VIRGINIA WOOLF'S USE OF THE PAST: THE EARLY CRITICISM TO "TO THE LIGHTHOUSE" (HISTORY, MODERNISM, WORLD WAR I)

MARILEE LINE FULTON
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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Abstract
In her early twenties, Virginia Woolf considered becoming a historian, and for several years after she began The Voyage Out, her criticism centered on historical and biographical subjects. Later she, alone among British novelists, combined history and modernist technique, most obviously in her last five novels. Orlando and Flush are mock biographies; The Waves appears against vast cycles of history and prehistory; The Years is a modernist rendering of the three generation novel; Between the Acts concerns a pageant of English history performed while planes preparing for war fly overhead. But the historical fiction that began with Orlando did not represent a return to earlier interests. This dissertation, dealing with the early criticism and the first five novels, proposes that history played a formative and continuing role in Woolf’s criticism and her fiction.

A study of Woolf’s early criticism belies the common assumption that her critical theories evolved from her fiction. The criteria Woolf developed in response to biographies and histories are precisely the criteria she later applied to fiction. Her work in history also affected her prose style and her feminism. Initially she admired what she later saw as masculine history and prose. Her own style was too like “the coils of my own brain.” Before she had finished The Voyage Out, however, she charged that traditional history ignored “our point of view.” Many years later, she contended that the female writer must find her own sentence, “adapting it to the shape of her thought.”.

The role of history in Woolf’s fiction was, initially, to point her in directions she did not consciously intend to go. In the first two novels, the historical themes--debates over Gibbon, Mrs. Hilbery’s unfinished biography--are often extraneous; but they became the focus of Jacob’s Room, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse, novels that constitute what Woolf later called “the new biography” and what I term “the new history.” In writing fiction Woolf did not abandon history; she found other forms through which to explore it.

Keywords
Literature, English

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THE EARLY CRITICISM TO *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

BY

MARILEE LINE FULTON
B.A., MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE, 1968
M.A., UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, 1971

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

December, 1985
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Dissertation director, Jean E. Kennard, Professor of English

Carl Dawson, Professor of English

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Robert M. Mennel, Professor of History

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Preface

The following abbreviations for Woolf's works appear throughout the dissertation:

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ABSTRACT

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S USE OF THE PAST:
THE EARLY CRITICISM TO TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

by

Marilee Line Fulton
University of New Hampshire, December, 1985

In her early twenties, Virginia Woolf considered becoming a historian, and for several years after she began The Voyage Out, her criticism centered on historical and biographical subjects. Later she, alone among British novelists, combined history and modernist technique, most obviously in her last five novels. Orlando and Flush are mock biographies; The Waves appears against vast cycles of history and prehistory; The Years is a modernist rendering of the three generation novel; Between the Acts concerns a pageant of English history performed while planes preparing for war fly overhead. But the historical fiction that began with Orlando did not represent a return to earlier interests. This dissertation, dealing with the early criticism and the first five novels, proposes that history played a formative and continuing role in Woolf's criticism and her fiction.
A study of Woolf's early criticism belies the common assumption that her critical theories evolved from her fiction. The criteria Woolf developed in response to biographies and histories are precisely the criteria she later applied to fiction. Her work in history also affected her prose style and her feminism. Initially she admired what she later saw as masculine history and prose. Her own style was too like "the coils of my own brain." Before she had finished The Voyage Out, however, she charged that traditional history ignored "our point of view." Many years later, she contended that the female writer must find her own sentence, "adapting it to the shape of her thought."

The role of history in Woolf's fiction was, initially, to point her in directions she did not consciously intend to go. In the first two novels, the historical themes --debates over Gibbon, Mrs. Hilbery's unfinished biography-- are often extraneous; but they became the focus of Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse, novels that constitute what Woolf later called "the new biography" and what I term "the new history." In writing fiction Woolf did not abandon history; she found other forms through which to explore it.
INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf was nothing if not paradoxical. Born into one of the most literary families in England, she lived her adult life at the very heart of the intellectual life of her time; yet she claimed that she was an outsider, a "common reader." She wrote a novel in which her avowed intention was "to criticize the social system at its most intense"; yet she centered it on the wealthy, snobbish wife of a Member of Parliament and endowed her with a sensibility (drawn largely from her own) which many readers have found sympathetic. A bluestocking who had loved her own teachers and resented society's disparagement of them, and who for a short time had taught history herself, she mercilessly satirized the pedantic socially gauche Miss Kilman, history teacher. She was a feminist, yet her presentation of the feminine woman was almost interchangeable with society's ideal—sensitive, sympathetic, and wise in human relationships, but unable to understand a square root or distinguish Romans from Greeks. And not the least of the paradoxes is that Woolf, who more than anyone except Joyce has come to represent modernism in British fiction, wrote historical fiction, a genre which the British modernists seem to have opposed in their very temperament.
Early in the twentieth century, historical fiction, a mainstay of Victorian literature, quite suddenly went into eclipse. It was probably edged out by those very forces that ushered in the particular form of autobiographical fiction practiced by Lawrence, Joyce, and Richardson in English and Proust and Gide in French. Historical fiction, at least as it had been written in the nineteenth century, depended on a sense of shared values, of community, and of continuity. The breakdown of that sense at the end of the century made both the material and the methods of Victorian fiction obsolete. In her discussion of A Portrait of the Artist, Dorothy Van Ghent has described the conditions that fostered the emergence of the new fiction in this way:

in a time of cultural crisis, when traditional values no longer seem to match at any point with the actualities of experience, the mind turns inward on itself to seek the shape of reality there—for the thinking and feeling man cannot live without some coherent schematization of reality. Here at least—in one's own memory, emotion, and thought—is the empirical ground for such investigation. The great autobiographical artists, St. Augustine, Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, made their self-inventories under historical compulsions of this kind. The dates of 1913 for Sons and Lovers and 1914 for Joyce's
Portrait [1916] carry their own obvious implication: they mark a time of shocking disclosure of the failure of the social environment as a trustworthy carrier of values (263). 

In referring to the shared values of the nineteenth century, I do not mean to imply that the novelists of the time approved of their society. Frequently, on both sides of the Atlantic, historical fiction was the vehicle for social criticism, made all the more trenchant because it condemned both past and present. Thackeray and Twain, for example, delighted in mocking not only two societies at once but anyone foolish enough to believe that either was superior. Hawthorne and Hardy, in the tragic mode, lamented both the obvious evils of a more passionate past and the more subtle evils of a spiritually barren present. But implicit in all such historical fiction is the belief that the values of the novel are the true values of the culture, no matter how far either past or current society may have strayed from them. Additionally, both nineteenth century fiction in general and historical fiction in particular depended upon the assumption that certain generally agreed upon events are important in life, whether they are the events affecting an entire continent or those occurring in the individual life. Perhaps most important, nineteenth century fiction reflected the belief that objective truth
could be known: a historical event or a life was always subject to misinterpretation, but the truth was obtainable. The task of the novelist was to develop characters and situations at length, to make them real, to tell the whole story.

The modernists, such writers as Woolf's immediate predecessors Conrad and Ford and her contemporaries Joyce, Proust, and Richardson, resisted these assumptions and the fictional methods they implied. As the first wave of twentieth-century intellectuals, they felt little sense of shared values, continuity, or community. In place of a Thackeray or a Dickens urging society to return to its true human values, we find a Joyce saying "Non serviam." These writers argued that the whole of a story can never be known, much less told. They believed that traditional fiction ignored our subjective reality, which is, finally, the only one we know with any certainty. Thus, Ford Madox Ford objected to the straightforward chronological narrative of traditional fiction on the grounds that it failed to correspond to real experience: "Life does not say to you: In 1914 my next-door neighbour, Mr. Slack, erected a greenhouse.... If you think about the matter you will remember, in various unordered pictures..." (Conrad: A Remembrance 193, emphasis mine).

