smith emphasizes that “national symbols, customs and ceremonies” should elicit similar “emotional responses from all strata of the community”—that is, a common sense of nationalism or patriotism (77). By concentrating the narrative gaze during these scenes not on the novel’s principal characters, but rather on a

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within weeks of her move, she celebrated London’s “amazing” beauty and vitality, in contrast to the “stillness of Rodmell” in Richmond and adds that she would like to “write about London, & how it takes up the private life & carries on” (D 2:301). See also D 2:282-83, 298, 302 and L 3:96-97. DiBattista also comments on Woolf’s detailed descriptions of London in the novel; she argues that “the public spaces of London’s streets represent what pastoral landscapes represented to the Romantics—the inspiring scene that provides the ‘plaguy spirit’ with intimations of its own immortality” (34). See also Jean Moorcraft Wilson (132-33). For an alternative assessment of the relation between character and the London setting, see Naremore (80-82).

collection of Londoners of various classes, ages, and genders, Woolf presents a cross-section of England in order to spotlight the communal nature of her characters' responses—that is, their production of a national community through their understanding of the various national languages.

In the first scene, Woolf illustrates a disparate group of Londoners' synchronic creation of the national community through their responses to a mysterious grey car. The narrator details the various reactions to this car that contains a face, "glimpsed by three people for a few seconds," but assumed to be "one of the very greatest importance," on Bond Street before it glides away in the direction of Buckingham Palace, leaving in its wake "a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops" that "grazed something very profound" (14, 16-17, 18).<sup>12</sup> Just as the Peace Day parade Woolf described in 1919 was intended to signify national strength and unity, the mysterious grey car in *Mrs. Dalloway* represents power and order for most of the Londoners who see it, although not the "important" face within it, or hear about it through the "rumours . . . in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street" (14). Indeed, the enigmatic figure gains even more power and significance due to his or her anonymity. The figure in the car, assumed by the various characters to be either the Prime Minister, the Prince of Wales, or the Queen, possesses the "voice of authority"—despite, or perhaps *because* of, the fact that he or she never speaks—and inspires a "spirit of religion" in the on-lookers (14). Speculating

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<sup>12</sup>This scene, along with the novel's opening description of Clarissa venturing into the streets of London, constitutes one of the first parts written of what became *Mrs. Dalloway*. Between April and August 1922, Woolf wrote two short stories entitled "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" and "The Prime Minister," collected in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. The latter story is Woolf's first version of this scene involving the reactions of various Londoners to the mysterious grey car. In it, Septimus Warren Smith first appears as a character (CSF 152-59, 317-23). I discuss below some of the significant differences between Woolf's portrayal of Septimus in "The Prime Minister" and that in the version of the story rewritten for inclusion in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

that they are “within speaking distance of the majesty of England” and “perceiv[ing] instinctively that greatness was passing,” the “ordinary people” with zealous intensity reverence the vehicle’s occupant as

an 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 gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known. (16, 18)

Like St. Paul’s Cathedral, which Mr. Bentley regards as a “symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly,” and Buckingham Palace, which Richard Dalloway later venerates similarly as a “symbol” that “stand[s] to millions of people” as a means of “continuity” and the “handing on [of] traditions from the past,”<sup>13</sup> the enigmatic figure in the car becomes an “enduring symbol” of the nation, one that evokes for these Londoners thoughts “of the dead; of the flag; of Empire,” “the flowing corn and the manor houses of England; and . . . the frail hum of the motor wheels as the walls of a whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of a whole cathedral . . .” (28, 117, 18)—that is, thoughts of the nation in its various, concrete manifestations. The Londoners invest this “face of the very greatest importance” with an eternal, even mystical, symbolism, around which they coalesce as the transcendent embodiment of the nation that will exist even after the great city of London has deteriorated into

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<sup>13</sup>Similarly, in 1939, Woolf described Buckingham Palace as a place where, in the English imagination, the inhabitants are “always smiling, perfectly dressed, immune . . . if not from death and sorrow, still from the humdrum and pettifogging” (“Royalty” M 230).

nothing more than a “grass-grown path” and its inhabitants, into fragments of bone and metal. In this regard, these characters make the car and its unknown occupant into a synchronic symbol of their faith that England will at least in some sense exist eternally, even following wars that could be more apocalyptic than the one they recently underwent.

Hence, just as the Dalloways’ guests later at the party sense intuitively that the Prime Minister is the “symbol of what they all stood for, English society” (172), “the immortal presence” assumed to occupy the grey car unites the Londoners on the street not only with the living, but the dead, as well. They “seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon’s mouth, as their ancestors had done before them” (18). This face becomes an embodiment of what Ernest Renan describes as the transcendent “soul” or “spiritual principle” of the nation (19), or the modern nation that Lauren Berlant characterizes with its “law” in the “collectively-held history” and discourses of “its traditional icons, its metaphors, its heroes, its rituals, and its narratives” and that appears as a “birthright” for the nation’s subjects (20). Each onlooker experiences what he or she regards as a personal connection to the “enduring symbol” seated in the car—as well as the symbolic discourse of the nation for which its mysterious occupant is a synecdoche. It is this sense of personal affinity with the presumably eternal aspects of their national ideology that reinforces the subjects’ national solidarity. Displaying their indoctrination in this “birthright” language of such national symbols, the Londoners in *Mrs. Dalloway* recognize, apparently “instinctively[,] that greatness was passing” and, in their shared experience “looked at each other”—although they are strangers—and reflect upon the eternal, monumental aspects of their nation, including “the dead . . . the flag . . . [and] the Empire” (MD 18). Concurrently, however, Woolf undermines the supposed endurance that these

characters project upon England with the nature of the symbol through which those characters imagine it. By associating the synchronic national eternity with a modern car, Woolf intimates that the Englishmen and -women's faith in the nation's transcendent "soul" is illusory, an invention, comparable to the recent invention of the automobile, and one that, like this particular automobile, will not endure. Also by association, neither will the flag, the Empire, the manor houses, nor even the cathedral endure. But for her novel's characters, these symbols signify both the longevity of the nation and their synchronic union with the English, past, present, and future.

While this first scene highlights the role of transcendent symbols in galvanizing the English subjects, the second one illuminates the role of communal rituals, especially those dependent on an immersion in the national language, in creating a diachronic national community. These same Englishmen and Englishwomen look to the sky when an airplane appears there. At first regarding this airplane as "ominous," the onlookers are relieved to discover that it is unthreateningly skywriting a message, which Michael North notes was a burgeoning means of advertisement in the early 1920s, "in a time before broadcasting of any kind existed" and that could "reach a large audience simultaneously" (MD 20; North 83).<sup>14</sup> In a moment in which "the whole world became perfectly silent," the onlookers watch, enthralled, as the "white smoke . . . curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters" and together attempt to determine what word is being spelt until one character declares that the message is merely an advertisement for toffee (MD 19-21). But, as Gillian Beer argues, the significance of this scene

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<sup>14</sup>North adds that for the audience of a skywritten advertisement, "the desire to excel, to be the first to interpret the mysterious words, meets and merges with the need to conform, to read as everyone else is reading" and that this act of reading aloud was "part of the advertisement itself," the words being "produced first as smoke and then as sound, once by the advertisement and then once more by the crowd of potential consumers" (83). For readings of this scene's critique of commercialism and imperialism, see Phillips (4-5) and Abbott (202).

lies not in the message, but rather “the communal act of sky-gazing” (“The Island and the Aeroplane” 275).<sup>15</sup> Much like the daily ritual of newspaper reading, the shared effort to decipher the ephemeral letters unites the group in a manner that “creates” London “every moment afresh,” as Clarissa Dalloway had stated earlier in the novel (MD 4). One observer, Mrs. Dempster, imagines the airplane “soaring over Greenwich and all the masts; over the little island of grey churches, St. Paul’s, and the rest” (28): with its passage starting over the nation’s capital and continuing across the entire breadth of England, the airplane’s voyage unites the island in that sense of diachronic simultaneity, just as the “face of the greatest importance” had unified the Londoners in their shared synchronic discourse of “enduring symbol[s] of the state.” Whereas the symbolic values projected upon the grey car link these modern Londoners with other members of the English national community in its past and future manifestations, those same Londoners’ simultaneous act of reading the skywritten letters helps create a diachronic sense of solidarity within the current national community.

Within this national community lie also the shared memories of World War I, to which the novel’s characters allude frequently, even if only vaguely and indirectly. The airplane is first looked upon as “ominous” due to the recent use of such vehicles in air raids, one of which Woolf would later describe in the 1917 chapter of *The Years* (1937).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Clarissa is relieved that “the War was over . . . thank Heaven—over” and recalls fondly the “almost perfect gloves” one could purchase “before the War,” while Mr. Bowley observes and pities the “poor women,

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<sup>15</sup>See also J. Hillis Miller (104), Naremore (83), and Haring-Smith (148).

<sup>16</sup>Indeed, Sherry draws attention to a connection between this new form of advertisement and the military: he explains that the Air Ministry encouraged its pilots to engage in skywriting, in order to continue to hone their flying skills “at no cost to the state” (265). See also John Young (99-100). Levenback comments extensively on the air raid scene in *The Years* in the fourth chapter of *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*.

nice little children, orphans, widows” created by “the War” (MD 5, 11, 20). Clarissa’s aged aunt Helena Parry recalls the manner in which “the War” had “disturbed” her pursuit of painting orchids when it “dropped a bomb at her very door,” and Richard Dalloway reflects momentarily on the “thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten” (178, 115). In his study of the commemoration of Armistice Day in Britain, Adrian Gregory states, “The First World War marks a watershed in attitudes to death,” in that “the requirements of national morale prevented extravagant mourning in wartime, forcing prominent people to mourn only for a short period of time in public and with as stoic an attitude as they could muster” (21). Similarly, in 1922 (the year in which Woolf began to write *Mrs. Dalloway*), C. F. G. Masterman cited the “putting [of] ‘realities’ aside” and “refusing to face facts which might paralyse action” as quintessentially English abilities, ones particularly evident in the postwar period (*England after the War* 19). Thus, displays of excessive grief, which could “paralyse action,” were discouraged as threats to the war effort and to the national community both before and after the fighting ended. Hence, as Woolf surmised in December 1918, “The war is already forgotten.” In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa’s strongest memory of the recent war is the image of Lady Bexborough—a fictional representation of one of the “prominent people” to whom Gregory refers—proceeding with her duty of opening a bazaar, even with “the telegram in her hand” announcing the death of “her favourite” son (5). Clarissa admires this woman, whom one critic cites as an illustration of “English stoicism in the face of death” (Marder, “Split



Perspectives” 58), precisely because she could “put aside” her grief and persevere in her civic duties.<sup>17</sup>

In her introduction to *The Hours* (the published manuscript drafts of *Mrs. Dalloway*), Helen M. Wussow notes that, in revising the novel, Woolf reduced the number of direct references to the First World War (xxiv), a process indicative of postwar England’s attempt to repress not only the memory of the war, already “half forgotten” like the millions of dead soldiers, but the grief and other strong emotions it inspired. This trend is apparent in other texts written and published in the decade following the war; for example, in his exhaustive *History of England* (first published in 1926 and a source upon which Woolf draws in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Between the Acts*), George Macaulay Trevelyan devotes only five of the volume’s seven hundred-plus pages to the Great War, and even in this brief analysis avoids discussing directly the events of the war and its effects upon Britain (699-703).<sup>18</sup> Multiple critics have argued that *Mrs. Dalloway* examines postwar England’s valorization of the individual’s ability to ignore strong emotions, to maintain the public semblance of the “respectable life,” as Emily Jensen contends (175), while keeping more private turmoil hidden. This practice is suggested, for example, when Peter Walsh reveals that Richard Dalloway has insisted that “no decent man ought to read Shakespeare’s sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes” and because “the

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<sup>17</sup>See also DiBattista (41). Another critic, however, interprets Lady Bexborough’s stoicism as a *masculine* trait, rather than an English one (Nancy Taylor 374).

<sup>18</sup>In 1939, T. S. Eliot commented on what he saw as Western writers’ rather delayed reaction to the First World War: “Only from about the year 1926 did the features of the post-war world begin clearly to emerge . . . . From about that date one began slowly to realize that the intellectual and artistic output of the previous seven years had been rather the last efforts of an old world, than the struggles of a new” (“Last Words,” qtd. in Hynes, *The Auden Generation* 33).

relationship” represented in these poems “was not one that he approved” (MD 75).<sup>19</sup> Renan, Bhabha, and Anderson have all argued that a common memory of the past, its symbols and traditions, *and* a common forgetting, a group amnesia, are central to the formation and continual upholding of a sense of national community (Renan 10; Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 295-97; Anderson 199-201): in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the suppression of grief and the “half forgetting” of the war dead binds the community and allows it to continue. And it enacts this “forgetting” through the type of cultural language in which it communicates.

The desire in postwar England to half-forget the war and the importance of a common cultural language of symbols used to inculcate this repression is evinced in a ritual that Peter Walsh witnesses in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Strolling through the London streets after his brief, tense visit with Clarissa, Peter sees a group of soldiers, “boys in uniform, carrying guns, march[ing] with their eyes ahead of them, march[ing], their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (51). The parallel uses of a plural possessive pronoun and a singular article—“*their* arms” and “*their* faces” with “*an* expression”—indicates how the soldiers share a common identity and lack individual ones. Peter acknowledges further the statuesque, unindividuated bearing of these soldiers by associating them with the “exalted statues” of great English war leaders—“Nelson, Gordon, Havelock,” historical figures who through a “great renunciation” have “achieved at length a marble stare”—and he concedes grudgingly that “one had to respect” their robotic nature (51). Woolf implies that the “future of civilisation” rests currently with the

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<sup>19</sup>In “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” Clarissa recalls that Richard as a young man had revealed that “he had never heard of” Shakespeare’s “dark lady”; she further states that “she had married him for that”—because Richard “had never read Shakespeare” (CSF 155).

automaton-like, marble soldiers whose only emotions are their stiff “love of England” and mechanical sense of duty.<sup>20</sup> As Elizabeth Abel surmises, this scene indicates “that the military discipline intended both to manifest and cultivate manliness instills rigor mortis in the living” (41). But this sense of “rigor mortis,” this lack of emotion, is precisely what makes these soldiers admirable in this postwar nation. Woolf intimates that the statue-like bearing of these young men has resulted from the cultural response to the First World War when Peter watches them approach the Cenotaph—an “empty tomb,” as the narrator emphasizes (MD 51)—meant to commemorate “the noble army of those who died for their country,” according to a writer for the *British Legion Journal* in 1929 (qtd. in Bushaway 153). Opened in 1920, the Cenotaph quickly became the site of what one historian calls a “national pilgrimage,” attracting over a million visitors in a few days” (Bushaway 154).<sup>21</sup> But while it was meant to symbolize England’s losses, the emptiness of the tomb also disembodies the war dead, which suggests that it functions as a signifier in postwar England’s discourse that attempts to forget the war. As Peter watches, the automaton-like soldiers—rather Conradian “hollow men” who tend the hollow memorial—remove a wreath from the Cenotaph. This act symbolizes the suppression of grief in postwar England, the desire to avoid “‘realities’ . . . which might paralyze actions,” as Masterman states.

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<sup>20</sup>Squier suggests that Peter’s admiration for the soldiers “reveals that he is drawn to the exercise of imperialist power although he lacks the self-discipline of the ideal soldier” (*Virginia Woolf and London* 105). Low sees a resemblance between Woolf’s description of these soldiers and Benito Mussolini’s characterization of “the ideal fascist male,” who “denies himself, through the sacrifice of his own private interests, through death itself” (qtd. in Low 94-95). Low argues in this essay that “Woolf . . . had begun at least as early as *Mrs. Dalloway* to conceive of England as itself already fascist” (94), an argument made more overtly later in *Three Guineas* (1938) and, less directly, in the later novels *The Years* and *Between the Acts*.

<sup>21</sup>In an article about the unveiling of the Cenotaph, a writer for the *Times* similarly called this heavily attended ceremony a “Great Pilgrimage” (qtd. in King 21).

Like the soldiers, Woolf's Lady Bruton, Richard Dalloway, and Sir William Bradshaw enact also the national community's endeavor to half-forget the war through the type of national discourse that they utilize and promote. Lady Bruton, who is "more interested in politics than people," has developed "a project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents"—perhaps those members of the "Lost Generation" left disillusioned and purposeless by the War—"and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada" and, as she later adds, in Britain's current colonies, as well (MD 105, 108, 180-81). Her plan consists of expelling this generation "daily scourged by the bloody war" from England and, for this woman who "had the thought of Empire always at hand," using colonized territories as a receptacle for those whose immediate physical presence threatens to disrupt her vision of the nation (180). Moreover, as David Bradshaw has discovered, letters written to the *Times* around the day on which Woolf's novel is set and which encouraged immigration to Canada were common, and this type of "project" was praised as a means "to reduce unemployment and the pressures it was placing on the domestic economy and the repopulate the Empire and Dominions after the depredations of the War" ("Introduction" xxv-xxvi). Nevertheless, even when relocated to the far reaches of the British Empire and Commonwealth, these geographically displaced "young people" would still for Woolf's Lady Bruton be encompassed in her vision of the national community, since any territory over which the Union Jack flies will remain "forever England" (180-81).

Richard Dalloway, however, criticizes Lady Bruton's "broad and simple" remedy for its absence of "Proportion"; it is merely the product, he decides, of "a strong martial woman, well nourished, well descended, of direct impulses, downright feelings, and little introspective power"

(109).<sup>22</sup> Much like the Edwardian Richard Dalloway who appears briefly in *The Voyage Out* and whose hope for England's future lies in a "unity of aim, of dominion, of progress,"<sup>23</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway's* postwar Richard, a politician whose knowledge and power Peter Walsh equates with those of the British government and who embodies "the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit" (VO 55; MD 161, 76), seeks to remove the effects of the war through legislation. As a politician, Richard's solution to all problems in England is legislation: the sight of prostitutes and a "female vagrant" in Piccadilly leads him to speculate on his country's "detestable social system" and the need to "clean" London. For Richard, the female vagrant, who "laughed at the sight of him" as he passes her, is disturbingly perplexing because she seems to have "flung herself on the earth, rid of all ties . . . impudent, loose-lipped, humorous" (116). As typified by her incomprehensible, "impudent, loose-lipped" language, this woman brazenly and disconcertingly, for Richard, exists outside his England, so carefully organized with the system of bills and laws that he venerates. His reliance on legal and class-biased language in response to her indicates his desire to use on political means to regulate her,

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<sup>22</sup>Like Richard Dalloway, John Maynard Keynes in 1920 dismisses emigration as a means to solve postwar Britain and Europe's economic and social problems; he argues that such a plan is impractical, "for it would take years to transport them [the 'surplus population'] overseas, even, which is not the case, if countries could be found which were ready to receive them" (228). However, one critic of *Mrs. Dalloway* points out that the 1914 and 1919 Aliens Restrictions Acts "discouraged alien immigration to Britain, while they encouraged British emigration to the empire" (Usui 156). See also Zwerdling (129). In 1922, Masterman, like Woolf's Lady Bruton, refers to "a great emigration," precipitated by the British Army's "direct contact with Australians, Canadians, and Americans" that stimulated "a pride in the great English-speaking races growing up beyond the oceans, in which every man, however poor, has a chance of decent life, denied in this little overcrowded island of cities" (*England after the War* 24-25).

<sup>23</sup>Hermione Lee cautions, "The Dalloways in *The Voyage Out* are considerably different from the later Dalloways," for "the satire in the later book is more complex and less obvious" (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 93). See also Froula, "*Mrs. Dalloway's* Postwar Elegy" (128-29) and Sherry (241) on the differences and similarities between the portrayals of the Dalloways in these two novels.

clean her, bring her back into his more structured vision of the national culture, or, failing that, eradicate her altogether—just as the dead soldiers from the war are best “half forgotten.”

Similarly, when Bradshaw mentions Septimus Warren Smith’s suicide, Richard refers to “some provision in [a] Bill” as a solution, a legal means to account for and defuse such individuals (183). Although he has told his wife that he ““didn’t like [Bradshaw’s] taste, didn’t like his smell,”” this Member of Parliament agrees implicitly with the renowned doctor’s practices in treating those afflicted by what the British government then labeled “shell-shock.”<sup>24</sup> In examining Septimus earlier in the novel, Bradshaw, using the exalted language of Empire, insists that the former lacks a proper “sense of proportion,” a word that Richard Dalloway also uses when he criticizes Lady Bruton’s emigration scheme, as a result of his war experience (MD 109, 96). Bradshaw’s “treatment” of such individuals consists primarily of isolating them: he “secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, [and] made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion,” and thus by “worshipping proportion,” he makes “England prosper” (99). But, as Kathy J. Phillips observes, Bradshaw and Richard’s “Proportion is really disproportion,” in that it favors “wide class differences, hypocrisy hiding force, and oppression of women” (18). In the name of Proportion, doctors and politicians seek to eliminate from England those they categorize as “lunatics” by

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<sup>24</sup>In 1922, the British government defined *shell-shock* as “emotional shock” or “nervous and mental exhaustion” resulting from “prolonged strain in combat” (“Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” qtd. in Thomas 51). In “Virginia Woolf’s Septimus Smith and Contemporary Perceptions of Shell Shock,” Thomas argues that Woolf became familiar with Parliament’s 1922 report on shell-shock through her husband and other connections. She argues that Woolf, through the portrayals of Septimus and Sir William Bradshaw, criticizes the government’s definition of and recommended treatment for war veterans supposedly suffering from shell-shock: “[Woolf’s] development of Septimus Smith may, in fact, be viewed as an implicit rejection of some of the Report’s values and findings” (49). See also Zwerdling (29-30) and Tylee, *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness* (156).

relying on terminology that linguistically removes those whom they find disruptive from the national community. And Bradshaw's plans for improving humanity extend beyond England: as the narrator explains, the doctor's revered "Proportion" has a "sister" or twin "Goddess" named "Conversion," who "even now" is at work "in the heat of the sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa," as well as the more local "purlieus of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own." Hence, in addition to wanting to "make England prosper" by "secluding her lunatics" that lack a proper "sense of proportion," Bradshaw wishes to strengthen the power of the British Empire due to what he thinks of as his senses of "love, duty, [and] self sacrifice," but what is in actuality a service to the will of "Conversion," which seems to offer "help, but desires power" by "dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance" (MD 100). Bradshaw thus promotes a brand of British imperialism predicated on the English people's view of themselves "as the creators of a worldwide system in which they as it were gigantically replicated themselves, carrying with them their language, their culture, their institutions, their industry" and "as the seed of a mighty race embarked on a mission to remake the world in its own image" (Kumar 189-90). However, as Woolf's husband argued in 1920, "moral ideas have never been the motive . . . in any imperialist venture," and such moral purposes for the Empire that Bradshaw stresses "become a duty only after" the colonizer has "fill[ed] his pockets" (Leonard Woolf, *Economic Imperialism* 16, 18). Moreover, since, as many historians argue, World War I was fought at least partially due to Britain's colonial interests and disputes,<sup>25</sup> Bradshaw here

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<sup>25</sup>See Thomson (219), Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* (314-15), and Keegan (18-19). It should be noted, however, that some recent historians have argued that conflicting imperialistic concerns were not a chief cause of the war; for example, Ferguson contends that "there is scarcely any evidence that [colonial] interests made businessmen

employs a discourse that promulgates those resolute and jingoistic ideologies that lie at the roots of the war.

Hence, whereas Lady Bruton turns to the colonies as a convenient venue into which to expel England's undesirable elements, Bradshaw regards them more as places in which to spread his particular type of Englishness that consists of "love, duty, and self sacrifice." Equally important in Bradshaw's plans for Britain and England is his desire to sequester those citizens who still live within England and who may corrupt his vision of the postwar community. Later in the novel, Peter Walsh admires the "light high bell" of a speeding ambulance as it bears away the nearly lifeless body of Septimus Warren Smith, who in his madness has just "flung himself vigorously" from an upper-story window (MD 149, 151). Peter admires the vehicle as an emblem of "the triumphs of civilization" in its ability to dispose efficiently the less savory aspects of English society.<sup>26</sup> Like the ambulance, Bradshaw, although he may consider himself "the priest of science" (94), is another vehicle through which such threats of disruption are eliminated. He brags of his abilities to "swoop" upon, "devour," and "shut . . . up" these "lunatics" (102). Alex Zwerdling notes the striking similarities between Bradshaw and the equally uncharitable, brutal policeman in the Victorian skit in *Between the Acts* (130). Indeed, Septimus Smith characterizes Bradshaw and the other doctor Holmes as "lawgiver[s]" and "judges" who "saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted" by frequently giving their "advice"

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want a major European war. In London the overwhelming majority of bankers were appalled at the prospect, not least because war threatened to bankrupt most if not more the major acceptance houses engaged in financing international trade" (32). See also Eksteins. In "The Big One: Historians Rethink the War to End All Wars," Gopnik offers a useful, brief summary of various historians' theories on the causes of World War I.

<sup>26</sup>Similarly, in *A Passage to India*, Forster's narrator speculates that "we must exclude someone from our gathering[s], or we shall be left with nothing" (38).



with the imperative auxiliary verb “must” (MD 147-48). In addition to Zwerdling, several other critics label Bradshaw more of a policeman than a doctor because his supposed medical “treatment” is in actuality a means to confine those he regards as “lunatics” in order to prevent them from “propagat[ing] their views,” to infect England.<sup>27</sup> In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault argues that the language used to separate alleged “lunatics” from the rest of the population, as well as the more literal sequestering of the former group in asylums, was thought a necessary step “for the edification of the perfect city,” or, more broadly, the perfect nation (63). Further, as Foucault notes, this practice began in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the same period during which many historians locate the origins of the modern nation. Like Woolf, Foucault describes this seclusion in asylums of those deemed insane as more of “a ‘police’ matter” than a medical one in which the chief concern would be to cure the sick (46). Foucault adds that these societies treated madness as a “moral error . . . a transgression against the written or unwritten laws of the community” (60). Among “the insane,” then, is any individual who “crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order . . . and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic” (58).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>See, for example, Abel (41-42), Paul (41), Nancy Taylor (371), Wang (185-86), Matson (174), and Rosenfeld, “Links into Fences” (141, 153). In even more damning readings, Edwards deems Bradshaw and his colleague Holmes “vampires” (171); Forster, Fleishman, Schlack, and Wolfe characterize the doctor as “diabolical,” “malevolent,” “evil,” and “a villain” (Forster, “The Novels of Virginia Woolf” 177; Fleishman 89; Schlack, *Continuing Presences* 58; Wolfe 51); and Low regards him as a model for “the censorship, propaganda, and sporadic violence of the dictatorship” and “the quintessential fascist” (97-98).

<sup>28</sup>Eagleton refers to Bradshaw as “a man Michel Foucault would cheerfully have murdered” (*The English Novel* 322), and Wang also briefly compares this character’s “homes” to Foucault’s descriptions of the *Hôpital Général* in *Madness and Civilization* (185). See also Carroll (109), DiBattista (47-48), Haring-Smith (154), and Froula, “Mrs. Dalloway’s Postwar Elegy” (145). Bazin and Lauter briefly suggest that Woolf recognized a connection between the incarceration of those whose behavior is deemed “bizarre” and fascism (32).

Like Foucault, Irigaray argues that “the one who has the power to prohibit madness,” like Woolf’s Bradshaw, “gives the name of ‘madman’ to his other . . . that is, to whatever is foreign to him”; consequently, she continues, “‘madness’ will not simply disappear on command but will rather be subjected to prohibition, denial,

Finding his patient to have “crossed the frontiers of bourgeois order,” Bradshaw wants his patient to suppress his “unsocial impulses,” advises Septimus, ““Try to think as little about yourself as possible,”” and suggests that combat affected the young man so adversely due to a “lack of good blood” (MD 98, 102). In seeing himself as a “prophetic Christ,” Septimus has transgressed the ethics of the national community; he should realize, as Bradshaw recommends, that ““nobody lives for himself alone”” and focus on “family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career,” values which would reintegrate him into the national community by enabling him to serve it (102, 98-99).<sup>29</sup> But until he learns this lesson, Septimus must be contained in an asylum “without friends, without books, without messages,” completely isolated from the community (99). For Bradshaw, Septimus may have ““served with great distinction in the War”” (96), but his insistence upon holding beliefs and speaking a language that may pollute the national culture and community now endangers England. The historian Eric Leed comments on civilians’ fears of returning soldiers, who were believed to be capable of violence upon reentering civilization: “Commonly the violence of the veteran was seen as an ‘expression’ of his estrangement from social norms, and his habituation to the arts of violence. It was, clearly, an after-effect of living in an environment that educated only a man’s ‘native animal instincts’” (203). Woolf hints at the veteran’s violent tendencies in a manner that also subtly implies the war’s origins in colonial disputes through her portrayal of Peter Walsh, a colonial administrator

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leaving a clear field to law, discourse, which are discrete and have neatly delineated categories and dichotomies, with nothing left unaccounted for outside themselves” (270-71; original emphasis).

<sup>29</sup>Similarly, Bradshaw’s colleague Dr. Holmes had attempted to reintegrate Septimus into the English national community by appealing to his sense of marital duty: he has suggested that Septimus’s unconventional behavior will give his Italian-born wife “a very odd idea of English husbands,” and “Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife?” (92).

whose return to his homeland and Clarissa, his first love, after five years in India parallels Odysseus's return to Ithaca and Penelope after the Trojan War. Like the returning soldier whom Leed argues that civilians fear, Peter manifests a violent nature through his habitual brandishing of a pocket-knife and his pursuit of an unknown young woman—a chase he undertakes “stealthily,” “with a lizard’s flickering tongue,” armed with his knife, and in the spirit of “an adventurer,” “a romantic buccaneer,” free of “these damned proprieties, yellow dressing-gowns, pipes, fishing-rods” that he sees “in the shop windows” and therefore associates with the “respectability” of a domesticated English life (52-53). Similarly, Bradshaw fears Septimus’s violent inclinations, deciding to place the ex-soldier in an asylum or a “home” upon learning that he has threatened suicide, since it is then “a question of the law” (96-97). And Bradshaw is hardly alone in his fear of Woolf’s returning soldier: in her brief appearance in the novel, Maisie Johnson, newly arrived in London from Edinburgh, is startled by Septimus’s “queer,” “odd” appearance in Regents Park, and Maisie (in an echo of Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz) wishes to cry, “Horror! horror!” (26-27). Even Septimus himself intuits that the community wishes to be rid of him: “The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes” (92). However, as much as characters like Bradshaw, Richard Dalloway, and Lady Bruton may strive to employ a language predicated on a wish to “half forget” and remove the “horror” of the First World War, *Mrs. Dalloway* spotlights the ways that this nation continues to be “daily scourged by” it through her presentation of Septimus Warren Smith.

#### Septimus Warren Smith and the Unspeakability of War

During his ineffective and hostile examination at the hands of Bradshaw, Septimus Smith sarcastically belittles the First World War as “that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder”

(MD 96). As Woolf's novel bears out, this war was far more than a "little shindy" for all of England and particularly for combatants like Septimus, as much as politicians and doctors would prefer to downplay its impact. In his assessment of the effects of combat experience upon the soldiers of the First World War, Leed suggests that "the experience of war" functions as "an initiation" for the soldier—although, he cautions, "what state, condition, or station the soldier was being initiated into" is often unclear (32-33). He observes also that initiation rites or rites of passage are traditionally used to render the initiate into a viable, functioning adult member of his or her culture; however, the "school of courage," as the English veteran Philip Gibbs repeatedly describes the First World War in his memoir, more often alienated the soldier from his homeland (Leed 110). Leed also characterizes combat experience as creating "a new man," but "one who has no immediately apparent or even predictable purpose," for he is initiated into a state in which "the boundaries between the visible and invisible, the known and unknown, [and] the human and inhuman" collapse. Consequently, the soldier who reenters the homefront experiences a particular breakdown of language, in that "the distinctions that were central to orderly thought, communicable experience, and normal human relations" are "shatter[ed]" (148, 21).

Whereas the ability to discern the distinctions necessary to language lies at the base of culture (as, for example, Lacan, Sigmund Freud, and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argue) and at the base of a national community (as Anderson, Bhabha, Berlant, Paul Gilbert, and Smith contend), combat experience frequently alienates soldiers from those communities. Like the veterans who become, as Leed explains, unable to communicate and engage in "normal human relations" as a result of their combat experience, Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith has become a "relic straying on the edge of the world," an "outcast, who gazed back at the

inhabited regions, [and] who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world” (MD 93). The war, by blurring the “distinctions” on which language is predicated, ironically alienates soldiers from the national community they were commissioned to protect.<sup>30</sup> While planning this novel, Woolf decided that Septimus “should always remain out side [*sic*] human affairs,” unable “to identify himself with” people and sensing that other people are engaged in living but that he is not” (TH 417, 425-26). Through her portrayal of Septimus, Woolf hints at the faulted causes of the war, explores the effects of it upon England, and illustrates the problems for the national community that result from the attempt to “half forget” its devastating effects. In his analysis of *Jacob’s Room*, Sherry argues that the novel’s lack of direct references to the war indicates its “unspeakability,” an “unspeakability” that causes Woolf to represent the Great War through its “unrepresentability, or in a representation” that is “unsteadied” (275). Similarly, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus, a product of that “unspeakable” war, suffers from a linguistic paralysis that leaves him unable to convey intelligibly the war’s damaging effects upon him, thus estranging him from the English community.

Septimus’s alienation stems partially from his inability to reconcile his reasons for joining the war effort with his war experience—an ironic discrepancy that Paul Fussell deems definitive of wars in general and the First World War in particular (*The Great War and Modern Memory* 7-8). The young, idealistic Septimus enlisted in the British army “to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (MD 86)—influenced by what Eveline Kilian describes as “a vague sense of patriotism” expressed

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<sup>30</sup>Minow-Pinkney makes a similar argument regarding Septimus’s loss of “the capacity for communication” (78). However, she does not cite his combat experience as a direct cause of this problem.

through “a desire to protect English culture and women” (152).<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the insurgence of volunteerism in European armies dating back to the French Revolution, George L. Mosse argues that its rise coincides with the development of modern nationalism. These soldiers enlisted, Mosse contends, in the belief that they “no longer fought merely on behalf of a king, but for an ideal which encompassed the whole nation under the symbols of the Tricolor and the *Marseillaise*” (18)—or, in Septimus’s case, Shakespeare and an attractive woman.<sup>32</sup> For Septimus, these two emblems of prewar England—Shakespeare and the idyllic image of a beautiful young woman he wishes to “save” and protect—are not unrelated. An aspiring poet, Septimus had left his rural hometown for the opportunities he thought awaited him in London—that is, to become a “great man,” leaving for his mother and sister “an absurd note behind him, such as great men have written, and the world has read later when the story of their struggles has become famous” (84). In his dual interests in Shakespeare and Isabel Pole, Septimus imagines himself as “like Keats” (85), a poet whose rural childhood and unrequited love resemble his and who becomes a great poet. According to DiBattista, Woolf intimates that Septimus was meant to become a “great man,” a revered poet like Shakespeare and Keats, but the war cruelly takes this destiny from him (43). However, Woolf’s narrator suggests that prewar

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<sup>31</sup>See also Henke, “*Mrs. Dalloway*” (130), Ruotolo (106), and Tylee, *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness* (162).

<sup>32</sup>Centuries before the French Revolution, Shakespeare demonstrated the appeal of patriotism in inspiring troops, albeit not volunteer ones. In *Henry V*, the title character, in one of his most famous and oft-quoted speeches, motivates his men to attack the French village of Harfleur by complimenting them as the “noblest English / Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof” and men “whose limbs were made in England”; he further encourages them to “dishonor not [their] mothers,” to “show the worth of [their] breeding,” and thus to fight, “cry[ing] ‘God for Harry, England, and Saint George!’” (3.1.18-37). Henry invokes similar sentiments in his inspirational monologue delivered before the Battle of Agincourt in Act IV, scene iii. In her examination of “Wars and ‘British’ Identities from Norman Conquerors to Bosnian Warriors,” Korte argues that *Henry V* “stages a medieval war in the light of a new Elizabethan sense of the English nation” (13).

England destined this character not for greatness, but more probably for mediocrity, since “London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them” (MD 84).<sup>33</sup>

Wartime England encouraged young men like Septimus, “one of the first to volunteer” (86), to enlist through various means, including jingoistic newspaper articles, pervasively printed throughout the war and which led Woolf in 1916 to denounce the war as a “preposterous masculine fiction” (L 2:76), as well as the recruitment posters that upheld young Englishmen like him as individuals whose presence at the Front would “save” England. These posters, displayed throughout England for the duration of the war, helped create a language of “patriotic sentiment” that Woolf in a 1915 letter to Duncan Grant described as “so revolting that [she] was nearly sick” (L 2:57; see also 2:71).<sup>34</sup> One of these posters, typical of the ones Woolf and Septimus’s real-life counterpart would have seen, depicts a burly Englishman attacking a German soldier in order to protect a boy holding a basket of produce, accompanied by the caption, “Germany means to starve us out. There is only one answer. A blow straight between the eyes . . . Enrol to-day and release a fit man to the front” (“National Service”; see Appendix 1). Another poster stresses the need to protect Englishwomen and children: below the declaration that “Women of Britain

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<sup>33</sup>Schlack offers a theory on Septimus’s unusual first name. She cites the origin in Dante’s *Inferno*, which Septimus has been reading, as Woolf’s narrator indicates (MD 88). Schlack argues that *Septimus*, meaning “seven,” refers to Hell’s Seventh Circle, where those guilty of “war, suicide, and sexual perversion” are punished (*Continuing Presences* 70; author’s italics; see also Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 111 n.). In regard to this character’s very common last name, Poole finds it to imply that Septimus “is a sort of Everyman,” in that his inability to communicate with others is a problem “we have all had” (“We All Put Up with You Virginia” 83). See also Froula, “Mrs. Dalloway’s Postwar Elegy” (131) and Bradshaw, “Introduction” (xiii-xiv).

<sup>34</sup>Even in 1910, Woolf had described war as “invented presumably by gentlemen in tall hats in the [Eighteen-]Forties who wished to dignify mankind” (Review of *Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century*, E 1:330-31).

say—"Go!" it features a sad but determined mother holding her adolescent daughter and small son and watching with resignation as British troops march away ("Women of Britain"; see Appendix 2). And another appeals to the Englishman's patriotism by placing a smiling recruit, dressed in full uniform and holding a rifle, before an idyllic English countryside of rolling hills and cottages, suggesting that this man alone bears the responsibility of being England's protector—as emphasized by the poster's query and command: "Your country's call[:] Isn't this worth fighting for? Enlist now" ("Your Country's Call"; see Appendix 3). This poster thus seeks to evoke from young Englishman those primal associations between a love of England and a love of the land on which the nation is located that later historians like Krishan Kumar and Ian Baucom emphasize, but for the purpose of wartime recruitment.

Indicative of a patriotic discourse that emphasized the importance of every soldier in guarding England from the evil Hun, the sentiments expressed in such posters have inculcated in Septimus the belief that he "was alone" and solely responsible for "blocking the way" of the apocalyptic "flames" that threaten England and all its inhabitants (MD 67,15). Septimus, having learned the lessons that "the War had taught him," still regards himself as England's protector, even five years after the war has ended (86). The soldiers Peter Walsh sees at the Cenotaph can perform their duty only by offering the "great renunciation" of sentiment and any mark of individuality; similarly, Septimus recalls proudly that he "developed manliness" in the trenches by learning not only not to show, but to feel "very little emotion," even after witnessing the death of his close friend Evans "just before the Armistice" (51, 86). In examining the postwar Septimus, Sir William Bradshaw notes that his patient repeats the word *war* multiple times—suggesting to the doctor that the young man "was attaching meanings to words of a



symbolical kind,” a symptom he considers “serious” (96). But, as Roger Poole points out, Bradshaw consistently misdiagnoses his patient (*The Unknown Virginia Woolf* 185): Septimus’s repetition of the word certainly indicates a “serious” condition, but not that he regards the war *symbolically*. Rather, Septimus, taught to see himself as his nation’s savior, has interpreted his war experience too *literally*. In her discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Claire M. Tylee argues that Septimus’s repeated references to himself as a scapegoat stem from “the common platitude during the First World War” that “soldiers were sacrificing themselves for their country”—a trend that writers like Wilfred Owen satirized (*The Great War and Women’s Consciousness* 163).<sup>35</sup> Septimus’s exposure to the jargon of war propaganda has caused him to regard himself as the literal protector of his nation and a “sacrifice” or “scapegoat” whose death is required for its survival.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, this belief has alienated him from postwar English culture.

Simultaneously, Septimus’s time on the Front has led him to the contradictory realization that “it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning”—a conclusion that he first draws on the train home after the war (88). In the memoir of his World War I experience, Robert Graves explains that in the trenches, patriotism “was too remote a sentiment” and one “rejected as fit only for civilians.” Further, when a new recruit arrived and “talked patriotism” by, in the

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<sup>35</sup>Woolf expressed tentative admiration for war poets such as Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Reviewing a collection of poems by the latter in 1917, she notes his use of “jaunty matter-of-fact statements” that convey “loathing” and “hatred” and lead her to comment, “[W]e say to ourselves, ‘Yes, this is going on; and we are sitting her watching it,’ with a new shock of surprise, with an uneasy desire to leave our place in the audience, which is a tribute to Mr. Sassoon’s power as a realist” (E 2:120). However, she adds, “we might hazard the guess that the war broke in and called out this vein of realism before its season,” for she prefers poems which are “full of promise for the future” and “beauty” (121). In a review written in the following year, she praises Sassoon’s ability to reveal “the terrible pictures which lie behind the colourless phrases of the newspapers, but complains, “Mr Sassoon’s poems are too much in the key of the gramophone at present, too fiercely suspicious of any comfort or compromise, to be read as poetry” (E 2:269-70).