In contrast to the implicit argument of much historical fiction, these modern writers believed that most people's
lives had little to do with large events: their own lives were their large events; and even the important events within the individual life were, they believed, other than novelists commonly supposed. As early as 1903, Virginia Woolf thought about her father's approaching death and wrote, "I am sure that the facts of life—the marryings and bearings and buryings are the least important and one acts one's drama under the hat" (L I 79-80). She was to express the same idea sixteen years later in "Modern Fiction": "The moment of importance came not here but there.... Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope..." (CR 154), and still later in Jacob's Room: "It's not catastrophes, murders, deaths, diseases that age and kill us; it's the way people look and laugh, and run up the steps of omnibuses" (82).

In place of the omniscient or reliable first person narrator and the conventional plot and characterization of Victorian fiction, these writers present unreliable and conflicting narrators, disturbed chronology, and plots whose organizing principle is not external reality but the movements of a consciousness. We never know the truth about Conrad's Jim or Kurtz or Ford's Ashburnham because there is no tale beyond the subjective response of the teller. "To Marlow, the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out.
only as a glow brings out a haze..." (Conrad 68). And the subjects themselves could not tell us the truth: "For who in this world can give anyone a character? Who in this world knows anything of another heart--or of his own? (Good Soldier 155, emphasis mine).

One obvious result of this new attitude toward fiction was the admission of much material that would not have been considered suitable earlier. "'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist," wrote Virginia Woolf. "Everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (CR 158). To borrow from Keats, what the imagination seized was not necessarily truth, but it was by its very nature significant. At the same time, this new attitude, so receptive to new material, meant the virtual abandonment of certain traditional material, notably history. It is no accident that Joyce's Ulysses, which more than any other single work has come to represent the modernist experiment in fiction, might almost be termed "anti-historical." In it Joyce demonstrates that the material of epic and of everyday life are one and the same--birth, death, wandering, homecoming. It is important too, if we bear Woolf's comment about "marryings, bearings and buryings" in mind, that the birth, death and very qualified homecoming in Ulysses are entirely subordinated to the
workings of Bloom's, Stephen's, and Molly's minds; the events have no independent existence.

Because the modernists looked inward for their values and beliefs, inevitably the dominant material of their fiction was autobiography—and autobiography of an intensely introspective, skeptical, cerebral kind. Their novels are not the Victorian blend of autobiography and history, the retelling of events to a sympathetic reader; they are a re-enactment of events and a recreating of the self, addressed, if to anyone, to the self. Jane Eyre, for all the passion of her story, can tell us matter-of-factly that eight years passed and she grew up. Stephen Dedalus watches his childhood self recede and vanish: "How strange to think of him passing out of existence in such a way, not by death but by fading out in the sun or by being lost and forgotten elsewhere in the universe!" (Portrait 93). In place of the Victorian autobiographical novel and the Victorian historical novel—and many novels that could be considered both—the modernists give us autobiography to the exclusion of history.

I am not suggesting that historical material or an interest in history is inherently incompatible with modernist philosophy and fictional techniques. The example of Faulkner demonstrates that they are in fact perfectly suited. Nevertheless, British novelists, in some ways consciously, in other ways perhaps quite unconsciously, seem
to have felt that there was such an incompatibility. In contrast to American fiction, which shows a steady unbroken tradition of historical novels from the early nineteenth century to the present, British fiction shows an abrupt falling off of historical fiction in the twentieth century. Whereas almost every major Victorian novelist wrote at least one important historical novel, in the twentieth century the form was relegated to such minor figures as Walpole, Bennett, Galsworthy, and Graves. Perhaps more important, these novelists, without exception, used traditional techniques. It is impossible to say that these authors wrote historical fiction because they were inclined toward traditional methods or, alternatively, that they used traditional methods because they wrote historical novels. In fact, all except Graves wrote non-historical fiction that was equally traditional. But here the example of Conrad and Ford is illuminating. These writers, whose major work is highly experimental and exerted a profound influence on the development of twentieth century fiction, did try historical fiction; but the resulting novels, Conrad's *Rescuer* and *Rover* and Ford's *Fifth Queen* trilogy, are traditional in technique. The relegation of historical fiction to minor and traditional novelists and to the minor and traditional work of the major novelists suggests that, for whatever reason, most British novelists could not imagine the combination of historical fiction and modernist methods.
Virginia Woolf, almost alone among the modernists,² did attempt such a combination, not once but five times. Orlando is one of the few twentieth-century British novels to be included in full-length studies of historical fiction. And, after completing Orlando, Woolf went on to write an unbroken series of novels that may all be considered historical. Each takes up a different theme and a different approach, but the centrality of history in each is undeniable. Orlando deals with the sexist bias of history and also poses the problem that in history, as in personal memory, the extraordinary is remembered and then falsely labeled the ordinary. The Waves seeks to present the individual life against the backdrop of the huge cycles of history and even prehistory. Flush, though at first appearing even more fanciful than Orlando, like Orlando addresses serious problems of biography and gives glimpses into the obscure destinies that Woolf believed history overlooks. The Years seems at first glance a return to the traditional family chronicle--the three generation novel--until one realizes how fragmented and incomplete are its glimpses into randomly chosen scenes, divided by surprisingly uneven intervals. This novel, as much as anything Woolf wrote, embodies the modernist principles she laid down in "Modern Fiction": "The accent falls differently from of old..." (CR 154). And like Orlando and Flush, it seeks to redress the sexist bias of history. Between the
Acts again suggests the cycles of history and prehistory, and it also debates such issues as whether human character changes over time or remains the same. It centers on a pageant of English history (again with the accents falling in surprising places) presented on a summer day in 1939 as the planes preparing for the next war fly overhead.

The biographies of Woolf and her recently published early letters reveal some of the reasons for this persistent use of history in her fiction. From early childhood she read history as voraciously as she read fiction, and during the spring when her half-sister Stella was dangerously ill, the fifteen year old Virginia found that "those eternal old Graphics and my Macaulay" were "the only calm and unanxious thing in this most agitating time" (Quentin Bell 57). She was also profoundly influenced by her father's historical as well as his literary interests. "I was more like him than her [her mother], I think," she once wrote (L III 374); and she often expressed her gratitude that her father not only gave her the free run of his library but also gave her good guidance. He introduced her to Gibbon, Macaulay, and Carlyle; and certainly her lifelong love of biography was at least partly due to his influence.

The letters of Woolf's early twenties show that history was more than an avocation. In 1905 she taught history at a working women's college, and for a time she considered becoming a professional historian. Admittedly, there was
some family pressure to do this, for she mentions frequently that her aunt Caroline Stephen urged her to stop "selling my soul to journalism and write a solid historical work" (L I 166). When she felt that she had committed herself to fiction, she was somewhat relieved that her aunt was no longer alive to object: "I'm very much excited by the thought of going back to the work of imagination [The Voyage Out]. What a good thing the Quaker wont [sic] be shocked by it--she wanted me to write a life of Henry the 8th" (L I 448). Nevertheless, for a time she had been very excited by the idea of writing history. In July of 1905, she had written to Violet Dickinson, "Do you feel convinced I can write? I am going to produce a real historical work this summer..." (L I 202). Her first published writings were reviews of histories and biographies and personal essays on historical and historical-literary topics. For example, her second essay accepted for publication was "Haworth, November 1904," a description of the Brontës' house. Surprisingly, although she had written stories since childhood and had attempted a novel at the age of fifteen, none of the letters written before 1906 mentions the possibility of a career in fiction.

Woolf would not have made a good historian. While only the most naive student believes that history consists of facts and dates, a vocational counselor might reasonably take alarm at Woolf's frequent observation, supported by her
friends, that she had no head for facts, logic, or even what she knew other people saw as "real life." As Lytton Strachey observed early in his acquaintance with her, she was "rather wonderful, quite witty, full of things to say, and absolutely out of rapport with reality" (Spalding 48). More than once she remarked, only half facetiously, that one of the solid advantages of fiction is that the writer does not have to verify the facts. When she was confined to facts, as in the biography of Roger Fry, she became frustrated and despondent. She freely admitted that her readers were right in finding numerous inaccuracies in To the Lighthouse (L III 379, 399); when she tried to figure out when a character had to have been born to be a certain age at a certain date, she almost invariably added wrong; and her idea of teaching history was to impress upon her students "a few good scenes" (Quentin Bell 210). To some extent Woolf's difficulty with facts reflects a deliberate scorn for them, based on her belief that they distort, that the granite of fact is meaningless without the rainbow of suggestion and imagination; but to some extent she genuinely worried that she did not have "that 'reality' gift" (D II 248). In any case, the truth remains that she lacked certain abilities essential to the historian.

Yet Woolf did have the one most essential quality of the historian, a superb historical imagination; and she had an insatiable desire to understand the past, emotionally as
well as intellectually. Like the speaker in "The Mark on the Wall," she forgets the name of the flower, precisely because she is lingering on the thought that its seed was there in the time of Charles I. At times Woolf's historical imagination is nothing less than visionary. There is perhaps nothing extraordinary in her statement that "those vast rivers and fertile valleys, those forests and odorous trees and mines of gold and ruby fill up the background of the plays" of Shakespeare—we can credit Shakespeare for most of this. But she finishes her sentence with these thoughts of her own:

as, in our fancy, the blue of the distant plains of American seems to lie behind the golden cross of St. Paul's and the bristling chimneys of Elizabethan England. (G&R 162)

This could be Blake.

Woolf's interest in history has not been entirely ignored. Although critics have concentrated on time itself—and in particular the disparity between clock time and psychological time—they have also given some consideration to Woolf's interest in World War I. And if the historical novels received too little attention from earlier critics, contemporary critics have begun to fill that gap. The combination of the publication of the letters and the complete diaries, the Woolf centennial, and the development of feminist criticism has drawn a great deal of
attention to Woolf, and it was natural for critics to take a special interest in what had been most neglected—particularly when it contained some of Woolf's most strongly feminist writing.

What has been almost entirely overlooked is the subterranean influence of history in the novels that precede Orlando. For Woolf did not, as the pattern formed by those later novels might suggest, abandon her early interest in history in favor of fiction and literary criticism, then return to that early interest in later life. History is everywhere in Woolf's fiction. The characters in the early as well as in the later novels are always thinking about it, reading it, writing it, stumbling upon ruins, and gazing at—or imagining—scenes that seem to change into past or future before their eyes. The characters in The Voyage Out debate Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Jacob Flanders writes essays that ask, "Does history Consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" (JR 39). Mrs. Hilbery cannot write the biography of her father, a famous Victorian poet, because she knows too much about him and about the period. Rachel Vinrace imagines "mammoths ... in Richmond High Street," (VO 67) and Lily Briscoe looks out to sea thinking "distant views seem to outlast by a million years ... the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest" (TL 34). This brooding on past and future is also characteristic of both the narrative and
the critical voice. The narrator of *Mrs. Dalloway* projects the crowd on Bond Street into the future, "when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones" (23). The essayist prophesies that "posterity will be singing" Christina Rossetti's poetry "when Torrington Square is a reef of coral perhaps and the fishes shoot in and out where your bedroom window used to be" (CR2 220).

Sometimes in the early novels, the references to history seem irrelevant. In *Night and Day*, the historical concern, Mrs. Hilbery's biography of her father, is simply abandoned halfway through the novel. But the issue reappears, in new form, in Lily Briscoe's struggles and her final success with her painting. Mrs. Hilbery does not finish her biography, but Virginia Woolf finishes hers. Like Lily suddenly resolving after ten years that "she would paint that picture now" (220), Woolf returns to her old subject—how to create a work of art from the life of a loved one without violating the opposing dictates of truth and art. The debate over Gibbon in *The Voyage Out*, though not abandoned, is not fully integrated into the rest of the novel. It is one of the vehicles for the polarity of male and female, another topic which reaches fruition in *To the Lighthouse*. And again, the later form of the polarity shows no traces of its early connection to overtly historical issues. Woolf moves from the historical topic, biography,
to the non-historical, painting, and from male and female reactions to Gibbon to the contrast of an intellectual man and his wise but non-intellectual wife.

But if certain themes that were earlier related to history reappear without history as their vehicle, history serves in the later novels as a vehicle for other issues. And again certain ideas and interests in history seem to guide Woolf to the next phase of her career. Jacob's Room—with its backdrop of all European history and even prehistory and its immediate concern with World War I—surely helped to pave the way for Between the Acts. Its more immediate effect was, as Woolf herself realized, to show her the way to Mrs. Dalloway. She meant of course that she learned her narrative technique in Jacob's Room. What was less obvious to her, I think, was that she did not have her various historical themes under control in Jacob's Room, whereas in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse she did. Thus, in content as well as in technique, failure in Jacob's Room led to success in Mrs. Dalloway.

Virginia Woolf was no historian manqué, and we are much the richer for her early realization that she was a novelist and literary critic. History was, however, of great importance to her throughout her life. It was, as I shall show, closely tied to her quest for wholeness and meaning—for a "discovery in life, something one can lay hands on & say 'this is it'" (D III 62). More specifically, Woolf's
interest in history, beginning as a subtext in the first two novels, steadily grew in importance until it fully emerged in Orlando. In the first two novels, history seems to appear often in spite of the author's clear intention to deal with other issues. In Jacob's Room, the lack of control I mentioned above is not due to the irrelevance of the historical themes but to their number. In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Woolf knew she was writing a new kind of historical novel, but paradoxically her very success has partially disguised her intention. Writing of traditional history (essentially political and economic history), she one complained, "Our point of view they ignore entirely" (B&P 23). When she deliberately set out to present "our point of view," the results were not easily recognized as history. And history is in one sense subtext, in another sense text in To the Lighthouse. It is subtext in that ideas Woolf came to through her interest in history are present in disguised form, and text in that, like Jacob's Room and Mrs. Dalloway, it contains several other issues that are overtly historical.

If, on the surface (though not in reality), Woolf's fictional career seems to move from the non-historical to the historical, the criticism seems to follow a reverse pattern. Early in her life, most of Woolf's criticism was of histories and biographies, and although she never abandoned these works, she turned her attention increasingly
to literature, and particularly to fiction. But again, Woolf's interest in history played a role in her criticism analogous to its role in her fiction. Her impatience with many of the histories and biographies she read not only helped to convince her that fiction was her element but also established in her mind similar criteria for the two forms. Her approach to history was amateurish and bellettristic, but, while she retained the amateur tone in her literary criticism, the content was scholarly and profound. Finally, Woolf's interest in history played a formative, and continuing, role in the development of her feminism. Her early feeling that history ignored her point of view developed steadily until it reached fruition in *Three Guineas* (1938). It is no accident that this pamphlet and the last novels, the novels most overtly concerned with history, also contain some of her most feminist writing.