<sup>36</sup>For other readings of the scapegoat motif in the novel, see Fleishman (77), Henke, “*Mrs. Dalloway*” (138-41), DiBattista (43-44), Zwerdling (131), and Froula, “*Mrs. Dalloway’s* Postwar Elegy” (148-49).

fictional instance of Septimus's case, referring to an idealistic belief that he would fight "to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square," "he would soon be told to cut it out," as Graves recalls (188). And, on one level, Septimus's combat experience has taught him to "cut it out": even in Shakespeare's plays, metonymic of the idealized English culture he enlisted to save, the postwar Septimus now finds only a "message" of "loathing, hatred, despair" (88). Further, he recognizes "human nature" as at its core "repulsive" and "brutal," since "human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity," and people, as "wicked," "making up lies as they passed in the street"—realizations that lead him to want to share the truth that "dogs will become men" (92, 89, 66, 68). But coupled with this view of humanity as "repulsive," "wicked," and brutally animalistic is his conflicting belief that his combat experience has given him some "supreme secret" of "universal love" that he is obligated to give "whole . . . to the Prime Minister" and spread beyond to the nation and the Empire. This rhetoric and desire to impart upon these savage people a "universal" message aligns Septimus with imperialists like the fictional Sir William Bradshaw, who rhapsodizes about the British Empire's ability to teach its subjects about "love, duty, self sacrifice," and Rudyard Kipling and John Ruskin, who rhapsodized about the imperialists' duty to lead the "wild," "fluttered folk" of "savage" lands "toward the light" of "human arts" and "divine knowledge" that England, as "mistress of half the earth" possesses (Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" [1899] 215-17; Ruskin, "Imperial Duty" [1894] 2020). But unlike these more clear-minded promoters of Empire, Septimus cannot reconcile the conflicting visions given to him by the war of the world generally and England more specifically

as both “brutal” and infused with “universal love.” Consequently, he is doubly alienated from the English national community.

Further, the conflicting beliefs that the war has taught him has rendered Septimus an embodiment of the cultural and linguistic gap that historians and other writers have commonly noted when describing postwar England. Linguistically, this “gap” refers to the awareness, heightened by the war, between the idealistic, jingoistic jargon used to promote the war effort and the tragic reality of the war in practice. This discrepancy is noted, for example, by the American veteran Ernest Hemingway when he has Frederick Henry, an ambulance driver stationed on the Italian front in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), express his distrust of “the words sacred, glorious . . . sacrifice . . . glory, honor, courage, [and] hallow”—“[a]bstract words . . . [that] were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and dates” (184-85).<sup>37</sup>

Culturally, the war period itself appears as a “gap” in English and European history. In *A War Imagined*, Hynes argues that in the war’s aftermath, the English regarded their nation’s history as divided starkly into epochs occurring before, during, and after the war. Drawing upon various sources, he illustrates how postwar English writers frequently characterized prewar England “as a lost Eden,” wartime England as a “gap in history,” and postwar England as “a valueless, directionless vacuum,” “disvalued and depressed”—a trend he finds throughout 1920s

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<sup>37</sup>In “‘A Tyranny of Words’: Language, Poetry, and Antimodernism in England in the First World War,” Bogacz traces this trend in the writings of such combat poets as Owen, Sassoon, and Graves, as well as that of noncombatant writers associated with High Modernism, such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Bogacz cites various articles and poems written by “amateur” contributors to the London *Times* and other British newspapers during the war which employ the very abstract language of “sacrifice,” “heroes,” and “ideals,” and he contrasts this diction with the “contempt” and “anger” it inspired in soldiers, who thought it “deceived those at home about the nature of modern war” (643-44). See also Fussell (174 ff.).

novels, which are typically “concerned with loss” (328-29). Similarly, Beer, as well as other critics, notes that the Great War appears in Woolf’s writings as a “deep historical separator” (*Virginia Woolf* 53), or what Woolf in 1940 described as a “chasm” within English history. In *Jacob’s Room*, Betty Flanders’s exclamation at the novel’s conclusion—“Such confusion everywhere!” (176)—describes not only her deceased son’s forever-vacated room, but also an England reeling from the war and plunged into turmoil. And in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), a novel divided into sections set before, during, and after the war, Woolf identifies the postwar world of the characters as a “fallen” one and the war itself as a gap to which the narrator and characters allude frequently but only vaguely.<sup>38</sup> While the mere appearance of Mrs. Ramsay reading to her son in the first, prewar section of the novel can “subdue” the “reign of chaos,” the words “chaos” and “chaotic” are used frequently in reference to the setting in the third, postwar one (47, 148; see also, for example, 150, 161), and in this last section, Lily Briscoe complains upon returning to the Ramsays’ summer home that “she felt cut off from other people,” “she had no attachment here . . . as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyway. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was . . .” (146).

Also in *A War Imagined*, Hynes cites Septimus Smith as “the archetypal damaged man,” indicative of “the growing authority of the Myth” of a fallen culture in the decade following the

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<sup>38</sup>In terminology similar to that Hynes employed to describe English subjects’ sense of postwar England’s relationship to their prewar past, Fleishman characterizes *To the Lighthouse* as a novel that illustrates “what it feels like to be alive before, during and after a cataclysmic event like World War I” (122). In the “Time Passes” section, Woolf’s narrator refers obliquely to the war as “something out of harmony with [the] jocundity and [the] serenity” of the natural world (133). Moreover, the war seems to destroy Nature’s ability to function as a “mirror” to both the “nobler” and the “mean[er]” attributes of mankind (134). See Haule and Clewell for discussions of Woolf’s representations of the First World War particularly in this section of the novel.

war (345). He notes Woolf's creation of what he deems "a very Bloomsburyish Myth of the War" by including in the novel memories of the "world-before-the-war"—as seen especially with Clarissa's and Peter's nostalgic recollections of the idyllic Bourton of the 1890s—and "the world after," "but no middle"—that is, the war itself (345).<sup>39</sup> But Woolf depicts the war in *Mrs. Dalloway* more directly than she does so in any of her other novels with the character of Septimus Warren Smith. Commenting on *The Years* in 1937, Woolf explained to Stephen Spender that she "couldnt bring in the Front . . . partly because fighting isnt within [her] experience, as a woman; partly because [she] think[s] action generally unreal. Its the thing we do in the dark that is more real" (L 6:122). Similarly, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf represents the Great War not with "unreal" battle scenes, but instead with a glimpse into the ways that war continues to affect one of its combatants "in the dark." Septimus's inability to reconcile the idealized language of the national community with the reality of the war suggests that he is the missing "middle" in Hynes's equation, an embodiment of the war and its manifestation in the English national community as a gap within that culture.

The degree to which Woolf makes Septimus representative of the war and its chasm-like effects upon English culture becomes more evident when we recall how she represents the results of the war through characters in her other novels. In *The Waves* (1931), Woolf employs a complex symbolic language centered on Percival to represent the gap that World War I left in English culture and to associate that war with the imperialist doctrines that helped cause it. The novel's descriptions of the silent Percival and his death obliquely point to the war and its colonial

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<sup>39</sup>For another reading of the world depicted in *Mrs. Dalloway* as a "fallen" one, see Poole, "'We All Put Up with You Virginia'" (91-92).

origins. Although not a literal soldier, Percival is militaristic, associated with “guns and dogs” (TW 60). Moreover, when drafting the novel, Woolf originally intended Percival to die in the First World War—a fate technically unrealized in the published version of the novel but intimated in Louis’s early prediction that Percival “will certainly . . . die in battle” (60, 37).<sup>40</sup> However, in the published version, Percival dies after falling from a donkey while tending to his colonial duties in India: by eliding the literal combat death with a colonial one, Woolf subtly points to World War I’s origins in imperial disputes among the European nations. For the novel’s other characters, Percival signifies all that is most admirable in prewar English culture, while the manner in which Woolf relates his death indicts that culture for its activities that led to the war. Sharing a name with one of King Arthur’s crusading knights and revered as a “remote,” “monolithic” “hero” and even a god, the silent Percival constitutes the novel’s center, as well as a focal point for his friends, who believe he had “set this hubbub in order” (36, 82, 123, 136, 180). Consequently, when he dies, his friends find that “we are doomed, all of us” because “the lights of the world have gone out” (151-52).<sup>41</sup> Percival’s death leaves a “gap,” a disillusioning “chasm,” in what had appeared an ordered community. However, this death, “the hero’s fall from his donkey,” also suggests “the decline of the raj in the comic end of British colonialism,” even as the novel’s other characters try to mythologize their hero and thereby “gain a national identity,” as Jane Marcus argues (“Britannia Rules *The Waves*” 150-51).

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<sup>40</sup>See TWD (556) and Levenback (98, 98 n).

<sup>41</sup>This phrase echoes Edward Grey’s famous description of “the lamps . . . going out all over Europe” at the start of World War I (qtd. in Dangerfield 340).

Whereas Percival represents those ideals that the war took from England and Septimus represents the gap left behind, North Pargiter of *The Years* more coherently expresses a cognizance of this gap. As the only other World War I soldier in Woolf's novels who survives the war, North, like Septimus, appears estranged from postwar English culture. His combat experience has made him cynical, unlike the idealistic Edwardian Jacob Flanders and the heroic Percival. In the "Present Day" chapter, set nearly two decades after the war has ended, he listens to a group of young men reminisce over their recent school days and silently realizes that his "education" "had been in the trenches," where "he had seen men killed." Further, North scoffs at the youths' propensity to join societies and sign manifestoes for "Justice! Liberty!" (404-05). He wonders, "What do they mean by Justice and Liberty?" Much like Hemingway's Frederick Henry, North regards the postwar world as one in which "something's wrong . . . there's a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality" (405).<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Woolf in *Flush: A Biography* (1933), asks, "[D]o words say everything? Can words say anything? Do not words destroy the symbol that lies beyond the reach of words?" (37-38). And in 1918, she more explicitly criticized the discussions of war written by "stout red-faced elderly men" in the *Times* by declaring, "Sometimes I try to worry out what some of the phrases we're ruled by mean. I doubt whether most people even do that. Liberty, for instance" (D 1:138). Much as she argued in *A Room of One's Own* that the war has "shattered" the illusion that the romantic words nineteenth-century poets could assume directly inspired the emotions they wanted their readers to feel,

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<sup>42</sup>This description of North Pargiter resembles Woolf's characterization of her brother-in-law Philip Woolf, who fought in the First World War and was severely wounded in 1917 by the same shell that also killed his brother Cecil. In 1919, Woolf refers to Philip as a "fearfully dark and dismal" figure, "an outsider, a spectator, unattached, & very lonely" (L 2:404; D 1:248). Additionally, Philip after the war trained as a farmer (D 1:277, 277 n.), similar to North's pursuit of farming in South Africa. Noting these comments that Woolf made in her diary describing his rather "detached" emotional state after the war, Levenback cites Philip as a possible model for Septimus Smith (57).

North Pargiter and Frederick Henry have found that their combat experience has rendered meaningless much of the abstract, ideological language used to represent the war's aims and to define the national consciousness.

Unlike Woolf and these characters, Septimus Smith still looks for that connection “between the word and the reality” it is supposed to represent. Woolf's readers have frequently attempted to diagnose the causes of Septimus's insanity and have argued convincingly that it stems from, for example, a denial of his homosexuality, a repression of grief and other powerful emotions or, conversely, the feeling of too much emotion, an inability to distinguish the living from the dead—or more simply from a case of “the deferred effects of shell shock,” as Sir William Bradshaw states (MD 183).<sup>43</sup> Here, I am concerned not with diagnosing Septimus's condition, but instead with examining how it is manifested in the novel and how Woolf employs it to comment on the effects of the First World War upon England. In her introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1928), Woolf cites Septimus as Clarissa Dalloway's “double” (vi), or, as she elaborates on this adumbration in her diary, a means to place the former character's “insanity” next to the latter's “sanity” (2:207). Additionally, through Septimus, Woolf represents the devastating effects of World War I upon England itself: Septimus, with his beliefs that “human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity” and that “the world itself is without meaning” (MD 88-89), embodies the gap that the war has ripped into English culture. Suffering from the “unspeakability” of the war in the postwar English culture, Septimus is left

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<sup>43</sup>On the nature of Septimus's psychological illness, see Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (106-12); Marcus, “Middlebrow Marxism”; Jensen (162, 165, 173); Bazin and Lauter (28-29); Henke, “*Mrs. Dalloway*” (139-40); Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London* (113); Spilka (47 *passim*); Paul (139); Levenback (49-50); and Showalter, *The Female Malady* (193).



without a language comprehensible to the national community, since he lacks “the enormous resources of the English language, the power it bestows . . . of communicating feelings” (MD 178). The phrase “English language,” as Woolf’s narrator uses it here, can refer either to that language commonly spoken in the United States or Australia, as well as Britain, or the language culture of England that consists of national symbols, traditions, and rituals—as Paul Gilbert describes it—and from which Septimus, with his inability to “communicat[e] feelings,” is alienated. Septimus’s language problem is twofold: first, by seeing himself as too literally given the role of the “protector” of England based on his education and recruitment propaganda, he has isolated himself into the role of a sacrificial lamb—“the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer” (25)—or even a “prophetic Christ” meant to redeem and “save” his nation. For Septimus, language meant to be *symbolic* becomes *literal*, thus alienating him from the common symbolic language of the nation. While North Pargiter can recognize “a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality,” Septimus still looks for the “reality” behind a word. Second, because he believes he has “failed” in the war, that he has committed a “crime” simply by surviving when his friend Evans has died (96-98), Septimus feels more akin to animals, parts of the natural world, and the dead than his fellow Englishmen and -women. He is beneath culture, beneath language. For Septimus, only these two disparate worlds exist: a bestial, inhuman, vicious one, and a symbolic, idealized one. He is the gaping hole between them. Rather than acknowledging the “gap” in language that North recognizes, Septimus has become the gap itself.

Although Septimus knows that “communication is health [and] communication is happiness” (93),<sup>44</sup> he is unable to communicate, at least with the living. Levenback argues that Septimus cannot distinguish life from death (49-50), as is suggested when he imagines seeing the spectral image of his dead friend Evans who had earlier, as he recalls, tried to speak to him and whom he has glimpsed throughout the day (MD 70; see also, for example, 93, 25). Septimus regards himself as a literal ghost, as when he declares, “I have been dead, and yet am now alive” (69). For Clarissa Dalloway, London may be a city bursting with life; but for Septimus, it is Eliot’s “Unreal City” where “death had undone so many” (*Complete Poems and Plays* 62). In Septimus’s London, the dead indeed are more real than the living. Through a shift in narrative perspective, Woolf reveals that “the dead man in the grey suit,” whom Septimus sees in Regents Park and recognizes as Evans, is Peter Walsh as he passes the couple and notes briefly that Lucrezia, “the poor girl[,] look[s] desperate” and wonders “what . . . the young man . . . [had] been saying to her to make her look like that” (70-71). To Septimus, the image of Peter becomes a dead man among a community of “the dead . . . in Thessaly,” the Greek province in which Mount Olympus is located and in classical mythology, thought to be “the country of magicians” (MD 70; Howatson and Chilvers “Thessaly”).<sup>45</sup> To Peter, however, the sight of Septimus and Lucrezia Smith briefly enters his consciousness as what he assumes to be a young couple having a “lovers[’] squabble” within the greater community of the visitors in the park, the sight of which leads him to praise London and England as “enchanting” in their “softness,” “richness,”

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<sup>44</sup>Woolf also used this sentence in her essay on Montaigne, written concurrently with *Mrs. Dalloway* and published in 1924. She subsequently included this essay in the first *Common Reader* (CR1 64-65).

<sup>45</sup>Henke suggests that “the spectre of Evans returning from Thessaly” may represent Septimus’s “profound guilt over a suppressed desire for Greek love” (“*Mrs. Dalloway*” 141).

“greenness,” and as embodiments of “civilisation, after India”—typified by what he interprets as “the domestic family life of the parks (71). Peter recognizes the people in the park, including Septimus, Lucrezia, and himself, as part of England’s national community. But he does so only by misinterpreting the nature of “the awful fix” the Smiths have “got themselves into” and in a manner that prefigures Clarissa’s later misunderstanding of the reasons behind Septimus’s suicide. In contrast, Septimus, in looking upon Peter, feels no kinship with his fellow Englishman but rather feels akin to “the dead . . . in Thessaly” as they sing to him.

Woolf typifies how Septimus “always remains out side” the symbolic community of the nation in the second section of the novel through his response to the mysterious, authoritative grey car and the skywritten message created by the airplane. These scenes first introduce Septimus in the novel, emphasizing their importance in defining his character, his mental state, and the significant differences in his reaction to these symbols of the national community that galvanize the other characters. While the other passers-by can recognize themselves as members of the nation by interpreting the car and its mysterious occupant as national symbols, Septimus is oblivious to the supposed “greatness . . . seated within” the car; rather, his attention is drawn to the car itself, or, more accurately, the “violent explosion” that results when the car backfires and sounds like “a pistol shot,” a sound that evokes a memory of the war and its pervasive use of technological warfare (13-14).<sup>46</sup> Thus reminded of his war experience, Septimus is “terrified” of the “drawing together” of the other Londoners as they gaze upon the automobile and its hidden

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<sup>46</sup>The germ of this scene and Septimus’s reaction to the “violent explosion” lie perhaps in an event Woolf records in her diary in February 1915. Here, she recalls visiting London and on St. James street, hearing “a terrific explosion” that caused people to “come running out of Clubs,” fearing a “Zeppelin or aeroplane” attack; but the source of the sound is “only . . . a very large tyre burst” (D 1:32). That Woolf some years later has Septimus relive this moment emphasizes that the war is still ongoing for him, and that, for her, England continues to reel from the effects of that war.

passenger (15). Just as Lucrezia's removal of her wedding ring when her finger grows too thin, leads Septimus to assume that "their marriage is over" (67), this disturbed character's interpretation of the vehicle highlights his inability to distinguish symbolic from literal meanings. The other onlookers consider the figure who sits within the car an "enduring symbol of the state," but the agitated Septimus feels "*as if* some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames" (emphasis added). The "horror" and its apocalyptic "flames," then, initially exist for him only figuratively. However, this "horror" in the next sentence becomes a more literal threat: "The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought." In Septimus's mind, the car is not a symbol of the nation, but rather a literal threat to it, a threat that he alone can defeat in his role as the protector of his fellow citizens.

Woolf makes Septimus's linguistic alienation from the national community, due to his inability to distinguish symbolic from literal meanings, more obvious with his response to the skywriting. Septimus recognizes the letters not as spelling "actual words," but instead as symbols in some proto-language through which he personally is being "signal[ed]" (21). He notices the letters only when Lucrezia, following Dr. Holmes' orders, tells him to look, in order to "take an interest in things outside himself," but ironically, his interpretation of the airplane's message only makes him focus more intently inward and, again, away from the national community. Indeed, the letters themselves appear to him as nonsensical noises, so that a nearby woman's spelling "K . . . R . . ." become the sounds "Kay Arr" (22; Woolf's ellipses).<sup>47</sup> He

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<sup>47</sup>In a Kristevan reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Minow-Pinkney interprets Septimus's and the other characters' acts of interpreting the letters as indicative of Woolf's "rejecti[on of] the thetic self of keys and master-codes," noting that one character initially reads the letters as spelling "'a K, and E, a Y perhaps?'"—which she regards as a

finds in these sounds a message of “exquisite beauty” and one that “connect[s]” the “millions of fibres [of] his own body” with the natural world of leaves, trees, and birds in a “pattern,” but one that excludes the rest of humanity, including his fellow Londoners (21-22). Just as Septimus’s writings about war, “odes to Time [and] conversations with Shakespeare,” suggest that he cannot communicate in the national discourse, his inability to interpret the skywritten letters coherently points to his alienation from the nationally understood language (140, 147).<sup>48</sup> For the other observers, it is “the communal act of sky-gazing” and not the “message” that matter; for Septimus, it is this message of natural beauty, intended only for him, that is being transmitted, and he is located consequently in a world in which, as Leed argues, “the boundaries between the visible and invisible, the known and unknown, [and] the human and inhuman” have disintegrated, rendering him unable to communicate and thus to participate in the national community.

In an earlier version of this scene, Septimus’s reaction to the mysterious grey car does not emphasize the recent war’s devastating effects on language, as does the published version. The earlier Septimus acts as a more articulate vehicle than his later counterpart through which Woolf

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teasing offering of a “‘key’ to all mythologies” akin to that which a scholarly character in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* pursues (Minow-Pinkney 59; MD 20). Matson offers a similar reading of this scene (164-65). Alternatively, Abbott argues that the ability of the characters—excepting Septimus—to recognize that the letters spell a brand name indicates that these characters are “modern consumers” who “are fully versed in product names” (202).

<sup>48</sup>Steinberg argues that Septimus’s habit of writing in seemingly unrelated fragments resembles is possibly based on T. S. Eliot’s method in *The Waste Land*—“These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (*Complete Poems and Plays* 75)—which Eliot read to the Woolfs just before Virginia began writing *Mrs. Dalloway* and which the Woolfs published at the Hogarth Press (12, 5-6). Steinberg contends that Woolf at least partially based the character of Septimus on Eliot, since both worked as clerks and were poets, mourned the losses of close friends who died in the First World War, and married rather suddenly and apparently lovelessly (9-12). Further, he finds echoes of Eliot’s poetry—particularly *The Waste Land*—in Woolf’s novel. For example, he suggests that Woolf’s scapegoat motif resembles Eliot’s use of the myth of the Fisher King (15). Ruotolo also refers briefly to Septimus as a character who resembles the figures who move “through the unreal streets of London” in *The Waste Land* (104). See also Paul (140) and Gilbert and Gubar (*No Man’s Land* 2:315-18).

criticizes the government for an ill-conceived and wasteful war. In “The Prime Minister,”<sup>49</sup> Septimus blatantly criticizes the purpose and results of the war: “Now was Europe free! Mrs. Lewis and Robertson Ellis might tear up their photographs of decaying bodies and mad children” (CSF 321). He then translates this discontent into a desire not only to kill himself, but also to attack the government for its role in the war and the subsequent devastation of Europe: “He would kill himself. He would give his body to the starving Austrians. First he would kill the Prime Minister and J. Ellis Robertson. My name will be on all the placards, he thought. He could do anything, for he was now beyond the law” (322). But all that remains in the later version of this passage consisting of Septimus’s political criticisms, dreams of assassination and self-sacrifice, and envisioning of himself as a Nietzschean *Übermensch* are vaguer expressions that some “horror” sits in the Prime Minister’s car, that he alone can “block the way” of the destructive flames he sees arising there, the vow that he “would not go mad,” and a desire to “tell the Prime Minister . . . the meaning of the world” (MD 15, 22, 148). Suzette Henke argues that Woolf’s revisions make “the political cause of Smith’s suffering” only “implicit” rather than “openly expressed”—alterations, she adds, that make the character more “sympathetic” and his madness more “subjective [and] lyrical” (“The Prime Minister” 135-36). More importantly, through the later version of Septimus, Woolf comments on the postwar English national community’s reliance on a discourse that encourages the forgetting of the recent war, resulting in veterans like Septimus’s experiencing its effects only in a fragmentary and often

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<sup>49</sup>This story, unpublished in Woolf’s lifetime, is now collected in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. See the introductory note to “The Prime Minister” in Appendix B of *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* for Susan Dick’s description of Woolf’s composition of the story (316-17). Steinberg also comments on Woolf’s development of Septimus’s character (18-20).

incomprehensible manner, since the national community will not allow them to express their devastation. Septimus's combat experience has made him unable to "grasp . . . things in their totality," to comprehend the meaning of individual symbols and other signs within a broader system of signification, which Lacan cites as integral to communication (126). Due to the war, Septimus is estranged from "the world of things" created by the "world of words" (Lacan 65).

This alienation culminates in Septimus's suicide. Most critics regard this suicide as Septimus's final defiant act, a rebellion against "the lawgivers" Holmes and Bradshaw.<sup>50</sup> But what this act and those leading up to it constitute are this troubled, alienated veteran's last, desperate attempts to join a community, whether national or otherwise. The narrator begins the description of the final moments in Septimus's life by emphasizing the latter's isolation from not just the national community, but humanity as a whole: sitting in his home with his wife, he is cognizant of the trees outside that "dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air" and the "sound of water" through which he hears "the voices of birds singing," perhaps those same birds who had earlier sung to him in Greece (139, 24). Feeling isolated, even in a flat in London and while sitting near his wife, Septimus senses that he is "floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away"; this vision leads him to take comfort in the thought of death, the ultimate means of separation, as expressed in a line taken from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in which Imogen's brothers assuage their grief for their sister, believed dead, by encouraging themselves to "fear [death] no more," for "all must . . . come to dust" and thus leave "home" and "the tyrant's stroke" (MD 139; Shakespeare,

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<sup>50</sup>See, for example, Carroll (110).

*Cymbeline* 5.2.258-81).<sup>51</sup> By juxtaposing frightening references to “dogs” who threaten England and Septimus with pastoral imagery and Shakespeare’s poetic descriptions of profound emotion which typify that idealized England for which the former fought, Woolf highlights the unreconcilable gap between this troubled character’s dueling perceptions of the nation. Due to this discrepancy, Septimus senses that the national community has not only rejected him, but further, wishes to destroy him, for “once you fall . . . human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and thumbscrews are applied. Human nature is remorseless” (98). In his final moments, Septimus longs to escape this relentless “human nature,” embodied in the “lawgivers” of the England, through death and into a union with “Nature,” who signals him with a “gold spot which went round the wall” and who is “standing close up to breathe through her hallowed hands Shakespeare’s words, her meaning” (139-40).

Immediately following this fatalistic resignation, however, Septimus is drawn to the national community, ironically, as represented to him by the sight of his Italian-born wife Lucrezia sitting nearby and fashioning a hat while chatting about the lives of their neighbors.<sup>52</sup> This sight leads him to insist that “he must be cautious” and that “he would not go mad” and “fall

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<sup>51</sup>For evaluations of Woolf’s uses of these lines from *Cymbeline*, see especially Kelley (104-06) and Schlack, *Continuing Presences* (64-66); see also J. Hillis Miller (71), DiBattista (56), Spilka (56), Jensen (171-72), Ruotolo (96), Minow-Pinkney (63, 68), Tylee, *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness* (156-57), Phillips (21-22), Monte (612-13), and Froula, “Mrs. Dalloway’s Postwar Elegy” (135-36).

<sup>52</sup>Usai comments extensively on Lucrezia’s precarious position in the English national community, since she is a foreigner. As a native Italian speaker, she cannot communicate well in English, and while she gained British citizenship by marrying an Englishman, her husband’s death “confront[s] her with the difficulty of returning to Italy, which was already under Mussolini’s fascist control” (157-58). Early in the novel, Lucrezia complains about her alienation both from her husband and the English national community, lamenting that she is “solitary,” “suffer[ing]” and “without friends in England” (23, 16). And as Woolf would later state in *Three Guineas*, Englishwomen are “step-daughters, not full daughters, of England” because an Englishwoman, even if “she helped . . . beat the Germans,” will become “a German if she marries a German” (148-49 n. 12).



. . . down, down, down in the flames”: chafing in his role as the scapegoat, he laments, “Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her dress and Mr. Peters was in Hull?” (141-43). But in an earlier draft of this passage, Woolf suggests that even here, Septimus is more attuned with natural world rather than the human one, for he likens the comfort he takes from Rezia’s actions and conversation to entering “a pocket of warm air, one of those recesses, or sanctuaries, hollowed in the heart of the woods” (TH 298). In the published novel, Septimus’s dream of rejoining the productive world of the national community is soon obliterated by the realization that the language of that community is a discourse that excludes him. When the granddaughter of his landlady appears at the door, bearing the evening newspaper—one of those mediums of the national culture—Lucrezia coos at the child, gives her sweets, and plays a “game” in which she repeats phrases from the newspaper: “Surrey was out. . . . There was a heat wave.” But as Septimus listens, “the sounds of the game became fainter and stranger and sounded like the cries of people seeking and not finding, and passing further and further away. They had lost him!” (144-45). Much as when another character’s voicing of the skywritten advertisement was reduced to nothing more than nonsensical, if beautiful, sounds in Septimus’s consciousness, the sentences Lucrezia repeats from the newspaper become unmoored from language’s process of signification, making Septimus acutely aware that “no signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification,” as Lacan states (150), and that language is ultimately a “game” in which the speaking subject is “seeking and not finding” in a discourse in which Septimus is “lost.” Feeling thus removed from the language of the nation as exemplified in the

newspaper,<sup>53</sup> Septimus “start[s] up in terror” and attempts feebly to ground himself by concentrating on tangible objects that represent the national culture—such as “the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort”; but he realizes he is “alone forever,” and has been so since he left Milan five years earlier at the end of the war: “He was alone with the sideboard and the bananas. He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out—but not on a hill-top; not on a crag; [but] on Mrs. Filmer’s sitting-room sofa” (142, 145). Abandoned and isolated from the English community, he looks for the only community he believes he can still join—that of “the voices of the dead” which have terrified him throughout the novel, and he cries out for Evans, who he believes hides just out of sight, behind “the screen, the coal-scuttle [or] the sideboard” or who “sing[s] behind rhododendron bushes” (145, 147).

Estranged from England, Septimus commits his final act. Hearing Holmes, one of those “judges” who “saw nothing clearly, yet ruled, yet inflicted,” enter his building and realizing that “Holmes would get him,”<sup>54</sup> Septimus considers various means of suicide, including using razors, but “Rezia . . . had packed them,” and “Mrs. Filmer’s nice clean bread knife with ‘Bread’ carved on the handle,” “but one musn’t spoil that” (149). Even in this last, desperate moment, Septimus wishes not to pollute the language discourse with his blood. He finally settles upon the window, to which—as the narrator indicates in another version of this passage—“the joint hands of Holmes & Bradshaw pointed” (MD 149; TH 317). However, Septimus approaches the window only reluctantly, resisting “the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window

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<sup>53</sup>In an earlier, much abbreviated version of this passage, the narrator reveals that “lately [Lucrezia] had not given [Septimus] the paper” (TH 299): if newspapers and the reading of them perpetuate the national culture, as Said and Anderson argue, then Septimus has been kept out of that culture.

<sup>54</sup>Septimus in a sentence stricken from an earlier draft indicates even more clearly his sense that Holmes is hunting him: “The hounds were on him” (TH 316).

and throwing himself out”: aware that this method constitutes Holmes and Bradshaw’s “idea of tragedy,” he hesitates before he “flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings” until the last moment, when Holmes appears in the doorway (MD 149).

As he jumps, Septimus yells, “‘I’ll give it you!’” (MD 149)—a declaration that expresses his final rejection of the national community and his turning instead to the natural world and the world of the dead. Janis Paul argues that this statement indicates his attempt to communicate with the other members of the English national community through his “gift” of death (141-42), and Deborah Guth interprets it as “I’ll just show you” or “I’ll give it [to] you,” with “it” referring to the “melodrama” that Septimus believes the doctors will enjoy (“Rituals of Self-Deception” 37).<sup>55</sup> But Guth’s and Paul’s readings are more clearly supported by an earlier draft of the scene, where Woolf has Septimus refer to his suicide as “‘an offering’” that he undertakes with “the belief that he was giving up to humanity what it asked of him” (TH 317). However, the removal of these lines and the substitution of the vaguer declaration “‘I’ll give it you!’”—as James Naremore points out, added only in the final page proofs of the novel (108)—suggests that this “it” may refer to the life Septimus sees himself giving to that natural, inhuman world that lies outside the system of linguistic signification. With his final thoughts that “life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want,” Septimus rejects not only “human nature,” but also, more specifically, the English national community. He embraces instead the world of “Nature,” “brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare’s words, her meaning” to “fear not the heat of the sun” and death (MD 149, 140).

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<sup>55</sup>See also Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man’s Land* (3:25) and Froula, “*Mrs. Dalloway’s* Postwar Elegy” (150).

Tylee recognizes in Septimus's final act of throwing "himself vigorously, violently" from his London flat's window an act of "defiance" against "the idea of duty" and a means to grab "the only freedom left him" (*The Great War and Women's Consciousness* 164); but Septimus's choice of death stems less from a desire for freedom and rebellion, and more from a desire for membership in a community, any community, even if only that which nature and death seem to offer, since the national community has rejected him due to his combat experience.

After his death, it is only Lucrezia among the characters in the apartment building who realizes that her husband is a belated war casualty: "She had once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she stayed with her aunt in Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War." In contrast, Holmes in his epitaph deems Septimus merely a "coward" (MD 149-50). As he explains to Mrs. Filmer, "no one was in the least to blame" for the death (150); but as Woolf's delineation of this character makes clear, this his alienation from the national community, a detachment which precipitates his suicide, is deeply rooted in his war experience and England's reaction to that war. It is through the novel's protagonist's envisioning of England and her one-sided union with Septimus that he is brought back into the national community—but only through a fundamental misunderstanding of this troubled veteran and the devastations wrought by the First World War.

"If only they could be brought together": Clarissa Dalloway's National Community

As Zwerdling comments, "Clarissa has troubled readers from the first" (138). While some critics praise her as "unself-consciously anti-authoritarian" and as an emblem of "beauty and joy" who "loves . . . life" and "preserves this attitude in the face of war, death, sickness, age, and the limiting demands of her own personal ego" (Matson 178-79; Edwards 177, 172), others

damn her as “a trivial woman who represents a dying age” (Ouditt 189). This critical disagreement reflects Woolf’s own ambivalence about this character. Woolf found Clarissa “too glittery, too stiff & tinselly,” but compensated for these faults by “invent[ing] her memories,” “dig[ging] out beautiful caves behind” her through her “tunnelling process” that acted as a means to “tell the past by instalments”; nevertheless, for Woolf, “some distaste for [Clarissa] persisted (D 2:272, 263, 3:32).<sup>56</sup> Like Woolf, the more recent reader Janis Paul finds Clarissa’s character both distasteful and admirable. She exonerates this heroine ultimately by declaring, “If Clarissa Dalloway is less than she might be, that is because her world is less than it should be: it, too, is shallow, conventional, and withholding, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is about that world as much as it is about Clarissa” (133). That is, according to Paul, Woolf chastises Clarissa for being “shallow” and “conventional” only to the extent that the England in which she lives holds these qualities. Clarissa is merely the “shallow” and “conventional” product of a “shallow” and “conventional” society.<sup>57</sup>

However, Woolf presents this character not simply as an innocent, passive product of England’s social system but as an active participant in it: Clarissa helps perpetuate that world which Paul correctly sees the novel as criticizing. To some, Clarissa appears “anti-authoritarian” especially when compared with such authoritative characters as Sir William Bradshaw, Richard

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<sup>56</sup>Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* employs a similar artistic approach when she completes her painting in the novel’s third section by “tunnelling her way . . . into the past” (173).

<sup>57</sup>For other laudatory readings of Clarissa, see Naremore, Henke, “*Mrs. Dalloway*” (128 *passim*), DiBattista (63), Ruotolo (99 *passim*), Minow-Pinkney, Wyatt (121), Littleton (36 *passim*), and Low (98 *passim*). For other scathing interpretations, see Moody (67-69), Jane Novak (125), Phillips (3, 7), Tate (147-70), and Rosenfeld, “Links into Fences” (141, 154). Marder in “Split Perspective: Types of Incongruity in *Mrs. Dalloway*” offers a useful summary of the various critical responses to Clarissa’s character. He divides these critics between those who more positively regard her as “an existential heroine,” and what he calls “the realists” who deem “Woolf’s portrait of a lady . . . a study in social decadence,” one that “typifies superficiality of the British upper classes” in a predominantly satirical presentation (51-52).

Dalloway, and Lady Bruton; however, it is Clarissa Dalloway who most actively creates or imagines a postwar English culture. Her exuberant love of England leads her to elide the devastating effects of World War I, embodied in the novel with the troubled figure of Septimus Warren Smith, not by marginalizing and thereby eradicating them—as Bradshaw, Lady Bruton, and politicians like her husband wish to do—but instead by absorbing them into a reconstructed and stronger English community. In *Modernism, History, and the First World War*, Trudi Tate convincingly interprets Woolf’s presentation of Clarissa as a critique of the privileged, sheltered society woman’s inability or refusal to understand those sufferings in and outside England for which that nation and the British Empire are culpable. I would add that Woolf delineates Clarissa’s method of rebuilding the English national community after the war as one that can be accomplished only through a willful misunderstanding of the effects of the war upon its victims and through a mistranslation of those effects into a language of “sacrifice.” This envisioning of a new England centers largely upon Septimus and, by extension, others who were most profoundly affected by the war.

As various critics have noted, Woolf endows these two characters—divided by class, gender, and war experience—with many shared traits.<sup>58</sup> Most significantly, both Septimus and Clarissa recognize an “emptiness” in the world: the former suspects that “the world itself is without meaning,” and the latter admits privately that “the heart of life” consists of “a hollowness” or “an emptiness” (88, 174, 31). Despite these similarities, Woolf envisioned *Mrs. Dalloway* as a novel that would delineate through the pairing of Clarissa and Septimus “the

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<sup>58</sup>See Kelley (107), Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (112-13), and Bradshaw, “Introduction” (xxxiv-xxxvi) on Septimus and Clarissa’s shared characteristics.

world seen by the sane & insane side by side” (D 2:207).<sup>59</sup> Hence, although both regard the world as ultimately “empty” and “without meaning,” it is these characters’ divergent responses to their common acknowledgment of this meaninglessness that render one “sane” and the other “insane.”

Using different terminology, Benedict Anderson, like Woolf’s characters, suggests that “all communities . . . are imagined” and thus at their core “without meaning.” That is, communities (national and otherwise) exist only through the complicity of their members who continually and actively create them by participating in their rituals and upholding their symbols in order to sense “a deep, horizontal comradeship” that constitutes the community, national or otherwise, itself (6-7). Clarissa, like Septimus, is at times acutely aware of this national fictionality. She hosts parties, which she sees as her “gift,” her “offering for the sake of offering,” because she believes that most people’s lives consist primarily of “waste,” “so she brings them together”; she becomes a “centre,” a “diamond,” “a meeting-point, a radiancy . . . in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to,” and by “combin[ing]” these “lonely” people, she “create[s]” a sense of “deep . . . comradeship” among them: “if only they could be brought together,” Clarissa believes, then these people could forget momentarily that their lives consist of nothing but “waste” (122, 37). Whereas Septimus’s view of the world generally and England more specifically as “without meaning” leads to his fixation on “human nature” as consisting of nothing but brutality, disguised by “lies,” Clarissa’s comparable glimpse of the “hollowness” and

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<sup>59</sup>Similarly, in her notes for the novel, Woolf explains, “Suppose it is to be connected this way: Sanity & insanity. Mrs. D[alloway] seeing the truth. S[eptimus] S[mith] seeing the insane truth” (TH 153). Also, in a letter written shortly after the novel’s publication, she explains, “I certainly did mean . . . that Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway should be entirely dependent upon each other” (L 3:189).

“emptiness about the heart of life” results in her desire to manufacture a community (122, 174). And it is this impulse to create a community that lies at the base of a nation, as the later historian Ernest Gellner would argue (*Thought and Change* 169).

Even other characters acknowledge the unifying power of Clarissa’s parties. As Peter Walsh walks through London’s streets to the Dalloways’ house, the “rushing” cabs seem “drawn together . . . because they bore people going to her party, Clarissa’s party” (164). Her parties create the English national community in miniature form—or, at least, a particular version of this community. The party that Clarissa hosts on that June day in which the novel is set “brings . . . together” lords and ladies; courtiers and politicians; professors and a token poet—although “a bad” one; even Mrs. Hilbery from Woolf’s 1919 novel *Night and Day* and Clarissa’s ancient aunt Helena Parry, who “belonged to a different age” and whom Peter had believed dead; the Prime Minister; and many of the characters glimpsed throughout the earlier portions of the novel—such as Richard, Elizabeth Peter, Bradshaw and his wife, Hugh Whitbread, Sally Seton, and Lady Bruton, but excepting Septimus, Lucrezia, and Doris Kilman (162, 165-83). These exclusions also hint at the flaws in this hostess’s envisioning of the national community.

Clarissa’s sense of her membership in the nation goes beyond her parties. While Septimus yearns to be “away from people” and senses a connection between the “millions of fibres [of] his own body” with the inanimate world of leaves and trees, Clarissa experiences “odd affinities . . . with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter”—“affinities” that lead her to conclude that some “unseen part of us” that is “attached to this person or that” will survive after death (25, 22, 153). Clarissa, unlike Septimus, holds a stalwart belief in the viability and longevity of the national community. As Woolf presents it,



Clarissa's identity depends upon her relations with other characters: she titled the novel not after her heroine's Christian name, but rather her married one. Additionally, Clarissa cites "her only gift" as one for "knowing people almost by instinct" and her greatest desire, "that people should look pleased as she came in" a room (9-10), and throughout the novel, she frets frequently over Peter Walsh's opinion of her (see, for example, 7, 36, 44, 121-22, 168, 174), as well as Lady Bruton's presumed slight in inviting Richard, but not her, to lunch, since "her lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing" (31; see also 30, 37, 47).

Clarissa demonstrates repeatedly her ability and willingness to create and perpetuate the English nation both by upholding its supposedly transcendent symbols and by "creating" it "every moment afresh." Indeed, for Clarissa, these two aspects of the national community are linked inextricably. In the novel's second section, the narrator dwells briefly on Clarissa as the character exits the flower shop and spies the mysterious grey car with its occupant of "the greatest importance"—indicated, as the latter notes, by the presence of a "magical . . . disc . . . inscribed with a name" in the footman's hand (14, 17). Clarissa assumes the personage to be the Queen, on an errand to "open some bazaar": in a series of metonymic associations, Clarissa envisions the Queen as a symbol of England particularly through her role as a hostess, picturing her "blaz[ing] among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak leaves, Hugh Whitbread and all his colleagues, the gentlemen of England, that night in Buckingham Palace" (17). In the presence of the car, Clarissa assumes immediately "a look of extreme dignity" because she recognizes the Queen presumed to occupy it as a synchronic, "enduring symbol of the state," associated with Buckingham Palace and British military victories; more diachronically, she realizes that she, too, will give a party and that she occupies the same

“glittering” world as the Queen (16-17). Hence, for Clarissa, the symbols within national discourse attain their significance due to their position both in what Bhabha calls the “timeless,” synchronic time of the nation—the Queen as an “enduring symbol of the state”—and through what Anderson calls their diachronic “simultaneity”—the sense Clarissa has of both she and the Queen functioning as hostesses who “bring together” the disparate members of the nation and thus create the English nation “afresh.”

While Clarissa is less assured than her husband that “Acts of Parliament” can “deal with” “the veriest frumps, the most dejected miseries” who “drink their downfall” and sit “on doorsteps,” she “love[s]” nonetheless what is “here, now, in front of her” as she walks the city streets and revels “in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead . . . life; London; this moment in June” (9, 4). At moments, Clarissa embraces fully her English national identity: for example, as she walks along Bond Street, she is comforted by the thought of “messages . . . passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty” and experiences “the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown,” a part of the “astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them” through London as “Mrs. Dalloway, not even Clarissa any more,” as “Mrs. Richard Dalloway,” the wife of a Conservative Member of Parliament and therefore one whose identity depends upon her relationship to the English nation (7, 10-11). Unlike Septimus, Clarissa appears well versed in the symbolic language of the nation.