If much remains to be written on Woolf's use of history in her last novels, the subterranean influence of history in the early criticism and the first five novels is not only more neglected but, I think, more interesting. For Woolf has left a very full account of the development of her mind and her art, yet she seems not to have noticed the importance of history in her early work. It was not until she began working on *Mrs. Dalloway* that she came to realize
that in writing fiction she was not so much renouncing
history as offering a new kind of history.

My study will trace Woolf's interest in history from
the early criticism, where it is often the stated topic,
through the early novels, where it is essentially a subtext,
to its emergence as a central issue in Mrs. Dalloway and To
the Lighthouse. Because I am tracing an interest rather
than a specific theme, perhaps I should add here that my
definition of history will be flexible. The guiding
principle will be Woolf's own thought. For example, by the
usual definition of history as the written record of the
past, I should exclude both prehistory, because it is not
written, and World War I, because in Woolf's time it was not
the past. But I include them both because of Woolf's
interests and ideas. Rachel Vinrace, a largely
autobiographical creation, wants to know how "mammoths who
pastured in Richmond High Street had turned into paving
stones and boxes full of ribbon, and her aunts" (VO 67), as
surely as she wants to follow Gibbon's "roads back to the
beginning of the world," believing that "by passing down
them all knowledge would be hers and the book of the world
turned back to its very first page" (175). Woolf too wanted
to see all time, from prehistory to the far future, as
united and whole.

To explain my inclusion of World War I, I might invoke
Thomas Mann:
The exaggerated pastness of our narrative is due to its taking place before the epoch when a certain crisis shattered its way through life and consciousness and left a deep chasm behind. It takes place—or, rather, deliberately to avoid the present tense, it took place and had taken place—in the long ago, in the old days, the days of the world before the Great War.... Is not the pastness of the past the profounder, the completer, the more legendary, the more immediately before the present it falls? (v)

Woolf certainly would have agreed, and both World War I and the vanished pre-war world appear as memory in several of her novels. But I would go further, and suggest that even the present moment is often treated as the past in Woolf's fiction. For example, the day in 1923 on which Mrs. Dalloway takes place is history in a sense because the novel continually asks the reader to look into the future and see that day as past. Simultaneously, the novel looks into the past and sees it as present. Every moment of time is both a past moment held forever in memory and expressed in song, a present moment when the song is sung, and a future moment when the song and the singer are gone:

Through all the ages—when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise, the
battered woman ... stood singing of love—love which lasted a million years.... [And] the passing generations—the pavement was crowded with bustling middle-class people—vanished like leaves, to be trodden under, to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring.

(MD 124)
Chapter Notes

1. See also 263-66. Irving Howe makes a similar point in his discussion of the modernism of Jude the Obscure:

Jude the Obscure is Hardy's most distinctly "modern" work, for it rests upon a cluster of assumptions central to modernist literature: that in our time men wishing to be more than dumb clods must live in permanent doubt and intellectual crisis; that for such men, to whom traditional beliefs are no longer available, life has become inherently problematic; that in the course of their years they must face even more than the usual allotment of loneliness and anguish; that in their cerebral overdevelopment they run the danger of losing those primary appetites for life which keep the human race going; and that courage, if it is to be found at all, consists in a readiness to accept pain while refusing the comforts of certainty. (271)

2. The other possible candidate for modernist historical novelist is of course Lawrence. I would suggest, however, that while his fiction is undeniably modern both in technique and in content, it is otherwise quite different from the fiction I have been discussing. Although Lawrence's style is highly experimental and internal events take precedence over external, the narrative is, nevertheless, chronological and, in the main, reliable. Despite Lawrence's fascination with psychology, the subjectivity of reality is not for him a primary concern. It is partly for this reason that he seems so like an updated Hardy, rather than a Joyce, Conrad, or Woolf.

3. Woolf omits the apostrophe from contractions and possessives so frequently in her letters and diaries that I have decided not to write sic hereafter as I think to do so would prove distracting. A Writer's Diary, the abridged diary published by Leonard Woolf in 1954, corrects the punctuation, but the more recently published five volume diary and the six volumes of letters do not.
CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY CRITICISM

"The Victorians," Mrs. Swithin mused. "I don't believe," she said with her odd little smile, "that there ever were such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently."

"You don't believe in history," said William.

--Between the Acts

Although Woolf's mature criticism is beginning to receive the attention it deserves, her early criticism, much of which concerns history and biography, is still neglected. By the time she began The Voyage Out in 1907, Woolf had been publishing non-fiction for almost three years; by the time she had finished this first novel in 1913, she had published over fifty essays and reviews. Yet the earliest article most critics discuss is "Hours in a Library" (1916); and many begin with "Modern Fiction," which postdates not only The Voyage Out but also Night and Day.¹

If discussion of Woolf's criticism had not so persistently involved other issues, the neglect of the earliest essays might not matter; but the criticism has almost always been studied in relation not only to the fiction but to Woolf's background and intellectual development. For these issues the first eleven years of publishing are crucial. The two points most often debated are Woolf's claim to the status of an amateur in her
criticism and the relationship between her critical theories and her fiction. I would suggest that these two issues are related, that both the critical voice and the critical theories have their roots in Woolf's upbringing. Both the voice and the theories manifest themselves first in Woolf's early essays on history and biography. I also hope to show in this chapter that much of Woolf's attraction to fiction --both the writing of her own novels and the writing about others'--was closely tied to her love of history. In the study of history and in the writing of and about fiction Woolf sought to unite the world of fact and the world of imagination, opposites she would eventually term "granite" and "rainbow."

Until recently, critics have generally rejected Woolf's claim that she was excluded from the male world of intellectual privilege. The only point on which they disagreed concerned Woolf's own perception of her situation. Jean Guiguet, for example, suggests that she knew she was not deprived but felt the injustice of other women's deprivations (169). More recent critics, particularly feminists, have finally accepted Woolf's claim as valid; but even now, on somewhat different grounds, the debate continues. When one feminist critic, Jane Marcus, writes that "writing, for Virginia Woolf, was a revolutionary act" (1), another, Joanne Trautmann, objects, "A revolutionary act? When she was born and bred to it?" (6).
Was writing a revolutionary act for Woolf, or was she born and bred to it? The answer is both, and to some extent Woolf tells us it is both. There is unmistakable autobiography in the description of the Hilbery family in *Night and Day*, who, together with their friends, "seem to prove that intellect is a possession that can be tossed from one member of a certain group to another almost indefinitely" (N&D 32). Of the Stephens, as of the Hilberys, we might say that "The names of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, and so on... were, for some reason, much more akin to [them] than to other people" (34).

Socially, Woolf was a member of the upper middle-class; intellectually, she was an aristocrat. From childhood she was surrounded by important novelists and scholars, friends of her father, a leading historian, biographer and critic. If she broke with his Victorian conventions after his death, she seems to have stepped effortlessly into the very center of the intellectual life of her time, as he had before her.

Critics who challenge Woolf's claim to be an outsider often point to her own observation that her otherwise conservative father was unusually liberal in allowing his daughters the free run of his library (CDB 74). Bell tells us that Leslie Stephen took great pride in Virginia's learning (53), and Mark Goldman sees him as a major influence on her writing style and critical theories. Bell and Goldman both point to Stephen's insistence on honesty
and spontaneity, and Goldman concludes that "the pains [Woolf] takes to preserve her amateur standing and independent spirit are ... an inheritance from her father" (Bell 53, Goldman 85). Katherine C. Hill takes the argument even further, suggesting that Leslie Stephen "was determined that [Virginia] should become his intellectual heir" (351).

But Leslie Stephen's pride in his brilliant daughter notwithstanding, I wonder how we can equate the free run of a library and even the most enthusiastic support for her writing with the years of boarding school he gave as a matter of course to his sons. A Cambridge graduate might be justly proud of the learning displayed The Common Reader, but the point is that Woolf achieved this learning largely on her own. There are real gaps, too, in her learning, gaps that she regretted all her life. When, for example, she begins her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" with the statement "For it is vain and foolish to talk of Knowing Greek since in our ignorance we should be at the bottom of any class of schoolboys..." (CR 24), she writes not only as her persona, the common reader, but as herself. Her brothers began Greek as children; she began when she was almost eighteen, in lessons that occurred only once or twice a week. Her father once remarked that there was a certain lack of logic in the commonly held idea that one should study Greek literature in order to appreciate the beauty of modern literature. "How," he asked, "do you learn to appreciate either?" (22). But
Virginia Woolf did not want to know Greek in order to appreciate English literature; she wanted to know Greek for itself. Indeed there is something very touching in her description of the excitement she felt when her brother Thoby "first told me--handing it on as something worth knowing--about the Greeks" (MoB 108).

Beyond regretting that she had missed knowledge she would have enjoyed having, Woolf feared that her informal education might be a handicap to her writing. In 1907 she wrote to Violet Dickinson,

So my good woman,—this is a specimen of my narrative style, which is far from good, seeing that I am forever knotting it and twisting it in conformity with the coils of my own brain, and a narrative should be straight and flexible as the line you stretch between pear trees.... If only my flights were longer, and less variable I should make solid blocks of sentences, carven and wrought from pure marble; or the Greek marble which absorbs colours. (L I 300)

Almost a year later she wrote to Clive Bell,

I see all you say of my looseness--great gaps in all my sentences, stitched across with conjunctions--and verbosity--and emphasis. If I had had a good grounding in Greek, I might have done better. (L I 330)
Even as late as May of 1925, when she had just published *The Common Reader* and *Mrs. Dalloway* within a month of each other, Woolf expressed this same sense of inadequacy. When Goldsworthy Lowe Dickinson wrote that *The Common Reader* was "the best criticism in English," she answered, "I was very nervous as to what people like you might think, as I have so little education, and I thought much of that book was great nonsense" (L III 182 and note).

The examples of Katharine Hilbery in *Night and Day* and Kitty Malone in *The Years* suggest that to be intellectual in an intellectual family could in fact intensify a girl's awareness that she and her brothers were not equals. Katharine likes mathematics, but she is kept from pursuing this interest partly because it is not considered feminine, but more importantly because she is too busy showing visitors memorabilia of her grandfather, a famous poet, and helping her mother with his biography. Neither task interests her, but they fall to her precisely because she is an unmarried daughter and her family is privileged and important. Kitty, the daughter of an Oxford don, is unable to finish her history because she is wanted to show visitors around the university, which she does not attend.

Perhaps the best example of the paradoxes of being a female member of the privileged intellectual class appears in the private meaning of an incident in *A Room with a View*. S. P. Rosenbaum has recently noted that the narrator, who
"is and is not Virginia Woolf," goes to the university library, where she is denied entrance, to study the manuscript of Henry Esmond. This manuscript "is preserved at Trinity College, Cambridge--Thackeray's old college--and it was presented to the library by his son-in-law, Leslie Stephen" (54). And, innocent as Stephen was in this instance, it must have been puzzling to his daughter to have a father who simultaneously encouraged her and approved the society that excluded her. In Moments of Being, Woolf describes how, after a day of studying or writing, she felt reduced to an ornament at tea, dinner, or a party. No success as a scholar could compensate for her feelings of inadequacy in the role that society, including her father, seemed to consider more important (MoB 127-32). And for all his encouragement of her learning, the passage that Katherine Hill cites to prove that he wanted Virginia to be his heir contains something very odd, as Hill herself observes. Writing to his wife about Thoby's career, he remarked, "but I don't want him to be an author, that is a thing for ladies and Ginia will do in that line" (Berg Collection, as quoted by Hill, 351).

If this comment seems to denigrate Leslie Stephen's own profession and accomplishments, his writing shows no such self-disparagement. It contains all the authority that Woolf believed was denied to her, and a reading of even a few pages reveals great differences between his approach and
style and his daughter's. He uses the confident "I" of the established scholar and teacher advising his students. In an essay on English literature, for example, he refers repeatedly to "a man's needs," rather than to the pleasures of merely reading (32). Hill is probably right in her claim that Virginia Woolf's historical/biographical approach to literature, which she maintained against the approach of the New Critics, was an inheritance from her father (355); but for him history and biography lay in the established mainstream and the lives of the great, not the obscure.

Woolf's use of "we," seems at first more formal, less personal than her father's "I"--until we realize that it is not the editorial "we," but the voice of her persona and herself. It is far more personal and inclusive than her father's authoritative "I." As Barbara Currier Bell and Carol Ohmann have observed, Woolf's decision to write from the point of view of the common reader was both a way of expressing her sense of exclusion and a way of avoiding the masculine style:

when she says "we," she means we, rhetorically asserting the existence of a community, but, in fact, by that rhetoric and other devices ... working to create a community. "We" are English men and women who read for pleasure and for inspiration when "we" can get it.... "[We] are] guided by an instinct to create for [ourselves],

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out of whatever odds and ends ['we'] can come by, some kind of whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing." But "we" do not like labels. "We" do not care about the difference between the pre-Romantics and the post-Romantics, or between a novelist of manners and a novelist of sentiment. (51)

Woolf was "born and bred" to writing, but it was to writing of a particular kind—the belles lettres of the conventional Victorian woman squeezing her writing in between pouring out tea and opening bazaars. She was "revolutionary" in the way she seized on the role of amateur and used that position to justify challenging the intellectual and political establishment. Her style is at once urbane and naive, conciliatory and iconoclastic. It was Woolf who made the famous remark that Middlemarch is "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people" (CR 172), but as a critic she frequently does not write like a grown-up, as she demonstrates in the very use of the term. She asks such questions as "How should one read a book?" and "why are the minor Elizabethan playwrights boring?" To a certain extent, those who say Woolf was not deprived are right: if she had been truly deprived, she would have been a real life Jude Fawley, pressing her nose to the glass and never guessing how much sham and ignorance the intellectual establishment contained. As it was, she asked questions
from the point of view of an outsider—but one who has been very near the inside.

Although Woolf continued to have doubts about her education and her writing, she gradually developed the confidence to embrace what she had earlier deplored in her own style and to reject what she had admired. She came to advocate a new style for women in terms strikingly similar to those she had used in self-criticism. In 1907, her writing had been too like "the coils of my own brain"; in 1929, "a woman must make for herself [a new type of sentence], altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it" (G&R 81). The masculine style she rejected was, as I shall show in my next chapter, closely associated with male historians in general and with Gibbon in particular. Moreover, the confidence Woolf demonstrates in her mature criticism began to evolve in her early work in history and biography.