DiBattista argues that throughout the novel, Clarissa recognizes that “community and social order” are based on “illusion” and that she is consequently “plagued by the knowledge,

never completely redeemed, that the power of social illusion is closely allied to delusion” (44). Nevertheless, Clarissa expresses repeatedly her need for illusion—for example, when she decides she likes Hugh Whitbread because he always “assur[es] her,” a middle-aged housewife, “that she might be a girl of eighteen” (MD 6). Further, throughout the novel, she displays her willingness and ability to embrace the “illusion” (or delusion) upon which the integrity of the national community depends in a manner that is virtually religious. Metaphorically, Clarissa’s world is a religious one: the narrator employs religious language to describe her as she enters her house after her morning errands. Immediately following her description of St. Paul’s Cathedral as a “symbol” that “martyrs have died for” and “of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together,” the narrator shifts her gaze to Clarissa, who enters the Dalloways’ house, “cool as a vault,” “like a nun withdrawing . . .” and “like a nun who has left the world and feels round her the familiar veils and the response to odd devotions” and who is attended by a maid that treats her like a goddess (28-31). But Clarissa’s realm is more than symbolically religious. Despite Peter Walsh’s characterization of her as “a thorough-going skeptic,” her own assertion that she does not believe in God, and her antipathy toward Doris Kilman’s “detestable . . . religion,” Clarissa displays a zealous faith—what Christine Froula calls her “atheist’s religion”—in the national community (MD 77, 126; Froula, “*Mrs. Dalloway’s* Postwar Elegy 138). Feeling “blessed” by the benefits of her comfortable life, she believes she must “repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it—of the gay sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling. . . . [She] must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments” (MD 29).<sup>60</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>60</sup>Ruotolo also points out the connotations of religious worship in this statement (110).

as Henke argues, the narrator's description of Clarissa's party is "analogous to the Catholic offering of the Mass" ("*Mrs. Dalloway*" 126-27, 141-44).

Clarissa's pseudo-religious sense of a community is one that Benedict Anderson argues lies at the roots of a nationalist discourse. In *Imagined Communities*, he points to the "ebbing of religious belief" beginning in eighteenth-century Europe, a decline that left Europeans viewing their world as "arbitrary," without meaning; however, "the dusk of religious modes of thought" coincided with the rise of modern nationalism, which acted as "a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" by offering subjects membership in a community that, much like a religious one, included the living, the dead, and future generations, for even if "nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and . . . glide into a limitless future" as they are imagined (11-12).<sup>61</sup> Embracing her secular, humanist philosophy, Clarissa takes comfort in "the ebb and flow of things," evident "in the streets of London," where she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there [at Bourton], ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of the people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between people she knew best, who lifted their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (9)

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<sup>61</sup>See also Stone, who argues that the burgeoning, modern national government in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England "laid claim to those loyalties" formerly the property of the Catholic Church. Fueled by the rise of Protestantism, the destruction of "the social and psychological supports upon which both the community and the individual had depended for comfort and to give symbolic meaning to their existence," thereby "enormously strengthened . . . the rise of the authoritarian, all-embracing, inquisitorial, all-demanding nation state" (139-40).

This belief in a “mist” that connects herself not only with “the people she knew best,” but also with those whom “she had never met,” endows Clarissa’s sense of community with a religious importance and suggests a confidence in that community that resembles a spiritual faith.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, this envisaging of herself in the midst of this imagined community points to her creation of an identity through her relationships with others in a national community that includes those who live in England’s present, as well as its past, as signified here through the reference to Bourton. However, the use of the rhetorical phrase “she was positive” implies that Clarissa manufactures knowingly this belief in an imagined community, that she must assure herself of her faith in an illusory or delusional community.

Hence, Clarissa’s envisioning of England includes those who inhabit the nation’s future, in addition to its past and present. Further, the comfort gleaned from a focus on “the ebb and flow of things” and faith in a uniting, even if not literal, “mist” differentiates Clarissa’s reaction to the First World War from those of politicians like her husband and doctors like Sir William Bradshaw, or the alienated war veteran Septimus Warren Smith. Unlike these characters, Clarissa translates the devastations of the recent war into a discourse of sacrifice that symbolically unites the community. In “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street,” Clarissa thinks of the “thousands of young men [who] had died [so] that things might go on” (CSF 158-59). Whereas Richard and Bradshaw wish to “half forget” or eradicate the devastating effects of the war, in the published novel, Clarissa tells herself that misery and joy in England vacillate cyclically and that

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<sup>62</sup>In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay perceives similarly a metaphorical “mist” that connects all (63-64). Further, in this novel, Lily Briscoe seeks a sense of immortality through art: although cognizant of how ‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘she’ pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes,” she believes that this “change” does not affect “words” and “paint”; hence, while her painting may be “hung in attics” or “rolled up and flung under a sofa . . . [o]ne might say, even of this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it ‘remained for ever’ . . .” (179).

many survive and thrive, despite the sufferings and deaths of others. Later historians like Hynes and Fussell, early-twentieth-century ones like Masterman and H. G. Wells, and the narrator in Woolf's next novel *To the Lighthouse* saw postwar England as "fallen." But Clarissa Dalloway sees England as existing in a "late age" in which "the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears," "tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and historical bearing" (9-10). In an earlier version of this sentence, Clarissa overtly cites the causes of these "tears and sorrow" as "deaths" (TH 266)—a more direct reference to the human losses from World War I. This mention of "deaths" in connection to her own "tears and sorrows" enables Clarissa to share more directly in the sufferings experienced by combatants and their families—a connection that she will develop in her imaginative, one-sided union with Septimus Smith at the novel's climax. Similarly, Clarissa later envisions the sufferings of the world accumulating and then receding in waves: "So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall" (MD 39). Like that of the phrase "she was positive," Woolf's use of an epic simile here draws attention to the conscious artificiality of this vision of the world. In *The Voyage Out*, the prewar Clarissa is comforted by the sight of warships that assure her of Britain's strength, even when she is geographically isolated from her homeland (VO 60); in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the postwar Clarissa asserts a belief that England will be strengthened by the recent war, the sufferings and losses caused by which will render the nation stronger and more mature.

This discourse of sacrifice, of "courage and endurance," gleaned from "tears and sorrows," resembles the "language of remembrance" that characterizes British World War I memorials. As the historian Bob Bushaway notes, these memorials drew heavily on "the notion

of sacrifice” rather than “those of duty and patriotism as a justification for British losses in the war” (160-61).<sup>63</sup> For example, the inscription on the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, unveiled concurrently with the Cenotaph on Armistice Day, 1920, and passed by Doris Kilman en route to her church (MD 133), typifies this language of sacrifice. This memorial commemorates “the many multitudes who during the Great War of 1914-1918 gave the most that man can give[:] life itself for God[,] for king and country[,] for loved ones home and empire[,] for the sacred cause of justice and the freedom of the world” (Ryle). As this dedication suggests, the purpose of the memorial was to inculcate in British subjects the belief that these soldiers willingly sacrificed their lives in order to strengthen England and the British Empire, and they should be remembered as such. Similarly, according to Clarissa, the national community should not forget, ignore, or remove the marks of this painful experience—as Richard, Bradshaw, and Lady Bruton recommend—but instead recall the glorious “sacrifice” that justifies these losses. Additionally, whereas Septimus’s war experience has led him to view himself as England’s literal protector and scapegoat and whose view of human nature as selfish and brutal has led to his isolation from his fellow countrymen and -women, Clarissa envisions a community held together “*like a mist*”: the English national community is, as Anderson would later assert, *imagined*, for the uniting mist is not a literal, physical one, but it nevertheless binds a community through symbolic means. Hence, even if Clarissa shares with Septimus a recognition of “an emptiness about the heart of life,” she can assert a belief in a national community, strengthened by its unity in common loss and tragedy—a faith that Septimus no longer possesses.

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<sup>63</sup>For a different view of memorials commemorating the First World War, see Winter (5).

However, in conflict with this desire to view England in this “late age” not as fallen, but fortified by its losses, Clarissa is haunted during the day on which the action of the novel occurs by memories of her bygone, idealized youth. Even her parties, meant to create a “radiancy” and “deep comradeship,” “satisfied her no longer as they used to”—a situation she attributes to her “growing old” (174). When ordered by Richard to rest for an hour, Clarissa admits privately that she is “desperately unhappy” (120). This “unpleasant feeling” or “depression” stems partially from her sense that both Richard and Peter are “criticis[ing] her very unfairly, laugh[ing] at her unjustly, for her parties” (121), but also from her anxiety over the thought that her current role as a politician’s wife and a society hostess pales in comparison with her early life at Bourton, her family’s rural ancestral home.<sup>64</sup> As she converses with Peter, she pictures herself as a child, standing “between her parents,” and simultaneously as “a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said, ‘This is what I made of it! This!’”—a vision that leads her to question, “And what had she made of it? What, indeed?” (43). Similarly, when Peter arrives unexpectedly on the morning of her party, his appearance poignantly reminds her how her life may have differed, had she married him instead of Richard: “it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with

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<sup>64</sup>Minow-Pinkney points out that Woolf characterizes Bourton with nature imagery, which suggests its Edenic associations in Clarissa’s memory (57).



Peter, and it was now over” (47). Clarissa senses regretfully that her adult life has not lived up to the potential promised in her girlhood.<sup>65</sup>

Clarissa’s recollection of her idealized past emphasizes that the intensity of her youth had to be renounced in order to allow her to undertake an adult role in the national community—as painful as that sacrifice may have been and still is. Woolf implies the national community’s demand for this sacrifice when she has her heroine concede that while young, she could act with “a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything [and] do anything,” but then she realized that these “qualit[ies]” are ones “much commoner in foreigners than in Englishwomen” (33). Clarissa’s fond memories of this life of “abandonment” center predominantly not only on Bourton, but on her relationship with Sally Seton, with whom the former decides she must have been “in love,” a “love” that was “not like one’s feelings for a man” and defined by its “purity” and “integrity”—and perhaps one akin to the “feeling that one used to have” which Woolf would later find expressed in the great Victorian poetry of Tennyson and Rossetti (MD 34-35; AR 14).

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<sup>65</sup>Hermione Lee argues that *Mrs. Dalloway* establishes “an ironic dichotomy between youthful aspirations and middle-aged resignation” (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 105)—as seen here with Clarissa’s comparison of her current life with that of her girlhood. Lee finds this dichotomy most “startlingly” demonstrated with the appearance at the party of Sally Seton, who is “no wild thing (as we have continually imagined her) but a complacent Mancunian housewife,” or, as Clarissa explains, she “used to think [Sally’s life] would end in some awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom; instead of which she had married, quite unexpectedly, a bald man with a large buttonhole who owned, it was said, cotton mills at Manchester. And she had five boys!” (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 105; MD 182; see also Schlack, *Continuing Presences* 56 and Froula, “*Mrs. Dalloway’s* Postwar Elegy” 155-56). Similarly, Peter Walsh fondly recalls that he as a young man had been a Socialist, but one who “failed,” since he never helped fashion the utopian society he had idealistically envisioned (50). Woolf also intimates that Richard’s present, postwar life has not fulfilled its prewar potential. Peter recalls that when he first met Richard at Bourton, the latter may have lacked “brilliance” and “imagination,” but he possessed the “inexplicable niceness of his type” and moreover “ought to have been a country gentleman,” since “he was at his best out of doors” and “would have been happier farming in Norfolk,” rather than “wast[ing]” himself “on politics” (74-75, 77). Indeed, later in the novel, Richard wistfully thinks of haymakers in Norfolk who move “trembling globes of cow parsley” beneath “the blazing summer sky” as he traverses the busy London streets (113)—a moment in the novel that invokes those idyllic pastoral images of England so prevalent in the national imagination and that recalls the comparable lines of longing for such an England seen in, for example, Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village,” William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” and William Butler Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.”

She characterizes this love by equating it with that of Shakespeare's Othello at seeing his beloved Desdemona after an extended absence: "If it were now to die / 'Twere now to be most happy" (2.1.189-90; qtd. in MD 35). Clarissa's recollection of this declaration suggests that she believes her own emotions were experienced most fully during this summer in her youth and declined thereafter—just as Othello's "happy" love for his wife deteriorates into a jealous, murderous rage through the remainder of Shakespeare's play. For Clarissa, this "pure" love culminated in "the most exquisite moment in her whole life" when "Sally . . . kissed her on the lips"—a moment she holds in her mind now like "a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up" and the "radiance" of which "burn[s]" with a "religious feeling" (35-36).<sup>66</sup>

But, unable to experience such intense emotions now, Clarissa knows she has become a "cold spirit" in whom "something central . . . something warm" is "lack[ing]"—a realization that leads her to decide that "there was an emptiness about the heart of life" (31). Although she can "remember going cold with excitement" and "ecstasy" in the prewar past, Clarissa cannot "even get an echo of her old emotion" in the postwar present (34). As Peter recalls, this "coldness" or "hardness," which he still finds manifest in the present-day Clarissa, first appeared when she rejected both him and Sally for the more conventional Richard Dalloway, after which, when Peter spoke to her, "he felt that he was grinding against something physically hard; she was unyielding. She was like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone" (49, 60-61, 64). This "woodenness," then, appeared as a consequence of Clarissa's acceptance of a marital role in the English nation. Moreover, Clarissa recalls her youthful idealism that she held during this period:

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<sup>66</sup>See Jensen (163-66) and Kelly (103) for a discussion of Clarissa's homosexuality, as displayed in this scene. DuPlessis argues that Clarissa's passion for Sally and lack thereof for Richard indicate that the novel "displaces heterosexual love from the narrative center" (57).

she and Sally read avidly but secretly the utopian writings of William Morris, “meant to found a society to abolish private property,” “spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe,” and “did the most idiotic things out of bravado,” such as “smok[ing] cigars” (33-34). That is, as Englishwomen, they rebelled against the national patriarchal culture that strove to keep them out of the Oxbridge library and those other excluding, dominant institutions and practices that Woolf criticizes in *A Room of One’s Own*, *Three Guineas*, and “The Leaning Tower,” as I argue in my Introduction and first chapter. But now Clarissa recognizes herself as merely the aging wife of a moderately successful Member of Parliament and one who, in an admittedly “base” manner, frets jealously over Lady Bruton’s presumed slight to her in “not asking her to lunch” (37). The privileged position Clarissa grants to the recollections of her idealistic and passionate youth establishes, as Hynes argues, a dichotomy between an Edenic “world-before-the-war” and a decrepit “world after”—a contrast that threatens to undermine her attempt to envision postwar England not as fallen, but redeemed by the discourse of the “tears and sorrow” of wartime sacrifices.

The heroine’s attempt to create a unified postwar English culture is thwarted further by her refusal to include in this community those members she finds distasteful—in a manner that resembles Sir William Bradshaw’s, Lady Bruton’s, and Richard’s wish to expunge undesirable elements. Much like her husband’s antipathy toward the female vagrant he sees in Piccadilly, Clarissa’s exclusions evince a class bias. Despite her claim that her parties allow her to “combine” all the “lonely” people, she concedes only reluctantly and at others’ suggestions to invite her cousin, the dowdy and unmarried Ellie Henderson, whom she regards as “dull,” and “why should she invite all the dull women in London to her parties?” (117-19). Although they

are cousins, Clarissa and Ellie, as the narrator makes clear, move in different social circles: while the much “sought after” Clarissa glitters among lords and ladies, Members of Parliament and Prime Ministers, Ellie lives a life of “self-abnegation,” in a “weaponless state” with her meager “three hundred pounds’ income” (significantly short of the five-hundred-pound one Woolf later promotes in *A Room of One’s Own*), which leaves her “timid, and more and more disqualified year by year to meet well-dressed people who did this sort of thing”—that is, gathered at lavish parties—“every night of the season” (168-69). Virtually ignored and ostracized at the Dalloways’ party, Ellie nevertheless admires pathetically the “interesting people; politicians, presumably,” and it is Richard, not Clarissa, whose pity leads him to speak to her, for “he could not let the poor creature go on standing there all the evening by herself” (169). Apparently, while Clarissa can feel “odd affinities . . . with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns,” these “affinities” do not extend to those like Ellie Henderson, whose inability “to hold themselves upright” causes the hostess to fret that her party is a “complete failure” (153, 167-68). Just as Sir William Bradshaw’s vision of England excludes the “disproportionate” philosophy of Septimus Warren Smith, Clarissa’s hope that her parties will create “a refuge for the lonely to come to,” ironically and rather cruelly ignores the disenfranchised Ellie Henderson due to her less advantageous economic position.

Clarissa’s impatience with this “dull” character indicates her class-based prejudices, her inability to acknowledge that perhaps Ellie’s obvious discomfort at the society party stems from her lack of pretty, fashionable dresses and inexperience with such dignitaries as can be found in the Dalloways’ parlor. But it is not Clarissa’s failure to like or even pity “the shabbily genteel Ellie Henderson” (Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London* 99) that reveals most baldly the hostess’s

inability or refusal to include particular Englishwomen in her vision of the national imagined community. It is Doris Kilman, her daughter's "seducer; the woman who crept in to steal and defile," who inspires in Clarissa a hatred that "rasped" (MD 12, 175). In relation to the national community, Miss Kilman is an outsider, as she is a highly educated woman and a "radical Quaker feminist," as Masami Usui characterizes her (158-59).<sup>67</sup> Woolf's narrator makes clear that Miss Kilman is a character who has "suffered . . . horribly" because of the war: she has undergone a familial loss, for "her brother had been killed," and she feels "cheated," not just because she is "clumsy" and "poor," but because, after "the War came," she had lost her teaching position at Miss Dolby's school, since she refused to "pretend that the Germans were all villains—when she had German friends, when the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany"—she insisted that "there were people who did not think the English invariably right," and "she could read history" and thus knew that for centuries, Britain and Germany considered each other allies, not enemies (MD 132, 123-24, 130). But as Usui points out, "there was a national and international anti-German movement during the war," and in particular, "the anti-German movement was very strong among the British," resulting in "cruel and inhuman images of German soldiers and even of German women" in propaganda posters, as well as anti-German riots in London (158-59).<sup>68</sup> Sherry reads Miss Kilman's "condensed and bitter vindictiveness" as "the grim warrant and promise for future strife" (288)—that is, the Germans' intense resentment

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<sup>67</sup>As Woolf suggests about Miss Kilman, Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* became "a feminist" as a result of the war: "But the war had drawn the sting of her femininity. Poor devils, one thought, poor devils, of both sexes" (159).

<sup>68</sup>For further discussions of British anti-German propaganda and prejudices both before and during the war, see Eksteins (126, 226), Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (92-93), and Chapter 8, entitled "The Press Gang," in Ferguson.

of the Allied Powers' postwar treatment of them which in part led to the Second World War two and a half decades later.<sup>69</sup> Miss Kilman's sympathies and her Germanic surname—which had been spelt *Kiehlman* in the eighteenth century (MD 123)—have rendered her an outsider in postwar England.

However, in explaining her reasons for disliking Miss Kilman, Clarissa does not directly refer to the German affinities of her daughter's tutor, but instead focuses on how Miss Kilman “had taken her [Clarissa's] daughter from her” (125). To Clarissa, Miss Kilman is “nauseating,” “heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace,” a hideous, “prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare” (117, 125-26). Woolf's presentation of Doris Kilman—both through the novel's protagonist as well as its narrator—lacks empathy, suggesting to some readers that the author's class prejudices influenced the portrayal of this character, whose “grandfather

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<sup>69</sup>Froula develops this reading of Doris Kilman. She argues that this character's resentment of her war-induced status as a “racialized outcast” renders her a “walking allegory” for “the aggressively aggrieved postwar Germany,” while Clarissa in her hatred for and distrust of Miss Kilman, “personifies an England tyrannical in victory and heedless of the political consequences of the international class oppression instituted at Versailles.” Woolf through the conflict of these characters, then, “explores the competition, envy, hatred, and aggression between classes and nations that had already engulfed Europe in war and would slowly rise to a boil again the 1920s and 1930s” (“*Mrs. Dalloway's Postwar Elegy*” 139-40). Woolf also suggests that the First World War will lead directly into the Second in *The Years* when “the guns went on booming and the sirens wail[ing],” even after peace is declared (TY 305). Moreover, after World War II had begun, she expressed this view in her diary. When she met Sigmund Freud, then a German exile, Woolf suggested to him the possibility that the latest war would not have occurred if the Allied Powers had not won the earlier one; however, as she records, “Freud said It would have been worse if you had *not* won the war. I said we often feel guilty—if we had failed, perhaps Hitler would have not been. No, he said, with great emphasis; he would have been infinitely worse” (D 5:202).

It should be noted that some recent historians cast doubt on the commonly accepted theory that the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles economically, militarily, and politically crippled Germany, thus acting as a chief cause of the Second World War in Europe. See, for example, Steiner's *The Lights That Failed*. However, Woolf's fellow Bloomsbury member John Maynard Keynes predicted disastrous results from Versailles in *The Economic Consequences of Peace* (1920), an analysis that has remained influential for decades and one that may have shaped Woolf's thinking about World War I and post-war England and Europe—although her extant diaries, letters, and reading notebooks do not indicate that she ever read it. In his study, Keynes, argues that “the spokesmen of the French and British peoples have run the risk of completing the ruin, which Germany began, by a Peace which, if it is carried into effect, must impair yet further, when it might have restored, the delicate, complicated organization, already shaken and broken by war, through which alone the European peoples can employ themselves and live” (3-4). Thus, he asks ominously, “[W]ho can say how much is enduring, or in what direction men will seek at last to escape from their misfortunes?” (251).

kept an oil and colour shop in Kensington” (131).<sup>70</sup> But for other critics, Miss Kilman is a “monster” not because of her working-class background, but because of her “violent grudge against the world,” zealous religious faith,<sup>71</sup> “intense,” greedy fixation on food, fervent desire to “grasp” and “clasp” Elizabeth Dalloway whom she wishes to “make . . . hers absolutely and forever and then die,” and her judgmental, “overmastering desire to overcome” Elizabeth’s mother and “unmask her” for the “fool” and “simpleton” she believes this character to be (132, 129, 130, 125). That is, for these critics, Woolf denigrates Miss Kilman because she is too domineering and close-minded—much like Bradshaw and Dr. Holmes.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>For example, Carey points out that “Miss Kilman is independent, and has gained a degree in history” and is thus “just the sort of woman Virginia Woolf, as a campaigning feminist, might be expected to champion”; however, “Miss Kilman is depicted as a monster of spite, envy, and unfulfilled desire” because “the social prejudices of an upper-middle-class intellectual prove stronger than feminism” (19): for this critic, the presentation of Miss Kilman proves that Woolf is the privileged, artistic snob, isolated in her Bloomsbury ivory tower—a characterization made by Raymond Williams, for example (*Problems in Materialism and Culture* 156). See also Minow-Pinkney (74-76) and Phillips (7). In “A Don, Virginia Woolf, and the Case of Miss Kilman,” Primamore argues specifically against Carey’s assessment of Woolf’s attitude toward Doris Kilman. She contends that “the narrative voice of the novel is supportive of [Miss Kilman]” in that “Woolf, the writer, shares certain values with [her]”—for example, “both women [the writer and the character] are concerned with truth and honesty,” intellectual pursuits, and “the kinds of knowledge considered essential for understanding modernist poetics” (126, 129, 132). Primamore emphasizes that it is Clarissa, not the narrator or Woolf, who regards Kilman as a monster (128). However, there is little evidence to suggest that Woolf intended Miss Kilman as a sympathetic character, since her dominant emotions—as described by the narrator—consist of “bitter and burning” hatred, at worst, and a “sinister serenity” gained from her religious faith, at best (MD 124-25).

In an alternative reading, Childers briefly suggests that Woolf’s unflattering portrayal of Miss Kilman reflects the author’s “impatience with [the] feminism” that the character supports; Childers contends that Woolf “was tired of the repetition of feminist politics and the predictability of the opposition” (64)—a sharp shift from, for example, the more flattering portrait of the active feminist and then socialist Mary Datchet in the earlier novel *Night and Day*, a character who at the conclusion of the novel is glimpsed diligently working “for the good of the world” in a light that is “a sign of triumph, shining . . . for ever, not to be extinguished this side of grave” (431).

<sup>71</sup>Like Clarissa, Woolf, too, expressed a dislike for religion. In the summer of 1923—a time during which she was writing *Mrs. Dalloway*—Woolf in a letter describes the “religious revival” she had recently witnessed in Paris and which, to her chagrin, John Middleton Murry was embracing: “this religious revival,” she declares, “is a glum business,” one that leaves her “dejected as a shovelful of cinders” (L 3:58-59).

<sup>72</sup>Among these critics, Naremore refers to “Kilman’s suffocating egoism” (109) and Schlack designates her “an embittered spinster and religious fanatic” who “radiates those qualities of death, sterility, and repressed hostility which her last name implies” (*Continuing Presences* 52). See also Kelley (91-92), Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (107), Henke, “*Mrs. Dalloway*” (136-37), DuPlessis (58), DiBattista (30), Zwerdling (125, 133),

Here, I wish to consider less Woolf's attitude toward Miss Kilman and more Clarissa's attitude and the reasons for it. Despite her admission that Miss Kilman "had been badly treated," Clarissa deems this "badly treated" character "callous" and "insensitive," due to her "religious ecstasy," and rather sanctimonious in her attention to her "causes":

[Miss Kilman] was never in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority, your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were; how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be, all her soul rusted with that grievance sticking in it, her dismissal from school during the War—poor, embittered, unfortunate creature! For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants . . . (11-12)

Squier analyzes this passage and concludes that "Miss Kilman irks [Clarissa] by confusing a private grievance with a public wrong" and by abandoning "all social sensitivity under the pressure of her growing bitterness," since, as Woolf's narrator explains, she "would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians, but in private inflicted positive torture"

(Squier, *Virginia Woolf and London* 97; MD 11-12). But while this critique of Miss Kilman's

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Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* (160), Abel (43), Matson (173), Littleton (44, 49-50), and Hoff (190).

In an alternative reading, Jensen argues that Clarissa's ambivalent "love/hate response to Doris Kilman" stems from her own repressed homosexuality: "Clarissa's response to Kilman is hers, and it is real. She hates Kilman for the power she has, and that power is Kilman's ability to love women . . . and in the process to defy the heterosexual norms that so inhibit Clarissa. Yet she loves her for the exactly same reason" (174-75). In a similar vein, T. E. Apter (66), Moon (15-56), Tylee (*The Great War and Women's Consciousness* 165) and Usui (158) interpret Miss Kilman as the "voice of anger trapped within" Clarissa, as the last critic states—the heroine's "dark double," as Gilbert and Gubar famously characterize the relationship between Jane Eyre and the insane Bertha Mason Rochester (*The Madwoman in the Attic* 360).



confusion of the public with the private is a useful one, Clarissa has rejected this “poor, embittered, unfortunate creature,” first, also because the former character is a member of the working classes. After all, Clarissa admires Lady Bruton’s zeal for her social causes and similarly recalls with great satisfaction Sally Seton’s and her own youthful flirtation with a social agenda which resembles that of Doris Kilman. Second, and as more directly expressed by the protagonist, Miss Kilman appears a “monster” to the former because she fails to embody those traits by which Clarissa wishes to define the ideal postwar Englishwoman, who overcomes her “tears and sorrows” with “courage and endurance”—that is, finds strength in sacrifice. For Clarissa, Miss Kilman is not an Englishwoman comparable to her, but rather a “spectre,” a “life-blood”-sucking vampire, and an “idea.” Clarissa detests Miss Kilman because she is her “daughter’s seducer” and a shopkeeper’s granddaughter, and also because she typifies those qualities Clarissa wishes to expel from her England. Not only did Miss Kilman lose her job, but she openly behaves “embitter[ed]” as a consequence; and not only is she poor, but she expresses a “grievance” with her poverty. By focusing on Miss Kilman’s angry reactions to her “unfortunate” circumstances, rather than the causes for them, Clarissa renders this “poor, embittered, unfortunate creature” ironically into a woman with “all that power” (175). On some level, perhaps, Clarissa recognizes that her hostility toward Doris Kilman is misplaced, for she concedes privately, “She hated her; she loved her” (175). But Clarissa’s more open dislike for her daughter’s tutor—an antipathy of which both Elizabeth and Miss Kilman are aware (125, 131)—instigates her rejection of yet another one of the “lonely people” from her vision of England.

Clarissa resolves these discrepancies in her vision of postwar England through her complex response to the news of Septimus's death—information that reaches her at the peak of her party. Moreover, the meaning she projects onto Septimus and his death ironically makes him a symbol that can help bind together her vision of postwar England. Clarissa gains a vague sense of Septimus's wartime experiences as the catalyst for his suicide when she overhears her husband and Sir William Bradshaw discussing the need for "some provision in the Bill" pertaining to cases of shell-shock and when Lady Bradshaw explains to her that she and her husband had arrived late for the gathering because the doctor had been "called up on the telephone" to deal with "a very sad case" of "a young man" who "had been in the army" and who "had killed himself." Clarissa is at first distressed, for, as she privately exclaims, "in the middle of my party, here's death" (183). As Tate points out, she behaves rather selfishly here, since it is not death itself that has been brought into her party, but rather merely the mention of death: "Septimus's corpse, like those of the other dead millions [from the war], is safely out of sight" (164). Nevertheless, the flustered Clarissa seeks an empty room to consider, "What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?" (183-84). However, even the room into which she retreats and in which "there was nobody" bears the imprint of England, for "the chairs still kept the impress of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton" who had recently occupied them (183). In the wake of these "authoritative" and "deferential" figures, Clarissa reflects initially upon the physical, literal aspects of Septimus's death, picturing how "he had thrown himself from a window," so that the ground "flashed" up in his line of vision and the "rusty spikes" passed through him, until finally "he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness" (184). Imaginatively, Clarissa undergoes her own death, in which "her dress flamed,

her body burned”.<sup>73</sup> she experiences vicariously the death intended for her by the end of the novel, as Woolf indicates in her introduction to the Modern Library edition of the novel (vi).<sup>74</sup> But then Clarissa focuses on the reasons behind Septimus’s suicide, which she interprets in her national language of sacrifice. In doing so, she acknowledges, much like Septimus, that life consists primarily of “corruption, lies, [and] chatter”—but within this web of “corruption, lies, and chatter” lies a “thing” that Septimus’s death “had preserved”: “A thing there was that mattered,” and Septimus’s “death was an attempt to communicate” this “thing . . . that mattered” (MD 184). Hence, despite her earlier recognition that the “heart of life” is “hollow” and “empty,” Clarissa insists here that some “thing,” a “treasure,” some essential meaning, lies within this “heart of life”—an assertion precipitated by the mention of his suicide. Rather surprisingly, then, the reference to the unknown young man’s death convinces Clarissa that “the heart of life” is not “empty”; it reaffirms her faith in the imagined community.

A possible explanation for these cryptic references to the “treasure” or the “thing . . . that mattered” which Clarissa assumes Septimus to carry into death lies in an earlier version of this passage, where the former interprets the latter’s death more directly in the context of the First World War. Significantly, in the final, published version of this scene, the war is mentioned

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<sup>73</sup>An explanation for this imagining of death by fire lies in an earlier, longer version of this passage, where Clarissa recalls her past reactions to the news of deaths by other means: “[T]here coming to her, as always in such violent events, a sense of her body’s suffering to o; if it was a motor accident, she was hurled into the telegraph post; if a fire she was ablaze; if a drowning, under she went, before she could think or pity . . .” (TH 384). In the abbreviated, published version of this passage, Clarissa’s association of death by fire with Septimus’s suicide may evoke subtly and metonymically soldiers’ combat deaths, frequently caused by explosions—explosions, not unimportant to note, for which Clarissa had earlier longed when she worried that her party was a “disaster.”

<sup>74</sup>Forster claims to have intuited this original plan upon first reading Woolf’s novel: in a 1926 review, he asks, “Does [Clarissa] . . . commit suicide? I thought she did the first time I read the book.” He also discerns Woolf’s attempt to make Septimus Clarissa’s “double”: “The societified lady and the obscure maniac are in a sense the same person” (“The Novels of Virginia Woolf” 175). See Levenback for comments on whether or not Woolf ever intended to have Clarissa die (78, 78 n.).

neither by the narrator nor Clarissa—nor, for that matter, by Lady Bradshaw, Richard, nor Bradshaw, although the doctor’s mention of shell-shock metonymically invokes it. Woolf’s deletions of the more direct references to the war suggest not that Clarissa wishes to forget or remove the marks of it—as Richard and Bradshaw strive to do—but that she wants to absorb the traces of it in her imagining of a new, stronger, and more united England. In a draft, Woolf includes lines in which Clarissa, contemplating the reasons for and import of Septimus’s suicide, thinks of the “thousands of young men” who had fought “obsequiously,” “obediently,” and “freely” “in the war” and whose lives are now consequently “broken off”; she decides that these young men are better off dead, since “there were better things than growing old” (TH 386). Woolf intimates that, for Clarissa, Septimus’s death acts as a synecdoche for those of all the “thousands of young men” who had had their lives “broken off” by the war. Further, the adverbs used here suggest that Clarissa believes *all* the “thousands of young men,” including Septimus, enlisted in the military “freely” and from a sense of duty or willingness to sacrifice their lives for their country. And she postulates that death saved the soldiers from the horrors of growing old. Therefore, as Woolf writes in the published version, “this young man who had killed himself . . . had . . . plunged holding his treasure”—a “treasure” that Clarissa typifies in both the draft and published novel with a second recollection of the lines from *Othello*: “If it were now to die, / ‘Twere now to be most happy” (MD 184). She assumes, then, that Septimus killed himself as “an attempt to communicate” the message that one should not pity him—as she states a few paragraphs later (186)—but instead should regard him (and, by extension, all those “thousands of young men” who died in the war) as a symbol for the idealization and adolescent ardor of youth that all Englishmen and -women must sacrifice to become functioning members of the national

community. Hence, Clarissa is here reminded again of “how once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton” (185), a memory that evokes her intense, youthful, feelings for Sally Seton, those feelings that had to be relinquished to render her into Mrs. Dalloway, the wife of a Member of Parliament and a mother.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, Clarissa resolves her earlier anxiety over the loss of her idealized youth, declaring that now, as her eyes are drawn to the “sky above Westminster” which unites all English national subjects by hovering over them,<sup>76</sup> that “she had never been so happy” and “no pleasure could equal . . . this having done with the triumphs of youth” and “los[ing] herself in the process of living” as a mature Englishwoman (185). By translating the dead Septimus into a symbol of the youthful idealism and passion she believes all English subjects must sacrifice, Clarissa can exclaim that “she felt glad he had done it; thrown it away” (186). Just as the “it” in Septimus’s final declaration “I’ll give it you!” lacks a clear antecedent, so does the “it” in Clarissa’s description of Septimus’s “throwing it away”; but the context of this line suggests that this “it”

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<sup>75</sup>Both Leaska and Jensen focus on Clarissa’s erotic love for Sally that is hinted at in this scene. They argue that Septimus commits suicide at least partially due to his “crime” of homosexual attraction to Evans and that Clarissa intuitively recognizes this homoerotic love with which she identifies and thereby “transfer[s] onto another’s shoulders an ancient burden of guilt which has almost too much for her to bear; so that in Septimus’s death, she becomes the spectator of her own tragedy” and finds “absolution for a love which has made her inadequate in her marriage . . .” (Leaska, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 115-16; see also Jensen 162-63).

<sup>76</sup>Woolf makes the unifying powers of the sky more clear in an earlier draft, where Clarissa pictures the sky as it is “seen . . . between peoples shoulders . . . seen . . . here in London” (TH 395). In yet another version, Clarissa pictures the uniting sky not only as it appears above Westminster, but also above Parliament (397). Woolf briefly uses the sky and disparate characters’ concurrent gazing at it in a comparable way in *Night and Day* (161). But in *Jacob’s Room*, the narrator postulates contrastingly that although “travellers, the shipwrecked, exiles, and the dying” like to take “consolation” in the assumption that “the sky is the same everywhere,” it appears “lighter, thinner, and more sparkling” above Cambridge “than the sky elsewhere” (31-32).

These references to the sky also recall Forster’s descriptions of the “overarching sky” throughout *A Passage to India*. Forster’s narrator conjectures that the “strong,” “enormous” “sky settles everything” by making “the earth . . . beautiful” when it chooses” and affecting the “climates and seasons”; moreover, it is the sky that decides the English Fielding and the Indian Aziz cannot be friends yet (5, 362).

refers to an existence as a functioning member of the English nation, a role that necessitates the abandonment of the idealizations and ardent passions of youth. Clarissa assumes that Septimus dies clinging to the “treasured” ability to experience the love and intense passion she herself had, but lost, at Bourton in the presence of Sally Seton. In light of this interpretation of the suicide, Clarissa decides that Septimus’s death empowers her to “feel the beauty . . . the fun” of her own, present life (186). Jacob Littleton contends that Clarissa “clearly understands” Septimus, since “her thoughts mirror his (40); but, as Guth emphasizes, while Clarissa’s response includes an “exalted self-affirmation . . . mystical embrace . . . joyous communication [and] lyrical prose-musing,” Septimus’s emotions as he embarks upon his final act contrastingly include “the terror of the hunted beast [and] short, spasmodic thoughts of panic” (“What a lark! What a plunge!” 19). Just as Peter Walsh earlier in the novel could only incorporate Septimus into his vision of England by misunderstanding “the awful fix” between the latter and his wife as a “lovers’ squabble,” Clarissa does not “clearly understand” Septimus, but rather treats him as a symbol for the sacrifices she felt compelled to make and that she believes unites the national community. Indeed, her need to regard Septimus not as an individual, but as a symbol, is aided by her never learning his name, also indicating “the chasm between civilians and combatants,” since the latter prefer the former to remain anonymous, as Levenback argues (77). Until the moment of his death, Septimus could not engage in the symbolic discourse of the English nation, resulting in his isolation from that community; but in death, he is made into a symbol within that discourse. Further, in a final gesture of painful irony, Septimus, who due to his combat experience “could not feel” (MD 87-88) and who found primarily “loathing, hatred and despair” in the once-treasured words of Shakespeare, becomes after his death and in Clarissa Dalloway’s vision of

England, a metaphorical representative of her own intense, lost passions, as exemplified with poetic lines in which Shakespeare idealizes romantic love.

Thus, just as the room in which Clarissa considers the meaning of Septimus's death is marked by the "impress" of England's ruling establishment, her contemplation of Septimus projects upon this "young man" the mark of her vision of a strengthened, postwar England. She then extends this vision to include the "old lady," quietly preparing for bed, whom she spies in the house next door (MD 186). For Abel, "the vision of the old lady" indicates "Clarissa's willingness to contemplate an emblem of age instead of savoring a memory of youth" and implies this character's "positive commitment to development" (40). But more importantly, this woman, whom Clarissa deems "fascinating," becomes enveloped in the latter's envisaging of the national community, an imagining that encompasses the young and old, living and dead, past, present, and future. Because the woman is anonymous, like Septimus, and separated from her by two windows, Clarissa is free to project her own understanding of English national identity upon her.<sup>77</sup> At this moment, Clarissa recalls the line from *Cymbeline*: "Fear no more the heat of the sun" (MD 186). While the recollection of this line had caused Septimus to "fear no more" the offer of community he saw in the natural world and among the dead, the line marks Clarissa's contrasting decision to embrace life and reenter the party. Strengthened by her vision, her faith in the English national community reaffirmed after being shaken momentarily by the mention of a particular death and undermined more subtly throughout the day by her troubling, incongruous thoughts, Clarissa can return to the party, declaring that "she had never been so happy" and

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<sup>77</sup>Guth comments on Clarissa's propensity to stand at windows ("What a lark! What a plunge!" 25). See Gelfant (93-94), Kelley (111) and Mino w-Pinkney (80) for conflicting readings of Clarissa's response to the old woman.

eliciting a reaction of “extraordinary excitement” from Peter Walsh in the novel’s final lines (185, 194).

In examining this climactic scene, Minow-Pinkney declares that “what is crucial is not how Clarissa deciphers Septimus’ suicide, but *that* she deciphers it, that a relation is established between the two figures” (79). That is, as the only character who considers actively and extensively the reasons for Septimus’s self-inflicted death, Clarissa establishes a relationship with him that no other figure in the novel manages, or even seriously tries, to achieve.<sup>78</sup> But the reasons behind Clarissa’s one-sided union with the dead war veteran are more self-centered and, concurrently, concerned with the perpetuation of the national community than this critic concludes. Minow-Pinkney adds that Woolf, in this scene and throughout the novel, presents Clarissa as a mother-figure, a “Mother” that Septimus “embrace[s] . . . in death.” But Clarissa’s response to Septimus’s suicide appears far from maternal, since she insists that she does “not pity him” and rather narcissistically is “glad that he had” killed himself because his death allows her to “feel the beauty” and “the fun” (MD 186). Clarissa’s “deciphering” of Septimus’s final act is accomplished only by misunderstanding him. Gilbert and Gubar, among other critics, argue that the novel celebrates a “private Clarissa” in contrast with the more superficial, “public” Mrs.

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<sup>78</sup>Low similarly praises Clarissa for her “empathy,” which “enables [her] not to die with Septimus, but to rise phoenix-like from his ashes into an affirmation of happiness in her own life” (103). And Zwerdling contends that Clarissa “think[s] about Septimus’s death with full imaginative sympathy, understanding his feelings and situation instinctively with some part of her self that scarcely functions in the public world she normally inhabits” (141). What Zwerdling misses here in his class-sensitive reading of the novel is that Clarissa’s seemingly personal, “sympathetic” attempt to “understand” Septimus is achieved only through her imposition of public, national concerns upon this unknown young man. See also Haring-Smith (155), Wyatt (125), Steinberg (17-18, 25), and Paul (145). Among some of the more shocking justifications for the novel’s tragic death, Bloom describes Septimus’s suicide as a means of “communication” (Introduction 2), and Love characterizes it as “a sacrament in which Clarissa partakes” and as “a means of preserving life, not destroying it” (*Worlds of Consciousness* 159-60). Additionally, Gilbert and Gubar refer to the suicide as “a tribute to Clarissa, a tribute to the ‘terror’ and ‘ecstasy’ of the personal life over which she rules” (*No Man’s Land* 3:26; see also 2:317-18).



Dalloway (*No Man's Land* 3:25-27; see also, for example, Kelley 101); but what this character's interpretation of Septimus's suicide enables her to do is impose a public, national significance not only on his death and the sufferings precipitated by war, but on her own private emotions and regrets, as well.

In *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, Tylee states that Woolf through *Mrs. Dalloway* “gleefully . . . subverts the coercive power of the State and its religion”—the first represented primarily by the Bradshaws, Lady Brutons, and Richards, the second, by the Doris Kilmans who inhabit postwar England. This “subver[sion],” she continues, occurs through the consciousness of the novel's title character, who “communicat[es] across class and gender” lines and consequently appears as “a figure of compassion, comprehension, [and] absolution,” and “who bestows a general peace” as “the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world” (167). But this “mother,” rather than “subvert[ing] the coercive powers of the State and its religion,” makes Septimus Warren Smith, a belated war casualty who represents the many thousands of other English war casualties, a prominent symbol in the national culture and her own pseudo-religious vision of England. It may be true, as Littleton argues, that Clarissa's vision “rescues” Septimus's suicide “from the oblivion to which it might otherwise have been consigned” (53), or, as Naremore similarly contends, that “Septimus . . . ‘lives on’ through his alter-ego Clarissa” (107); but he does so only in a manner that misrepresents his thoughts and actions into a symbolic language of sacrifice—sacrifices, moreover, willingly given to render England, in this postwar “late age,” into a community strengthened by its common “tears and sorrows; courage and endurance.” In this manner, Woolf highlights the flaws in postwar England's cultural discourses: more obviously, that promoted by characters such as Sir

William Bradshaw, Richard Dalloway, and Lady Bruton seeks to enforce the forgetting of the war by eradicating the most disruptive lingering reminders of it, using the colonies as a receiver for those more painful results, if necessary; more subtly, and therefore more dangerously, the seemingly “anti-authoritarian” Clarissa Dalloway employs a rhetoric of sacrifice that avoids forgetting the war only by appropriating the “tears and sorrows” the Great War engendered for her national vision’s own purposes.

What Woolf spotlights through this novel are the ways that the war continues to cause conflicts and misunderstandings within England, a national community which still expects “sacrifices” to be made by the war’s victims, both civilians and veterans, even five years and more after the fighting had ended. While Woolf emphasizes that the purveyors of England’s dominant, patriarchal culture cruelly ignore and attempt to expunge the war victims’ sufferings, she also highlights the problems created by the sympathies of a character like Clarissa Dalloway. However, by looking more deeply into English history and the construction of national identity in her later novels, Woolf examines how the violent tendencies central to gendered English identity precipitates the wars that lead to such strife within the national community. That is, with her later novels, she explores more intently and more broadly the histories of Englishness and English national culture which preceded the recent history of the war and England’s postwar present.

## CHAPTER THREE

## “EVERYTHING MOCKED”: ORLANDO’S GENDERED ENGLISHNESS

Woolf’s examinations of the English past regularly emphasize the artificiality or fictionality of all historical accounts and in manners that anticipate Fredric Jameson’s discussion of *pastiche* as a practice prevalent in Postmodern texts. In “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Jameson distinguishes *pastiche* from *parody* by defining the latter as a form of mimicry “which mocks the original” and often evinces “some secret sympathy for” it, so that “there remains somewhere behind all parody the feeling that there is a linguistic norm” that the later text imitates. In contrast, *pastiche*, while also consisting of “the imitation of a peculiar or unique style” or “the wearing of a stylistic mask,” lacks “that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic,” and consequently, “pastiche is blank parody” predicated on the belief that a “pure” original “*never* really existed in the first place” (113-15; original emphasis). Implicit in any act of pastiche, then, is the assumption that no literary style or mode of writing is more natural or more privileged than any other: it marks Postmodernism as a literary movement or period that considers the present as no better or worse than the past, whereas the Modernist mode of writing more typically assumes the past to be more ordered or in some way better than the present.

Other critics find more overtly political uses for these Postmodern, empty acts of imitation than does Jameson. In “Of Mimicry and Men,” Homi Bhabha argues that the authors native to former colonies can employ parody in order to “marginalize the monumentality of history” by “mock[ing] its power to be a model”—ironically, “that power which supposedly makes

it imitable.” Moreover, the postcolonial subject’s mimetic acts can “liberate marginal elements and shatter the unity of man’s being through which he extends his sovereignty” and “problematize the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the ‘national’ is no longer naturalizable” (*The Location of Culture* 87-89). By mimicking the writing styles thought to be inherent or definitive of the dominant, formerly colonizing nation, postcolonial writers highlight the inventedness or artificiality of those styles. They thus undermine subtly the assumed superiority of that national culture.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler identifies a similarly subversive political purpose to mimicry in constructions of gender. For Butler, gender is always a performance or parodic act. She defines gender not as natural and preordained, dependent upon anatomy, but instead as an identity “tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*,” so that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.” As a result, “gender is always a doing,” a “doing” that creates the gendered subject,” and one through which individual subjects are “seek[ing] to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity” (25, 141). That is, individuals enact their gendered identities by mimicking the models of masculine or feminine behavior, as presented within their culture. As Bhabha contends, colonial or postcolonial subjects can, by imitating the writing styles of their colonizers or former colonizers, undermine the seemingly natural superiority of the latter’s culture; analogously, Butler at the conclusion of *Gender Trouble* hints at the political implications of her theory on the flexibility and performativity of gender categories, as these are challenged by transsexuals and homosexuals: “If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and

politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would emerge from the ruins of the old” (137-38, 148-49). Parody, then, can undermine cultural discourses of gendered, national, and colonial identities.

Virginia Woolf regarded her sixth novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) as a satire in which “everything [is] mocked,” even her “own lyric vein” (D 3:131)—that is, her personal, poetic writing style, as seen in such recently published works as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In Chapter Two of *Orlando*, the title character admires the fictional poet and critic Nick Greene’s “power of mimicry,” through which he “brought the dead to life, and could say the finest things of books,” but only “provided they were written three hundred years ago” (91). Through mimicry, Greene pays homage to the texts and writers of the distant past by upholding those ancient texts as superior to present ones, texts that are, as he insists, riddled with “faults” (90-91). But for Woolf, mimicry holds an additional purpose, one that resembles the more subversive purposes of imitation that Jameson associates with Postmodern texts, Bhabha finds central to postcolonial ones, and Butler sees as indicative of gender’s performativity. Various critics have examined Woolf’s uses of parody and its more Postmodern counterpart pastiche in *Orlando*,<sup>1</sup> and others have demonstrated the ways that this novel anticipates Butler’s theories on the construction of gender.<sup>2</sup> However, they have overlooked the degree to which the biographer’s shifting and imitative styles and Orlando’s ever-changing identity illustrate that

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Graham, Naremore, Minow-Pinkney, Roe, Boehm, Caughie, “Virginia Woolf’s Double Discourse,” Lokke, and Burns.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Karen R. Lawrence, Parkes, Burns, Cervetti, and Piggford.

English culture and Englishness are inextricably gendered, and national culture and identity are historically contingent, so that the particular presentation or performance of each depends upon the period in which they are represented or enacted. Thus, through its reliance on parody, *Orlando* illustrates the constructed and gendered nature of any version of English history, demonstrates the degree to which a national culture shapes gender performance, and highlights the artificiality of literary styles in a manner that pushes it toward the Postmodern tendency to “speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in an imaginary museum” (Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 115). Hence, by the end of the novel, Woolf emphasizes that modern English culture and identity are, in effect, Postmodern constructs, consisting of fragments from the national past and present in a collection of imitations which suggest that an original “*never* really existed in the first place.”

### The Gendering of English Histories

Virginia Woolf’s explorations of English culture frequently led her to reflect upon English history—a history that, as such works as *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) emphasize, she regarded as inescapably gendered. In *Jacob’s Room* (1922), her narrator cites history as a force that shapes individual identity; this narrator sees history “brewed” from the very land of England, so that, although the individual subject believes he or she starts “transparent,” “the cloud thickens” and “all history backs our pane of glass. To escape is vain” (49). That is, history, a sense of the past, confines and restricts, even as it defines the individual. In that same novel, Woolf explores not only the relationship between history and identity but the specific nature of history; here, however, she offers two rather different historiographic models. In one instance, Jacob wonders, “Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?” (39).

This rather traditional history of England would read like a linear, progressive story—moving chronologically through the various heroic actions and glorious deeds of “Great Men,” as told in the “Biographies” written presumably by other men, “Great” or otherwise. But in another instance, Jacob glimpses briefly another type of history. As the young Jacob examines a woman on a pier in Scarborough, he projects onto her a regressive history that moves from the present moment in the early twentieth century and through the last four decades of the previous century—all represented by imagined changes in the woman’s clothing. Jacob’s historical vision then shifts to a series of objects, such as a chariot, cannon-balls, arrow-heads, and a Roman camp (19). Unlike the telling of history through the “Biographies of Great Men,” this version recants the English past through more ordinary objects. These two lists of objects imply Jacob intuitively that English history and identity are gendered, in that the feminine versions of these are typified by skirts, stockings, and crinolines, whereas the masculine ones consist of objects used in war. In contrast from the view of the national history as exemplified through the seemingly inherent, perhaps even transcendent, “greatness” of a few male individuals, this latter history envisages national culture through the ever-evolving ways that a gendered identity is performed with the use of various “costumes” or “props”—among the material means through which a national culture is built.

The disparity between these models highlights the gendered and the fabricated nature of any biography or history—perhaps leading Woolf a few years later to wonder in a letter to her nephew Julian Bell if “any history is even faintly true” (L 3:465). At the time she posed this query, Woolf was writing *Orlando*, where she examines the extent to which any history is true by elaborately mixing fact with fiction, biography with fantasy, a “half laughing” tone with a “half

serious” one—as she indicates in her diary while drafting it (D 3:168). By constructing a history of England that is both a biography of a “Great Man” (and Woman) and an illustration of gender’s construction through a series of stylized, culturally contingent performances enacted by what one critic calls “the serially dual-sexed Orlando” (Piggford 47), Woolf’s satirical mock-biography demonstrates how versions of history can create an English national culture, examines a culture’s shaping of its subjects’ identities, and suggests that histories, national cultures, and national identities can be rewritten or redefined.

Among the many objects of Woolf’s satire in *Orlando* is the novel’s narrator or mock-biographer. She modeled this narrator on the ideal Victorian biographers promoted by her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, and Sir Sidney Lee—the first and second editors of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which Jane Marcus describes as “a master cultural narrative of England as a history of the lives of Great Men” (“Britannia Rules *The Waves*” 148-49). Orlando’s “biographer” appears clearly engaged in the search for “truth” and “fact” about his biographical subject’s life, a task that Lee promoted in his instruction manual for biographical writing *Principles of Biography* (1911). Early in the first chapter, Orlando’s biographer informs his reader of his goals in his biography while also suggesting the gendered nature of that project: “Happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one! Never need she vex herself, nor he invoke the help of novelist or poet. From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after, till they reach what ever seat it may be that is the heights of their desire” (14-15). The biographer implies the parental nature of the role he performs, that of a figurative father who complements his subject’s literal mother: while the mother physically “bears” the biographical subject and gives him life, the “father” metaphorically



gives that subject a written life—symbolically “bearing” him into the discourse of his national culture.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the biographer establishes a hierarchy by which the cultural and textual aspects of identity, associated with the paternal biographer, outrank the bodily aspects, which are relegated here to the domain of the mother. Hence, by imitating the style and method of conventional biographers, engaged in presenting the life of a great man, Woolf emphasizes the gendered nature of such a project and its privileging of concerns coded as masculine over the allegedly feminine ones.

The stated purpose of the biographer’s delineation of his subject’s life also indicates the type of national history and culture he promotes, while the inconsistencies in that presentation point to Woolf’s intention to “mock [biography’s] power to be a model,” as Bhabha would later argue in regard to postcolonial writing. The biographer sets himself upon the task of writing the “Biography of a Great Man” and thereby attempting to contribute to that version of English history, one that, again, subordinates the feminine to the masculine task of locating his subject’s life in a written national discourse. Woolf comments on this type of history in “The New Biography” (1927), where she characterizes Victorian biographies as ones where the subject “is almost always above life size in a top-hat and trench-coat” (GR 151), a mocking echo of Sidney Lee’s exaltation of biography’s expression of “the universal desire to keep alive the memories of those who by character and exploits have distinguished themselves from the mass of mankind” (7). Orlando’s biographer indicates he will demonstrate his subject’s “greatness” by focusing on the figure’s admirable actions, including his “deed[s],” “glor[ies],” and his ascent to high offices

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<sup>3</sup>Kristeva argues similarly that women hold a “biological fate” in the nation in that they carry the primary burden of physically bearing new national subjects, while men play a more symbolic role (*Nations without Nationalisms* 33-34).

(15). The former presents the latter literally in a flattering light early in the first chapter, where he places Orlando in the light from a nearby multicolored stained-glass window that bathes the boy's body in "various tints of heraldic light" and make his face appear to be "lit solely by the sun itself" (15), which seems to render him into the apotheosis of an illustrious English past. The biographer's exuberant descriptions of Orlando's physical appearance reinforce the greatness of his character and further render him into an idealized English physical specimen: his "short" lips reveal "teeth of an exquisite and almond whiteness," his nose is "arrowy," his eyes are "large," "drenched violets," and his brow resembles "the swelling of a marble dome" (15). However, Woolf undercuts the exalted image the biographer tries to create by including a painting of "Orlando as a Boy," which does not correspond to the written description.<sup>4</sup> Seemingly unknown to the biographer, the rather androgynous features he attributes to Orlando not only foreshadow the latter's sex-change, but conflict with the former's zealous effort to stress his subject's masculinity. In these opening pages, then, the manner of Woolf's appropriation of this type of biographer's voice undermines subtly its attempt to present any incontrovertible truth in the type of English history and culture it promotes, hinting at the flexibility of supposedly rigid gender categories.

In addition to the discrepancies between the first painting and description of Orlando, many other inconsistencies have been noted by critics, who regularly deem the "nameless and quasi-objective narrator," as David J. Herman states, "the butt of our humor" (179). But the gap between the biographer's serious attempts to present accurately the facts of his subject's life and

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<sup>4</sup>See Schaffer for a detailed analysis of the problematic relationship between the written text of *Orlando* and the pictorial images Woolf included in it.

his failure to do so is more than simply humorous. Just as colonial subjects can articulate through mimicry “those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical differences that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 88), Woolf parodies the traditional biographer’s fact-based presentation of a “great” man in order to subvert those biographers’ duties of writing and thus creating an incontestably dominant national history and culture. She emphasizes that such biographers interpret and present their subjects’ lives not simply to present some objective truth, but rather to help construct particular versions of national history and identity—ones that are, moreover, gendered. Just as in “The Leaning Tower” (1940) and *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf instructs her readers to “trespass freely” the supposedly hallowed grounds of English literature and not to be intimidated by “Milton’s bogey” (M 154; AR 114), in *Orlando*, she continually undermines the biographer’s credibility to challenge the assumed authority of attempts such as his at presenting an absolute historical account. Jacob Flanders asks, “Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?”; the answer provided in *Orlando* is that such a History is less certain than the national culture would like to believe.

In *Orlando*, Woolf also addresses Jacob’s question by associating her title character, who is for half of his life a “Great Man,” with English national history—a history whose authenticity is undermined as much as that of Orlando’s overtly fantastical life. Further, Woolf renders Orlando an embodiment of the modern English nation and his/her family, one of the more ancient roots of that nation—thus making the biography of Orlando tantamount to a history of England. Indeed, the novel, as well as Orlando’s life, begins in the late sixteenth century—a time period that may predate that in which England became a nation in the modern sense, but one when an English

consciousness, a precursor to a technical nationalism, became especially prominent<sup>5</sup> and concludes in “1928 . . . the present moment” (298), and the year in which the novel was published. This history is a clearly patriarchal one. In the first chapter, Orlando attempts to impress and woo his first serious love interest, the Russian princess Sasha, with “the whole history of his family” by bragging that their “house was one of the most ancient in Britain” and that his ancestors “had come from Rome with the Caesars” (48). Unfortunately for the lovesick Orlando, this illustrious history elicits little response from Sasha—thus subtly denigrating this history of “Great Men” dating back to the Roman emperors. The history of Orlando’s family is England’s history, dating back to the Roman occupation and naming of the island more than fifteen centuries before the birth of Woolf’s title character, and is one centered on masculine territorial conquests by powerful armies.

Additionally, Orlando’s house, already “one of the most ancient in Britain” in the sixteenth century, is a synecdoche for England, perhaps even for all of Britain. In a moment that clearly mocks the alleged factuality of his “biography,” the biographer reveals that Orlando can view from a hilltop on his estate’s grounds “nineteen English counties . . . on clear days thirty, or forty,” as well as various castles, rivers, and meadows, the English Channel, “the spires of London and the smoke of the city,” and Mount Snowdon in Wales (18). Woolf places her title character again on this hilltop near the novel’s conclusion (325-26) to emphasize Orlando’s association with England: whether that character is a naïve, passionate adolescent Elizabethan boy and aspiring writer or an experienced, mature modern woman and a published poet, his/her

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<sup>5</sup>See my Introduction for a discussion on the origins of England as a nation. There, I note that various historians—including Samuel (xxiii) and Greenfield (14) cite the Elizabethan or more broadly Tudor era as that in which a modern English national consciousness was born.

Englishness is associated closely with the “*English* soil of the ‘sceptered isle’” and “quintessentially English locales,” as Ian Baucom argues (12; original emphasis).<sup>6</sup> Other passages directly or indirectly associate the house, in addition to its grounds, with England and its history: in the exposition of the novel, Orlando’s biographer emphasizes the vastness of the building’s attic, for “there seemed trapped in it the wind itself”—that is, its own climate (14). Further, at the conclusion of the second chapter, Orlando—disgusted by, among other things, the ludicrous advances of the Archduchess Harriet—declares “his home uninhabitable,” referring to his house as well as England, and decides to seek an ambassadorship in Constantinople (118).

This house signifies not only England and its history, but Orlando and his/her family, as well. In Chapter Two, Orlando vows to devote himself to his inherited house, “this vast, yet ordered building” that was “built by workmen whose names are unknown” and inhabited by “the obscure generations of [his] own family,” by re-furnishing that house which embodies his “race,” for “better was it to go unknown and leave behind you an arch, a potting shed, a wall where peaches ripen, than to burn like a meteor and leave no dust” (106-07). Reminiscent of Jacob Flanders’ view of English history in Scarborough, Orlando’s ancestral house in the twentieth-century portions of the novel becomes a museum, the objects in which embody the national past. The chairs seem to be “holding their arms out for Elizabeth, for James [I], for Shakespeare,” and hence “the house was no longer [Orlando’s] entirely. . . . It belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living” (318). This description of Orlando’s house draws

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<sup>6</sup>In a reflective prose piece written a few years later, Woolf offers a similarly panoptic view of London, where she imagines that the city “has lain there time out of mind scarring that stretch of earth deeper and deeper, making it more uneasy, lumped and tumultuous, branding it for ever with an indelible scar. There it lies in layers, in strata, bristling and billowing with rolls of smoke always caught on its pinnacles” (“Great Men’s Houses” [1932] LS 29). As an Englishwoman, then, she sees England—as synecdochically signified here with London—as a literal and permanent part of the land itself.

heavily on the appearance of Knole, the ancient estate of Vita Sackville-West's family that was built in 1456, the place in which her father lived, and one that Woolf visited several times in the years and months before and while writing *Orlando* (D 2:306 n.).<sup>7</sup> The chairs "holding out their arms" for figures from England's past allude to Woolf's diary entry of 5 July 1924, written just after her first visit to the estate. Here, Woolf refers to various "treasures" in the house, including the "chairs that Shakespeare might have sat on" (306). In another diary entry—written less than two months before she began drafting *Orlando*—Woolf discusses Sackville-West's perspective on Knole. In response to Woolf's query as to how Sackville-West sees Knole, the latter responded that

she saw it as something that had gone on for hundreds of years. They had brought wood from the Park to replenish the great fires like this for centuries: & her ancestresses had walked so on the snow with their great dogs bounding by them. All the centuries seemed lit up, the past expressive, articulate; not dumb & forgotten; but a crowd of people stood behind, not dead at all; not remarkable; fair faced, long limbed; affable; & so we reach the days of Elizabeth quite easily. (D 3:125)

*Orlando* can be seen thus as a novel-length development of this historical perspective from which "we reach the days of Elizabeth quite easily" and "the centuries" since that of Elizabeth

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<sup>7</sup>With *Orlando*'s conviction to re-furnish the house and with the catalogue of various pieces of furniture and other items he purchases for the house (109), Woolf lampoons Vita Sackville-West's detailed inventories of items contained at Knole in her book *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922), as Naremore points out (208). In his brief biography of *Virginia Woolf*, Nigel Nicolson—the younger son of Sackville-West—suggests that Woolf wrote *Orlando* in part "to identify Vita with Knole forever, in compensation for losing it" upon the death of her father in January 1928: as a woman, Sackville-West, her father's only child, could not inherit the estate and it passed, along with the Sackville title, to her uncle Charles (107). For detailed treatments of the relationships between Sackville-West, her family, and Knole with the character of Orlando, his/her family and house, see Baldanza, David Bonnell Green, Hoffmann, Love, "Orlando and Its Genesis," Chapter One in Raitt, *Vita and Virginia*, Chapters Twenty-Eight and Twenty-Nine of Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, and Porter.

appear “lit up” with “a crowd of people . . . not dead at all.” Orlando, by living through these centuries, embodies the English history encapsulated by the house. By closely associating that national history with the fanciful, fictitious life of Orlando, Woolf mocks that history’s “power to be a model.”

In *Orlando*, Woolf also couches her title character in England’s cultural history in more subtle ways. For example, repeated imagery connects Orlando with some of England’s most important national institutions—those of its literary history and its church. In Chapter One, the biographer provides a detailed physical description of Orlando that includes a reference to the boy’s forehead “swelling” like “a marble dome pressed between the two blank medallions which were his temples” (15). Later in this chapter, Orlando spies Shakespeare writing poetry in a room of his family’s home, a sight he—or, more accurately, now *she*—recalls in Chapter Four when, as a woman, Orlando returns to London early in the eighteenth century; here, she remembers Shakespeare as “the man with the big forehead,” writing at a table—a memory invoked by the sight of the marble dome, built during her absence from England, on St. Paul’s Cathedral (21, 163-64).<sup>8</sup> This dome connotes for Orlando “a poet’s forehead,” as well as the writings not only of Shakespeare, but also the other “great” Elizabethan poets: “She thought now only of the glory of poetry, and the great lines of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton began booming and reverberating, as if a golden clapper beat against a golden bell in the cathedral tower which was her mind” (164). Hence, Orlando recognizes a close relationship between

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<sup>8</sup>In an early review, Mortimer points out that this reference to the dome on St. Paul’s is one of the many anachronisms in *Orlando*, as it had not yet been built when the protagonist returns to England in the late seventeenth century (242). Again, Woolf’s manipulation and manufacturing of details mixed with verifiable historical facts is indicative of her parodic and heterogenous methods in the novel.

For a discussion of the differences between Orlando’s initial response to her sighting of Shakespeare and her later recollection of that sighting, see my first chapter.

Shakespeare, the English literary history he dominates, and England's national church—as depicted both through the shared marble dome imagery and the ringing of the church bell that she internalizes as the “booming and reverberating” of these “great” writers’ poetry in the “cathedral” located within her own domed forehead.<sup>9</sup> Further, Woolf implicitly connects Orlando him-/herself with these powerful national institutions through these images of his/her similar “marble dome” forehead, and more overtly with his/her own poem-in-progress, “The Oak Tree.” In Chapter Four, the newly female Orlando clutches the manuscript of this poem to her bosom as if it were a “talisman,” and in Chapter Six, it appears almost a physical part of her, for when she reluctantly gives the completed text to Nick Greene for publication, she feels the poem’s absence as “a bare place in her breast” (164, 281).

Woolf illustrates the degree to which historians and biographers fabricate national history with her biographer’s presentation of a particular and important event in the young Orlando’s life through a complex interlacing of fact and fantasy, and of history and myth. In the first chapter, Orlando’s passionate love affair with the Russian princess Sasha is virtually mythologized through its association with the Great Frost of 1608. In the winter of this year, temperatures dipped low enough so that the Thames in London—and elsewhere—froze into ice a foot or more thick: solid enough so that a fair was held upon the ice, much like that “park or pleasure ground”

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<sup>9</sup>See my analysis of Woolf’s assessments of Shakespeare and English literary history in my first chapter. For studies that point to the thematic and stylistic similarities of *Orlando* and *A Room of One’s Own*, see Boehm, Minow-Pinkney (127*passim*), and Thompson.

In Chapter Four of *Orlando*, Woolf satirizes this assumption that a majestic, domed forehead indicates literary genius: while taking an evening carriage ride with Alexander Pope, Orlando admires the latter’s figure, thinking, “How noble his brow is”; however, as the biographer parenthetically explains, Orlando here is “mistaking a hump on a cushion for Mr. Pope’s forehead in the darkness” (205). Subsequently seeing him in the light—or “the light of truth,” as she deems it—Orlando disappointedly learns that “Mr. Pope had a forehead no bigger than any man’s” (207, 205). Orlando consequently realizes that she cannot “worship” Pope, due to his weak and deformed physical appearance. This encounter thus undermines the assumed “greatness” of this “Great Man,” as English literary history and national culture have judged him.



described in *Orlando* (35 ff.).<sup>10</sup> However, although the Great Frost, as Woolf calls it, has an historical basis, Orlando's biographer exaggerates its attributes into what Sandra M. Gilbert describes as a fantastical "timeless time . . . when London seems to hang suspended on the ice in an eternal moment" ("The Battle of the Books" 184). In Chapter One, Orlando's biographer states that, as "historians tell us," the river froze "to a depth of twenty feet and more" and that the Great Frost began so dramatically and suddenly that "birds froze in mid-air and fell like stones to the ground," that a "young countrywoman" began to cross a road when she "turn[ed] visibly to powder and [was] blown in a puff of dust over the roofs as the icy blast struck her at the street corner," that the freezing of "unfortunate wayfarers" in Derbyshire led to what appears a "great increase of rocks," and that through the clear ice could be viewed porpoises, flounders, and eels, either "dead or merely [in a state] of suspended animation," as well as a sunken boat under London Bridge (33-36). By having him seriously present these obviously fanciful details as incontrovertible "fact," Woolf lampoons the biographer's insistence that the events he reports—no matter how absurd—are "true," since reputable, even if unnamed, "historians," of course, can be trusted; consequently, she undermines the historian and biographer's claim to present a history that is more than "faintly true." In other words, Woolf is "mocking" biography's or history's "power to be a model" within the national culture.

She further undermines biography's and history's "powers to be models" in this culture by employing the mythologized history as a backdrop to Orlando and Sasha's love affair. In a

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<sup>10</sup>According to Thomas S. W. Lewis, Woolf's primary historical source on the Great Frost was R. Chambers's *Book of Days* (1863), "a popular miscellany of 'Anecdote, Biography, and History' that was part of every Victorian library"—and an account that drew upon seventeenth century descriptions of the meteorological phenomenon (303). The *Book of Days* describes the "frost fair" that occurred on the frozen Thames, as well the eventual break-up of the ice (qtd. in Lewis 303). However, Lewis adds, Woolf "embellishes the scene with her imagination" in *Orlando*, as most likely did the author of the *Book of Days*.

sighting that the biographer calls an “accident,” Orlando first sees Sasha, a Russian princess who had accompanied the Muscovite Ambassador to London, when she is skating upon the ice in London, a figure whose Russian clothing initially makes her gender indeterminate but to whom Orlando is instantly attracted (37-39).<sup>11</sup> Sasha’s exotic appearance, foreign mannerisms, and language attract the English Orlando: she is “like nothing he had seen or known in England,” and as an unpredictable and unfamiliar foreigner, “she never shone with the steady beam of an Englishwoman” (47). The pair begin an “intimacy” that “soon became the scandal of the Court,” since Orlando had been nearly engaged to a daughter of an aristocratic Irish family (41, 33). This “intimacy” predominantly occurs upon the nearly magical ice: Orlando and Sasha habitually escape the “detested” English Court and visit “the public part of the river,” “disappear[ing] among the crowd of common people” and later, when they desire “privacy,” they venture into the rural areas surrounding the river outside London (43-44). In this regard, Woolf couches the passionate affair in an event that has entered English history in a manner partially based in fact, partially based in fiction.

Further, Woolf makes this affair part of English history by setting its painful demise against the backdrop of the end of the Great Frost. Sasha’s coy and evasive ways—initially appealing to her lover—eventually lead Orlando to doubt her love for him so that, as the biographer describes, “the tremendous force of his feelings was like a quicksand beneath a monument” (49). Orlando’s “doubts” are verified in the following paragraphs when he sees

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<sup>11</sup>As Hussey notes, Orlando’s affair with Sasha was modeled partially on that of Sackville-West with Violet Trefusis (*Virginia Woolf A-Z* 319-20). Like the former one, the latter pair met while ice skating—as Woolf indicates when she wrote to Sackville-West that she had begun “the chapter [of *Orlando*] which describes Violet and you meeting on the ice” (L 3:430).

Sasha embracing a Russian sailor (51). Although Sasha first convinces Orlando that the sight he thinks he has witnessed has resulted only from “the foulness of his imagination,” she soon abandons him—which Orlando discovers when he notes the absence of the Russian ship from the harbor (52, 64). Significantly, Sasha’s “faithless” betrayal occurs simultaneously with the sudden disintegration of the ice, a melting as dramatic as the onset of the Great Frost. Here, the biographer points to the illusory nature of the ice’s stability and clarity: “Where, for three months and more, there had been solid ice of such thickness that it seemed as permanent as stone, and a whole gay city had stood on its pavement [there] was now a race of turbulent yellow waters” (61-62). Not only does the ice’s inherent instability and murkiness reflect the weakness and impurity of Orlando and Sasha’s relationship, but, to further ground this historical-fantastical event and love affair in English national culture, Woolf locates on the broken ice a representation of the English national community. As rain begins to fall, the seemingly solid ice breaks into a collection of icebergs, carrying numerous “human creatures”: an old man reading from a Bible; other “solitary wretch[es]” penitently confessing their sins and “crying vainly for help”; a group of young men “roar[ing] and shout[ing] the lewdest tavern songs” and “blasphemies” with great “bravado”; women holding their infants; an “old nobleman . . . calling for vengeance upon the Irish rebels”; “a couple in bed”; various objects and pieces of furniture, including “a table laid sumptuously for a supper of twenty”; and “a cat suckling its young” (62-63). This cross-sectioned representation of England, which includes the religious and the blasphemous, the solitary and the married, the common and the noble, adults and children, men and women, and humans as well as inanimate objects and animals, drifts to its death as the ice fragments, and at the moment when Orlando realizes that the apparently stable “monument” of his relationship

with Sasha has analogously “shift[ed]” and “shake[n]” as it slips into “quicksand.” In this sense, the historical and fanciful aspects of London’s Great Frost mirror Orlando’s love affair with Sasha, a relationship whose beginning and ending coincide with those of this meteorological event, and thus rendering that affair historical and fanciful—like the “cloud” of history that “backs” it.

#### Setting Foot on English Soil: Orlando’s Performances of Englishness

As Erica L. Johnson states, “gender is but the most pronounced of many factors that inform Woolf’s construction of Englishness” in *Orlando* (113-14). Through this character’s “biography,” Woolf highlights the gendered nature of both England’s history and national identity. The novel emphasizes not only that English history is gendered, but that in order to be recognized by the nation, the individual must hold clear membership in one gender category rather than the other, as the roles expected of an Englishwoman differ from those of an Englishman. When the newly female Orlando returns to England after her mysterious transformation, she first realizes the difficulties she will encounter in trying to claim her inherited titles and estates: she is “in a highly ambiguous condition,” so that “the Law” is “uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity,” the owner of a county seat or homeless (168). As George Mosse argues, the nation “assign[s] everyone his place in life,” and “any confusion between . . . categories threaten[s ] chaos and loss of control” (*Nationalism and Sexuality* 16). Similarly, in *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler suggests that “there may not be a subject who stands ‘before’ the law, awaiting representation in or by that law,” because “the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal ‘before,’ is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy” (2-3). In other words, national subjects only become

subjects—that is, gain national identities—when “the law” recognizes them by placing them in its preordained “categories,” such as those here listed by Woolf. Woolf’s use of apposition in this passage suggests that each of these categories—alive or dead, man or woman, titled or untitled—is of equal importance in defining the subject’s national identity or role and place in the nation. Maria DiBattista argues that Woolf’s “ambiguous syntax” here parodies legal language and implies, “To be alive is to be a man is to be a titled aristocrat. To be dead is to be a woman is to be a social nonentity” (120). Moreover, it suggests that if “the Law” cannot locate an individual in any of these categories, then it considers that individual nonexistent. Indeed, Orlando’s identity remains in flux—at least, from the perspective of the Law of the nation—until she marries in Chapter Five, thus proving to the courts that she is a woman: “‘My sex,’ she tells her husband Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire, “‘is pronounced indisputably, and beyond the shadow of a doubt . . . Female’” (254-55). Although the reader and Orlando herself may not be quite as assured of her gender, England has deemed her a woman—therefore granting her an identity within that nation and allowing her “undisturbed possession of her titles, her house, and her estate” (255).<sup>12</sup>

However, while the ability to perform one gender role rather than the other appears central to a national identity, Woolf continually emphasizes in *Orlando* the individual’s ability to shift gender performances, to mimic different gender models, whether those coded male or female and as these models change during various time periods. While the nature of Orlando’s

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<sup>12</sup>Minow-Pinkney comments on the other court rulings found in this legal document: as Orlando informs Shel, her alleged sons by the Spanish dancer Rosina Pepita have been “pronounced illegitimate,” and therefore they cannot inherit Orlando’s estate; and although Orlando retains possession of this estate, only the “heirs male of [her] body” may inherit it from her. Minow-Pinkney argues that the courts “provisionally accept” Orlando’s femaleness “only to eliminate a worse social threat to property (gypsy origins), and womanhood is anyway finally expelled from the pedigree to secure patriarchal ‘rights’” (128-29).

performances changes most obviously and dramatically with the sex transformation at the novel's midpoint, those performances and Orlando's gendered national identity shift throughout his/her life, as dictated not only by anatomy, but by changes in the national culture, as well. At the start of her manuscript draft of *Orlando*, Woolf indicates that her "biography" will "tell a person's life from the year 1500"—a date she later changed to 1553—"to 1928," a "life" in which this person "change[s] its sex" and "tak[es] different aspects of the character in different Centuries," thus proving "the theory . . . that character goes on underground before we are born[,] and leaves something afterward [*sic*] also" (OM 308). Throughout the published version of *Orlando*, Woolf presents gender as a series of performed acts. For example, Orlando and the Archduke Harry in Chapter Four "acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour" before abandoning this performance and beginning what the biographer calls a more "natural discourse" (179). And later in the same chapter, the physically female Orlando assumes masculine clothing and in this guise, solicits the prostitute Nell in a scene that resembles a tableau in which the former, playing the chivalric gentleman, encounters the latter, in the role of the helpless, coy lady (215-16). That is, Nell and Orlando briefly mimic culturally established gender roles. In this instance, Orlando is a female character who previously was a male one and who now briefly resumes a masculine identity simply through a change of clothing and demeanor. The biographer confesses near the end of the chapter that Orlando's identity during this period is difficult to pinpoint: "What makes the task of identification still more difficult is that she [Orlando] found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another" (220). According to James Naremore, *Orlando* "present[s] history as a kind of pageant, where the costumes change but the actors remain essentially the same" (195). But for Orlando, clothing is closely tied to her

gendered identity, which appears here as a series of performed costume changes, so that she has “no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothes can conceive” (O 220-21). These rapid changes in clothing, then, instigate equally rapid shifts in identity—leaving the conventional biographer discombobulated in his attempt to identify and categorize his subject into one gender category as opposed to the other.

On the ship named the *Enamoured Lady* during her journey back to England shortly after her physical transformation into a woman, Orlando reflects more specifically on the attributes associated with an Englishman and an Englishwoman. Indeed, it is this realization and then the respective dismissal and assumption of these particular attributes, more so than the changes of her body, that cause Orlando to *become* an Englishwoman.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, she here defines these gendered identities based not on inherent, physical differences, but on performed, external acts that define gender in a manner particular to a specific culture at a specific time. She first lists all those activities in which she cannot participate, since she is no longer a man: she cannot swear, “crack a man over the head,” “draw [her] sword and run him through the body,” “sentence a man to death,” “lead an army,” wear the medals won in battle, or be honored in ceremonies like that she had undergone in the previous chapter as a man upon whom the title of duke was conferred (157-58, 130). Orlando thus defines masculinity as a series of violent, aggressive acts or the honors obtained by perpetrating such acts. On the other hand, in considering “the penalties and privileges of her [new] gender,” she describes femininity as the maintenance of a carefully

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<sup>13</sup>Burns makes a similar point (351), but fails to note that Orlando on the *Enamoured Lady* becomes not only a woman, but more specifically an Englishwoman: that is, her gender performance depends equally on the dictates of her national culture as it does on her identification with one gender rather than the other.

cultivated appearance, enacted by the wearing of clothing and cosmetics and by assuming a pose of complacent servitude and helplessness. She realizes that the eighteenth-century English culture in which she lives will expect her, as a woman, to serve tea, assure men of the intelligence of their remarks (even when she regards these remarks as “monstrous”) and devote many hours each day to the acts of “hair-dressing,” “looking in the looking-glass,” “staying and lacing . . . washing and powdering,” and maintaining her chastity, that most prized “jewel” of femininity, “year in and year out” (156-57, 154). Ironically, Orlando recalls that “as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled”; only now does she recognize that “women are not . . . obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature,” but rather that these seemingly natural “graces” are performances that necessitate “the most tedious discipline” (156-57). She considers jumping overboard in a staged display of her decorously feminine helplessness in order to receive the “pleasure” from being “rescued by a blue-jacket,” but discards the idea when she realizes that such a staging would tarnish her feigned display of that omnipotent “jewel” chastity, for there is a “word”—one that the biographer chastely “omit[s],” since “it was disrespectful in the extreme and passing strange on a lady’s lips”—for women who would falsely perform such an act (156). Moreover, Orlando only realizes the performances expected of her as a woman when she first wears “such clothes as women then wore,” “the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank,” on the ship that carries her back to England (153). She defines not simply masculine and feminine identities, but more specifically masculine and feminine *English* identities—and, even more specifically, as they are defined at that point in the nation’s history: she must behave as “a young Englishwoman of



rank” only when she has “set foot on English soil” (157).<sup>14</sup> Thus, Woolf’s presentation of gender roles prefigures Butler’s argument that gender norms vary among different time periods and cultures or nations.

The series of particular gendered national identities that Orlando enacts bears out this general distinction between English masculinity and English femininity, in that the male Orlando bases his identity on violent, aggressive models, and the female one devotes assiduous attention to her attire to enact hers. However, Orlando’s performances of gender vary significantly, contingent just as much, if not more, on the era in English history in which they occur than on Orlando’s physical sex. Initially, the Elizabethan Orlando comically and hyperbolically strives to imitate a masculine model codified by violent acts in a colonial context, in keeping with the fact that England began its imperial pursuits in this era. The biographer first presents Orlando in the act of attacking the shriveled head of a Moor that dangles from the rafters in his house’s attic (13). By making her protagonist’s assault of a Moor here so overtly parodic, Woolf begins the novel by stressing that such a masculinity is an affected, imitative identity, inculcated in Englishmen by a national culture that “deforms” them into taking “pleasure” in “power and dominion,” as she later argues in *Three Guineas* (105). Additionally, by staging Orlando’s first parodically violent act as one targeted at a Moor’s head, Woolf stresses that English masculinity was a performance enacted in the colonial theater throughout the era of national history that the novel covers. As Marcus states, this opening scene draws a “connection between the production of culture and colonizing war and conquest,” so that “we cannot account for the flourishing of

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<sup>14</sup>Roessel makes a similar point, but one that fails to emphasize the national aspects of Orlando’s gendered identities (404).

English culture . . . without acknowledging the presence of the diminished, defeated, defaced black man at the scene of origins” (*Hearts of Darkness* 37).

Further, Woolf ensconces this act in a patrilineal English history: he mimics the exploits of his fathers, for it was “Orlando’s father, or perhaps his grandfather” who “had struck [the head] from the shoulders of a vast Pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa.” Whether the identity of the particular killer was Orlando’s father or grandfather is inconsequential; what is important is that one of “Orlando’s fathers”—a term used to designate all of his illustrious male ancestors, the symbolic source of that “heraldic light” which infuses him in this scene—perpetrated this vicious, imperial act. The glory and the masculinity of that “heraldic” line of English fathers has been enacted through imperial domination, suggesting that Englishness is “constantly reproduced,” but most intensely at its “finest moments” and when it is challenged, either “from within [or] without,” as Robert Colls argues (“Englishness and the Political Culture” 29).<sup>15</sup> Orlando’s fathers expect him to continue their family tradition and “rid[e] in fields of asphodel, and stony fields, and fields watered by strange rivers” in order to strike “many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and [bring] them back to hang from the rafters,” so as to encourage his sons to perpetuate the legacy of their fathers when Orlando himself becomes part of this group. These fathers thus form the base of Orlando’s family, as well as the identity as an Englishman that he is expected to cultivate: as the biographer indicates

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<sup>15</sup>Colley cites an analogous intensification of Britishness as the Empire expanded and thus “in reaction to the Other beyond their [the British] shores” (6). See also Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780* (91), and see Phillips (184-200), Hovey, and Kaivola for postcolonial readings of *Orlando*.

in the next chapter, ten generations of them now lie in the family crypts, located “deep beneath the foundations of the house” (70-71).<sup>16</sup>

Woolf also stresses the parodic nature of Orlando’s Elizabethan male Englishness by having him model it on a character from a play by Shakespeare, the most definitive writer from that period in English history and the one who has been judged since at least the Romantic era as “quintessentially English goods” (Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag* 1), as I argue in my first chapter. Like the staged attack on the Moor’s head in the attic theater, Woolf’s choice of fictional characters for Orlando to imitate in order to signify his masculinity makes the performance ostentatiously artificial, an empty act of imitation. In Chapter One, Orlando creates his gendered identity not by attacking a Moor, but rather by emulating one. After learning of Sasha’s betrayal of him with a Russian sailor, Orlando witnesses a performance of the final scenes of *Othello* and identifies himself with the “black man . . . waving his arms and vociferating,” and Sasha, with the “woman in white laid upon the bed” and whom Othello smothers as a punishment for her imagined adulterous acts (56). In a “stylized act” of aggression, Shakespeare’s Othello kills Desdemona, and Woolf’s Orlando re-enacts this killing, at least in the theater of his own mind: “The frenzy of the Moor seemed to him his own frenzy, and when the Moor suffocated the woman in her bed it was Sasha he killed with his own hands” (57). The masculine third-person singular pronouns in this sentence refer ambiguously either to

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<sup>16</sup>In the manuscript version of this passage, Orlando reflects further on the manner in which “life is founded upon a tomb,” upon his “ancestors & [his] death & corruption” (OM 311): he envisions here in morbid imagery that the present is founded upon the past—a sentiment that Woolf presents in a lighter manner in the novel’s last chapter, as discussed below. Similarly, in “Abbeys and Cathedrals” (1932), Woolf characterizes London as “a city full of tombs,” but one that is also “in the full tide and race of human life” (LS 34-35). These examples suggest that Woolf perceives English culture, whatever the era, as being predicated on the past, potentially in a manner that stifles the living and the present.