Critics have not, as far as I know, traced Woolf's voice or theories back to the earliest essays and reviews. Indeed only Holtby mentions that writing criticism first was necessary to Woolf's development as a novelist (26), and even she does not discuss any of the early essays specifically. Guiguet writes simply, "The fact that Virginia Woolf began her literary career by writing criticism needs no special explanation: it was a normal
The neglect of Woolf's earliest work has led to a number of distortions, particularly in discussions of the relationship between the criticism and the fiction. Critics have generally held that, however the two forms interacted later, initially the criticism grew out of the fiction. Daiches, for example, sees dissatisfaction with her first two novels, particularly Night and Day, behind Woolf's complaint in "Modern Fiction" (1919) that, for us at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and twenty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds. (CR 153, Daiches 23)

Michael Rosenthal, similarly, sees Woolf's approval of her own fiction behind the essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923):

While "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" is probably the best-known instance of Mrs. Woolf's dressing up in theoretical trappings intensely individual assertions concerning her own values and
techniques, it is by no means the only one.
Indeed, most of her speculations about modern literature are of this sort. (253)

Even Guiguet, who blames the critics rather than Woolf for attaching too much importance to only a few of her essays (specifically, these two and two others, "The Russian Point of View," and "The Art of Fiction"), nevertheless assumes that these essays are essentially technical and lend themselves to justification of Woolf's own methods (124).
All these critics assume, explicitly or implicitly, that the earliest essays worth considering are those written simultaneously with or just after the first two novels. All agree that Woolf derived her critical theories empirically from her own fiction.

In doing so, these critics have failed to consider the role of the earlier essays on biography and history; but before turning to those, I would suggest that even the essays on fiction do not quite support their view. If the theories advanced in "Modern Fiction" emerged from the writing of Night and Day, they had a short gestation period, as Woolf wrote the essay only a few months after completing the novel. Yet the essay is not only very polished but remarkably similar to "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," written four years later and divided from Night and Day by Monday or Tuesday and Jacob's Room. It seems unlikely that these ideas should emerge in such complete form immediately after
Woolf completed a traditional novel and remain largely unchanged through the fictional experiments of the next three years. It is far more plausible that these ideas emerged over several years and that, rather than coming upon them after completing *Night and Day*, Woolf, not surprisingly, failed in her first novels to achieve what she wanted. Indeed she almost says this in "Modern Fiction," when she laments that we "construct[...] our two and twenty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds" (CR 153).

But the proof that the theories preceded the fiction is to be found, not in the essays on fiction, but in the earlier essays on history and biography. In these neglected works, we both hear Woolf's distinct critical voice and see the clear outlines of her literary theories. The overriding tone of these early essays is skepticism, and skepticism remarkably like that of her later essays on much of the fiction of her time. In her 1910 review of the social history *Modes and Manners of the Nineteenth Century*, she begins by repudiating the historical approach that assumes history is the record of political, economic, and military events:

> Wars and ministries and legislation—unexampled prosperity and unbridled corruption tumbling the nation headlong to decay—what a strange delusion it all is! invented presumably by gentlemen in
tall hats in the forties who wished to dignify mankind. Our point of view they ignore entirely: we have never felt the pressure of a single law; our passions and despairs have nothing to do with trade; our virtues and vices flourish under all governments impartially. The machine they describe; they succeed to some extent in making us believe in it; but the heart of it they leave untouched—is it because they cannot understand it? At any rate we are left out, and history, in our opinion, lacks an eye. (B&P 23)

The sense that history is "made up," that it bears little resemblance to real life, and that historians succeed one another, each interpreting the past in prefabricated phrases handed down from his predecessors, has parallels in "Modern Fiction." First, there is the passage already quoted, with its references to "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing," which Woolf believes "has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide."

Second, she writes in the same paragraph,

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love, interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so
impeccably that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn. But sometimes, more and more as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this? (CR 154)

The passage in the review of Modes and Manners is also important because it is here, and not in The Common Reader, that Woolf first speaks as an outsider who complains that "our point of view [is] ignore[d] entirely"—precisely what she would later say about literary history. If the outsider is not specifically identified as female in the review, nevertheless the article contains hints of Woolf's later feminism in its suspicion that history is created to dignify men's activities. It is not a great leap to the mockery of regalia and parades we find in Three Guineas.

Toward its conclusion, the review takes a surprising turn. Having set up the history of manners as an alternative to political history, it rejects this approach as well:

As for manners, the term is so vague that it is difficult to test it; but it is probable that they too only approximate, and that people's behaviour
is the roughest guide to what they mean.... For this reason a history of modes and manners must use phrases which are as empty as any in the language, and the history is not of ourselves but of our disguises. (B&P 27)

In embryo, this article suggests the pattern of Woolf's own movement away from traditional history to fiction. One by one, Woolf was to reject political history, social history, biography of the great, and even, to some extent, biography of the obscure. To her, the only form really capable of containing truth was, paradoxically, fiction. Thus, she goes on to say, in her concluding sentence, "The poets and the novelists are the only people from whom we cannot hide" (27).

Woolf was almost equally suspicious of biography, although it was unquestionably her favorite avenue to the past. Distrust of biographies, with important implications for her fiction, appears repeatedly in the early reviews. Initially, she is attracted to Frank Mumby's *Girlhood of Queen Elizabeth* because it consists primarily of letters, which she tended to trust more than third person analysis, but she still comes away dissatisfied. She sees that the very qualities that made Elizabeth a great queen preclude our knowing her real nature: "To think perpetually and never to act without a motive was the one safe policy," Woolf writes. Then, apparently, she realizes that the
difficulties of knowing Elizabeth go beyond her special circumstances (the dangers she faced during the reigns of her brother and sister) to embrace all the great and famous: "for there is much less individuality in the way great acts are done" (B&P 175). Writing of the great is comparable, then, to writing of manners: decisions in affairs of state are as powerless to reveal real life as are clothing, furniture, and architecture.

Even the great who are private citizens, Woolf suggests, are exceptional in their very nature and therefore not the best sources of history. Thus, she finds a biography of Keats in some ways less useful than a biography of the lesser known Thomas Hood. To read about someone like Hood is to realize that,

at the same time that Keats and Lamb were writing there flourished—so thick that even men like these showed little higher than the rest—a whole forest of strenuous and lusty human beings, journalists, artists, or people simply who happened to live then and rear their children.

(B&P 54)

She goes on to describe the kind of literary history she would later satirize in Orlando:

A student of letters is so much in the habit of striding through the centuries from one pinnacle to the next that he forgets the hubbub that once
surged round the base; how Keats lived in a street
and had a neighbour and his neighbour had a family
—the rings widen indefinitely; how Oxford Street
ran turbulent while de Quincey talked with Ann.
(B&P 54)

This review anticipates too the essay on John Evelyn in The
Common Reader, in which Woolf suggests that the diary of
this almost forgotten man sometimes conveys more sense of
real life than the more famous and more artistic diaries of
Pepys (CR 87).

In such reviews Woolf reveals the impulse that would
eventually lead her to project a history of England based on
the lives of the obscure. But at this time—and indeed
throughout her life—her reviews of other writers' lives of
the obscure were not usually laudatory. The problem she
sees is that many biographies are written without sufficient
material: little is known, and what is known is often
uninteresting. Why, she asks, does anyone write a biography
of Eliza Haywood, an obscure eighteenth century novelist?
And she answers, "She is dead, she is old, she wrote books,
and nobody has yet written a book about her her" (B&P 126).
Again, why write about Maria Edgeworth? Does anyone still
read her books? She concludes that perhaps the author of
Maria Edgeworth and Her Circle
thinks it does not matter. The past has an
immense charm of its own; and if one can show how
people lived a hundred years ago— one means by that, how they powdered their hair, and drove in yellow chariots, and passed Lord Byron in the street— one need not trouble oneself with mind and emotions. Indeed, we can know little of the dead; when we talk of the different ages of the past we are really thinking of different fashions of dress and different styles of architecture. (B&P 130)

As in the review of *Modes and Manners*, Woolf sees the description on clothing and surroundings as a poor substitute for biography and history, and again we can see the lines of the later criticism. Woolf makes the same charge against the author of this biography that she later makes against the Edwardian novelists. In "Modern Fiction," for example, she writes that Bennett's characters in particular seem "to spend their time in some softly padded first-class railway carriage, pressing bells and buttons innumerable" (CR 152). She admits that "his characters live abundantly, even unexpectedly," but she adds that "it remains for us to ask how do they live and what do they live for?" (152). In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," she suggests that if he saw her hypothetical Mrs. Brown in a railway carriage and wanted to write about her, "Mr. Bennett, alone of the Edwardians, would keep his eyes in the carriage"; but he would discuss the posters on the wall, the cushions, her gloves and brooch, her social status--
everything except Mrs. Brown herself (CDB 107).