Othello, “the Moor,” or to Orlando—thus blurring the identities and actions of Shakespeare’s fictional protagonist and Woolf’s pseudo-biographical subject and emphasizing the performative nature of both characters’ masculinities. By embodying this model of maleness in a fictional character, Woolf suggests the fictive nature of the Elizabethan’s “ideal” model of manly behavior—that is, a figure who most clearly and purely embodies the aggression by which that culture defined English masculinity.<sup>17</sup>

While violent acts, even if imagined ones, typify his performance as an Englishman, Orlando plays the part of an Englishwoman through her attention to her appearance. Significantly, Orlando first arrives in England as a woman during the Augustan age. During this period, English culture valorized reason, and hence, as DiBattista argues, Woolf, by setting the fantastic sex-change on the cusp of this era, makes “a joke at the expense of the spirit of the age of reason” (119). Contrastingly, the English during the Age of Enlightenment also promoted models of femininity predicated on hyperbolically artificial illusions, as exemplified and satirized particularly in the writings of Alexander Pope. In Chapter Four of her mock-biography, Woolf quotes Alexander Pope’s mock-epic poem “The Rape of the Lock” (1714) to exemplify this model of femininity in the literary figure of Belinda, the poem’s heroine (O 209). In this poem, Pope satirizes the overemphasis on external beauty and propriety, at the expense of the more important qualities of virtue and chastity, as practiced by England’s upper classes. Pope most succinctly conveys the satirical point of his poem after the Baron has “raped” Belinda’s “lock.”

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<sup>17</sup>The fact that Othello is a Moor does not preclude him from being seen as a model of Elizabethan English masculinity, since, as Woolf explains in “The Narrow Bridge of Art” (1927), even when Shakespeare and other “Elizabethans laid their scenes in foreign parts” and created foreign characters, “they only shifted the scene from one side to the other of a very thin veil,” and “the country remained English; and the Bohemian prince was the same person as the English noble” (GR 15). See also Rosenfeld’s comments on Woolf’s use of *Othello* in *Orlando (Outsiders Together 140-41)*.

In the concluding couplet of the fourth canto, Belinda wails to her “rapist,” “Oh, hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize / Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!” (lines 174-75). In this tearful complaint, Belinda unknowingly suggests that she values her unmarred appearance more than her unviolated virginity and thus comically perpetuates a model of femininity defined by its focus on maintaining a carefully cultivated appearance and displaying extreme emotions, affected to gain sympathy, just as Woolf’s fictional and newly female Orlando had earlier in the same chapter considered histrionically jumping overboard from the *Enamoured Lady* to elicit a sailor’s sympathy.

In Chapter Four, Orlando—consciously or unconsciously—performs her eighteenth-century English femininity based on this model. Like Belinda, she cries publicly and particularly in the presence of men because she knows that “it is becoming in a woman to weep”; analogously, she is appropriately disturbed when she witnesses the Archduke Harry crying because, although she “knew from her own experience as a man” that “men cry frequently and as unreasonably as women,” she also knows that “women should be shocked when men display emotion in their presence, and so, shocked she [is]” (165, 180). In this chapter, Orlando pays especially assiduous attention to her clothing and cosmetics—an echo of Belinda’s excessive and epically described preparations for her visit to Hampton Court, as well as those of the sexually aggressive Jinny in *The Waves* (1931), a character who delights in “the infinite variety of women’s dresses” (TW 220). Similarly, when the eighteenth-century Orlando decides to travel to London in order to seek “life and a lover,” she diligently attends to her appearance—seeming instinctively to select her most flattering dress, jewelry, hairstyle, and cosmetics that transform her into a “mermaid, slung with pearls” or “a siren in a cave” whose beauty is designed to tempt men to their doom (O

185). However, this appearance is not natural, as the biographer here emphasizes. While regarding her reflection in a mirror, Orlando smiles “the involuntary smile which women smile when their own beauty, which seems not their own, forms like a drop falling or a fountain rising and confronts them all of a sudden in the glass” (186). This beauty is merely an outward display, a façade employed to attract men with its exaggerated femininity.<sup>18</sup>

Pope’s brief cameo in the chapter further emphasizes eighteenth-century England’s veneration of appearance over substance and ironically illustrates that this satirist himself embodies those very qualities he satirizes. In this chapter, Woolf places Orlando in a carriage with Pope—leading the heroine to speculate, “Future ages will think of us with curiosity and envy me with fury” (205). Here, Orlando vacillates comically between attempts to admire and worship Pope the “great” poet—whose name, along with those of Addison and Dryden, “chime[s] in her head like an incantation”—and moments of recognition when passing through the light of street lamps—or, as the biographer calls it, “the light of truth”—that Pope is simply a “plain,” “ignoble,” and even “despicable . . . deformed and weakly” little man in whom “there is nothing to venerate” (197, 205-07). In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf’s speaker warns her female readers not to be fooled by the seemingly inviolable greatness of “Milton’s bogey” (114); and in Chapter Four of *Orlando*, Woolf undermines any attempt to deify a respected eighteenth-century poet. Moreover, Orlando is satirized, as well: although she sees through the “miasma” of Pope’s

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<sup>18</sup>A decade later, Woolf more blatantly underscores the pragmatic goals of women’s fastidious attention to their appearances: in the first chapter of *Three Guineas* (1938), she argues that the Englishwoman has been “forced to use whatever influences she possessed to bolster up the system which provided her with maids; with carriages; with fine clothes; with fine parties—it was by these means that she achieved marriage” (38-39). That is, women will costume themselves, as well as participate in other rituals and practices, in order to attract men and lure them into marriage, the institution Woolf repeatedly cites as the “one great profession open to” the Englishwoman (6; see also 20, 25, 38)—and thus, ironically, women have had a vested interest in supporting and perpetuating a culture that oppresses them.

illusory “greatness,” she and the poet “went on talking agreeably, as people of birth and education” do, about such mundane topics as “the Queen’s temper and the Prime Minister’s gout” (207). Even while recognizing the artificiality of this society, Orlando—as well as Alexander Pope, the great social satirist—continues to participate actively in perpetuating it.

In the following chapter, the nineteenth-century Orlando displays her feminine national identity through different acts, but ones that are equally artificial and mimetic. Here, Orlando is driven by a force that the biographer calls “the spirit of the age” to emulate a model of femininity most purely epitomized in Queen Victoria and characterized by the idolatry of marriage and family, the simultaneous though contradictory shame of sexuality and childbirth, the crippling modesty, and the dependence on men. As Julia Briggs states, Woolf represents this era as a contradictory one of “growth and fecundity but also of general depression and debilitation” (73). From Chapters Four to Five, the narrative shifts ominously from the playful Augustan age into the Victorian one in which “all was dark; all was doubt; all was confusion” (226). Orlando watches the descent of a dark cloud that hovers first over St. Paul’s Cathedral, that building which an anonymous, twentieth-century Londoner in *Mrs. Dalloway* hesitates to enter, since “great men belong to it; martyrs have died for it,” and which Jeanette McVicker cites as a recurrent symbol in Woolf’s works “of a sedimented tradition of patriarchal power” (MD 28; McVicker, “Six Essays on London Life,” Part II 154).<sup>19</sup> As Orlando watches, the dark cloud over the cathedral grows into “a huge blackness sprawled over the whole of London,” the arrival of John Ruskin’s “storm-cloud of the nineteenth century” that covers not only London, but the

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<sup>19</sup>Indeed, Woolf elsewhere sees St. Paul’s “dominat[ing] London,” for “[i]t swells like a grey bubble from a distance; it looms over us, huge and menacing, as we approach it . . .” (“Abbeys and Cathedrals” [1932] LS 30).

rest of England, as well, and which renders the climate and the landscape, as well as the culture, darker, damper, and duller (O 226, 227-28). To her chagrin, Orlando discovers that the debilitating “spirit of the age” of Victorian England oppresses her both physically and metaphorically in the clothing it compels her to wear as an Englishwoman. Her fashionable Victorian garments impede her movements as she is “dragged down by the weight of the crinoline she had submissively adopted” and her “thin shoes” prevent her from walking in her garden so that “her muscles lost their pliancy,” and she consequently has become “nervous” when walking alone, “lest there should be robbers” or ghosts against whom she is too weak to defend herself (244-45). As the biographer had reflected in Chapter Four, the differences between masculine and feminine clothing compel “the man [to look] the world full in the face, as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking,” while “the woman takes a sidelong glance at it, full of subtlety, even of suspicion” (188). Orlando’s Victorian attire has rendered her into that woman who merely “takes sidelong glances at” her world.

Orlando further plays the role of the Victorian Englishwoman when “the spirit of the age” compels her to desire a mate. This “spirit worked upon her” by creating an initially mysterious “tingling and vibration” in her body, a “tingling” that concentrates in “the second finger of the left hand”—making that appendage seem like an alien entity when Orlando examines it “to see what [has] caused this agitation” (239-40). Citing the model of Queen Victoria, she subsequently realizes that the “spirit of the age” is one in which “wedding rings abounded” and one which has led her to believe that “each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life, whom it supports, by whom it is supported, till death do them apart”—that is, in which marriage seems “natural” (241, 245). Hence, Orlando desperately craves the presence of anyone to lean on, for



“one must lean on someone”—even if that “someone” is “only . . . a porter” (247). And yet, although to Orlando “it now seemed . . . that the whole world was now ringed in gold,” “she could not see that Nature had changed her ways or mended them, since the time of Elizabeth at least” (241-42). She realizes to her confusion that “Nature” has not precipitated this change in England, but rather that it has originated in the national culture and further has altered her own identity, causing her to desire a husband.

One critic argues that the Victorian Orlando agrees to marry Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine as a cursory offer of “dextrous deference to the spirit of the age that allows her a modicum of peace with her surroundings” (Lokke 244). But this reading suggests a division in Orlando’s identity between that which hollowly plays the part of the woman who desires a husband, and a central, essential self that remains unaffected by the national culture which compels her to do so. For Orlando, however, the role of the demure woman and future wife is her identity as a Victorian Englishwoman, or at least an important component of it. “The spirit of the age” speaks through Orlando and, moreover, “took her and broke her,” reshaping her identity. (246, 244). Thus, when Orlando first meets Shelmerdine, she recognizes him as the “romantic and chivalrous, passionate, melancholy, yet determined” gentleman, and herself, as the forlorn maid, since she is trapped with a broken ankle in the mud in which she has fallen (248-50). In a scene reminiscent of Marianne Dashwood’s first meeting with Willoughby in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) or that of Catherine Earnshaw with Edgar Linton in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Orlando and Shelmerdine declare their love for each other in a highly stylized and melodramatic manner. While she had only intermittently and half-heartedly “acted the parts of man and woman” with the Archduke Harry and with Nell the prostitute, Orlando here

enthusiastically embraces the role, exclaiming at the moment of her engagement, “I am a woman . . . a real woman, at last” (253). “The indomitable nature of the spirit of the age” has “ring[ed] her in gold,” redefining her gendered identity so that she believes to be “a real woman” in Victorian England, she must play the part of the helpless lady who seeks the aid of the chivalrous gentleman and, ideally, falls in love with and marries that gentleman (244).<sup>20</sup> In “The Russian Point of View” (1925), Woolf states that “the mind takes its bias from the place of its birth” (CR1 182); as she demonstrates in *Orlando*, however, the mind is biased by not only “the *place* of its *birth*,” but also the time period and culture in which it exists.

#### “The TRUTH”: Challenges to Orlando’s National Identity

However, while the Elizabethan, Augustan, and Victorian Orlandos rather flawlessly, albeit sometimes reluctantly, enact gendered national identities as dictated by those national cultures, the Stuart-era Orlando finds that identity challenged radically and in a manner that more overtly illustrates the artificiality of gender and nationality, as well as the close association between them. It is in this chapter where Orlando’s mysterious and dramatic sexual

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<sup>20</sup>Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out* (1915) anticipates Woolf’s later illustration in *Orlando* on symbiotic gender roles; however, he does so in a more overtly critical manner. He angrily explains to Rachel that men “believe [they] must have the sort of power over [women] that [they]’re said to have over horses. [Women] see [men] three times as big as [men] are or [women]’d never obey [men].” Here, also, Terence says that the “daughters have to give way to the sons,” as “the sons have to be educated”—a statement that prefigures the argument of *Three Guineas* both in phrasing and content (VO 196). Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse*, the unmarried Lily Briscoe comments on the respective and co-dependent roles of men and women, albeit more overtly sardonically than does Orlando and her biographer. In rather objectively analyzing Charles Tansley, Lily realizes that there exists “a code of behaviour” which specifies that women must on certain occasions “go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself”; analogously, these young men are compelled “to help [women]” if, for example, “the Tube were to burst into flames”—in which case she “should certainly expect Mr. Tansley to get [her] out” (91). Here, then, Lily realizes that, ironically, women help men by playing their roles as hapless victims, as dictated by the “code of behaviour,” in that they thereby create an opportunity for the latter to “assert [them]selves” in displaying their powerful masculinity. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily questions the need for such a performance: “But how would it be, she thought, if neither of us did either of these two things?”; in *Orlando*, however, Woolf more subtly undermines the necessity of these interacting gender roles by satirizing them in an exaggeratedly melodramatic scene.

transformation occurs, but the biographer chooses to emphasize instead the still-male Orlando's assumption of the post of "Ambassador Extraordinary" in Constantinople, which is cited in the chapter's opening paragraph as the "most important" aspect of Orlando's life in this era (119). Whereas most readers would consider the fantastic sex-change the "most important" event, the biographer does not even allude to it here, but rather focuses on what he regards as Orlando's "most important" role "in the public life of his country" (119). Additionally, the biographer apologizes for the dearth of "trustworthy record[s]" that would detail this portion of Orlando's life, for the fires that resulted from the revolution when the latter held office "damaged or destroyed" them, leaving a record that consists only of "lamentably incomplete . . . fragments" (119, 121). By having him base his account on such fragments, Woolf undermines the biographer's credibility, as Herman points out (180), and aligns the obscuring in this chapter not of Orlando's gender role with his/her role in the "public life of his [and her] country"—that is, Orlando's Englishness. This juxtaposition suggests that an obfuscation of gender is tantamount to an elision of national identity.

Orlando's Englishness becomes increasingly ambiguous when the biographer begins to describe his subject more closely. In the first direct glimpse of him in this chapter, Orlando is "entranced" by "the city beneath him" as he "gaz[es]" at it from his balcony (120). This vista differs strikingly from England: "Nothing, [Orlando] reflected, gazing at the view which was now sparkling in the sun, could well be less like the counties of Surrey and Kent or the towns of London and Tunbridge Wells," for he could discern no "parsonage . . . nor manor house, nor cottage, nor oak, elm, violet, ivy, or wild eglantine" (120-21). Hence, Woolf has located Orlando in a land radically unlike his homeland and emphasizes the distinctions by describing

Constantinople in terms of the aspects it does *not* share with England. Additionally, since Turkey is a nation in which three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—intersect, it is a place where East meets West and consequently one in which boundaries between nations and cultures are blurred, as suggested by the biographer’s reference to “the inhospitable Asian mountains” Orlando can see from his balcony (120). For Orlando, Constantinople becomes a place in which to question his Englishness. Although he is “English root and fibre,” he is “surprised” to realize that he feels a “passion of affection” for the wild, exotic landscape of “bright, unseasonable flowers . . . unkempt, pariah dogs beyond even his elk hounds at home, and . . . the acrid, sharp smell of the streets” (121). This un-English “passion of affection” for the Turkish landscape leads Orlando to wonder if, even hope that, one of his fathers “had taken up with a Circassian peasant woman” during the Crusades, resulting in the alteration of Orlando’s supposedly and otherwise purely English blood—through the less noble maternal line, of course—so that he now “fancie[s] a certain darkness in his complexion.” However, David Roessel astutely interprets Orlando’s role as ambassador in the Muslim city of Constantinople as an occupation reminiscent of his “vow to cut off the heads of Moors just as his ancestors had done” in the novel’s opening paragraph (412): as much as Orlando may long to “go native,” his masculine English identity, emphasized by his position as “Ambassador Extraordinary,” sides him squarely with the would-be colonizers. Indicative of the nomadic nature of his national identity, this foreign setting causes Orlando to question his Englishness by making him desire to expand it to include aspects from the alien culture and thus to render his national identity ambiguous, in that he is capable of perceiving himself as a simultaneous member of two drastically dissimilar nations. Not only does Woolf obscure the record of Orlando’s tenure in Turkey with fragments, rumors, and

mysteries, but she clouds his national identity with confusion and inconsistency. Even as he is made a duke, the highest peer in England—Orlando ironically mingles with the natives and supports their rebellion against the English-supported Turkish government, as the biographer obliquely suggests (123-24, 130-31, 139, 141).<sup>21</sup>

The sex-change that Orlando undergoes in Constantinople blurs his gender more than his reactions to and activities in the city obscure his national identity; further, the sex-change underscores the performative aspects both of gender and the purported ability of the biographer to convey any “Truth.” Woolf renders this transformation stylistically artificial by associating it with and presenting it as an English masque. As the biographer reports based on the diary of “John Fenner Brigge, an English naval officer,” a “tableau vivant or theatrical display in which English ladies and gentlemen . . . represented a masque” occurs during the ceremony in which the Dukedom was conferred upon Orlando (126-27; Woolf’s ellipses). In the following pages, the biographer delineates the sex-change as a masque in which the Sisters Purity, Chastity, Modesty are frightened away by the trumpet blasts of “The TRUTH,” which functions as a *deus ex machina* that seems both to transform Orlando and compel the biographer to confess this startling turn of events: Orlando “stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman” (136-37). Thus, in this account of Orlando’s life that privileges the linguistic realm of the metaphorically paternal biographer over the physical one of the literal

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<sup>21</sup> Rado observes that the transformation and the coma-like sleep that precedes it enables Orlando to escape not only the revolution, but his inconvenient marriage with the gipsy Rosina Pepita (164).

mother, even Truth is an artificial construct, a stylistic device employed to convey a “truth” that is not at all clear.

The biographer, uncertain as to his subject’s gender, describes Orlando’s “ravishing” form as one that “combine[s] . . . the strength of a man and a woman’s grace,”<sup>22</sup> and he uses masculine pronouns in describing what he simultaneously deems “a woman.” This unclear use of pronouns pervades the remainder of the text—for example, when the biographer describes how, in the early nineteenth century, the female Orlando recalls her activities in Elizabethan London “when she was a little boy” (224; see also 168-69, 216-17, 237, 247). This unstable use of pronouns had been foreshadowed in the novel’s opening line: “He—for their could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters” (13). After the single word “he,” the biographer interpolates his own sentence in order to justify in a surprisingly defensive tone this use of the third-person masculine singular pronoun in regard to his subject.<sup>23</sup> With the exception of this initial sentence and the gender transformation scene, this problem occurs only after Orlando returns to London—emphasizing the cultural nature of gender and that disputes over the protagonist’s gender only occur in England. The biographer’s inability to use pronouns clearly

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<sup>22</sup>Rado notes that in this scene, Woolf provides only very oblique descriptions of Orlando’s body, declaring only that it is “ravishing” (164). Rado intriguingly argues that Woolf throughout her *oeuvre* attempts to “escape the body” through what the former calls the androgynous “sublimating sublime.” Woolf’s theory of androgyny, then, is less an attempt to transcend *gender*—as Showalter has argued (*A Literature of Their Own* 264, 289)—than an effort to transcend *corporeality* itself. According to Rado, this wish to leave the body stems from Woolf’s experiences of abuse during her childhood (138 *passim*, especially 144-45 and 149). Contrastingly, Karen R. Lawrence finds that the lack of bodily descriptions in the sex-change scene “comically deflates the symbolic power and horror of the sight of castration upon which psychoanalysis builds its theory of sexual difference” (268).

<sup>23</sup>For other comments on *Orlando*’s opening sentence, see DiBattista (116), Bowlby (50-51), Minow-Pinkey (132), Little, “(En)gendering Laughter” (182-83), Caughie, “Virginia Woolf’s Double Discourse” (484), Boehm (200), Phillips (185), Hovey (398), Rado (162), and Rosenfeld, *Outsiders Together* (137).

and to convey the “Truth” of his subject’s gender points to the faults and instability of language, highlights gender’s performative and changeable aspects, and further cripples the biographer’s reliability—thus conveying Woolf’s skepticism that “any history is even faintly true.”

In “Orlando’s Voyage Out,” Karen R. Lawrence importantly asks “why, in a fantasy of transsexual life lived over more than three hundred years, it seemed necessary to plot the text’s most radical event”—the sex transformation—“*outside* of England” in Constantinople. Lawrence argues that “Orlando’s journey suggests that gender crossing is imagined as a cultural border crossing as well” (255-56).<sup>24</sup> I would add that in *Orlando*, Woolf presents Constantinople and the surrounding countryside as places which obfuscate both Orlando’s national identity and his/her gender. Thus, Woolf blurs the lines between seemingly sharply bifurcated categories and stresses how membership in a particular gender category assigns the subject specific roles within the national culture and conversely the ways in which membership in a particular nation shapes the subject’s gender performance. Although undeniably now a woman—meaning presumably that she possesses the usual female body parts—Orlando, the biographer stresses, does not react to her newly and startlingly acquired “position” as one would expect of a “young lady of rank.” That is, she does not “scream,” “faint” or “show [any] such signs of perturbation”; rather, she reacts

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<sup>24</sup>With “The Significance of Constantinople in *Orlando*,” Roessel devotes an entire essay to various reasons—mostly historical and biographical ones—as to why Woolf set the gender transformation not only abroad, but specifically in Turkey. He argues that Woolf “situated the most momentous event in *Orlando*, the celebrated sex change, in Constantinople” because it is the place where Vita Sackville-West, accompanying her husband in his position as a diplomat in Turkey, conceived her first child—an event that “in the traditional view” transformed her into “a mature woman”; it is a place she had associated with the “erotic feelings between women” in other works, such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*; due to her brother Thoby’s death and her sister Vanessa’s recovery from typhus, contracted in or near Constantinople, it is a place where “a male disappears and a female survives”; and it is located in a part of Europe that both Leonard and Virginia Woolf regarded as the site at which World War I began, and thus she there transforms Orlando from a young man with violent tendencies into a young woman whose gender excludes her from participation in war and aggressive acts of colonialism (398-14). Although he makes important points, Roessel here overlooks the connection Woolf makes between blurred gender and national identities.

unemotionally and rationally—qualities associated with masculinity—through actions that are “deliberate in the extreme,” including calmly examining her papers and other possessions and taking only those, such as a pair of pistols, that will be useful while living with the gypsies who await her (139-40). Muddying her gender further, Orlando dresses in the androgynous Turkish clothing (139)—garments that, unlike the English breeches and skirts, cloud the divisions between gender categories and indicate that the Turkish culture, unlike the English one, does not clearly separate these categories.

Moreover, after the transformation, the newly female Orlando “swung her leg over a horse” in a rather masculine style and runs away with a group of gypsies, with whom she lives for an extended period of time (140). This temporary joining of gypsy culture even more radically obscures both Orlando’s gender and her nationality. Like the Turks, the gypsies appear to place little value on gender distinctions, for, as the biographer notes at the onset of the next chapter, “the gypsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gypsy men” (153). Since one can assume that gypsy women possess the same basic anatomical “particulars” as Englishwomen, one can assume further that the biographer here implies discreetly that gypsy women differ from gypsy men only in terms of these “important” body parts; culturally, there is little, if any, distinction between the two genders (at least, from the English biographer’s and Orlando’s perspective), and hence gypsy society is an androgynous, even culturally genderless, one.<sup>25</sup> Woolf presents Orlando’s national identity as similarly compromised: due to “her dark hair and dark complexion,” the gypsies “seem to have looked

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<sup>25</sup>Blair places Woolf’s references to gypsies and gypsy culture in *Orlando* in a context of a “contemporary British engagement, even obsession, with the gyps[ies]” and notes that Sackville-West was reputed to possess a “gypsy heritage” (145, 142). See also French.



upon her as one of themselves” (141). Indeed, Orlando embraces the gipsy lifestyle by milking goats, collecting firewood, herding cattle, helping make wine and drinking it from a goat-skin, smoking from a pipe, and occasionally stealing chicken eggs; however, as the biographer carefully explains, she then would “always put a coin or a pearl in place of” the stolen egg (141). The biographer thus not only draws attention to his subject’s strong moral character, as an effective Victorian biographer should, but he points to the ways in which Orlando openly crosses the lines between cultures, for even while living within a gipsy society that condones stealing, she still attempts to adhere to English moral codes by replacing what she steals with objects of significantly greater value.

Offering her title character the opportunity to undergo a cultural or national transformation, as well as a sex-change, Woolf locates Orlando in a culture that contrasts strikingly with English culture. As Johnson emphasizes, “the gypsies know no nation states,” and “they recognize no geographical boundaries save those between land and sea” (119). Since gypsies traditionally live transnationally, freely crossing national borders and placing no value on owned land, they offer Orlando the chance to abandon her Englishness, as well as the limitations of national identity. In a 1903 journal entry, the young Virginia Stephen described her attraction to this rootless existence: “I never see a gipsy cart without longing to be inside it. A house that is rooted to no one spot itself but can travel as quickly as you change your mind, is complete in itself[,] is surely the most desirable of houses” (PA 208). For both Virginia Stephen and Orlando, a culture unmoored from the confines of geography appears appealing, in relation to what can seem to them the more rigidly bound national culture of England. In *Orlando*, Woolf defines gipsy culture against its English counterpart: while the English would view themselves as

“civilized” and others as “barbaric,” the gipsies pay Orlando the “highest compliment” by hypothesizing that, with her “dark hair and dark complexion,” she is “by birth, one of them,” and that she “had been snatched by an English Duke from a nut tree when she was a baby and taken to that barbarous land where people lived in houses because they are too feeble and diseased to stand the open air” (141-42). The gipsies hence bestow upon Orlando a gipsy heritage, perhaps in substitution for the Turkish one the male Orlando had earlier desired. However, the well-read, English Orlando assumes her cultural superiority to these “ignorant” and “savage” people: she insists to herself that she stems from “an ancient and civilized race.” Conversely, the gipsies become “uneasy” and embarrassed at Orlando’s “low birth [and] poverty” when she describes “with some pride” her fathers’ titles and their large, five-hundred-year-old house. As Orlando realizes subsequently, the gipsies’ “own families went back at least two or three thousand years,” making “the genealogy of Howards and Plantagenets . . . no better and no worse than that of Smiths and Joneses,” since all “were negligible” when compared to this older culture’s “ancestors [who] had built the Pyramids centuries before Christ was born” (147-48). The gipsies value British imperialism and peerage system no more highly. They deem these savage institutions in which “a Duke . . . was nothing but a profiteer or robber who snatched land and money from people who rated these things of little worth, and could think of nothing better to do than to build three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms when one was enough, and none was even better than one” (148). Recognizing the accumulation of land on which the wealth and prestige of both her family and England is predicated, Orlando realizes that, ironically, her own family would denounce any man “who did now what her ancestors had done three or four hundred years ago” as “a vulgar upstart, an adventurer, a *nouveau riche*” (148-49), and, as Kathy J. Phillips

observes, this passage indicts colonialism. With both her nationality and her gender rendered uncertain, Orlando recognizes the historically contingent and socially constructed nature of the supposed “nobility” of her paternal ancestors and the most revered families in England. The monuments upon which English national culture have been founded may seem sturdy and inviolable, but now Orlando recognizes that they, like the apparently solid ice on the Thames, are impermanent and unstable.

However, in realizing the differences between gipsy and English cultures, Orlando is led not to embrace fully the former lifestyle, but rather to yearn to return to her homeland, suggesting that as much as her performed and gendered Englishness can change, it is a national identity rooted in the land of the “scepter’d isle,” in “quintessentially English locales” and “authentic identity-determining locations” (Baucom 12). As the gipsies grow increasingly suspicious of and plot to kill her, Orlando is inspired by a sudden vision of a picturesque English meadow during the changing seasons while looking at the arid, sparsely vegetated, stagnant Turkish landscape. Like the speaker in Rupert Brooke’s poem, for whom a plot of foreign soil will remain “forever England,” and Woolf’s Lady Bruton, who takes solace in the image of the Union Jack waving over the distant territories of the Empire (MD 180-81), Orlando, situated on an alien Turkish landscape, manifests a faith that “England will be wherever English people are found,” as the late-nineteenth-century Liberal scholar John Seeley asserts (*The Expansion of England* [1883]; qtd. in Colls, “Englishness and the Political Culture” 44). Despite her ability to project an imaginary English countryside on the foreign landscape, Orlando decides immediately to set

sail for the geographical, physical version of her homeland (O 150-51).<sup>26</sup> Orlando's geographical and cultural displacement from England leads her to wish to return to her homeland in order to perpetuate her national identity—now, as an Englishwoman—rather than to reject that identity.

### Playing the Gipsy: Orlando's and England's Parodic Identities

Whereas the sex-transformation, the events that surround it, and the setting in which it occurs challenge Orlando's gendered Englishness most dramatically and personally, the changes in England illustrated in the novel's final chapter jeopardize more broadly the national culture itself. While the Englands represented in *Orlando's* previous chapters appear cohesive, that of the last chapter, set in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is unstable and de-centered, particularly as seen in its language and introduced with an ominous reference to the “crash[ing]” of “a shower of fragments”—in an echo of Woolf's 1924 reference to contemporary English literature as evocative of “the sound of breaking and falling, crashing and destruction” (“Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” CDB 115). This fragmentation threatens to disintegrate the national culture, but actually reshapes it as one that embraces the heterogenous and potentially disruptive “threats to its existence” both “from without and within,” as Colls states. More specifically, in this chapter, Woolf delineates English culture and identity as frantically parodic, in a manner that is virtually schizophrenic, in that it is defined by its inclusion of scraps from the national past and voices from writers born in other nations but who are nevertheless part of the

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<sup>26</sup>These descriptions of the English countryside in the various seasons of the year stem from Vita Sackville-West's idealized vision of England in her long poem *The Land* (1926), which is divided into sections entitled “Winter,” “Spring,” “Summer,” and “Autumn.” As many critics have noted, Orlando's long poem “The Oak Tree” is based on Sackville-West's poem, an excerpt of which is quoted and attributed to Orlando's authorship in the text (265). Additionally, each poem won prestigious poetry prizes: “The Oak Tree,” the “Burdett Coutts' Memorial Prize” (O 312) and *The Land*, the Hawthornden Prize. See Bazargan on Woolf's references in *Orlando* to Sackville-West's poem.

English community. Similarly, Woolf had demonstrated in *Mrs. Dalloway*, particularly through her portrayal of Septimus Warren Smith, the breakdown of language in England as a consequence of the First World War. In *Orlando*, she also characterizes her contemporary England as fragmentary with the biographer's collage of imitations—although here, she does not directly attribute the cause of this chaos to the war.<sup>27</sup> Most obviously in this chapter, Woolf renders the novel a Postmodern one in which “all that is left is . . . to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in an imaginary museum” (Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 115). In adopting a writing style more closely identified with Postmodernism, rather than Modernism, Woolf concludes her novel by emphasizing that English national culture and identity are Postmodern constructs.

As England “crashes” into a “shower of fragments,” Orlando's English identity becomes correspondingly defined by this splintering. However, she simultaneously rejects models of English masculinity and femininity. When Orlando does nothing in the opening pages of the chapter but sit in a chair, write, and think, the biographer desperately hopes that his subject will either kill a wasp in a display of masculine bravado or turn her attention to a romantic affair, as women should do, since, according to poets, “love . . . is women's whole existence” (267-68). But he is chagrined when his biographical subject does neither. The biographer elaborates on the

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<sup>27</sup>Beer notes the virtual dearth of direct references to World War I in Woolf's mid-career novels, such as *Orlando* and *The Waves*, an absence the former attributes to the latter's desire to locate these novels' characters in “a world devoid of close historical markers” (*Virginia Woolf* 56). In *Orlando*, the protagonist perhaps obliquely alludes to the war when she sees in London “women s[itting] beside great baskets of spring flowers—a possible allusion to the poppies distributed to male noncombatants during the war—and “boys running in and out of the horses' noses, holding printed sheets to their bodies” and also “bawl[ing],” sights that lead Orlando to sense that “she had arrived at some moment of national crisis,” some “Disaster! Disaster!” (274). But Orlando never investigates the cause of this “disaster.” The biographer more directly refers to the First World War later in the chapter, in a portion set in 1928. Here, he parenthetically mentions that “another war; this time against the Germans” has occurred (302)—but the subject is never again mentioned.

type of femininity that he wishes Orlando to emulate by drawing on the writings of D. H. Lawrence: he longs for Orlando to “write . . . a little note” to a gamekeeper, who would then “whistle under the window” and begin a romantic dalliance with her which resembles that between the repressed, aristocratic Constance Chatterley and her rustic, virile gamekeeper Mellors in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, published about four months before *Orlando* (O 268-69).<sup>28</sup> “Surely,” the biographer hopes, “Orlando must have done one of these things?”; but “alas,—a thousand times, alas, Orlando did none of them.” “The male novelists” define love as the “slipping off [of] one’s petticoat and—“ (269)—a sentence left discreetly incomplete in the novel. But, as the biographer disappointedly admits, Orlando neither engages in an illicit affair, nor does she appear preoccupied with love, as the biographer believes a proper Englishwoman should be. He sadly concludes that Orlando “is no better than a corpse and so [he] leave[s] her” (269). By refusing to enact the type of behavior the biographer finds definitive of twentieth-century English femininity, Orlando appears to him to lack any identity, rendering her “no better than a corpse.”

Woolf has the biographer imitate the styles of other early-twentieth-century writers in order to present English culture in this era as a loose conglomeration of affected “styles in an imaginary museum” and in a manner which intimates that this culture is as undefinable as

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<sup>28</sup>DuPlessis argues that Woolf here “evoke[s] and dismis[s]” the “Hemingway novel of adventure,” in addition to “the Lawrence novel of sexuality” (62). Naremore (208-09), Fleishman (139), and DiBattista (140-41) also note the Lawrentian allusions in this passage. Naremore suggests Woolf may have read *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* while still writing *Orlando*, since the former novel had been “distributed privately in England in 1928” (209). However, Woolf probably did not read Lawrence’s novel before completing the manuscript of *Orlando* in the spring of 1928 (D 3:176-77, 183), if she ever read it at all. But she may have heard about Lawrence’s notorious novel—which, as she later noted in her diary, a friend of hers deemed “DISGUSTING” (D 2:217)—before completing *Orlando*, since several members of her circle openly admired Lawrence, they shared common friends, and, as she recorded in her diary in 1923, E. M. Forster had paired Woolf and Lawrence together as “the only two [novelists] whose future interested [him]” (D 2:242). Hence, even if Woolf never read *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, conversational references to it in 1928 may have been on her mind as she completed *Orlando*. See Albright, Buckley, Schapiro, Siegel, Ingersol, Wussow, *The Nightmare of History*, Sumner, and Miracky on Woolf and Lawrence.

Orlando's identity. For example, this England contains the voice of T. S. Eliot, an American expatriate living in London and the opening lines of whose "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917) and *The Waste Land* (1922) the biographer echoes with "Let us go, then, exploring . . ." and, in the same paragraph, a series of present participles and other words concluding with *-ing*—"humming," "hawking," "morning," "starling" (O 270).<sup>29</sup> In this chapter in *Orlando*, Woolf through the biographer also mimics her own fluid, lyrical style, as she proposed to do when she first conceptualized the novel (D 3:131). In a paragraph in which Orlando examines the view outside her window in London, the biographer describes the flowers and other plants of Kew Gardens in images replete not only with sexual and phallic connotations, as Phillips notes (116), but ones that thematically resemble those of Woolf's short story "Kew Gardens" (1917). In the short story, Woolf both vividly presents the flowers, with their heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves" and "unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface"—and the couples, "one after the other," who "irregular[ly] and aimless[ly]" stroll past the flowerbeds, where "they were enveloped in layer after layer of green-blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance an a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere" (CSF 90, 95).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>See the openings of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("Let us go then, you and I . . .") and *The Waste Land*, in which Eliot concludes five of the seven opening lines of "The Burial of the Dead" with present participles—"breeding," "mixing," and "covering," for example (*The Complete Poems and Plays* 13, 61).

<sup>30</sup>Earlier in *Orlando*, Woolf makes another allusion to her own writing. In Chapter Two, the biographer describes the passing of time for Orlando as a phenomenon in which "things remain much as they are for two or three hundred years or so, except for a little dust and a few cobwebs which one old woman can sweep up in half an hour" (98)—thus directly drawing upon the recently published *To the Lighthouse*'s middle section entitled "Time Passes," where the most prominent human actions that indicate the movement of time are the dustings and sweepings of Mrs. McNab in the Ramsays' summer home. In deed, Orlando's biographer emphasizes the connection by stating in quotation marks that "Time passed." Zwerdling comments briefly on Woolf's use of "self-mockery" in *Orlando* (56-57).

Additionally, the biographer parodies the Joycean associative, stream-of-consciousness style employed in, for example, the “Lestrygonians” and “Nausicaa” chapters in *Ulysses* (1922) when he reveals Orlando’s thoughts as she composes a stanza of “The Oak Tree”: “Grass . . . is all right; the hanging cups of fritillaries—admirable; the snaky flower—a thought strong from a lady’s pen, perhaps, but Wordsworth, no doubt sanctions it; but girls? Are girls necessary? You have a husband at the Cape, you say? Ah, well, that’ll do” (O 265). Moreover, and as Phillips notes (196), these parodies together act as a prelude to the biographer’s announcement that “Orlando was safely delivered of a son on Thursday, March the 20<sup>th</sup>, at three o’clock in the morning” (O 295). This method resembles another technique Joyce used in *Ulysses*, where in the “Oxen in the Sun” chapter, he moves through a series of imitations of English writers’ styles that begin with Latinate ones associated with the Norman invasion and conclude in the cacophonous, fragmented twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> As in the final chapter of *Orlando*, these stylistic exercises preface the announced birth of a child,<sup>32</sup> rendering even the biographer’s use of various stylistic parodies a stylistic parody itself. Through these acts of mimicry, Woolf, like Joyce, mocks any author’s or writing style’s assumed ability to gain authority through a seemingly “natural” origin, as Jameson and Bhabha argue. And by creating a national culture that contains and is defined by the writings

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<sup>31</sup>Webb compares Woolf’s use of parody in *Orlando* with that of Joyce in *Ulysses*—briefly, as seen in the “Oxen in the Sun” chapter and, more extensively, as seen in the “Cyclops” one. See also Wicht (138).

<sup>32</sup>As Minow-Pinkney notes, the birth of Orlando’s son constitutes “the only childbirth in all of Woolf’s novels” (142), with the possible exception of the oblique reference in *To the Lighthouse* to Prue Ramsay’s death “in some illness connected with childbirth” (132). Bowlby points out that Woolf frequently compares her books to babies and their completion to childbirth (176 n. 7). See also Preissle’s comments on the treatment of Orlando’s pregnancy and motherhood. Parkes notes that “marriage and childhood, traditionally climaxes of feminine experience in the English novel, become relatively unremarkable features on the landscape of Orlando’s journey through history”—suggesting Woolf in the novel “mocks heterosexual romance” (450).



of an American, an Irishman, and an Englishwoman, Woolf illustrates the heterogenous nature of a modern Englishness that can encompass such an international array of voices.

Woolf delineates Orlando's identity in this chapter as similarly parodic and heterogenous. Near the conclusion of the chapter and the novel, the biographer, bemoaning the difficulty in translating an individual's life into a coherent, linear biography, estimates that "there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once" and "say two thousand and fifty-two" selves or identities "lodg[ing] at one time or another in the human spirit" (308): as has become evident to the biographer in examining the twentieth-century Orlando, his subject simultaneously inhabits the past, present, and future, and she possesses multiple identities. Statements like these have led Lisa Rado to conclude that in the novel's final chapter, Orlando has succumbed to a multiple personality disorder, due to which she cannot reconcile the various time periods in which she has lived and has become "increasingly convinced of her own inability to keep up with each age's mincing and threatening demands" (170; see also Kushen). However, the biographer in this paragraph comments not only on the twentieth-century Orlando's multilayered identities, but on those of all twentieth-century individuals, as well: he imagines the "selves of which *we* are built up, one on top of the other, as plates [that] are piled on a waiter's hand" and that "have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own" (O 308; emphasis added). What Woolf demonstrates through Orlando's many recollections of her past selves, rapidly shifting roles, and confusion of England's past with its present is that England's present national culture is defined by a similarly collage-like melange of fragments. Orlando's seeming multiple personality disorder reflects a contemporary England defined by a schizophrenic and Postmodern "spirit of the age."

Orlando begins to manifest this chaotic, fragmentary “spirit of the age” around the midpoint of the chapter, as she embarks upon a shopping trip. She undertakes the role of the twentieth-century Englishwoman as consumer marginally more successfully than she did that of the romantic lover based on the model dictated by the poets or male novelists.<sup>33</sup> On the precise date of “the eleventh of October . . . 1928,” she drives into Marshall & Snelgrove’s, a modern department store in London, to purchase “boy’s boots, bath salts, sardines,” and “sheets for a double bed” (298-99, 300-01). However, although she procures the last item on the shopping list, she fails to purchase the other items because she sees a woman in the store whom she identifies as Sasha, now “grown so fat; so lethargic” (303). This sighting instigates Orlando’s volatile, painful recollections of a “faithless” girl who is “furred, pearled, [and] in Russian trousers” and, further, causes the store to seem “to pitch and toss with yellow water” among “the masts of the Russian ship standing out to sea,” and Oxford Street, visible through the store’s windows, becomes awash in “the ice blocks” that “had pitched and tossed that day on the Thames” (303-04). That is, for Orlando, “the present moment” merges with the past. Moreover, Sasha’s reappearance precipitates the reliving of other moments in Orlando’s prematurely long life—for example, “with her eyes full of tears,” she sees the Persian mountains as she enters her car after exiting the store (305).

But in Orlando’s consciousness, these memories of the past are interlaced with recognitions of England in the present: as she drives through London, she notes that “the Old

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<sup>33</sup>Abbot compares Orlando’s shopping trip to that of *Mrs. Dalloway*’s Doris Kilman, whose “grandfather kept an oil and colour shop in Kensington” (Abbot 208-09 n.; MD 131). He emphasizes these two characters’ class differences, as indicated by the latter’s choice of an Army and Navy store and the former’s selection of a more upscale department store where she purchases sheets of “the best Irish linen,” as the courteous salesman explains (O 302).

Kent Road was very crowded on Thursday, the eleventh of October, 1928,” in that the street is populated by “women with shopping bags[,] children [who] r[u]n out,” and “butchers [who] st[and] at the door,” and she notices markets, a funeral, and “a procession with banners upon which was written in great letters ‘Ra–Un’” (306-07). Raymond Williams comments on the rapid, “fragmentary” imagery of this passage and argues that its suggestion of Orlando’s “motoring fast” through London’s streets resembles the use of “cutting and montage” in film, then a relatively new art medium (*The Country and the City* 242). Moreover, Orlando’s consciousness has become so chaotic, mixing past recollections and an awareness of the present in a process that the biographer describes as the “chopping up small of body and mind,” that the latter is led to inquire “in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment” (307). Analogously, the biographer could also ask in what sense the English nation can be said to have existed at the present moment. Within Orlando lie

the boy who cut the nigger’s head down; the boy who strung it up again; the boy who sat on the hill; the boy who saw the poet; the boy who handed the Queen the bowl of rose water . . . the young man who fell in love with Sasha . . . the Courtier . . . the Ambassador . . . the Soldier . . . the Traveller . . . the Gipsy; the Fine Lady; the Hermit; the girl in love with life; the Patroness of Letters; [and] the woman who called Mar . . . or Shelmerdine . . . or Bonthrop . . . (309)

This catalogue of Orlando’s previous and current identities, all of which combine to constitute her present identity, represents some of the various and often conflicting roles and institutions within English culture: an aggressive imperialism, literary history, the monarchy and government, romantic love, the military, traveling, and marriage. Moreover, Woolf emphasizes

that this list represents not only the many facets of Orlando's identity, but more general roles within the national culture, as well, by capitalizing several of the roles her protagonist has played—"the Courtier," "the Ambassador," "the Soldier," "the Traveller," "the Fine Lady," and "the Patroness of Letters." One critic has characterized *Orlando* as "a gipsylike text" that "escape[s] . . . novelistic conventions" and is "adventurous, marginal, playful, and defiant" (Blair 157). Analogously, Orlando has played the role of "the Gipsy" both literally during her brief sojourn with these people in the Turkish mountains after her sex-change and symbolically, in the sense that England itself is a gipsy nation, one whose culture is "a house," like that of the gipsies the young Virginia Stephen had admired at the Wilton fair, "that is rooted to no one spot but can travel as quickly as you change your mind" (PA 208). Throughout its history, England may have occupied the same geographic location, but, as *Orlando*'s exploration of three and a half centuries of that nation's history indicates, its culture and expectations regarding national identity shift as rapidly as the location of traveling gipsies. Additionally, although it draws heavily on the English past not only in the chapters focused on specific periods but also in its delineation of present English culture, the novel resists venerating that past, but instead stresses the artificiality and mimicry prevalent in each era. While various literary historians cite as central to Modernism the presentation of the past as superior in relation to a decrepit present (a reading often applied to *The Waste Land*, for example), Woolf represents each spotlighted era of English history in *Orlando* as a series of "stylized masks," suggestive of a more accurately Postmodern categorization.

Near the novel's conclusion, the biographer reveals that Orlando's house, her ancestral home that has acted as the seat for her illustrious family whose roots reach back into the origins

of English history, has become a museum, a monument to the past. Entering the house, Orlando reflects with little remorse that “the house was no longer hers entirely. . . . It belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living” (318). Similarly, Orlando has become a monument to the English past, and, moreover, she virtually becomes a part of the land of England itself. In the novel’s final pages, she sets out to bury a first-edition copy of “The Oak Tree” beneath one of her familial estate’s oak trees—a tree she recalls from her boyhood in 1588 and which, like Orlando, is still miraculously “in the prime of life” (324). She wishes to offer the poem, the absence of which she had experienced as “a bare place in her breast,” as “a tribute” or “a return to the land of what the land has given [her]”; and although she leaves the book “unburied and dishevelled on the ground, afraid “the dogs would dig it up,” if she buried it (324-25), Orlando here recognizes her poem, her house, and herself as embodiments of England itself. Just as Woolf in a 1919 essay had seen in old houses “a private door into the past, through which one can see back to the pale beginnings of the English life four or five centuries ago” and argued that “the changes made in the house correspond to a change which slowly transforms the race which lives in it”(“The House of Lyme,” E 2:96-97, 100), she has spotlighted in *Orlando* the correspondence between public changes in English culture and private changes in that character’s performances of gendered national identities when, as she states in the manuscript of the novel, that character “tak[es] different aspects of the character in different Centuries.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

## BREAKING DOWN THE “PROTECTING &amp; REFLECTING WALLS”:

REWRITING ENGLISH HISTORY IN *BETWEEN THE ACTS*

In the penultimate entry in her diary, written twenty days before her suicide and during some of the darkest days of the Second World War, Virginia Woolf planned to “observe perpetually” and to spend “this time to the best advantage” by visiting “daily” the British Library, where she would “read history” by “select[ing] one dominant figure in every age and [writing] round and about” (D 5:357-58). She offers historical study as a distraction from “introspection.” Woolf had earlier “conceived . . . an idea for a Common History book—to be read from one end of literature including biography; and range at will consecutively” (318)—a projected third “Common Reader.” She fulfilled neither of these goals, but her literary endeavors attest to her ongoing exploration of the relations between England’s past and present, its history and contemporaneity. In her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), Woolf’s narrator suggests that “the time of Elizabeth was only distant from the present time by a moment of space compared with the ages which had passed since the water had run between th[e] banks” of a South American river (250). Hence, natural time appears to dwarf English history. And in her penultimate novel, *The Years* (1937), Kitty Lasswade recognizes the present moment represented in the moving train in which she sits, in that the train’s “rush[ing]” leads her to realize that “past and present [have become] jumbled together,” due to the force of “now,” which “changed things; destroyed things” (271). In this instance, the chaotic present corrupts the memory of the past.

In the final years of her life, Woolf faced not only the threatening, engulfing powers of the past and present in the abstract; she contended with the historical reality of World War II, and the journal entries she wrote in the these years resonate with the fear and sense of doom that the war engendered in her. Bombings and air raids occurred almost daily by 1940, one destroyed the Woolfs' home in October 1940, and even before this loss, Woolf wrote ominously of the apocalyptic "complete ruin not only of civilization in Europe, but our last lap" (D 5:329-31, 162). In these entries, not only her psychological depression, but also her fear of a Nazi victory caused Woolf to contemplate death: she darkly noted that her husband "says he has petrol in the garage for suicide sh[oul]d Hitler win" (284; see also 292-93). Woolf at this time could find little hope for the future: in June 1940, she wrote, "I can't conceive that there will be a 27<sup>th</sup> June 1941" (299). In *Between the Acts* (1941), a novel written during this dismal period in England's history, set a few months before the war began, and whose title alludes to Britain's precarious existence "between the acts" of the two World Wars, the characters convey a similar sense of despair, exclaiming that "the doom of sudden death hangs over" them (114).<sup>1</sup> Remarks such as these have led critics to regard *Between the Acts* as an expression of Woolf's "lost illusions," "a vision of human evil imminently about to destroy civilization," "a dystopian vision of the future of humanity" she held during the dark first years of the war, or even as "the longest suicide note in the English language."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Many of the novel's critics interpret its title as an allusion to World War II, imminent for its characters. For example, Pridmore-Brown notes that the novel is set "on a day in June 1939," approximately when "Hitler ha[d] already swallowed Czechoslovakia; [and] Britain ha[d] guaranteed Poland"—events that constituted "the beginning of the end of appeasement" and which "poised" both Britain and Woolf's novel "on the brink of World War II" (409).

<sup>2</sup>Zwerdling (323); Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (222); Bazin and Lauter (39); Marder, "Virginia Woolf's 'Conversion'" (467). See also Guiget (327) and B. H. Fussell (266).

However, at the same time that she feared the war would bring “complete ruin” to civilization, Woolf also looked to the ways in which that civilization could be examined and rebuilt. Perhaps more than any other time in her life, this war, which she realized threatened to “[wipe] out London pretty quick” (D 5:292), led her to see herself as a member of the English national community: in her diary, she describes the war as “odd” in that it “seems to” make “everything . . . meaningless,” but then “there comes too the community feeling” with “all of England thinking the same thing—this horror of war—at the same moment,” before “one lapses again into private separation” (D 5:215). In the summer of 1940, she disparaged the “emotional falsity” in “every paper, every BBC that rises to that dreary false cheery hero-making strain” during this “myth making stage of the war,” and she further complained, “I dont like any of the feelings war breeds: patriotism, communal &c, all sentimental & emotional parodies of our true feelings” (292, 302). But during these same months, she confessed, too, that she avidly read newspaper accounts of the war, since “the great battle which decides our life or death goes on” (292). The pronoun “our” may refer either to herself and her household or, more broadly, to England as a whole. Perhaps more than at any other period of her life, Woolf was acutely aware of her own existence as a part of an English community, as she indicated when she in this diary entry stated that “the writing ‘I,’ has vanished” (293). The war was a “desperate illness,” one bringing “darkness, strain” and “conceivably death,” and yet simultaneously it was also a liberating period in which “the protecting & reflecting walls . . . wear . . . so terribly thin,” so that “the ‘tradition’ has become transparent” (285, 166, 304). Despite the palpable and possibly apocalyptic destruction the war threatened, this “desperate illness” afforded her the opportunity to question those traditions on which English culture was based. During the First World War,



Woolf had denigrated war as a “preposterous masculine fiction,” one propounded in newspapers and the other media of the dominant national discourse (L 2:76). Similarly, she saw the then-ongoing Second World War as the conclusion—and possibly *the* conclusion—of that same “fiction.”

For Woolf, writing *Between the Acts*—a novel that she began by wanting to assume the perspective of “‘I’ rejected: [and] ‘We’ substituted” (D 5:135)—became one of her chief means to explore and dismantle the “protecting & reflecting” walls of English culture. On the same day that she learned her house in London had been bombed, she immediately turned to “P[ointz] H[all],” the working title for *Between the Acts* (5:330). More than just a means to escape from a terrifying reality, however, writing this novel constituted an imaginative rescuing of England by reevaluating the national culture. As Woolf explains in her diary, “Thinking is my fighting” (5:285). Five days after World War II began, she elaborated:

[A]ny idea is more real than any amount of war misery. And what’s one made for. And the only contribution one can make—this little pitter patter of ideas is my whiff of shot in the cause of freedom. So I tell myself. Thus bolstering up a figment—a phantom: recovering that sense of something pressing from outside which consolidates the mist, the non-existent. (235)

By composing a novel in which she evaluates the prevailing constructions of English history, Woolf not only defines the various attributes of the “figment” or “phantom” that constitutes the nation’s culture, but she attempts to pinpoint the mistakes made in the past and present in order to redefine them, just as in the essay “Anon,” written concurrently with *Between the Acts*, she restructured England’s literary history by relocating its roots in the works of “Anon.” As her

“whiff of shot in the cause of [England’s] freedom,” she strives to rebuild English culture, even when faced with its potentially complete annihilation.

In her earlier novels, Woolf had responded to the First World War far less directly than she did to the Second. In *Night and Day* (1919), written during the first war, she virtually ignored it, as Katherine Mansfield complained to John Middleton Murry,<sup>3</sup> and in her postwar novels *Jacob’s Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), she examined respectively the Edwardian culture that was destroyed by it and the problems within England in its aftermath. In contrast, Woolf’s World War II novel *Between the Acts* “fights” more actively to defend the nation by reevaluating and then rewriting English history. When, in another essay written simultaneously with *Between the Acts*, Woolf notes that she and other civilians can hear “Hitler’s voice as [they] sit home of an evening” (“The Leaning Tower” [1940], M 131), she suggests, as the later literary critics Rod Mengham and R. H. Reeve argue, that the Second World War was a period in which “the entirety of British society was engaged in total war,” one that collapsed the lines between soldiers and civilians, and public and private concerns, and that threatened all British subjects (xi). This apprehension of their participation in “total war” engendered in Britain what Adam Piette calls a “theatre of war” or “historical drama,” in which the wartime culture “aimed at transforming private imagination into public spirit”; as Piette observes, “a militarized culture does not merely incidentally invade the private imagination, but actually

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<sup>3</sup>In a letter written in November 1919, Mansfield privately confesses to Murry, “I don’t like it [*Night and Day*]” because “it is a lie in the soul” that suggests “the war never has been”; she further asserts, “[T]he novel can’t just leave the war out. There *must* have been a change of heart” (Hankin 204). In her review of the novel, published in the same month in the *Athenaeum*, Mansfield similarly deems it a retreat back into traditional methods of fiction writing and away from the more experimental style of Woolf’s short story “The Mark on the Wall,” which she admired: “Yet here is *Night and Day*, fresh, new and exquisite, a novel in the tradition of the English novel. In the midst of our admiration it makes us feel old and chill: we had never thought to look upon its like again!” (82).

covets it as its own, wish[ing] to transform it for its own uses, to make it its creature” (2, 5). In his analysis of national themes in *Between the Acts*, Jed Esty recognizes in this novel Woolf’s concurrent upholding and subversion of the traditionally jingoistic English pageant tradition in order to “encourage a relatively more socially inflected understanding of consciousness and reduce . . . the centrality of the autonomous psyche as an object of modernist representation” and to “resignify England as a meaningful . . . social collective” (104-05). But more importantly, given the imminent war, Woolf delineates an English historical past as a pageant, one that has compelled national subjects to enact particular roles in the “theatre of war” and of English culture. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf juxtaposes an historical pageant with a present one to show how Englishmen and Englishwomen have been and are playing gendered roles that have led to the Second World War. More hopefully, she also suggests that these roles can be rewritten and that a new, less violent national culture can be constructed.

#### Scenes from Merry England: The Past

In *Between the Acts* and also in her earlier novels, as well, Woolf emphasizes the grounding of England’s present culture in its past ones. In the opening chapter of *Orlando*, Woolf depicts the title character and his aristocratic family as synecdoches for England’s modern and ancient histories; analogously, she begins *Between the Acts* by predicating the ancient manor house Pointz Hall and its occupants on a similarly modern and an ancient English history. The novel opens with a description of Bart Oliver, the family’s patriarch and “of the Indian Civil Service, retired,” conversing with Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Haines, a local “gentleman farmer,” and his wife, “in the big room with the windows open to the garden” on a “summer’s night” (3-4). Here, Woolf seems to set up a traditional scene akin to one in which a yeoman seeks the advice

of his feudal lord on a picturesque English summer night. However, this idealism is immediately undermined, for even as she indicates pastorally that “the windows open to the garden,” the narrator reveals that the topic of conversation is “the cesspool”—an ironic contrast that Mrs. Haines senses, for she complains, “What a subject to talk about on a night like this!” This opening suggests that the novel will represent English history or culture not as a flourishing, fragrant garden, but as a stagnant, decaying cesspool. Indeed, Bart alludes to this decomposition and stagnation when he explains that “the site they had chosen for the cesspool was . . . on the Roman road,” where one could see “from an aeroplane . . . plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars” (4). The land upon which Pointz Hall is located itself becomes a palimpsest of England’s history, although in its current manifestation, that history has become a cesspool.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf depicts Pointz Hall and the nearby village both as a part of England, since it is located “in the very heart of England,” and as a synecdochic representation of the nation as a whole. She emphasizes this theme, for example, through her repeated use of island imagery that associates the house and its inhabitants with the “sceptr’d isle” or what the young Phyllis Jones in the opening of Miss La Trobe’s pageant describes as “*this isle*” that is “*sprung from the sea*” and “*cut off from France and Germany*” (BA 14, 29, 76, 204-05; see also PH 259).<sup>4</sup> This alienation also hints at the effects of the impending war that began as Woolf

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<sup>4</sup>For an analysis of Woolf’s use of island imagery in *Between the Acts* and other works, see Beer, “The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf.” Beer points out that the heavy reliance on aircraft as vehicles of warfare during World War II challenged Britain’s comforting sense of isolation, its historical status as a “safe fortress”—as became increasingly untrue during the Battle of Britain, ongoing as Woolf wrote much of her last novel (266). See also Pridmore-Brown, who contends that Woolf’s use of island imagery in *Between the Acts* may have constituted a satire of Winston Churchill’s “rousing BBC talks” that “glorified ‘this long island story’ and

wrote the novel: as she wrote in a letter to Vita Sackville-West only days before Britain declared war on Germany and later in her diary after that war had begun, she regarded her country home in Sussex as her and her husband's "little island" on which they were "marooned . . . by the bombs in London" (L 6:354, D 5:344). Moreover, Pointz Hall's geographic isolation emphasizes its unique chronological status: just as England as an island is "*cut off*," the novel's setting also appears isolated within England. As the narrator indicates, an 1830 description of the village from a hypothetical guide book suggests it is frozen in time like the chorus in the pageant, since "1830 was true in 1939" (52). Concurrently, the villagers believe they exist in continuity with the past, for they know their ancestors had farmed the same land for millennia, and they proudly can find their names in the Domesday Book (31)—suggesting that they represent an even older England, one that dates back to the days of William the Conqueror. Mark Hussey contends that the novel's synchronous setting in both the nation's past and present creates a sense of an apocalyptic "unravell[ing]" of time, the *dénouement* or demise of English culture and history ("'"I" Rejected; "We" Substituted"' 151). But by isolating Pointz Hall and its surroundings within this culture and history, Woolf renders them the distilled essence, the "very heart of English culture." Like Orlando's ancestral home, from whose fantastic grounds virtually all of England can be viewed, the setting of *Between the Acts* embodies English history from pre-Roman times to its cesspool-like present.

Although the village and the grounds of Pointz Hall contain England's ancient past, the inhabitants of Pointz Hall are removed from the history of their aristocratic house: unlike

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spoke of this 'island race' as the fount of manly heroism, the empire as the 'noblest' achievement of mankind, and history as a *bildungsroman*" (415).

Orlando, who feels closely connected to, even stifled by, the ten generations of his family entombed beneath the foundation of his house, the Olivers bear “no connection with . . . the old families who had all intermarried, and lay in their deaths intertwined like the ivy roots, beneath the churchyard wall” (O 70-71; BA 7). This new family had “bought the place” just “over one hundred and twenty years” ago;<sup>5</sup> to Bart Oliver’s chagrin, “the Olivers couldn’t trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years” (7, 30-31). Hence, although they inhabit an ancient house in “the very heart of England,” the Olivers are little more than the “vulgar upstart[s] . . . the *nouveau[x] riche[s]*” whom Orlando denigrates (O 149). They seem to represent a modern England that is “*cut off*,” “marooned” from its glorified ancient past.

In response to this absence of an illustrious lineage, the Olivers have hung several portraits—one of an “ancestress of sorts,” one of a male ancestor, and one of a woman whose portrait Bart had purchased “because he liked the picture”—in order to manufacture a familial history (7, 36). As the narrator explains, the latter two portraits hang adjacently in Pointz Hall’s dining room, and while the male one “had a name”—indeed, as even does “his famous hound” depicted along with him—the woman is anonymous (36). These paintings together represent those monumental masculine and more unknown feminine histories within English culture that Woolf examines in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and “Anon.” Even in a painting, the male ancestor is a great “talk producer” and a domineering figure with an intimidating gaze who “hold[s] his horse by the rein,” whereas the “long lady,” reclining on a pillow, is a mysterious

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<sup>5</sup>In the earliest draft of *Between the Acts*, Woolf states that the Olivers had owned Pointz Hall since 1710 (PH 41)—at least a century earlier than the period she hints at in the published version. By moving up the date of the Olivers’ original occupancy of the house, Woolf further alienates the family from Pointz Hall’s and England’s history, and perhaps intimates the nineteenth-century origins of World War II.

figure whose image de-centers the viewer by leading “the eye up, down, from the curve to the straight, through glades of greenery and shades of silver, dun and rose into silence” and “the heart of silence,” as the narrator later indicates (36, 50). Lucy Swithin later tells William Dodge that although the woman is ““not an ancestress”” biologically, the Olivers nevertheless ““claim her because [they]’ve known her—O, ever so many years”” (68). In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf finds England’s dominant, patriarchal culture driven by Englishmen’s desires for fame, which leaves them unable to “pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it” and is thus epitomized in the “band of famous names” which “splendidly encircle[s]” the domed ceiling of the Reading Room in the British Museum (50, 26)—a history of which the Olivers’ male ancestor is clearly a member. Conversely, Woolf in this same essay develops an Englishwomen’s history as an outsiders’ “supplement to history,” since they are “all but absent” from the revered, male-dominated one, as signified by their “empty shelves” within the British Library (43, 45, 52). More than two decades later, Woolf found the beginning of this “supplemental” history in the oxymoronically “silent” voice of “Anon” that existed before the printing press (ATR 383).<sup>6</sup>

But as Woolf stresses in *Between the Acts*, this history is an invented one, akin to what Eric Hobsbawm calls an “invented tradition” within a national culture. The narrator explains in the paragraph following the description of the portraits that “in the heart of [Pointz Hall]” stands a vase that seems to encapsulate an ancient history by “singing of what was before time was”;

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<sup>6</sup>See my first chapter. Moore recommends that *Between the Acts* and “Anon” “be read as companion pieces since in both Woolf is looking for a link between past and future which will transcend the emptiness of the present moment” (172). Although I agree that important links lie between these two texts, I do not believe that Woolf abandons all hope for the present state of England—a point discussed below. Other essays examining connections between *Between the Acts* and “Anon” include Silver, “Virginia Woolf and the Concept of Community,” Eisenberg, Ruotolo (227-30), and Esty (102-03).

significantly, though, the vase is merely an “empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent” vessel that contains “the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence” (BA 37).<sup>7</sup> Like the vase, the ancient barn on the grounds of Pointz Hall represents a similarly empty history: “the Noble Barn, the barn that had been built over seven hundred years ago and reminded some people of a Greek temple, others of the middle ages, most people of an age before their own, scarcely anybody of the present moment” (99). “Most people,” then, regard the barn as emblematic of some historical time period, but they cannot agree on a particular one, as the narrator intimates when, immediately following this illustrious description, Giles Oliver enters the building and finds it, like the vase, rather anticlimactically “empty”—a point repeated throughout the next few paragraphs (100-01). In an earlier version of this passage, Woolf grounds the barn more overtly in English history and suggests simultaneously the symbolic implications of its “emptiness”:

<The Barn was empty.> This noble building which reminded archaeologists of Greek temples, and had been lectured on by English professors wishing to remind the present generation of their past, and to prove that the middle ages were far more pure, poetical, jocund and virtuous than the present; the eighteenth century had said this of the fifteenth; the nineteenth of the eighteenth—and now in July 1938,<sup>8</sup> the current lecturer held that the hub of civilisation, happiness, purity and poetry had been reached about 1820—every century was agreed that the age was about one hundred years ago—this noble building stood empty as usual. (PH 109)

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<sup>7</sup>See Ingelbein (287, 291 n.), Barrett (20), and Ruotolo (221-22) for other comments on the empty vase’s significance in the novel.

<sup>8</sup>Woolf later set the action of the novel in June 1939—a date that places the novel’s characters closer to the imminent war.



Woolf characterizes the discourse of “English professors” as one which denigrates the present by inventing or imagining a “more pure, poetical, jocund and virtuous” past—here, a contrast these professors have imposed upon the barn, but one, as the passage suggests, their predecessors have also created. Intriguingly, the year which these professors cite as that after which England as “the hub of civilisation” began to decline is “about 1820,” when the Olivers acquired Pointz Hall and the barn. However, as Woolf emphasizes in both this draft and the later published version, the barn is “empty,” “empty as usual”: like the vase at its “heart” and its barn, the house “at the heart of England,” its inhabitants, and guests represent an England that has been manufactured.

Woolf also underscores the constructed nature of English history by grounding the Olivers and their guests in a particularly literary past. Indeed, Avrom Fleishman deems the characters “self-conscious” about English literature (216), and Hermione Lee notes similarly that they all display “something of a literary heritage” (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 209). However, this literary past is one from which the characters appear alienated. When in the opening paragraphs “a bird chuckle[s] outside,” Mrs. Haines hypothesizes that it is a nightingale (3), that most romantic of English birds celebrated most famously in John Keats’s ode. But the narrator immediately deflates these idyllic associations: she insists that it is simply “a daylight bird,” mindlessly “chuckling over” its very practical desires for “worms, snails, grit, even in sleep,” rather than Keats’s “immortal Bird” of “faery lands” (BA 3; “Ode to a Nightingale” [1819] 208-09).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, David McWhirter finds the confused bird of this opening passage more akin to *The*

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<sup>9</sup>Woolf similarly suggests the inapplicability of nightingales as symbols in relation to the practical concerns of modern England in *Three Guineas* (1938). In the first chapter, she ridicules a woman who has asked for a donation toward rebuilding a women’s college by suggesting that the latter has been “secluded among the nightingales and the willows” and consequently has not thought of ways in which not to replicate the mistakes of men’s colleges (31). Later in the chapter, she further associates these nightingales and willows with old and faulted

*Waste Land*'s fallen nightingale, who sings "'jug jug' to dirty ears," than to Keats's poem (McWhirter 790; Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 64).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, when Bart recites a few lines of Byron's poetry, remembered from his childhood, his daughter-in-law Isa briefly imagines herself and Mr. Haines as two beautiful swans, "float[ing] down stream." However, these swans are immediately stymied by "a tangle of dirty duckweed"—the practical impediments to the realization of this ideal love, represented by the "goosefaced" Mrs. Haines and Isa's stock-broker husband (3, 5-6). In a draft of these passages, Woolf indicates more clearly the inapplicability of Byron's lyrical image of lovers who go "a-roving by the light of the moon" to England's present: Isa laments that "Byron and Shelley were not for them" (PH 40). The natural imagery of *Between the Acts* lacks the associations with love, beauty, and immortality that England's Romantic poets had granted their nightingales, swans, skylarks, and daffodils. In these opening pages, Woolf locates the novel's characters in a present England that is predicated on the past, yet is stagnant and unproductive. In present-day England, the revered national past merely festers around and oppresses them.

The description of Pointz Hall's library suggests this distance between modern England and a past its inhabitants consider more illustrious. Isa deems this room "'the nicest . . . in the house'" (BA 19). Moreover, as Lucy later asserts, it is one that contains "'the poets from whom we descend by way of the mind'" (68). Whereas in an early draft of the novel, Woolf filled this library with volumes by Chaucer, Paston, and Marlowe, the library in *Between the Acts* consists

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traditions, ones that have led men to start wars; she instructs the woman to "set fire to the old hypocrisies," the burning of which will "scare the nightingales and incarnadine the willows" (36).

<sup>10</sup>Woolf also quotes this line from *The Waste Land*—in slightly altered form—in *The Waves* (1931; 177). See also Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (210) and Ingelbein (287-88).

predominantly of a “shuffle of shilling shockers,” purchased, read, and “dropped” by commuters taking the train from London to the remote village: if ““books are mirrors of the soul,”” as an aphorism quoted here states, then “nobody could pretend” in examining Pointz Hall’s book collection “that the looking-glass always reflected the anguish of a Queen or the heroism of King Harry” (PH 50-51; BA 16). If the novel’s present-day characters have “descended” from England’s great past poets, Pointz Hall’s book collection intimates another type of “descent” occurring: in its current manifestation, this once-illustrious literary history has degenerated or descended into one “of failures and fragments,” as Woolf had predicted “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924; CDB 117).<sup>11</sup> Although the “country gentleman’s library,” as the narrator later calls the Olivers’ book collection (BA 115), also contains the works of “Keats and Shelley; Yeats and Donne,” Charles Darwin, and biographies of Garibaldi and Lord Palmerston, Isa declares her entire generation, “book-shy.” At “the age of the century, thirty-nine,” Isa is fascinated by, and yet alienated from, the renowned books and authors of England’s past. Consequently, “for her generation the newspaper was a book” (19-20).

Through the Olivers’ hosting of the village’s annual pageant, Woolf emphasizes the importance of the English literary past to these characters who are simultaneously alienated by and attracted to it. As critics have pointed out, the pageant is closely tied to English national culture. Marlowe A. Miller explains that it is an art form traditionally “highly dependent on ritualistic symbols and music” and one that “rel[ies] upon a unifying moralistic and nationalistic theme” which “reassures the audience members of their roles within a community united by

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<sup>11</sup>In an essay in which he examines Woolf’s revising of the novel, Whittier-Ferguson compares closely the descriptions of the content of the library in the three extant drafts (309-10). For more comments on Woolf’s drafting and revising, see Wirth-Nesher (194-96).

Church or magistrate.” Moreover, as a genre that “grew out of rituals adopted from the Roman occupation,” the pageant lies at the foundation of English culture (139)—even if its roots in an un-English culture illustrate the invented nature of this seemingly organic national tradition.<sup>12</sup> Particularly common in the Elizabethan era, pageants continued to be staged in England well into the twentieth century. For example, Woolf’s friend and fellow English novelist E. M. Forster was commissioned to write two pageants in the 1930s, the later one in the summer of 1938 when the former writer began composing *Between the Acts*.<sup>13</sup> Within the novel, this pageant is written and directed by Miss La Trobe, “the only dramatist in any of Virginia Woolf’s novels” (Vanita 84), and one whom the other characters suspect is, ironically, not “pure English” (BA 57-58). Despite the mystery behind the origins of its fictional creator, the pageant in *Between the Acts* is clearly grounded in England’s long pageant tradition, as it consists of a series of skits that constitute, as one character describes, “scenes from English history . . . Merry England” (81). Woolf adheres to the conventions of English pageantry by deeply imbuing her pageant with national history, depicted through such well known symbols as medieval pilgrims, the iconic queens Elizabeth and Anne, a Victorian policeman, and a rendition of the jingoistic, imperialistic song “Rule, Britannia.”

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<sup>12</sup>See also Bergeron, Goodman, and Sears. For a conflicting view of Woolf’s use of the English pageant tradition, see Yoshino.

<sup>13</sup>In a diary entry dated 19 July 1938, Woolf refers to “Morgan’s pageant,” entitled *England’s Pleasant Land*—although she did not attend a performance of it (D 5:156 and 156 n.). The Hogarth Press published a transcript of this pageant in 1940. Forster wrote his earlier pageant in 1934 (Furbank 2:197-99), and it is collected in *Abinger Harvest*, first published by the Hogarth Press in 1936. See Esty for a discussion of the two pageants, their relationships to Forster’s novels, and the pastoral vision of England promulgated in them (76-85). Fleishman briefly notes that “Woolf was undoubtedly aware of her friend E. M. Forster’s 1934 pageant” (218 n.), while Esty suggests further that Forster’s use of the pageant form partially inspired her to write one in *Between the Acts* (86).

As Woolf presents the pageant in the novel, this history is intimately couched in the very landscape of “Merry England,” seeming to suggest a natural relationship between the nation and the land it inhabits.<sup>14</sup> Miss La Trobe sets the performance on the “natural stage” of the “open-air cathedral” among the ancient trees on the lawn of Pointz Hall, where, as one unnamed audience member insists, ““they say there’s been a garden . . . for five hundred years,” and in sight of a landscape that conjures communal images of “neighbors dig[ging] in cottage gardens and lean[ing] over cottage gates” and who “after toil . . . rest from their labours”; additionally, the performance, occurring on “a perfect summer afternoon,” is alternately hindered and enhanced by the natural world—including nearby mooing cows, blowing winds, swooping swallows, and a spontaneous, “sudden and universal” rain shower (76, 54-55, 134, 151, 140-41, 84-85, 180).

As Miss La Trobe writes it, the pageant itself also clearly imbeds English national culture in the physical landscape of England—illustrating that Englishness is typically associated with “authentic identity-determining locations” (Baucom 12). Embodying what Alex Zwerdling calls “the continual existence of an *essential* England” (309), a group of villagers, in the roles of peasants, acts as a chorus in the background of each of the individual “scenes from English history.” Representative of the farming ancestors the villagers recall and reminiscent of the “undifferentiated voices who sing like birds in the pauses of the wind” that Woolf describes in her essay “On Not Knowing Greek” (1925; CR1 29), this chorus alludes to an idyllic rural past by describing the organic building of what would become England through their “*cutting the roads*” and “*digging and delving*” in the earth in order to “*ground roots between stones*” and

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<sup>14</sup>Forster in the foreword to his 1934 pageant similarly intimates an organic connection between the history his pageant delineates and the land: he describes it as a “rural” history intended “to show the continuity of country life” (*The Abinger Pageant* 350).

“ground corn.” This agrarian lifestyle culminates in the peasants’ literally becoming the land they till, for they continue their “*digging and delving*” until they “*too . . . lay under g-r-o-u-n-d*” (BA 78, 125).<sup>15</sup> Believing that “*the earth is always the same,*” just as they “*remain forever the same,*” even as “*time passes*” through “*summer and winter and spring; and spring and winter again,*” they live cyclically, “*ploughing and sowing, eating and growing*” (125, 139). Thus coexisting in perfect harmony with nature, this pastoral chorus connotes a seemingly eternal England, that same one also inhabited by the “many nameless workers” and “eternal” peasants Woolf refers to in “Anon” and her earlier essay “The Novels of Thomas Hardy” (ATR 430 n.; CR2 249), and that T. S. Eliot in his nearly contemporaneous poem “East Coker” (1940) peoples with music-playing, “eating and drinking” dancers whose “feet [are] rising and falling” cyclically (*Complete Poems and Plays* 177-78).

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams points out that English literature remained “predominantly rural,” long after the English became “predominantly urban,” even in the “urban and industrial land” of the twentieth century: rural England hence signifies a virtually sacred, although rapidly disappearing “organic community” fondly and nostalgically recalled as “Old England” in the national imagination, although such a community probably never literally existed (2, 9).<sup>16</sup> In January 1941, Woolf herself wistfully regarded the sight of “a stallion being led, under the may beeches, along a grass ride” as an embodiment of England, and even *Three Guinea*’s disgruntled, alienated female speaker, who “as a woman . . . ha[s] no country,”

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<sup>15</sup>Woolf includes a similar description of the dead as part of the landscape in *Jacob’s Room*, where Betty Flanders envisages her dead husband “merged in the grass, the sloping hillside,” so that her home “Seabrook’s voice” is “the voice of the dead.” (16)

<sup>16</sup>Gervais makes a similar point (1).

experiences nevertheless “some love of England” in response to “the cawing of rooks in an elm tree” and “the splash of waves on a beach” (L 6:460; TG 109). And when Orlando’s sense of time and self disintegrate under the bombardment of confused memories and the chaotic history of twentieth-century England, her mind momentarily “regained the illusion of holding things within itself” through the sights of “a cottage, a farmyard and four cows” (O 307). Similarly, Miss La Trobe, through the use of an Arcadian chorus, presents England and its history as seemingly organic or “*essential*” and intimately grounded in the landscape.<sup>17</sup>

As Miss La Trobe’s chorus seems to imply, she—like the professors to whom the narrator refers in *Pointz Hall* in their description of the barn—may wish to regard the past as “pure, poetical, jocund and virtuous”; but, as the novel and the pageant within it emphasize, this idealized past exists only from the perspective of the present. Williams argues in *The Country and the City* that an Edenic “Old England,” in which the inhabitants lived harmoniously with each other and the land, is always elusive and never evident in the writings of contemporary authors: “When we moved back in time, consistently directed to an earlier and happier rural England, we could find no place, no period, in which we could seriously rest”—a problem he deems “a crisis in perspective” (35).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Robert Colls stresses more specifically that despite assumptions that the origins of English culture lie in an organic, harmonious community, like that represented by Miss La Trobe’s chorus, “the English people were never as ‘free,’ nor as incorporated, nor as ancient, nor as united as some of their representations claimed. Anglo-

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<sup>17</sup>For an enlightening discussion of Woolf’s use of the village chorus, see Cuddy-Keane’s “The Politics of Comic Modes in Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts*.” Here, Cuddy-Keane suggests that the novel’s title may allude to the chorus, for, as she explains, the *Oxford English Dictionary* “describes the Greek chorus as appearing ‘between the acts’”(275).

<sup>18</sup>See also Hawkins (63) on the invention of an idealized rural England.

Saxon England had been a slave society, and under feudalism, indeed, most English people were far from free” (*Identity of England* 18). In “Anon,” Woolf agrees: “There never was a world without memory; there never was a young world,” but rather only one in which the inhabitants “are already corrupt,” “Arthur is doomed; [and] the Queens are lustful” (ATR 485).

Nevertheless, some of Woolf’s readers have found in *Between the Acts* a longing for an idealized, organic English past.<sup>19</sup>

By making her pageant a literary one, Woolf demonstrates that this supposedly “unified,” “enduring,” golden English past is a fantasy, a fictional invention, just as much as any other literary “fashion.” Traditionally, English pageants would reenact events regarded as historical fact; for example, Forster’s first pageant depicts “ancient Britons in skins gathering fuel in the Abinger woods; a cry of ‘Romans, the Romans!’; [the] arrival of the Saxons and of the Normans; the news of the Spanish Armada . . . and so on”—what his biographer P. N. Furbank cites as “the usual ingredients” of a pageant (2:198). Woolf, in contrast, elides such definitive historical events, even ignoring the British army, as several audience members are chagrined to realize (BA 157, 179). Before an audience that, as the narrator suggests, constitutes a cross-section of the modern English population with its “representatives of our most respected families,” as well as “new-comers” who bring “the old houses up to date” (74), Woolf instead represents English history through parodies of various recognizable literary texts and styles, culled from various periods in that history. These include a ribald medieval song in the style of Chaucer, an Elizabethan-style tableau whose plot contains elements of various Shakespearean plays, a skit in the vein of a Restoration comedy of manners like those of William Congreve, and a jingoistic

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<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Zwerdling (308-09) and Cuddy-Keane, “The Politics of Comic Modes” (281).



Victorian-style melodrama. She suggests that any historical account constitutes a “verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model . . . of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*,” as Hayden White would later argue (2; original emphasis). Even the structure of a pageant within a novel harkens back to the quintessentially English Shakespearean tradition, as various critics have noted: Woolf here employs a variant on “the Shakespearean trope of the play within the play” and invokes “the Renaissance . . . *topos* of the world as stage” (McWhirter 799, Fleishman 213). Hence, as Pamela Caughie observes, *Between the Acts* presents an English history that consists of and invokes a series of multilayered representations: “Virginia Woolf creates characters who play characters created by La Trobe, who recreates characters from earlier dramas . . . who are themselves parodies of historical figures, and these figures are characters in another text, the text of English history.” Thus, “there seems to be no end to this chain of creations . . .” (*Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism* 52-53). In *Orlando*, Woolf’s heterogenous interlacing of supposed fact with obvious fantasy illustrates the fictionality of history; similarly, in *Between the Act’s* pageant, the presentation of parodic literary texts as English history emphasizes the manufactured nature of what may appear an organic national culture and, moreover, suggests that this culture was never golden nor immutable.

For Woolf, this national culture was patriarchal and, by the time she began to write *Between the Acts*, virtually fascist. In the third chapter of *Three Guineas* (1938), her speaker declares that the members of her “Society of Outsiders” “will dispense with pageantry,” offering as a reason “the example of the Fascist States,” which utilized pageantry and other celebrations of the state as “coarse . . . advertisement and publicity” in order to “paralyse” or “hypnotize the

human mind” and instill in national subjects its “attitudes” (113-14). In this essay, Woolf points repeatedly to the similarities between Germany’s Fascism under the Third Reich and England’s patriarchal rule. In one of the most volatile and accusatory passages in *Three Guineas*, she quotes an English and a German writer. One writer contends that “Government [should insist] upon employers giving work to more men, thus enabling them to marry the women they cannot now approach,” in order to properly support them; similarly, the other writer argues that “the world of men” and “the world of women” are “two worlds in the life of the nation”—the former being a world focused on “the care of [the man’s] family and the nation,” and the latter one, on “her family, her husband, her children, and her home” (TG 53).<sup>20</sup> Woolf asserts that this insistence upon separate spheres for men and women—the public one of the former, and the private one of the latter—is voiced by “Dictators, whether they speak English or German,” and this dictator is “a very dangerous as well as a very ugly animal” who lives “among us, raising his ugly head, spitting his poison, small still, curled up like a caterpillar on a leaf.” Moreover, this “animal” is found not only abroad, “but in the heart of England.” For Woolf, from the same “egg” grow fascism and patriarchy, since both ideologies subordinate women by confining them to the private, domestic realm. Consequently, she believes that England should fight to “crush him [the Fascist] in our own country before we . . . crush him abroad.”<sup>21</sup> It is passages like this one that have led many early critics of *Three Guineas*—published as tensions in Europe escalated and just over a year before Britain’s declaration of war on Germany—to declare the author and her

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<sup>20</sup>For a fuller discussion of these quoted passages, see my Introduction.

<sup>21</sup>Woolf had hinted at this argument—a connection between Fascism and the oppression of women—more than a decade earlier in *A Room of One’s Own* (30, 36).

essay “bad-tempered, peevishly sarcastic,” “silly,” “dangerous,” and “preposterous” (Q. D. Leavis 410).<sup>22</sup> For Woolf, fascist and patriarchal societies spring from the same “egg,” and this egg lies at the “heart of England”—both in its present state and in its history.

Woolf began writing *Between the Acts* a few months after completing the final draft of *Three Guineas*, about two months before its initial publication, and as very passionate reviews—both laudatory and scathing—were released.<sup>23</sup> Like *Three Guineas*, *Between the Acts* clearly delineates the intimate relationship between the dominance of a patriarchy and oppressive, violent acts—particularly those directed at women—within the egg at the heart of English national culture. Shortly before the pageant begins, Lucy Swithin wonders, ““there’s the whole of English literature to choose from. But how can one choose?”” (59). Through the fictional playwright Miss La Trobe, Woolf parodies selected literary texts to represent an English history dominated by an oppressive and often violent patriarchal rule. In the prologue to the pageant, “a small girl, like a rosebud in pink,” steps upon the stage and declares, “*England am I . . . / A child new born . . . / Sprung from the sea*” and “*a child, as all may see*” who is “*weak and small*” (76-78). However, although she represents England in its nascent state as a young,

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<sup>22</sup>In language more polite than but equally as damning as that used by the openly hostile Leavis, Woolf’s nephew and official biographer Quentin Bell chastises *Three Guineas* for its “wrong . . . attempt to involve a discussion of women’s rights with the far more agonizing and immediate question of what we were to do in order to meet the ever-growing menace of Fascism and war,” for “the connection made between the two seemed tenuous and the positive suggestions wholly inadequate” (2:205). For a summary and analysis of the responses to *Three Guineas* since its publication, see Brenda R. Silver, “The Authority of Anger: *Three Guineas* as Case Study.”