The parallels between the early reviews and the later criticism appear not only in the tone and content but in the very imagery. Toward the end of the review of Maria Edgeworth and Her Circle, Woolf introduces the image of the house as an example of the author's evasion of the real subject:

and dull must be our fancy if we fail in the end to furnish all the Georgian houses in existence with tables and chairs and ladies and gentlemen. There is no need to tease ourselves with the suspicion that they were quite different in the flesh, and as ugly, as complex, and as emotional as we are, for their simplicity is more amusing to believe in and much easier to write about. (B&P 133)

In her review of Ellis Chadwick's biography of Elizabeth Gaskell, she writes,

It is delightful to see how cleverly she vanishes. There are no letters to be had; no gossip; people remember her, but they seem to have forgotten what she was like. At least, cries Mrs. Chadwick, she must have lived somewhere; houses can be described. (B&P 137)

Both passages are strikingly similar to what Woolf
wrote about Hilda Lessways in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Here she criticizes Bennett for describing "not Hilda Lessways but the view from her bedroom window" (CDB 107). After quoting his description of the view, she continues,

Heaven be praised, we cry! At last we are coming to Hilda herself. But not so fast. Hilda may have been this, that, and the other; but Hilda not only looked at houses, and thought of houses; Hilda lived in a house. And what sort of house did Hilda live in? And Mr. Bennett proceeds. (109)

She concludes that Bennett is "trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there" (109).

An earlier review dealing with the futility of housing characters in books suggests not only similar ideas but also the first hint that Woolf viewed fictional and biographical subjects in similar ways. "Literary Geography" (1905), a review of Lewis Melville's The Thackeray Country and F. G. Kitton's The Dickens Country, proposes two kinds of literary pilgrimage, one in search of characters, the other in search of authors, and concludes that both are useless. As for seeking out the homes of fictional characters, "to imprison these immortals between brick and mortar strikes one as an unnecessary act of violence" (B&P 159). To follow Thackeray
on all his travels "needs either a boundless imagination or a mind that holds sacred the boots and umbrellas of the great" (B&P 159); if one follows Dickens, "we doubt whether the pilgrim at the end will know very much more about Dickens and his writings than he did at the beginning" (160). The review seems at first merely a variation on a familiar theme: these books, unlike the biographies Woolf rejects, deliver what they promise, but what they promise is worthless. But then, after writing that "a writer's country is a territory within his own brain," and that "we know our way there without signposts or policemen," Woolf concludes,

In the same way too the great dead come to each of us in their own guise, and their image is more palpable and enduring than any shapes in flesh and blood. Of all books therefore the books that try to impress upon the mind the fact that great men were once alive because they lived in this house or in that are those that seem to have the least reason for their being, for Thackeray and Dickens, having done with earthly houses, live most certainly in our brains. (161)

The equation of fictional characters and the dead is important for two reasons. It suggests, first, that Woolf saw similarities in the tasks of the biographer and the novelist and, second, that she believed biography and fiction had similar effects on the reader. At times she
acknowledges differences between the two genres, but in the very act of doing so, she reveals her tendency to combine them. She writes to Strachey that she is "not sure whether the character of Gordon [in Eminent Victorians] altogether 'convinces,'" but she concedes, "I daresay I'm really putting in a claim for the novel form" (L II 205). She was inclined too to make odd, almost mathematical, equations between the requirements and effects of truth and and those of art. An indifferent writer could sometimes interest readers if the subject was a real life; conversely, the artist could compensate for untruth with genius. In her review of a biography of Sterne (1909), Woolf writes that "a real life is wonderfully prolific" and that "the aesthetic effect of truth is only to be equalled by the imagination of genius" (G&R 168). Fifteen years later she was to present the Paston Letters as achieving through truth a moment of poetry:

It is their method to heap up in mounds of insignificant and often dismal dust the innumerable trivialities of daily life, as it grinds itself out, year after year. And then suddenly they blaze up; the day shines out, complete, alive, before our eyes. (CR 21, emphasis mine)

As the word "method" implies, the achievement is accidental, but it is as powerful as if it had been planned. In the
same essay, Woolf grants highest praise to Chaucer for combining truth and art, "as if poetry could handle the common facts of this very moment of Tuesday, the sixteenth of April, 1387, without dirtying her hands" (CR 16).

These tendencies—the unconscious assumption that biography should resemble fiction, the attempts to separate the two forms, the interest in comparing them—all suggest that Woolf asked of biography initially what she would later ask of fiction, her own and others'. She was to develop, additionally, a fascination with the way readers react to the combination of fact and fiction or the use of one when the other was expected. Like such novelists of our time as Barth and Doctorow, Woolf realized that, although we are told that one person existed and another is a fictional creation, our own experience of them makes them equally vivid in our imagination or, ironically, gives the edge to the fictional. It is Pope, nor Orlando, who seems insubstantial when the two meet. The case of Judith Shakespeare is even more powerful. We cannot say that she never existed because Woolf's whole point is that such a person would vanish without a trace:

and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a female body?—[she] killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where
the omnibuses now stop outside the the Elephant and Castle. (RoOO 50)

If history has omitted much of the truth, Woolf implies, it may be that the truth is more nearly present in what we imagine.

The belief in the power of the imagination to recreate the past when knowledge and study fail appears continually in Woolf's work. Beginning slowly and tentatively in the early criticism of history and biography, it evolved into a central theme of *To the Lighthouse* and the subsequent historical fiction. Yet even this belief was always qualified. In a diary entry of 1918, for example, Woolf describes how,

> ever since I was a child ... I have had the habit of getting full of some biography & wanting to build up my imaginary figure of the past person with every scrap of news I could find about him. During the passion, the name of Cowper or Byron or whoever it might be, seemed to start out of the most unlikely pages. And then, suddenly, the figure becomes distant & merely one of the usual dead. (D I 180)

The idea that the biographical subject returns to the state of the usual dead is crucial, for it is only when we bear the caprice of the imagination in mind that certain apparent inconsistencies in Woolf's criticism make sense.
As we have seen, she castigates several biographers for describing their subjects' houses and clothes; yet her own essay "Haworth, November 1904," itself a rather apologetic literary pilgrimage, includes a description of the emotion she felt at seeing Charlotte Brontë's clothing:

Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. Her shoes and her thin muslin dress have outlived her. (B&P 168)

Just how powerfully Woolf was affected appears in her use of the circumstance in the conclusion of Jacob's Room almost twenty years later:

"What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?"
She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes.