<sup>23</sup>Woolf declared the manuscript of *Three Guineas* “finished” on 9 January 1938, and she began “sketching out a new book,” one that could help her “relieve [her]self” of the tedious task of writing her biography of Roger Fry, on 26 April 1938 (D 5:125, 135). The Hogarth Press released it in England on June 2, 1938 (Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A-Z* 294). As with all her publications, Woolf voraciously read its reviews—perhaps even more nervously than usual—as is evident in her diary (D 5:147 *passim*). For example, she recorded that she was “pleased . . . that the [Times] Lit[erary] Sup[plement] says that I am the most brilliant pamphleteer in England” and that *Three Guineas* received “many high compliments, but annoyed that Vita Sackville-West privately complained of Woolf’s “misleading arguments” and rather unsurprised by Q. D. Leavis’s quite damning review (148, 149, 151, 165).

vulnerable girl, Miss La Trobe points to its masculine protection and mastery by playing on the gramophone a “bray[ing],” “blar[ing]” “pompous popular tune” that describes “*the valiant Rhoderick*,” “*armed and valiant / Bold and blatant / Firm elatant*” and who as one of the “*warriors*,” invades and then guards the “*new born . . . isle*” (79). This combined imagery depicts the forceful intrusion and subsequent domination by a masculine, warrior culture upon a vulnerable, “new born,” and feminized island. Indeed, Miss La Trobe plays versions of this bellicose song at various points in the pageant, thereby reminding her audience of the pervasive presence of an aggressive masculinity throughout English history. Immediately following its representation as a delicate child, England becomes a “*grown . . . girl*,” a symbol of fertility “*with roses in her hair, / Wild roses, red roses*”: as the audience surmises, this England—played by “Hilda, the carpenter’s daughter”—is that ““in the time of Chaucer,”” since ““she’s been maying, nutting”” (80). The chorus then sings a bawdy medieval song in which a male speaker “*kiss[es]*” one girl and then “*tumbl[es]*” another “*in the straw and in the hay . . .*” (81). This song, which echoes the one intoned by Shakespeare’s Ophelia after she is driven mad by, among other things, Hamlet’s sexual conquest and rejection of her,<sup>24</sup> suggests men’s dominance over women in English culture.

Miss La Trobe focuses on the more violent relationships between the sexes in a brief Shakespearean-esque tableau performed before a Queen Elizabeth—played by “Eliza Clark,

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<sup>24</sup>In Act IV, scene v, Ophelia sings about a maid who is seduced by a young man: ““Let in the maid, that out a maid / Never departed more”; this maid complains to her lover, ““B efore you tumbled me, / Y ou promis’d me to wed”” (54-55, 62-63)—lines that, for most critics, indicate her sexual relationship with Hamlet. The references to flowers made by Woolf’s Hilda may also draw upon Ophelia’s subsequent distribution of flowers to her brother Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude, as well as her suicide in which she drowns surrounded by “fantastic garlands . . . / Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,” as Gertrude describes later in the same act (4.5.175-80, 4.7.168-69). For a brief study of “*Hamlet in Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts*,” see Vanita. Leaska points to possible sources of the villagers’ song additionally in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing* (PH 213 n.).

licensed to sell tobacco,” as the narrator informs the reader, but who to the audience, “looked the age in person”—and who, quoting Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*, orders the actors to “*Play out the play*” (BA 88; *1 Henry IV* 2.4.484). Thus, she indicates that this gendered violence is inherent in the works of that playwright whose “fame is so synonymous with the highest claims of . . . nationalism” throughout England’s modern history (Dobson 214). In Miss La Trobe’s play, a group of young men attack an old woman as she tells a story about her finding an abandoned “*babe in a basket*” (83, 89). Pleading with the ruffians, the woman, identified as “the crone,” implores, “*Are you come to torture me, Sirs? / There is little blood in this arm*”—lines that haunt Isa Oliver through much of the remainder of the novel (89-90; see also, for example, 216). Miss La Trobe emphasizes further the Englishman’s sexual dominance over the Englishwoman in by playing on the gramophone another “merry little old tune,” one which an unnamed character in an early draft of the passage identifies as “an old country dance” (BA 124; PH 130). This song acts as a prologue to the play entitled “Where there’s a Will there’s a Way,” a parody of various Restoration comedies. Tapping along with the song, Bart Oliver is pleased to hear the tale of “*young Damon*” seducing the young woman Cynthia by stating that “*peace has come to England, / And reason now holds sway*” (BA 124). Indeed, Bart applauds Reason, the embracing of which he hopes will enable his brooding son “to give over these womanish vapours and be a man” (133; see also 123): for Bartholomew Oliver, to “be a man” in England, one must act with aggressive sexual dominance and avoid those melancholy emotions he deems “womanish.”

These private, individual attacks on women, then, reflect more broad aggressive acts in English national culture. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that “the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected” and thus “the tyrannies and servilities of one are the tyrannies and

servilities of the other” (142): the oppression and violent treatment of women in the private home is fostered by a patriarchal culture that promotes violence. When she began writing *Between the Acts*, Britain was preparing for the impending war with Germany; consequently, Woolf was perhaps even more acutely aware of the ways in which “one rockets between public & private,” as she wrote in her diary in April 1939 (5:213). In *Between the Acts*, she illustrates what she describes in *Three Guineas* as the “bridge which connects the private house with the world of the public life” (18) most overtly in the monologue delivered by “Budge the publican” at the opening of the Victorian portion of the pageant. Just as Woolf’s satire of Victorian English culture in *Orlando* is the novel’s “most savage” (DiBattista 137), the pageant’s Victorian skit hostilely and unflatteringly represents these recent predecessors of Woolf and the pageant’s audience. Indeed, in response to the skit, one female character in the audience detects an insult: “Why she did not know, yet somehow she felt that a sneer had been aimed at her father; therefore at herself.” This statement which suggests that the character’s sense of her own Englishness stems from a sincere belief that the past was “grand” and inviolate; as she defensively insists, “There were grand men among them . . .” (BA 164; Woolf’s ellipses).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>In an earlier draft of this passage, this character, Mrs. Jones, is absent, and instead, Mrs. Arthur Johnson more ambivalently concedes that the Victorians’ “ideas were not altogether ours. But they were good according to their lights. They had their faults. But there were grand men among them . . .” (PH 150; Woolf’s ellipses). Woolf’s revisions of the passage suggest that she wished to emphasize the hostility with which Miss La Trobe presents the Victorians and their concepts of the English nation and British empire—a hostility that is intended to offend the pageant’s audience.

As noted, for Woolf, the most important “grand” Victorian man in her life was her father, Sir Leslie Stephen. In *A Sketch of the Past* (1939)—an extended autobiographical essay she wrote concurrently with *Between the Acts*—she paints a rather ambivalent picture of her father as a loving, but flawed and domineering man, one who was prone to profound “glooms,” “violent outbursts,” and fits of jealousy. She deems him both “godlike” and “childlike,” and one who fit the mold of “the great men of the time,” in that “men of genius” during the Victorian era “were naturally uncontrolled” and in that “those who had genius in the Victorian sense were like the prophets; different, another breed” (MB 107-11). Hence, while Woolf in her autobiographical sketch questions the hallowed greatness of one Victorian “man of genius,” she in the contemporaneous *Between the Acts* more generally subverts

Through the introductory speech delivered by Budge, playing a policeman, Woolf baldly indicates the dictatorial nature of England's patriarchal culture. In the third chapter of *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that membership in a patriarchal society compels any otherwise respectable a man to become "a monstrous male," one who is "loud of voice, hard of fist, [and] childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially" (105). Just as Elizabethan England compels Orlando to perform his masculinity through acts of aggression and domination, the male character in the opening performance in the Victorian portion of Miss La Trobe's pageant demonstrates his masculinity by dominating both colonial subjects abroad and women domestically. Here, Budge, an incarnation of that "monstrous male" Woolf describes in *Three Guineas*, appears in the role of a policeman as "a pompous march tune brayed" (160)—a tune whose lyrics echo those of the "pompous popular tune" Miss La Trobe had played at the start of the pageant and which describes "*the valiant Rhoderick*" and his warrior conquest of the England. "Eminent, dominant, [and] glaring," Budge is "a huge symbolical figure" and "the very spit and image of a Victorian constable" when he stands menacingly on a pedestal and, as the narrator elaborates in an earlier draft, gestures in a manner that is "kingly, if a shade too violent" (BA 163; PH 149). He bears a truncheon with which he directs London's traffic and, more generally, "*direct[s] the traffic of 'Er Majesty's Empire'*"—one that includes "*the Shah of Persia; [the] Sultan of Morocco . . . black men; white men; sailors, soldiers crossing the ocean,*" those who "*proclaim her Empire,*" and even "*'Er Majesty in person,*" for "*all of 'em Obey the Rule of*

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the greatness thought to lie in recent England's past. For a fuller discussion of Woolf's relationship with her father, see my first chapter.

[his] truncheon” (161-62). Using imperial imagery similar to that of *Mrs. Dalloway*’s policeman-like Sir William Bradshaw in his hymn to the “goddesses” Proportion and Conversion (MD 100-02), Budge’s policeman represents the Law of England: “*I take under my protection and direction the purity and security of all Her Majesty’s minions; in all parts of her dominions; insist that they obey the laws of God and Man*” (162). Even in the context of a play, Budge’s authority is one the audience members accept and to which they submit: when Budge points his truncheon at Lucy Swithin, seeming to indict her for a traffic violation, the nervous woman reacts “as if in truth she had fluttered off the pavement on the impulse of the moment” and interprets the former’s accusation as “the just rage of authority.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, her nephew Giles, a male member of England’s professional class, identifies with the policeman by thinking triumphantly, “Got her,” and thus “taking sides with authority against his aunt” (161).

To the audience, Budge’s “eminent, dominant, glaring” policeman embodies England “at the very height of Victorian prosperity” (163). Using the well-known phrase coined by Rudyard Kipling in his imperialistic poem, Budge refers to his rule as “*the white man’s burden*” and the “*white man’s job*,” while those oppressed by this rule are paying “*the price of Empire*” (162). Budge’s duties include the “*protection and correction*” of the members of “*Er Majesty’s Empire*,” “*a Christian country*” ruled by what he calls “*the laws of God and Man*” (162). In a text cited repeatedly in *Three Guineas*, Sophocles’ Antigone provokes the anger of Creon—a figure whom Woolf presents as the prototype for the modern fascist dictator—by attempting to

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<sup>26</sup>In a 1927 essay, Woolf also refers to the deference automatically given to those in the costumes of authority figures: “When we see [a King or a Judge or a Lord Mayor] go sweeping by in their robes and their wigs, with their heralds and their outriders, our knees begin to shake and our looks to falter” (“An Essay in Criticism” GR 85).



uphold the gods' Laws, although they contradict the laws of man and, more specifically, Creon (TG 81, 141). In *Between the Acts*, Budge avoids this conflict by presenting himself as an enforcer of both God's and Man's laws—thus validating the secular national culture he represents with divine approval. He is the embodiment of what Lauren Berlant describes as the seemingly “natural law” that governs and regulates the nation (20). Victorian England, then, succeeded due to its control over all aspects of its subjects' lives, including all their public and private aspects: as Creon asserts in lines quoted by Woolf in the third chapter of *Three Guineas*, “Whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in just things and unjust . . . disobedience is the worst of evils” (141). Similarly, “*the Rule of [Budge's] truncheon*” is a pervasive one that extends to “*thought and religion; drink; dress; manners; [and] marriage too,*” for “*The ruler of an Empire must keep his eye on the cot; spy too in the kitchen; drawing-room; library; wherever one or two, me and you, come together*” (162-63). Budge, like Creon, presides over a state that prefigures the fascist dictatorships of twentieth-century Europe, and, as Woolf argues in *Three Guineas*, one that also exists in “the heart of England” in the form of a patriarchy. Budge is, in other words, the pageant's purest manifestation of that domineering English national culture that Woolf continually sought to criticize and undermine.

Among the novel's modern-day characters, Bart Oliver typifies this aggressive, authoritarian masculinity, as demonstrated through his seemingly self-appointed “duty” as the family patriarch “to ensure conventions do not change,” as Lucio P. Ruotolo argues (216). More specifically, in his relationship with the family's two adult women, his daughter-in-law Isa and his sister Lucy, he upholds a belief in the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. James Naremore cites Bart and Lucy as the novel's “nineteenth-century couple” (233), and DiBattista

calls them “complementary opposite[s] in the English stock of comic characters” (202). From his long life, Bart recalls most fondly his youthful days in India: early in the novel, he dozes and dreams of himself in a setting that, as Kathy J. Phillips notes (216), resembles that of the final section in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, where there is “the shadow of a rock” and “no water” (BA 17; see Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* 72). Woolf characterizes Bart with imagery which resembles that she had earlier applied to Percival in *The Waves* (1931). Neville associates the latter character with “guns and dogs,” while Bernard imagines him “on a flea-bitten mare,” “wear[ing] a sun-helmet,” and “using the violent language that is natural to him [Percival]” in order to solve a native dispute; analogously, Bart in *Between the Acts* envisions himself as “a young man helmeted” and “in his hand a gun” while surrounded by savages (TW 60, 136; BA 17). However, Bart’s daughter-in-law Isa enters the room and wakes him, causing him to resent her as one who “destroyed youth and India” and in a manner that resembles Peter Walsh’s contrast between his adventurous life in India and Clarissa’s concurrently domestic and conventional existence (BA 17-18; MD 48, 52-53). Similarly, for Bart Oliver, Isa symbolizes the respectable life of domestic responsibilities that disrupts his hyper-masculine adventurous pursuits, while simultaneously being “grateful to her . . . for continuing” his family line (18). Bart, Victorian in sensibility, believes in a sharply bifurcated world of Ruskinian separate spheres, in which—as Ruskin explains in his 1864 lecture “Of Queens’ Gardens”—the Englishman is “active, progressive, defensive,” and “*always* hardened” with his “energy” focused upon “adventure . . . war, and . . . conquest,” whereas his wife remains in the home, which she maintains as “a vestal temple . . . watched over by Household Gods” and a “place of Peace” free from “all terror, doubt, and division” (77-78; original emphasis).

Bart also schools the younger Oliver men in a brand of masculinity free from anything he deems feminine: he silently chastises his moping son Giles' "womanish vapours" and more actively commandeers the training of his five-year-old grandson George in the traditional models of English maleness he venerates. Sneaking up upon the child as he plays in the garden—a realm Ruskin associates with women and in which Woolf locates the boy's nanny and infant sister—Bart, roaring, holds to his face a rolled newspaper as if it were a giant beak; George screams in abject terror of this "peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms" (BA 11-12). This fearful reaction angers Bart, who disappointedly declares his grandson "a cry-baby"; he repeats this taunt to himself as he saunters away and later complains to Isa that her son is a "coward" (13, 19). Meanwhile, the humiliated George, unable or unwilling to express his resentment to his intimidating grandfather, conveys his displaced hostility to Bart's Afghan hound, chastising it as a "wild beast" and a "bad beast" before he begins to cry (12-13). Here, Woolf illustrates the early fashioning of one of those "monstrous males" whose making she in *Three Guineas* attributes to England's patriarchy. Subjected to his grandfather's instruction, George Oliver can later assume the role of the Victorian policeman, directing "'*Er Majesty's Empire*,'" just as the young, Elizabethan, masculine Orlando attacks the head of a Moor in his ancestral home's attic and in conscious imitation of the imperial aggression of his fathers and grandfathers (O 13).

While Bart embodies those traits by which Ruskin defines an ideal Victorian masculinity, his sister Lucy clings to those traits by which Ruskin delineates its feminine counterpart. As Ruskin advises, the Englishwoman should maintain an ideal home as a "place of Peace," a "shelter . . . from doubt . . . and division," free from the "anxieties of the outer life" in which her

male companion must struggle; as the guardian of such a domain, she must “be enduringly, incorruptibly good” and “instinctively, infallibly wise,” in that she possesses a “passionate gentleness of an infinitely variable . . . modesty of service” (77-78).<sup>27</sup> As “flighty” as she seems to most of the novel’s characters, Lucy displays her complete lack of “doubt” and “division,” her “goodness,” through her unflappable religious faith (205-06). Lucy “belonged to the unifiers; [Bart] to the separatists” (118)—characterizations that suggest that the “passionate gentleness,” in contrast with the “active, progressive” spirit of “conquest,” that Ruskin associates with the Victorian Englishwoman versus the Victorian Englishman, respectively. Lucy and Bart exemplify their variant natures the morning of the pageant when the former worries it may rain: in response, Lucy “fingered her crucifix,” declaring ““We can only pray””; however, the more practical Bart states that they should ““provide umbrellas,”” a remark his sister interprets as a blow at her faith (23). But the siblings coexist in a state of complementary harmony, never resolving their fundamentally conflicting views on the world and seeming to thrive on these mild arguments. In an earlier draft of the novel, Lucy realizes that “she could just as well argue with Bart in absentia,” for “he was her adversary—the other point of view,” the necessary counterpart of her own (PH 171). As Woolf delineates them, Bart and Lucy occupy naturally and comfortably their Ruskinian separate spheres in which the latter dominates the former. Moreover, these roles within the private house suggest the corresponding roles the siblings would be expected to assume within the more public national community.

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<sup>27</sup>Poole regards Lucy as “the intuitive, feminine, Julia-figure in the novel” (*The Unknown Virginia Woolf* 226, 224): that is, he interprets her as a fictional manifestation of Woolf’s Victorian mother whom she presents elsewhere as the quintessential “Angel in the House.”

Woolf illustrates the mutual influence of the “private house” and “public life” in England with her parody of a Restoration comedy “Where there’s a Will there’s a Way.” As Zwerdling suggests, this title points to “the mercenary motives of the characters in pursuit of the fortune disposed of in the will” and also “the power of the individual will to carve out a disproportionate share for itself” (318-19). Additionally, this skit, like the Victorian, Renaissance and medieval ones, highlights in particular the dominance of the Englishman’s “will”—both in the sense of a legal document controlling the dispersal of financial holdings and that of his general power—over the Englishwoman. Here, Woolf parodies late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century comedies of manners, plays in which male characters often vie for heiresses and their estates and which thus render the plays’ female characters into little more than pawns in these masculine battles that culminate either in their assumption of marital roles or in some way bowing to the control of their male counterparts. In *Feminism and the Family in England*, Carol Dyhouse points out that wives in England well into the twentieth century were treated economically and socially as the property of their husbands, who gained legal control over their wives’ holdings through marriage (150-51). Restoration comedies are the product of such an English national culture that equates marriage and women with valuable property that men control.

The action of Woolf’s play centers predictably upon the struggle between two male characters, the villainous Sir Spaniel Lilyliver and the more gallant Valentine, for control over the sizeable inheritance of the young, beautiful Flavinda—a fortune she and her future husband will acquire only if “*she marr[ied] to her Aunt’s liking,*” with this aunt being the decrepit, “*old hag*” Lady Harpy Harraden (BA 131, 128). As Lady Harpy explains, the fortune in question was amassed by Flavinda’s dead father, “*Brother Bob,*” who “*became Emperor of the [West] Indies*”

and accumulated “*ten bushels of diamonds . . . rubies . . . two hundred square miles of fertile territory bounding the River Amazon to the Nor-Nor-East . . . and as many Concubines as he had with him at the time of his decease*” (130-31). That is, Brother Bob’s estate rests upon the dual exploitations of women and of foreign lands, so that, as Phillips argues, it emphasizes his and the other characters’ reliance on “the plunder of the colonies” (205). In addition to having amassed his fortune through the subjection of women abroad, Brother Bob, even in death, uses his monetary power to dictate the lives of his two closest female relatives: as outlined in his will, his daughter Flavinda must be preserved and “*wrapped in the sere clothes of virginity*” until she is effectively sold into a respectable marriage, and his sister Lady Harpy must act as his proxy who will approve such an acceptable match (BA 129). Even when dead, Brother Bob has made his sister and daughter the prey of a money-hungry rake like Sir Spaniel, who pretends to court the love-starved aunt in order to gain access to her nubile niece and thereby acquire the twin prizes of the young girl and her father’s vast fortune. By the end of the skit—after the presumably more virtuous and genuine but never-present Valentine has absconded with Flavinda—Sir Spaniel appears upset, not so much by the loss of his beloved as by the blow his ego sustained in losing the prizes to the younger man (128, 143). Sir Spaniel consequently vows to “*have the law on ‘em*”—referring to both Flavinda and Valentine. Functioning within an English national culture that equates women with property and that is ordered by the shifting of these properties from one man to another, Sir Spaniel is outraged and humiliated, his masculinity undermined, when he loses his coveted possessions to the younger man. Despite Miss La Trobe’s decision to eliminate the climactic confrontation between Sir Spaniel and Valentine, this elided scene and the former

character's agitated reaction to it hint at the violent conflicts that lie at the base of English national culture.

The elimination of this masculine battle allows Woolf to focus more directly on the effects of the action of the play upon the two main female characters. She highlights the extent to which Englishwomen are, ironically, collusive in their own oppression within the national culture. Earlier in the pageant, Isa Oliver had asked, "Did the plot matter?"; she had concluded that the plot serves only "to beget emotion" and thus that the effects of the action upon the text's characters, as well as its readers or audience, are more important (90). In the presentation of her mock-Restoration play, Woolf removes the scene most critical to the battle between the male characters, relegating this pivotal confrontation to nothing more than a brief summary spoken by a minor character (141). Woolf spotlights instead the action's emotional and psychological effects upon Lady Harpy and Flavinda to illustrate the importance of both men and marriage to women in English culture—a theme implicit, yet more underplayed, in the comedies she mimics. Both of these female characters, to varying degrees and employing variant methods, actively support the culture that subordinates them. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that the Englishwoman seeks to attract a potential husband by tending to her appearance with deliberate uses of clothing and cosmetics in order to "[create] beauty for the eye" that "attracts the admiration of [the male] sex" (20)—a technique that women practiced notably in eighteenth-century England. In *Orlando*, the heroine in Augustan and Victorian England follows these precepts by meticulously cultivating her appearance and playing the role of the helpless, clinging female in order to catch a husband—a ploy at which she succeeds. The eighteenth-century

Orlando, desiring “life and a lover,” transforms herself into “a mermaid, slung with pearls” or “a siren in a cave” through her strategic costuming (185).

In “Where there’s a Will there’s a Way,” the virginal Flavinda also aspires to play such a role and, implicitly, to support an English culture that allows her to wield power only by making herself attractive to men. Although her aunt, following Brother Bob’s instructions, has attempted to keep her shielded from men and “*wrapped in the sere cloths of virginity*,” Flavinda chafes at her role as “*the green girl*” and yearns to “*lard [her] hair from [a] powder-box*” (136). She secretly “*read[s] romances*” and, mimicking these tales’ heroines, regularly “*grease[s] the key in the lock*” of her bedroom door in order to meet clandestinely Valentine “*in the dairy*” and “*read romances under the holly tree*” with him (136-37). She wants to play the role of the cruel seductress from one of these romances: angered and worried that “*brave Valentine*,” late for their secret meeting in a the park, has abandoned her, she imagines his arrival only to find her absent and his being led consequently to wail, “*Where’s Flavinda? . . . She I love like the heart in my breast*,” and then he in despair over his lost love, stabbing himself “*through his breast like the duke in the story book*” (138). Flavinda knows that her value to Valentine lies not only in her ability to perform the role of the alluring heroine, but also in her father’s estate, for as she imaginatively and defensively insists to her absent lover, she is “*no castaway*,” but a young woman who will inherit a large estate (137). Ultimately, however, Flavinda chooses the role of the defiant romantic heroine over that of the more complacent “*green girl*” who submits to her father’s control in the form of the will that grants her aunt as proxy the power to approve, even select, her husband. By leaving with Valentine, she forfeits her father’s fortune, which now—as Lady Harpy explains—“*must go the virgins*,” who will “*sing hymns in perpetuity for the repose of*



*his soul*” (145, 131).<sup>28</sup> Even as one virgin fails to redeem her father’s legacy through a marriage sanctioned indirectly by his will, a group of virgins will “*in perpetuity*” expiate the sins he committed in order to amass his estate. While Flavinda’s embracing of a role as a romantic heroine may exclude her from inheriting her father’s estate, her father’s patriarchal “will” is still exerted through his control over a more deserving group of virgins who will expiate his sins “*in perpetuity*.”

In *Lady Harpy Harraden*, Woolf creates a mock-Restoration character who desperately attempts to enter the “profession” of marriage and also who, more subversively, finds a role outside it. In several respects, Lady Harpy appears a stock Restoration comedy character: she is an aged coquette, one who has “*passed the meridian*” dividing youth from age but who ludicrously tries to play the role of the nubile, alluring maiden—a character akin to, for example, William Congreve’s Lady Wishfort in *The Way of the World* (1700; BA 144). With the assistance of her maid, her “*pounce-box*,” and her “*wig*,” Lady Harpy diligently attempts to transform herself into a “*Venus [or] Aphrodite*” in order to lure Sir Spaniel into marriage; but, as Sir Spaniel notes in a cruel aside, her overzealous efforts make her appear “*rigged like a barber’s pole of a May Day*” and like a “*jingl[ing] . . . she-ass at a fair*” (126-27, 129). In its reference to Lady Harpy’s attempt to transform herself into marketable goods, the last phrase stresses the economic importance of marriage for Englishwomen. When his plan to flatter the aunt so as to gain access to her more appealing niece and her fortune fails, Sir Spaniel harshly rejects Lady Harpy’s marriage proposal, calling her a “*scritch owl, witch, vampire*” (146-47). In other words,

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<sup>28</sup>Cramer regards “Flavinda’s enthusiastic cooperation in her ‘abduction’” as “a parody of the [pageant’s] rape and abduction theme” (179).

she is far less successful than Orlando or Flavinda at using cosmetics, costumes, and feminine posturings in order to attract a man, although she is no less interested in marriage. Through Lady Harpy, then, Woolf imitates aged, stock eighteenth-century female characters who themselves ironically parody the younger Englishwoman's desperate desire and need for marriage.

Moreover, through the twentieth-century audience members' reactions to this character, Woolf emphasizes this skit's satire of the Englishwoman's desperate attempts to support a patriarchal culture that seeks to control her. In an early draft, Giles Oliver, sensing the power of his masculinity, sits "straight as a dart[,] feeling . . . the effect of the play," whereas Mrs. Manresa, who worries above all that her "charms [are] fading," becomes "a little conscious . . . of her make-up" and "felt her sex indicted by the old harradan," but nevertheless pulls out her pocket mirror in order to examine her lips and "appl[y] her powder puff"—thus casting herself as the modern-day Lady Harpy (BA 109; PH 133).

Near the skit's conclusion, Lady Harpy is left alone on the stage, despairing her inability to play the desirable and marriageable Englishwoman. Here, Woolf highlights Lady Harpy's wish to participate in the "profession" of marriage, even when that system rejects her. But Woolf also subtly undermines the Englishwoman's need to marry: now abandoned, "*sans niece, sans lover; and sans maid,*" Lady Harpy vows, "*I'll be even with 'em . . . I'll outlive 'em all*" (145-46; Woolf's ellipses). At the conclusion of his play, Congreve's Lady Wishfort forgives the heretofore despised, duplicitous Mirabell and even gives him power of attorney over her vast estate, in addition to the coveted prize of the hand of her niece Millamant; conversely, Woolf's Lady Harpy is left outside the patriarchy. Hence, while the earlier playwright restores patriarchal

order by his play's conclusion, the later one avoids it, intimating that the old plots can be rewritten.

However, despite this message, the old plot is still replayed in the novel through the present-day character Mrs. Manresa, who, inspired by the pageant, regards herself as the "Queen of the festival" and Giles, as her "surlly hero" or "sulky hero" (79, 93; see also 107, 109-10). Hence, as Johnston argues, Mrs. "MANresa, from TasMANia," who is identified in the novel only with her husband's name, is a character who "prefers men, obviously," and thus she supports unquestioningly England's dominant patriarchal culture (268). As her diligent attention to her make-up and her coquettish ways suggest, Mrs. Manresa is a marginally more successful version of Lady Harpy: she can appear to the other characters as Venus, "goddess-like, buoyant, abundant, her cornucopia running over," and thus symbolic of "the power of the human body to make the earth fruitful" (BA 208, 119).<sup>29</sup> However, as this "abundant" goddess prepares to leave Pointz Hall, the artificiality of her sexual appeal becomes evident: in the light of the setting sun, her make-up appears "plated," like medieval armor, "not deeply infused" (208). Her illusion of beauty and fertility undermined, she leaves the grounds in a mundane, sterile spray of gravel churned by the wheels of her car. Lacking not only the success of Flavinda in attracting men, but also the pathos with which Miss La Trobe tinges Lady Harpy's ultimate failure in doing so, Mrs. Manresa exits the novel as little more than a middle-aged woman whose highest aspiration is to begin an adulterous affair with a middle-aged stockbroker.

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<sup>29</sup>As Leaska points out, Woolf based Mrs. Manresa's character partially on Vita Sackville-West, whose first name—actually, a shortened version of "Victoria"—means "life" in Latin (Introduction 14). Johnston speculates further that Woolf may have modeled Mrs. Manresa, with "her name and her luxuriant feminine image," on the New Zealander Katherine Mansfield, as well as Vanessa Bell; however, Johnston cautions, Mrs. Manresa "lacks the creativity Virginia admired in Vanessa and Katherine" (268).

Through both the English history represented in the pageant and the modern-day characters' re-enactments of this history, then, the novel points to the seemingly endless repetition of cultural patterns that still dictate the interactions among Englishmen and Englishwomen and shape their identities. The literal theater of the pageant, the more symbolic stages of the history it delineates, and the roles seemingly endlessly reenacted by those theaters' actors suggest how these performances have made England into a "theatre of war" and have prepared its inhabitants for their impending performances in it.

"The doom of sudden death hangs over us": The Present

The establishment of these patterns seems to abandon the novel's modern characters in an England destined to repeat its past mistakes. More frighteningly, the present depicted in this novel holds an even more immediate threat for England: the Second World War that looms in the characters' imminent future and one predetermined from the author's perspective as she wrote the novel, since it had already begun. Although the characters allude only rarely to the current political situation,<sup>30</sup> references to the war pervade the novel—from Giles Oliver's early characterization of Europe "bristling with guns," like a "hedgehog," that "at any moment . . . would rake that land into furrows," to anonymous audience members' references to "the Jews . . . the refugees" and "those damned Germans," and to the twelve military airplanes that fly overhead and interrupt the Reverend Streatfield's summation speech at the conclusion of the pageant (53, 121, 151, 193). Through the characters Giles and Isa Oliver and their relationship with each other, Woolf presents the violent tendencies still prevalent in England and that have

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<sup>30</sup>As Sears notes, "Among the subjects everyone [in the novel] conspicuously avoids is the war." She goes on to quote passages from Woolf's diary which indicate that "such avoidance was not uncommon in Woolf's circle as the crisis in Europe gathered force" (218, 232 n. 18).

precipitated the war. Moreover, she illustrates these modern characters' ingestion of literary models from England's past and their assumption of stifling roles based on these models—roles that leave them, as Isa complains near the novel's conclusion, longing for “a new plot” (215). That is, playing roles in more seemingly private settings reflects the role-playing required in the nation's “theatre of war.” And, as Woolf argues in *Three Guineas* and elsewhere, the violence inherent in the former is indicative of the violence in the latter. Further, Woolf's delineation of the relationship between Giles and Isa Oliver, the primary example of a modern English married couple in *Between the Acts*, stresses that the ready assumption of the roles dictated by their national culture prefigures the roles that culture will demand of them when it enters the imminent war.

Hence, as “actors” who will soon be required to perform in a “theatre of war,” Giles and Isa Oliver express alternately their mutual dissatisfaction with these roles and embrace them—as evinced in their private thoughts, interactions with the novel's other characters, and within their marriage. They are at times highly conscious of both the artificiality of these roles and the origins of them in an English national culture that predates them. Isa describes her feelings for her husband as an “outer love” (14); thus, she intimates that this love is predicated on public conventions, as dictated by an English culture which define the emotions she should feel for her husband.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, she reminds herself repeatedly that Giles is ““the father of [her] children,”” “a cliché conveniently provided by fiction” (14; see also 47-48, 207). In contradistinction to this “outer love,” Isa harbors an illicit “inner love” for Rupert Haines, whom she regards as a

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<sup>31</sup>As Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, the wife is expected “to love her husband and to be happy” as “a duty she owes to herself and to society” (462).

“romantic gentleman farmer” (14, 5).<sup>32</sup> Although her most intimate encounter with him occurred when he gave her a cup of tea at a tennis party, Isa imaginatively represents her relationship with Mr. Haines as that of “two swans” floating “down stream,” and she senses romantically that they “met before the salmon leapt like a bar of silver” (5, 208). In an earlier draft of this passage, Isa decides additionally that Mr. Haines must be a poet, like herself (PH 250).<sup>33</sup> Yet what Isa does not seem to realize is that she turns to literary tropes to characterize both her supposedly “inner” and “outer” loves—even if ones from vastly different traditions. That is, she experiences even her most intimate, supposedly inner emotions in a manner mediated by an outer language—a mediation indicative of the ways that public discourses can shape private emotions and thoughts.

In other instances, Isa turns more consciously to literary role-playing: as much as she hopes by the novel’s conclusion that “someone invented a new plot,” she finds solace in play-acting with one of her guests. When, during one of the intervals in the pageant, Isa confesses to William Dodge that “the play keeps running in [her] head,” the latter artificially and chivalrously addresses her with, “Hail, sweet Carinthia. My love. My life,” to which she automatically responds, “My lord, my liege.” And immediately following this brief, fanciful exchange, William watches as Isa shifts into yet another role—as easily as do Miss La Trobe’s actors “between the acts” of the pageant—when her son approaches the couple, causing Isa to assume the demeanor of the dutiful mother who gives the child cake and milk, “as if she had got

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<sup>32</sup>In an earlier draft, Woolf adds that for Isa, “there was the private love; and the cliché love” (PH 257; see also 259).

<sup>33</sup>In an even earlier draft, Woolf undermines the “romantic gentleman farmer” and Isa’s feelings for him by having her narrator suggest that Haines leads “a secret life” in which he “admire[s] the girl at the cottage on the left-hand side of the road,” an “admir[ation]” he shows by impregnating her (PH 37). The narrator here further postulates that “perhaps” Mr. Haines harbored some attraction to Isa, as well (37-38). In revising the draft, Woolf kept the focus more exclusively on Isa’s emotions, leaving the character of Mr. Haines rather underdeveloped.

out of one dress and put on another” (105). For Isa, the conventions of her life are typified by a nursery rhyme that Miss La Trobe plays on the gramophone at the start of one of the pageant’s skits: “*The King is in his counting house / Counting out his money, / The Queen is in her parlour / Eating bread and honey . . .*” (122; original ellipses). This verse, which reverberates in Isa’s mind in the second half of the novel (see, for example, 178, 181, 182), thus designates specific roles for husbands and wives, sharply distinct roles that Isa, burdened with her domestic duties, and Giles, a stockbroker, continually assume.

But, as the pageant suggests, English culture is predicated on violence, as well as on the construction of domestic harmony, between the two sexes. In his essay on *Between the Acts*, Herbert Marder characterizes the novel as a “patchwork,” “mellay or medley” of various genres and perspectives, in that it vacillates between “public and private voices,” including those of “the weather forecaster, the newspaper reporter and the guide-book writer” (“Alienation Effects” 434).<sup>34</sup> The newspaper has particular resonances for Isa. During the morning before the annual pageant begins, Isa reads an account of a rape in a newspaper article which, as Stuart Clarke has discovered, is based on one Woolf could have read in the London *Times* in June 1938 (3). In the novel, Isa is first mesmerized by the article’s descriptions of “a horse with a green tail”—a detail she deems “fantastic”—and then a “guard at Whitehall”—a reference she finds “romantic.” However, these fanciful details act as preludes to the reporter’s description of a young woman lured by these intriguing elements into the building and “dragged” by British troopers “up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed” and violated subsequently by one soldier, even

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<sup>34</sup>See also Laurence, “The Facts and Fugue of War” (228, 242), Beer, *Virginia Woolf* (128-29), and McWhirter (791).

as “she screamed and hit him about the face . . .”—the ominous ellipses Woolf includes to suggest the other horrific details of the rape (BA 20). DiBattista argues, “Isa’s imagination, like the victim’s, is lured on by the fantastic . . . encouraged by the romantic . . . only to be betrayed by the real” (197). Perhaps, for Woolf, these English literary traditions do not so much “betray” Isa and the reader, but rather suggest that the violence which becomes undeniably evident with the rape have functioned as an omnipresent, although subtle, undercurrent in them—a tragic but unsurprising inevitability that the sentence’s concluding ellipses may also intimate. Indeed, for Isa, this account is “real[,] so real that on the mahogany door panels [of the library] she saw the Arch in Whitehall[,] through the Arch the barrack room[,] in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him about the face.”

Not only does the foreboding presence of the soldiers allude to the war that was being fought as Woolf composed the novel, but here, the private house of Pointz Hall is imaginatively transformed into the public one of Whitehall and the army barracks. Ironically, these men become the enemies of their nation’s women, those whom they are trained to protect, so that, as one reader states, the “rape undermines the officially defined differences between ‘ourselves,’ the decent English, and ‘them,’ the brutal Germans,” the ostensible adversaries (Joplin 92).<sup>35</sup> If the newspaper is a “book,” then this book recants the same tale told in Miss La Trobe’s tour of English literary history: like descriptions of the “old crone” attacked by young ruffians in the Elizabethan skit, the girl “*tumble[d] / In the straw and in the hay*” in the villagers’ medieval

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<sup>35</sup>In her study of newspaper accounts both of the original rape and of the resulting criminal trials, Beer notes that a judge berated the perpetrators by pointing out, “‘One would think that every Englishman, especially English soldiers, would be anxious to help and protect’” the young girl they had raped and beaten (qtd. in Beer, *Virginia Woolf* 139).



song, and Budge's equally controlling (although not sexual) chiding of Lucy Swithin, the brief but haunting delineation of British soldiers' vicious sexual assault exemplifies an English patriarchal culture that aggressively and violently dominates women, even those women they are assigned to protect. Miss La Trobe's representations of English history repeatedly remind Isa of the rape. Indeed, throughout the remainder of the novel, Isa recalls the newspaper story—a memory often triggered by aspects of the pageant (see, for example, 22, 216). The account of this rape, when coupled with the group of young ruffians' attack on an old woman in Miss La Trobe's Elizabethan skit and Bart Oliver's oppressive, if not violent, relationship with his sister, implies that the rape is a logical conclusion of, not a horrific aberration from, an English national culture predicated on the oppression of women.

The modern Englishman's predilection for violence is embodied in what may at first seem an unlikely figure: Giles Oliver, the ordinary stockbroker who has dutifully attended college, has "take[n] a job in the city," and spends his days "buying and selling" disparate objects like ploughs, glass beads, or, most generically, "stocks and shares" (47). Early in the novel, Giles admits that, "given his choice, he would have chosen to farm"—that most traditional of English occupations enacted in harmony with the land.<sup>36</sup> However, he complains that "the conglomeration of things," such as falling in love with the woman who became his wife, has compelled him to assume a mundane, modern trade, rendering him into one of the "many" "undone" by death who "flow[s] over London Bridge" on the "dead sound" of the "final stroke of nine," as Eliot describes in the first part of *The Waste Land* (BA 47; Eliot, *Complete Poems and*

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<sup>36</sup>Richard Dalloway, a politician, also yearns to be a farmer—again, emphasizing the importance of England's rural past, whether real or imagined, in the national consciousness (MD 74-75, 77, 113).

*Plays* 62-63). Like Isa, Giles chafes at his role. For example, when he returns home from London to find his house filled with guests, he is led by “the ghost of convention” to assume his proper uniform in the role of host, although “he was enraged” (46). Whether in his more public or more private lives, “the ghosts of convention” dictated by English national culture compel Giles to play his expected roles.

Giles is angered not only by the “ghost of convention” that forces him to play the part of the proper host, but also by what he regards as the apathy of his fellow Englishmen and Englishwomen. A member, like Isa, of that generation in England for whom “the newspaper was a book,” Giles is an avid newspaper-reader, but while his wife is horrified by an article concerning a domestic atrocity, Giles’ attention is drawn to one regarding violent acts occurring abroad, in that more literal “theatre of war.” He has just read “in the morning paper . . . that sixteen men had been shot, others imprisoned, just over there, across the gulf, the flat land which divided them from the continent” (46)—presumably, in Belgium. Thus, he indicts his family and their guests for what he sees as their apathy as Europe in the summer of 1939 geared toward the war that would begin in a six weeks. Similarly, when his aunt Lucy comments that the view from Pointz Hall ““makes [her] so sad”” because ““it’ll be there . . . when [they]’re not,”” Giles, agitated, “nick[s] his chair into position with a jerk” as an impotent means to “show his irritation, his rage with old fogies who sat and looked at views over coffee and cream when the whole of Europe—over there—was bristling like . . . [a] hedgehog” and “at any moment guns would rake that land into furrows” (53). However, as frustrated as he is with his “old fogy” aunt Lucy, Giles suggests he is dimly aware that he, too, is equally indifferent, or, at least, passive, in response to the growing crisis: he realizes that he sits among “the old fogies” who ineffectually “[look] at

views,” and he is resentful to find himself “forced passively to behold indescribable horror” (54, 60). In an early draft of the novel, Woolf describes Giles’ passive hostility even more harshly and overtly: his anger is “frozen” and “had fixed itself eternally,” a description of his emotions indicated merely by the word “silent” in the published version (PH 84; BA 66). Hence, whereas Isa intuitively connects war and violence against women through the newspaper, that “book” for her generation, Giles can recognize no connections between himself, present-day English culture, and the “theatre of war” that, for him, is being played out only elsewhere.

Giles criticizes Lucy and, to a lesser degree, himself for remaining passive in relation to a Europe in which “at any moment guns would rake that land into furrows,” although he “exempted from censure” his father due to his love for the man (53). Similarly, in *Three Guineas*, Woolf stresses that Englishwomen like Lucy have “exert[ed] all their influence both consciously and unconsciously in favour of war” (37-39); but in *Between the Acts*, she indicts more directly the violent and oppressive tendencies of Englishmen such as Bart and Giles, more so than the supposed passivity of Englishwomen like Lucy, that have more directly precipitated the war. Representative of the modern Englishman, Giles displays these predilections in the most bloody incident that occurs in the novel. Near the midpoint of the novel and during the long interval between the pageant’s second and third acts, Giles vents his frustration at the “lust” he sees embodied in the “wild child of nature” Mrs. Manresa, the “perversion” in the homosexual William Dodge, and the “coward[ice]” he recognizes in himself for his own inaction by first playing a “child’s game” that consists of kicking “a barbaric” and “pre-historic” stone, “a flinty yellow stone, a sharp stone, edged as if cut by a savage for an arrow” (98-99). By showing his interest in this “game,” Woolf illustrates the origins of the supposedly civilized Englishman’s

proclivity toward violence in the rituals of those thought “barbaric” and “savage”—an argument she had recently made in *Three Guineas*.

However, Giles’ “game” does not sufficiently vent his frustration. He achieves a more satisfactory release when he stumbles upon a disturbing spectacle. Finding a snake, “curled in an olive green ring . . . choked with a toad in its mouth,” Giles projects upon this snake and toad monstrosity the inaction he laments in himself and the “old fogies,” for “the snake was unable to swallow; the toad was unable to die. . . . It was birth the wrong way round—a monstrous inversion.” Unlike this “monstrous inversion,” which Hermione Lee interprets as a symbol for the “abortive” relationships of the novel, Giles acts: “Raising his foot, he stamped on them. . . . The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him” (Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 218; BA 99). Andrew John Miller cites Giles the stockbroker as an example of a privileged member in England’s “professional classes” at a time in England when “the story of these ‘professional classes’ ha[d] . . . become inextricably identified with the story of the nation,” for “they represent the ideals that ha[d] come to dominate social and cultural life” (38). And this “story,” as Giles’ attacks on the “barbaric” stone and the snake and toad, as well as his more usually suppressed anger, make clear, is one of violence and oppression.

Moreover, this willingness to kill may prefigure Giles’ imminent war duties. Woolf hints at the Englishwoman’s support of such a “monstrous male” through Mrs. Manresa: when she later notices the blood on Giles’ shoes, she interprets its presence as a sign “that he had proved his valour for her admiration,” and thus she declares, “I am the Queen, he my hero, my sulky hero” (107; see also 109). While Isa briefly but enthusiastically embraces the role of playing “the

lady” to William Dodge’s “lord” during the same interval, Mrs. Manresa assumes that Giles plays the role of the hero, even if a “sulky” one, in order to attract her. Thus, Woolf intimates that acts of violence—a category that can include those perpetrated in war—frequently underlie the romantic relationships between Englishmen and Englishwomen. Additionally, she suggests that romance, with its heroes and ladies, acts as a “metonymic . . . trope” for “war to its deepest roots” (Schneider 8): wars will continue to be fought until these “old plots” are rewritten and new roles scripted.

Giles’ killing of the snake and toad further indicates the violence Woolf considered to be historically inherent in English national culture, as well as more specifically during the volatile period during which she wrote the novel. Julia Briggs suggests that the snake devouring the toad signifies “Hitler’s greed to swallow Europe” (86), while Johnston argues that Giles’ attack upon the snake conjures “the image of St. George slaying the dragon” (269)—the act of violence that constitutes the mythical origin of England and a sentiment evoked in Miss La Trobe’s recurrent playing of the song about Rhoderick’s conquering of the island. Moreover, as Johnston observes, the image of St. George was “used as a symbol of British national pride in the bellicose posters of the First World War” and “recalls the resurgence of aggressive nationalism in the 1930s” (269). In this manner, Giles’ violent act connotes “petty tyranny,” rather than the “valour” with which Mrs. Manresa endows it—a point that is clarified in Woolf’s source for this incident. In a September 1935 diary entry, she begins by referring to the fascist propaganda posters she had seen recently and then describes immediately the sight of a snake choking on a toad that she and her husband had spotted in their garden. Unlike Giles, Leonard merely “poked its tail,” but the incident causes Woolf to dream “of men committing suicide” (D 4:337-38). In a letter written a

few weeks later to her nephew Julian Bell, she employs this animal imagery to describe a Labour Party politician's verbal assault on a pacifist member of his own party. As she explains, the former behaved "like a snake whos swallowed a toad, denouncing him, crushing him" (L 5:432). For Woolf, then, the snake's futile attack on the toad represents rather pointless political aggression, akin to the boisterous displays of bravado that Aldous Huxley had witnessed at a 1931 parliamentary debate and which he had compared to "prep-school scolding matches" recalled from childhood (48-49), or Septimus Warren Smith's reference to the First World War as "that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder" (MD 96). Read in this context, Woolf's retelling of the incident in *Between the Acts* comprises a critique of those violent, masculine predilections inherent in English culture that dominate domestic relations and that would soon lead to World War II.

Hence, Giles' attack upon the snake-and-toad "monstrous inversion," Isa's adulterous love for Mr. Haines, and the Olivers' marriage appear, respectively, as lesser versions of St. George's slaying of the mythical dragon, the sentiments about which Romantic poets would rhapsodize, and the types of marriage described in novels. This manner of deterioration seems to support Zwerdling's contention that Woolf in *Between the Acts* expresses her "nostalgia for an older English culture," for "a once vital cultural tradition that has lost its authority and connection with the present" (308-09, 316).<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as Bart Oliver laments in a draft of the novel in regard to modern England, "'It's not an age for drama—nor for poetry, nor for fiction, come to that'" (PH 131). Woolf through Miss La Trobe depicts this seeming current

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<sup>37</sup>See also Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (213) and Sears (217) for other comments on the deteriorated present in *Between the Acts*.

disintegration of national culture through the pageant's final skit, entitled "The Present Day. Ourselves." Unlike the earlier skits, structured collections of pieces that each begin with a brief introduction that sets the tone for the era and then move into short plays that follow linear narratives, "The Present Day" one appears almost formless: Miss La Trobe begins with what she designates as "ten min[utes] of present time," during which she expects the audience members to engage in casual conversation; various actors' building of "the wall," meant to signify "Civilization"; the flashing of myriad small mirrors upon the audience while the actors deliver a collage of lines, taken from the earlier skits; an anonymous voice, usually assumed to be that of Miss La Trobe, reciting a speech over a megaphone in which it asks the audience to consider "ourselves," "the wall," and how the former constructs the latter; and the final exeunt of the audience at the pageant's end, as accompanied by the gramophone's ominous repetition of "Dispersed are we" (BA 179, 181, 183-85, 188, 196-98). Particularly in contrast with a seemingly ordered past, "the present day" in England appears cacophonous and fragmented, lacking the coherence that held together the earlier English cultures represented in the previous skits. Rather than being represented with a linear, discernible narrative, like the other skits, "The Present Day" is depicted instead with seemingly random, unrelated actions upon the part of the stage actors. However, even in this chaos, at least one observer detects a recurring theme: oppression. As "Mr. Page the reporter" writes in his notebook, "a black man in a fuzzy wig" and a "coffee-coloured" one "in a silver turban"—metonymic for England's reliance on its imperial subjects—assist in the construction of "Civilization (the wall)" (181-82). Additionally, Miss La Trobe emphasizes the Englishwoman's complicity in constructing and upholding a national culture that oppresses or imprisons them. After a man enters the stage bearing a hod filled with

bricks, an actress assists him by handing him those bricks with which he builds the wall of English civilization (181). Current English culture may be less ordered than its past counterparts; nonetheless, the hint of violent domination still is manifest within it.

By relegating the novel's present-day characters to re-enacting patterns established in England's past; characterizing the modern marriage as one typified by violence, suppression of emotion, and pretense; and spotlighting the cacophonous, war-threatened, "dispersed" qualities of modern English culture, Woolf seems to leave little hope for change in the nation's future. It is particularly the combination of the pageant's final emphasis on the disintegration of English culture into virtually meaningless fragments and the use of the gramophone and megaphone that has led many readers to insist that through *Between the Acts*, Woolf intimates that the war which was about to occur and to which the novel was clearly building is making England into a nation in which art is untenable. For example, Patricia Laurence argues that Miss La Trobe's decision to address her audience and actors through a megaphone—"a device," as Woolf would have known, "that often urged Londoners to don their gas masks or to enter bomb shelters during" the Second World War,—points to "the loss of the human artist's voice during a time of war" ("The Facts and Fugue of War" 243-44).<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in September 1939, Woolf complained that war's "perfunctory slaughter" and its letting of "all the blood of common life" threatens to "cut off" "all creative power" (D 5:235). Hence, the representations of modern England seen in *Between the Acts* appears to resign that nation's inhabitants to an apocalyptic "last lap," unredeemed even by art.

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<sup>38</sup>See also Bazin and Lauter (33-34) and Barrett (29).



“Let’s break the rhythm and forget the rhyme”: Looking to England’s Future

Despite these fears, Woolf offers tentative hope for England’s future by exploring, seemingly paradoxically, the nation’s past. As noted, in 1940, Woolf in her diary expressed her desire to compose “a common History book” that would encapsulate “one end of lit[erature] including biog[raphy]; & range at will, consecutively,” and also her awareness that the war rendered “the protecting & reflecting walls” of ““tradition”” “so terribly thin” and “transparent” (D 5:318, 304). That is, the continual threat of the complete annihilation of England both piqued her interest in her nation’s history—particularly in regard to its path to the current war—and made her realize that that nation’s history and culture have failed quite cataclysmically, leading her to wish to rewrite or reconstruct that history and culture in a manner that will help England, if it survives its current calamity, stave off future wars. In *Three Guineas*, also, she stresses that England’s histories and traditions are rewriteable when her speaker prescribes the prevention of war through the avoidance of “the old education of the old colleges,” which “breeds neither a particular respect for liberty nor a particular hatred of war,” and the construction of a new school, one that “must be built not of carved stone and stained glass, but of some cheap, easily combustible material which does not hoard dust and perpetuate traditions,” houses no “chained books and first editions under glass,” and instructs its students instead with “pictures and . . . books” that are “new and always changing” (33-34). As became evident to her particularly in the years immediately preceding and those during World War II, the future of English culture would depend on its national subjects’ recognition of their history’s and culture’s mutability, and this recognition would enable those subjects to break the cyclical patterns that culminate in war.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf illustrates through Lucy Swithin and the Reverend Streatfield the dangers entailed by a stalwart belief in a cyclical, continuously repeated historical patterns. The upholding of such historical models have doomed the novel's present-day characters and England to a bleak future of endless strife and the subordination of the weak by the strong, as exemplified by fascism during the period when Woolf wrote the novel. In contrast with critics like Laurence and Zwerdling, others such as Rachel Bowlby, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar argue that *Between the Acts* presents all historical and literary forms as artificial, constructed, and calculated means through which to impose order upon events that are inherently disordered (Bowlby 125; Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land* 3:51).<sup>39</sup> It is through the novel's offering of disparate historical models that Woolf emphasizes the constructed nature of any historical account and thus delineates England's past, present, and future as infinitely mutable. Whereas she presents the view of history as cyclical through Lucy and the Reverend Streatfield, Woolf emphasizes history's mutability through Miss La Trobe. The latter historical model complicates the meanings of England's past and the relationships between the inhabitants of England's present, even in a novel set in a nation which will soon be engaged in the "historical drama" of "total war" (Mengham and Reeve xi). The recognition of this historical and cultural flexibility leads to the realization that England can eliminate the patterns of violence and oppression that had reached their apotheosis in the various fascistic regimes then prevalent in Europe. Thus, in her final novel, Woolf hints at a plan through which England can avoid wars altogether.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf typifies those historical accounts that promote a belief in absolute origins and progress through references to Lucy Swithin's "favourite reading," a book

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<sup>39</sup>See also Wiley (10-11, 14).

the narrator calls “an Outline of History” and that draws upon H. G. Wells’s *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (1920) and George Macaulay Trevelyan’s *History of England* (1926) (BA 8).<sup>40</sup> Both of these extensive studies begin their historical tales deeply in the primordial past. Trevelyan stresses the continuity between the present national culture and a distant, exotic past by beginning his history of English and British cultures with a reference to the island’s “early immigrants,” who “have probably mixed their blood with some of the later races who are certainly among our ancestors” and who “came over by the land-bridge from Europe as they followed northward the last retreat of ice” “during the inter-glacial periods” (xvii, 2). Further romanticizing this originating history, Trevelyan describes these “early immigrants” as “hunters of the mammoth, the horse and the reindeer” in a land where “the untamed forest was king” that “swarmed with big and small game” which these early Britons hunted (2-4). These hunters and gatherers later gave way to farmers, then invading hordes of Angles and Saxons during a heroic and mythical era in which “prophecy hovers around,” “horns are heard blaring in the mist,” and “we catch glimpses of giant figures—mostly warriors at strife,” while “around all is the lap of waves and the cry of seamen beaching their ships” (2). As he delineates it, England’s early history appears simultaneously exotic and yet connected to current culture, since at least some of England’s current citizens share a bloodline with these hearty “early immigrants.” Like Trevelyan, Wells grounds current history and traditions in exalted, mysterious origins—ones that link mankind not just to primordial life, but, moreover, “the

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<sup>40</sup> Among readers of the novel, Gilbert and Gubar identify Wells’s study as the source for Lucy’s “Outline of History” (*No Man’s Land* 3:414 n. 87). See also Beer, *Virginia Woolf* (21) and Wirth-Nesher (194). Beer also cites Trevelyan’s *History* as a source for Lucy’s “Outline” (*Virginia Woolf* 144). Leaska notes that the lines Lucy reads from her “Outline” in the novel’s final paragraphs are a slightly altered quotation from Trevelyan’s *History of England* (PH 245-46 n.).

measurelessness of space and time” (3-4). Additionally, he suggests that this history has culminated in “the world to-day,” “so full of promise and opportunity” (15, 17). These two historians, then, present English and European history as virtually complete tales, linear narratives beginning in primordial, absolute, if still mysterious, origins, and progressing through human and, eventually, national histories, all clearly building to some climactic conclusion.

By the time that Woolf was writing *Between the Acts*, such cyclical and teleological views of history that Lucy enjoys reading had more sinister implications. In particular, they were associated with the fascist ideologies that dominated Europe and precipitated World War II. In 1940, Walter Benjamin attributed fascism’s possible success as a political ideology to the appeal it held for those who adhered to a “stubborn faith in progress,” a “faith” that could make fascism appear an “historical norm” (257-58). In a seeming paradox, fascism’s proclivity toward war functions as evidence of this “progress”: commenting on Italian fascism, the political scientist A. James Gregor explains that Mussolini regarded “the test of violence . . . provided by the revolutionary ascent to power and by war” as the “ultimate test of heroism and sacrifice” and a “vehicle of moral regeneration” for the nation (191). Similarly, W. B. Yeats also regarded war and violence as necessary in order to instigate beneficial change. Moreover, he interpreted such violent periods as evidence of a timeline that moved in a cyclical pattern: war, in Yeats’s schema, is valorized for what he saw as its ultimately revitalizing functions. As Frank Kermode argues in an influential account of modern poetry, Yeats “praised war” as “the means of renewal” and as a marker of the “transition, the last moment of annunciation, a new gyre” in the latter’s cyclical model of history—promulgated most directly in *A Vision* (1925)—that vacillated between two-thousand-year periods of peace, order, and harmony, and ones of strife, anarchy, and dissonance

(98-99). Convinced by the series of bloody wars prevalent throughout Europe in the first half of the twentieth century that he lived on the cusp of a new era, Yeats in his late poetry recommends that “we . . . laugh in tragic joy,” even as “the irrational streams of blood are staining earth” (Yeats 293). Kermode finds Yeats’s promotion of a cyclical historical model in which war is unavoidable as indicative of his support of Italian fascism and an Irish fascistic movement, for “the most terrible element in apocalyptic thinking is its certainty that there must be universal bloodshed” (107).<sup>41</sup> By clinging to the types of historiography that lie at the base of fascism, Lucy appears as one of those Englishwomen whom Woolf in *Three Guineas* cites as “unconsciously” supporting war, albeit innocently and naïvely.

Woolf’s comments after a November 1930 meeting with Yeats suggest opposition to his historical theories. As she writes in her diary, during this meeting, Yeats insisted that “we are at the end of an era,” emphasized “the necessity of tragedy,” argued that “all creation is the result of conflict,” and explained that “there must be tragedy to bring out the reverse of the soul.” Although she admits to having felt “some emotion” when she touched the “famous hand” and concedes that her own theories were “crude & jaunty . . . beside his,” Woolf remains unimpressed with Yeats’s “systems of thought” and notes at the end of the diary entry, Yeats talks “too much about dreams to be quite satisfactory” (D 3:329-32). Nevertheless, Lucy in *Between the Acts* takes comfort in versions of history that connect her contemporary England to such a virtually mythologized and simultaneously concrete past—the descriptions of which closely

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<sup>41</sup>Yeats’s readers disagree on the extent to which he was a proponent of fascism. As Chadwick explains, while “it is . . . easy enough to find passages in Yeats’s work that praise fascist doctrines . . . [he] is equally capable of endorsing ideas that directly contradict the fascist doctrine of the state” (869-70). Among Yeats criticism, the most oft-cited works that represent the two sides of the debate are O’Brien’s 1965 essay “Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats” and Cullingford’s 1981 book *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*.

resemble those found in either Wells's or Trevelyan's study. Early in the novel, she reads her "Outline of History" and is fascinated to read about "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly; when the entire continent, not then, she understood, divided by a channel, was all one; populated, she understood, by elephant-bodied, seal-necked, heaving, surging, slowly writhing, and, she supposed, barking monsters; the iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom, presumably, she thought . . . we descend" (BA 8-9). But Woolf belittles Lucy's beliefs through the syntax, for this description, peppered with "she understood"s and "she thought"s, suggests that Lucy's thought process is as cumbersome and unsophisticated as that of a small child, rather than that of an authority on national history.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf also undercuts the belief in an absolute connection between this exotic world and the more mundane present. Lucy's "imaginative reconstruction of the past" manifests itself in the appearance of Grace the maid, who opens the door during this exploration of origins and first seems to Lucy "a monster who was about to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest" (9). Lucy, to whom Grace refers as "Batty," again appears childish and silly in this scene, since she is innocently awed by the fantastic world of a book and, for a moment, cannot distinguish the "real" from the imagined. Our last image of Lucy is one where she turns the pages of her "Outline of History," "quickly, guiltily, like a child who will be told to go to bed before the end of the chapter" (218). In *Between the Acts*, far from fulfilling Wells's goal to further the "understanding of man's place in space and time" and the

"broad political or religious or social issues of today" (3), Lucy's "Outline of History" functions as the fuel for childish imagination and terror.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, Lucy, like Yeats, is comforted to believe that history moves in cycles; like Wells, she believes that this history moves toward a teleological goal or purpose. Some readers find Lucy's unshakeable beliefs in cyclical and teleological views on history and culture the most admirable in the novel,<sup>43</sup> but Woolf clearly denigrates them by having Lucy imagine that the cycles have been established by a Brobdignagian "gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head" which can recognize "all are one" in some overarching "harmony" (175). This historical vision includes the swallows Lucy sees in the Barn, in that she assumes the same swallows return from Africa to the Barn each year, dating back to when "they had come, she supposed, when the Barn was a swamp," and, as she later rhapsodizes in imagery originating in her "Outline of History," "Year after year they came. Before there was a channel, when the earth, upon which the Windsor chair was planted, was a riot of rhododendrons, and humming birds quivered at the mouths of scarlet trumpets . . . they had come" (103, 108). Although comforted by the swallows' seemingly

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<sup>42</sup> Although she cites Wells's *Outline of History* as the primary source Woolf drew upon to write the lines taken from Lucy's "Outline of History," Beer finds Lucy's repeated quotations from her book, as well as the novel's pervasive use of animal imagery, as evidence of Woolf's ongoing "engag[ement] with Darwin and the implications of his work" (*Virginia Woolf* 19). Indeed, she notes that when a bomb destroyed the Woolfs' London home in the fall of 1940, Woolf in her diary explains that she and her husband "c[oul]d salvage . . . little" from the house, but among the few items saved are her diaries and some volumes of Darwin, although she despairs that she "forgot [Darwin's] Voyage of the Beagle" (D 5:331). Beer argues that *Between the Acts*, the novel Woolf wrote during this time period, acts as Woolf's "fullest exploration of the new relations of experience to prehistory that had been fueled by Darwin's theories" (*Virginia Woolf* 19-20).

<sup>43</sup> For example, Hermione Lee deems Lucy "heroic," and though she finds little credence in Lucy's faith in "a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head," she praises this character's "enthusiasm" as "attractive" (*The Novels of Virginia Woolf* 225). DiBattista finds that Lucy's name "re calls the translucent, innocent beings of romantic Wordsworthian persuasions" (199). In one of the most laudatory readings of Lucy, Cramer describes this character as "the Great Goddess as Tragic Queen," one worshiped by both Isa and William Dodge (167). Ruotolo, however, identifies Lucy's devout Christian faith as what makes her "the unwitting disciple of patriarchy" (212).

dependable return, Lucy is content to leave the knowledge of the reasons behind these patterns to that “gigantic ear.”

Further, Woolf indicates the potentially dangerous implications of such cyclical and teleological approaches to history when conducted by those who hold more power than does Lucy. The former hints at the violent implications of Lucy’s faith with Bart’s response to his sister’s musings on the swallows. Lucy’s references to swallows remind Bart of Swinburne’s poem “Itylus,” a poem in which Philomela, having been transformed into a nightingale, implores her sister Procne, now a swallow, to hear the “voice of the child’s blood crying”—a reference to the dead Itylus, her son she killed as an act of vengeance against her husband Tereus’s rape and mutilation of Philomela (Swinburne 93; BA 115-16). Hence, Swinburne’s Philomela is horrified not by her brother-in-law’s attack upon her, but rather by the sisters’ slaying of a male child, an act which Swinburne’s speaker predicts will lead to “universal doom” if the “action is forgotten,” as Jane Marcus explains (*Virginia Woolf* 76).<sup>44</sup> Bart Oliver’s recollection of this poem, when placed in the context of Lucy’s association of swallows with a cyclical view of history, emphasizes that such an interpretation of history, English or otherwise, inevitably begets violence, privileges those acts of violence committed against men over those against women, and suppresses women’s voices—trends that Woolf, by the time she was writing this novel, associated with patriarchy and fascism. Moreover, Bart hints at his sister’s inclusion in this violent oppression when he, just after verifying his recollection of the lines from Swinburne by consulting his “country gentleman’s library,” looks upon her as “a bird on a telegraph wire before

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<sup>44</sup>See also Moore (166) and Barrett (26).



starting to Africa,” an interpretation followed immediately by a repetition of the opening lines of “Itylus”: “Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow . . .” (BA 116; Woolf’s ellipses).

Woolf’s references to the violence and oppression inherent within fascism helps undermine the belief in progressive models of history promoted by its supporters. In contrast, the history presented in *Between the Acts* lacks any sense of linear progression—beyond the chronological one preserved in the pageant. If the novel followed such an evolutionary, developmental path, it would have begun on a distinct and yet perhaps mysterious note, and its conclusion would have appeared the summit of all history and the “meaning” of the preceding text. However, the novel begins simply, precisely on a “summer’s night,” in the midst of conversation on cesspools, already begun (BA 3)—defying any claims to an absolute beginning. Similarly, the pageant begins when a “small girl” assumes the stage, posing as “*England . . . A child new born*” (76-77). But the girl, far from glorious, forgets her lines. Moreover, she speaks several lines before the audience even realizes the pageant has begun (77). The endings of both novel and pageant analogously subvert any grandiose expectations: the final paragraphs of the novel concern Isa’s rather resigned, silent acceptance of Giles and the continuation—not the realized conclusion—of life: “Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born” (219). And the last scene of the pageant centers on the “Present Time. Ourselves”: reminiscent of Eleanor Pargiter of *The Years*, who, as “the oldest” living member of her family, contemplates the “millions of . . . atoms [that] danced apart and amassed themselves . . . but how did they compose what people called life?” (366-67), the players, holding mirrors to the audience, reveal the “*orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves*,” which ingloriously constitute “*civilization*” (BA 188).

Like Lucy, the Reverend Streatfield downplays discordance and looks to the "harmony," the overarching "meaning" of the world; but, in a step beyond Lucy, the Reverend, who had earlier greeted the Olivers' guests "with the air of a person of authority" (74), gives to himself the task of surmising for the audience that "meaning," here, in response to the pageant that has just ended on its note of "*scraps, orts and fragments.*" He "surreptitiously mount[s] a soap-box" as the audience wonders confusedly what it should do as the pageant itself concludes: "To part? No. compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and other uncrossed their legs" (189). In distinction from this jumble, the Reverend appears to the audience as "their representative spokesman; their symbol" and immediately asks, "'What *message* . . . was our pageant meant to convey?'" (190-91; emphasis added). His reaction to the pageant—one he feels compelled to "convey" to the discombobulated audience—is a teleological one, a belief in the existence of some all-encompassing "message" in the pageant of history. For the Reverend, this "meaning" is that "'We are members of one another. Each is part of a whole. . . . We act different parts; but are the same'" and that a single "spirit . . . inspires, pervades" all (192).<sup>45</sup> The essential "message" of the pageant and the English history it depicts is that "we . . . are the same." The Reverend regards all the disparate events of England's past, as well as those in its present, as building toward an all-important "aim and purpose." He assumes that the pageant, which explored the diverse elements and time periods of English history and which culminated in the fragmentation of the "Present Time. Ourselves," can be reduced to a simple, essential "message." Moreover,

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<sup>45</sup>In an earlier draft, an audience member recognizes this last sentiment as an allusion to Shelley (PH 169)—thus re-emphasizing the importance of England's literary past in its present.

this "message" itself subsumes all individuals, across time and space, into one "whole" that elides all difference, all identity—as Lucy reduces all individual "agony" to its "necessary" part in "producing harmony" wherein "all are one."

However, the Reverend Streatfield's assessment of English history, meant to be encouraging to the audience members, is interrupted by the intrusion of "twelve aeroplanes," whose arrival splices the Reverend's call for donations to the "dear old Church"—the practical, monetary purpose of the pageant—mid-word: "Each of us who has enjoyed this pageant has still an opp . . . [the appearance of the planes and a paragraph break after which the speaker continues] . . . portunity" (193). The Reverend initially mishears the sound of the approaching planes as "some distant music," a new song that seems to supplant the "traditional" song that had been playing on the gramophone and that comforted the pageant's audience. Nevertheless, the airplanes' intrusion garners little response from the audience members. The planes' appearance makes "the audience gape" and "gaze" until "the planes had passed," and later, an unnamed character, exiting Pointz Hall after the pageant has concluded, comments, "Then when Mr. Streatfield said: One spirit animates the whole—the aeroplanes interrupted"; but the only lesson he or she carries from this intrusion is that "that's the worst of playing out of doors"—that is, risking potentially distracting interruptions, like the mooing of the cows and unexpected rain showers (193, 200).<sup>46</sup> However, the planes remind Woolf's readers of the war in the immediate future for the novel's characters. They act as a metonymy for a war that is, in Woolf's estimation, the actual climax of the Anglo-Saxon, medieval, Elizabethan, Georgian, and

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<sup>46</sup>Another character similarly asks, "if one spirit animates the whole, what about the aeroplanes?" (197). But the question is left largely unanswered.

Victorian, and contemporary English histories that have been represented in the pageant. That is, the new “music” of the airplanes does not so much replace the “traditional” tune that Miss La Trobe had been playing on the gramophone; rather, it represents the impending war that has resulted from the national traditions represented in the pageant. In this regard, the novel’s 1939 characters should not take comfort in the “message” that “we are all the same.” Instead, they should realize that the patterns of domestic, national, and colonial violence and oppression that Miss La Trobe has presented to them are paving the way for another war, one that could potentially “wipe out London pretty quick” (D 5:292).<sup>47</sup>

Reverend Streatfield’s and Lucy’s beliefs in a cyclical English history in which “we are all the same,” then, leaves little hope for England as a nation. If all English subjects—past, present, and future—are simply compelled to repeat the same roles, then England is doomed to destroy itself through public and private acts of violence. But the novel and the pageant within it ultimately suggest that English history and culture are re-writeable. From one perspective, Miss La Trobe’s representation of “The Present Day. Ourselves” as a fragmented collection of “*orts, scraps and fragments*” depicts contemporary English culture as meaningless chaos, a fragmented conglomeration of “scraps” from a violent and oppressive, but more illustrious and ordered past. Alternatively, this conclusion to the pageant may suggest more optimistically the flexibility of history, and English history in particular. The fictionality of history has been suggested throughout the novel—from the manufactured familial history that has been imposed upon the

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<sup>47</sup>For a conflicting view on the Reverend and his concluding speech, see Marder, “Virginia Woolf’s ‘Conversion’” (478-79).

portrait of the anonymous lady, “an ancestress of sorts,” whose picture Bart had purchased on a whim and who defiantly speaks of only silence and “what was before time was,” to the stories regarding the lily pond that Pointz Hall’s inhabitants and those of the nearby village have invented (7, 36). With regard to this pond, the servants in particular “insist” that in its “deep centre” lie the bones of “Lady Ermytrude,” who “drowned herself for love,” and now her ghost haunts the pond. Despite the fact that “the pond had been dredged” ten years ago and nothing more than a sheep’s thigh bone has been recovered from it, the servants project upon it a gothic tale of lost love, suicide, and hauntings because, as Bart sardonically explains to Mrs. Manresa, “‘Servants . . . must have their ghost.’ Kitchenmaids must have their drowned lady” (44). Tales accepted as history are thus reduced to fantastical stories with no little basis in empirical fact.

By the conclusion of the novel, this pond assumes a significance beyond its role in a local, romantic tale of love and death. After the pageant has ended and most of the guests have left Pointz Hall, Lucy “gaze[s] at the lily pond” and is mesmerized by the lilies closing their petals for the night. “Caress[ing] her cross,” she watches as the leaves on the water’s surface assume the “contours” of continents and nations. Whereas the more jaded narrator in Woolf’s first novel sees from the perspective of a ship’s deck England become merely “a shrinking island in which people were imprisoned” and the world’s continents “shrank,” the devout Lucy in the author’s last novel recognizes among the dead leaves in a lily pond “Europe . . . India, Africa, [and] America,” “islands of security” (VO 24; BA 204-05). On the grounds of Pointz Hall, that house within the “heart of England,” lies a microcosm of the world, a world that Lucy sees through the gaze of her religious faith. The pond and the concepts that meet in it—including the myth of the drowned woman, the sheep’s bone, Lucy’s stalwart faith, and the leaves that

resemble continents and nations—suggest that only by relying on faith can the individual discern or create meaning in what would otherwise have no particular meaning or significance. In an earlier draft, Bart states more explicitly that the views of the lily pond and the bones it contains shift, dependent on the interpreter’s perspective. While the servants romantically assume the bones “were a lover’s,” “the naturalists said they were a sheep’s” (PH 127). Just as Lucy can recognize random leaves as representing masses of land that bear particular names and possess particular histories and cultures, Woolf at this point in the novel suggests that over time, people have constructed various histories and cultures that they identify with those otherwise inherently valueless masses of land. That is, they have projected national histories and cultures onto a physical landscape. Even as Bart appears by her side to challenge Lucy’s vision of a world in the pond where even “fish had faith,” Lucy is unruffled in “her private vision” that “the sea on which we float” possesses an innate “beauty” and “goodness” (205). And it is only through such a faith—whether religious or otherwise—that such a vision of the pond, of England, and of the world is possible.

Miss La Trobe’s pageant makes clear that visions such as Lucy’s are possible only when one embraces illusion, for “death, death, death” results “when illusion fails,” as the director states near the end of the pageant (180).<sup>48</sup> For Miss La Trobe, the creation of believable illusion requires her audience’s acceptance of her necessarily amateurish sets and costumes, for, since “expenses had to be kept down,” the audience must be “swathed in convention,” so “they couldn’t see, as she could, that a dish cloth wound round a head in the open looked much richer

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<sup>48</sup>Similarly, in Woolf’s second novel, Ralph Denham writes to Katharine Hilbery, “if life were no longer circled by an illusion . . . then it would be too dismal an affair to carry to an end” (ND 414).

than real silk,” or that the “cloth of silver” worn by Queen Elizabeth consists only of “swabs used to scour pots” on the shoulders of “Eliza Clark, licensed to sell tobacco” (64, 83). And most of the audience members prove themselves willing and eager to place their faith in illusions regarding not only the pageant’s reliance on theatrical tricks, but the “props” of English culture, as well. They believe, even if only unconsciously, that the national community, one that unites England’s past, present, and future inhabitants, exists through a common “sharing . . . [of] a glorious heritage and regrets” and a mutual “programme to put into effect,” as Ernest Renan argued in 1882 (19). Immediately following the tableau in which a woman, a “black man in a fuzzy wig,” and a “coffee-coloured ditto in silver turban” help a man build “the wall,” the pageant’s audience notes what it interprets as the fortuitous landing of a flock of swallows—those birds whose repeated appearance in the Barn each year assures Lucy of history’s cyclical nature—on “the wall”; for this audience, those birds “who have always come . . . foretell what after all the *Times* was saying yesterday,” that “homes will be built. Each flat with its refrigerator, in the crannied wall. Each of us a free man; plates washed by machinery; not an aeroplane to vex us; all liberated; made whole . . .” (BA 182-83; Woolf’s ellipses). That is, the audience, like Lucy, the Reverend, Wells, and Trevelyan, wish to regard English history as both cyclical and characterized by some sense of progress, culminating, as emphasized by a national newspaper, in technological and political advancement, in freedom and liberty for all, despite the gendered and racial oppression the previous tableau had just attributed to England’s “wall of civilization.” For Miss La Trobe and Woolf, in contrast, it is the reliance of this “wall of civilization” on colonial and gendered oppression which demonstrates that such a cyclical view of history obviates any sense of progress. Wanting the pageant to verify their faith in the illusion

that all are “made whole” in what Wells describes as a “present dawn of world fellowship,” as led by Britain and its empire, these modern Englishmen and -women are chagrined by the music Miss La Trobe then plays on the gramophone—an “insult[ing],” jazz-like “cackle, a cacophony” that for them typifies “the irreverence” of “the young, who can’t make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole” (183).

However, it is with this “splintering” of “the old vision” that Woolf offers as her hope for England’s future. The audience’s hostility, already heightened by the cacophonous music, is exacerbated by the appearance of “children . . . imps—elves—demons” who enter the stage bearing mirrors. Fulfilling Bart Oliver’s prophecy that “the audience” must fulfill “a very important part” in the pageant (58), Miss La Trobe renders it an unwilling participant in her representation of England’s “Present Day”: the mirrors that her actors flash upon the audience members “shiver” them into “*orts, scraps, and fragments.*” As the mirror-bearers “leap, jerk, [and] skip” upon the stage, they reflect at first upon the audience the individual members among them, including “old Bart” and “Manresa.” But then even these identities are lost as the audience, representative of the inhabitants of modern England, are reduced to nothing more than a loose collection of noses, skirts, trousers, and faces—a fragmentation that the confused audience finds “distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair” (184). The onslaught continues when the cows and dogs join “the jangle and the din.” Earlier in the pageant, these noises from the animal world had affirmed the audience’s faith in the unbroken connection between “the present moment” and the “primeval” world described in the village chorus’s song about their omnipresent “*digging and delving*”: as their words had been decimated by the wind, rendered unintelligible, the cows had appeared to the audience to “annihilate the gap; bridge the distance; fill the emptiness and continue the



emotion” (140-41).<sup>49</sup> However, when the cows begin to low and the dogs bark as the “jangling” music plays during the “Present Day” skit, this combination of sounds suggests to the audience that “the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved” (184).

These variant reactions to the same stimuli—here, the interruptions of the cows—illustrates that the particular nature of the “illusion” utilized in the pageant, and, by extension, the national history and culture it represents, can always change. While the pageant’s earlier skits implicitly point to the flexibility of English history by delineating it with blatantly fictional representations, the final skit spotlights the comparable mutability of current and future English national culture by representing them as a “wall” that can be disassembled and rebuilt. Bowlby contends that the pageant’s “wall of civilization” refers to the wall represented by one of the play actors in the final act of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; this allusion to an amateurishly depicted prop within a play within a play, then, deepens Woolf’s suggestion that any civilization, English or otherwise, is a construct (131). This “wall of civilization,” like the hypothetical women’s college Woolf promotes in *Three Guineas*, is one that “each generation” can approach and reconstruct infinitely “afresh.” Until the present moment, the common element found in each “wall” that the various manifestations of English civilization have constructed is violence. Miss La Trobe most clearly makes this point when she, in her final monologue delivered through the megaphone to her audience, implores:

*Let’s break the rhythms and forget the rhyme. And calmly consider ourselves. . . .*

*Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers here or there. They do openly what we do slyly.*

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<sup>49</sup>In a draft, Woolf’s narrator adds, “The cows did what no poet could have done” by “annihilat[ing]” this “gap” (PH 139).

*Take for example . . . Mr. M's bungalow. A view spoilt for ever. That's murder. . . . Or Mrs. E's lipstick and blood-red nails. . . . A tyrant, remember, is half a slave. Item the vanity of Mr. H. the writer, scraping in the dunghill for sixpenny fame . . . Then there's the amiable condescension of the lady of the manor—the upper class manner. And buying shares in the market to sell 'em. . . . O we're all the same. . . . Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves? (187-88)*

Miss La Trobe, then, indicts her audience, representative of all modern Englishmen and -women, not for simply their indifference to an oppressive and violent national culture, but for their active perpetuation of it. Indeed, as Marlowe A. Miller states, despite Miss La Trobe's rather direct condemnation, the audience members “do not see that they are in collaboration with the greater spectacle of World War II and Fascism” (158). More hopefully, though, Woolf's playwright intimates that when her fellow countrymen and -women realize that the wall consists of mere “orts, scraps and fragments,” each possessing no inherent meaning, that wall can be reassembled into new configurations, ones that avoid the age-old reliance on patterns of violence and oppression.

Woolf leaves the conclusion of the novel similarly open-ended. Foregrounded in the preceding paragraphs with excerpts from Lucy's “Outline of History” that describe ““prehistoric man . . . half-human, half-ape, rous[ing] himself from his semi-crouching position and rais[ing] great stones,”” Giles and Isa are finally “left along together for the first time that day,” and seeming to arise from the primordial, brutal backdrop of Lucy's book, they are “silent,” “alone,”

“bar[ing]” their “enmity” and “love”—those contradictory, primal emotions they had each been repressing throughout the day and in a moment that Briggs finds brings together “the plots of love and war, since it is the primitive and uncomprehended impulses of love and hate within the individual that nurture the seeds of war” (BA 218-19; Briggs 87-88). The narrator refers then to their inevitable fight, followed by an equally inevitable “embrace,” from which “another life might be born”—a pattern, she further explains, grounded in the animal world of dog foxes and their vixens, “in the heart of darkness, in the field of night” (219). This animalistic imagery—coupled with the description of that house in “the heart of England” as one which “had lost its shelter” in a “night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks”—has led some readers to conclude that Woolf abandons her characters in an “apocalyptic” world.<sup>50</sup> However, Woolf proffers more concrete hope for her characters and for England in the novel’s final line: “Then the curtain rose. They spoke.” Here, she intimates that Isa and Giles, while compelled by their biological natures to fight, love, and reproduce, can become actors in a new play, that “new plot” for which Isa has longed. As Miss La Trobe insists, “death, death, death” results when “illusion fails”:<sup>51</sup> members of a national culture need to believe in or imagine an “illusion” that binds them together, but the shape of that illusion can change. In her last appearance in the novel, Miss La Trobe sits in a pub, where she bemoans what she regards as her “failure” to convey “her meaning” to her audience, but instead of vowing never to write a play again, she envisions a new one in which “the curtain . . . rise[s]” on “two figures, half concealed by a rock” (209-10). “What . . . the first words” spoken by these figures will be, “escape[s] her,”

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<sup>50</sup>See, for example, Zwerdling (321) and Laurence, “The Facts and Fugue of War” (244).

<sup>51</sup>Similarly, *Night and Day*, Mrs. Hilbery states, “We have to have faith in our vision” (412).

as it does Woolf; nevertheless, the novel's last line—"Then the curtain rose. They spoke"—offers the hope that Isa and Giles Oliver are beginning a new play, possibly a new "tradition" in an English culture in which "the walls" are rendered "terribly thin" by the impending war. Perhaps this time, the final lines of Woolf's final novel suggest, that ongoing "preposterous masculine fiction" will begin to appear to the inhabitants of England as unnecessarily wasteful.

In an earlier draft of this final scene, Woolf more explicitly draws attention to Giles' and Isa's roles as actors in the ongoing drama of English culture: they know they are about to embark on "the first act of the new play," although they know not "who had written the play," nor what its "meaning" is (PH 188). In this early draft, Woolf suggests bleakly that this "new play" will resemble the old one, for she adds a line in which the narrator notes despondently that the couple must enact "their part" by "tear[ing] each other asunder": like the fighting and killings that will soon occur among the armies of the world with guns, tanks, and bombs, Isa and Giles are forced to engage in their own, private warfare of bitter words. But by striking this rather brutal prediction and replacing it with a broader, more generalized final glimpse of these characters and their relationship in the published version of the novel, Woolf subtly implies more hope for England's future. In the novel's penultimate paragraph, Isa and Giles are represented not as the two halves of a troubled, modern English couple, but instead as the inhabitants of a house without shelter, and then as those in a "night before roads were made, or houses," and finally, as the "dwellers in caves" who "watched night from some high place among rocks" (BA 219). Woolf thus strips this married couple of the marks of their national culture and reduces their relationship to its most basic, biological elements in a prehistorical world lacking civilization's

most fundamental traits—houses and roads. And it is on this pared-down set that a new “historical drama” can begin, that a new “wall of civilization” can be built.

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1

**NATIONAL SERVICE**

**“GERMANY”  
MEANS TO STARVE US OUT  
THERE IS ONLY ONE ANSWER  
A BLOW STRAIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES  
NATIONAL SERVICE CAN DEAL THAT BLOW”**

MR NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, Director General

**ENROL TO-DAY  
AND RELEASE A FIT MAN FOR THE FRONT**

FORMS FOR OFFER OF SERVICES MAY BE HAD AT ALL POST OFFICES  
NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICES AND EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGES

APPENDIX 2



APPENDIX 3