(176)

The solution to the inconsistency is that the reader often has moments of vision despite the author's failure. A biographer who describes houses, clothes, or coaches is leaving the possibility that the subject will come to life entirely to chance. Woolf's description of her own process of constructing an imaginative picture out of "every scrap of news I could find," like her description of the common reader creating literary theories "out of whatever odds and ends he can come by" (CR 1), attests to the reader's power, not the author's.
Another inconsistency, which can be resolved the same way, appears in the review of *The Girlhood of Queen Elizabeth*, mentioned earlier. After asserting that we can never know the truth about Elizabeth, Woolf offers as a conclusion this apparent non-sequitur:

Thus, splendid and inscrutable, she rode through London on the day of her Coronation; arches, pyramids, and fountains stood in her way, from which boys sang greeting; a fine snow kept falling over her, but the gems and the golden collars shone clearly through the whiteness. (B&P 177)

The strikingly beautiful description of the queen on the one hand reiterates the impossibility of our knowing her and on the other teases us with the feeling that we have actually seen her as she was. The impossibility of ever knowing another human being, living or dead, encountered through history or personal experience, was to become one of Woolf's major fictional themes. One needs "fifty pairs of eyes to see round" Mrs. Ramsay, and "For there she was" is, finally, all Peter Walsh can say of Clarissa Dalloway. And "Why," asks the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us--why indeed? For the next moment we know nothing about him. (72)
The image of Elizabeth on the way to her coronation is both an index of the futility of trying to capture the past and a moment of vision in which, perhaps without knowing it, we do capture it.

Underpinning Woolf's belief in the power of the imagination to recreate the past is the conviction, sometimes stated but more often implied in her use of language, that people not only resemble their ancestors but in some way are their ancestors. Like so many of Woolf's most important ideas, it grew out of her early criticism. It first appears, in the review of Modes and Manners of the Eighteenth Century, where Woolf suggests that social history "is not a history of ourselves but of our disguises" (B&P 27). Thirteen years later she wrote in her diary that in writing The Common Reader she hoped to "find out certain things about ourselves" (D II 265). Orlando was inspired partly by Woolf's idea that Vita Sackville-West "descends from Dorset, Buckingham, Sir Philip Sidney, and the whole of English history" (L III 150), and partly by the striking resemblances in the Sackville family portraits, painted over several centuries. Some of the later writing contains a mystical strain. For example, in The Pargiters, the work that eventually split into The Years and Three Guineas, Woolf writes, "We must become the people that we were two or three generations ago. Let us be our great grandmothers" (8).
The strangest example of this mystical union of living and dead is a story Woolf wrote sometime in the last two years of her life, "The Searchlight." Here the characters listening to a story are continually confused by searchlights, real searchlights lighting patches of sky and land as they search for enemy planes, and imaginary searchlights lighting the past. In the story within the story, other characters also see scenes lit, metaphorically, by searchlights. Toward the conclusion, when the actual searchlight catches the woman telling the story, it is as if the light she has been shining on the past were suddenly turned on her. She, like the character in her story, wears blue on her head, and the light framing her makes her look as if she, again like her character, were standing in a doorway. When the others ask her at this point to identify the character in her story, she momentarily cannot because she has lost her own identity in that of someone she never knew:

"Oh, the girl.... She was my--" she hesitated, as if she were about to say "myself." But she remembered; and corrected herself. "She was my great-grandmother," she said. (HH 125)

Woolf's own intense involvement with the past has sometimes led to misinterpretation of her work. For example, Herbert Marder has criticized Woolf's writing on the sufferings of women in the nineteenth century, observing
that sometimes "she seemed to be protesting those grievances of the past as if they were her own" (72). Although Marder concedes that "Her purpose was to expose abuses, not to mark the progress that had been made toward eliminating them" (72), his view is inadequate, for two reasons. It ignores Woolf's belief that very little progress had been made, and it reduces to a fault one of Woolf's great strengths—her imaginative identification of herself with writers of the past. For example, in writing of the psychological restraints on female writers, Woolf finds symbolic meaning in the fact that Jane Austen hid her manuscripts (RoOO 71), but we would assume that both the literal and the figurative meanings of this habit should be far from the experience of a woman "born and bred" to writing. It comes as a surprise, therefore, to discover from the letters that Woolf hid her own manuscripts (L I 351); and I wonder how many of Woolf's comments about the past are either derived from both past and present or even derived from the present and projected onto the past.

It is not so much that Woolf failed to divide her time from the past as that she consciously and deliberately transcended the divisions of time. She is like Forster imagining the novelists of two countries and three centuries working simultaneously in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Going even further than Forster, she sometimes imagines literature as the work of one mind. She suggests
that we are surprised to see Defoe's name on the title page of *Robinson Crusoe* because "The book resembles the anonymous productions of the race" (CR 89). Writing of Henry James, she observes that all great writers have "a mood of the great general mind which they interpret and indeed almost discover" (DoM 134).

Woolf's desire to transcend the boundaries of time was balanced by an equally strong desire to see the past as past—and even to see the present as past, as she demonstrates in *Mrs. Dalloway*. These contrasting but complementary impulses partly account both for her attraction to fiction in general and for her taste in individual works. History and fiction were opposed in Woolf's mind when she was choosing between the "solid historical work" her aunt wanted her to write and the "work of imagination" she found so much more engrossing; but as her career unfolded, fiction emerged not as an opposite pole from history but rather as a compromise, a balancing point between the historical and the poetic in Woolf's intellectual makeup.

Taken in chronological order, Woolf's criticism reveals a gradual and apparently effortless shift from a preponderance of writing about biography and fiction to a preponderance of writing about literature; neither subject is excluded at any point. Additionally, as time went on, Woolf wrote more, not fewer, lives of the obscure. If we
consider just the criticism of literature, we find an overarching concern with fiction—surprising in one who not only read a great deal of poetry and drama but who comes close to combining poetry with her fiction. It is not simply that fiction is the genre Woolf most often discusses: when she discusses literature in general, novels and novelists make up the bulk of her examples; when she discusses poetry or drama, she applies standards largely derived from fiction, and she tends to admire whatever resembles fiction. Writing of Greek tragedy, she finds a modern counterpart in Emma; writing of the Elizabethan dramatists, she invokes the quotidian world of fiction in the question "Where is Smith ... where is Liverpool?" (CR 50). And again her writing on Chaucer is significant:

the pleasure he gives us is different from the pleasure that other poets give us, because it is more closely connected with what we have ourselves felt or observed. Eating, drinking and fine weather, the May, cocks and hens, millers, old peasant women, flowers—there is a special stimulus in seeing all these things so arranged that they affect us as poetry affects us, and yet are bright, sober, precise as we see them out of doors. (CR 20)

Woolf is an extremely poetic novelist, yet she repeatedly describes fiction as the prosaic genre, the one
that has to deal with the ordinary facts of life which
poetry and drama can generally escape. The novelist must
"keep his eyes on the ground, not on the sky" (CR 55);
fiction must "do all the work of the house; to make the
beds, dust the china, boil the kettle, sweep the floor" (B&P
17). But in return, fiction "has the priceless privilege of
living with human beings" (B&P 17). For Woolf fiction was
the genre that represented the most congenial balance
between the granite world of history and fact and the
rainbow world of poetry and the imagination.

In her own fiction, Woolf continually sought to balance
the granite of fact with the rainbow of imagination—
generally within the confines of each novel; but when she
leaned too far in one direction in one novel, the contrary
impulse reasserted itself in the next. After finishing the
traditional and realistic Night and Day, she began
immediately to work on the highly poetic and experimental
stories that led to Jacob's Room. After finishing The
Waves, which stands at the furthest reach of poetic
abstraction of all her fiction, Woolf wrote to Vita
Sackville-West, "You being a poet have no use for odds and
ends. The husks, the fragments, the general confusion which
I can make myself believe I find in London" (L IV 367).
Within months, she was at work on the most realistic and
"factual" of her novels, The Years, which began as a "novel
essay."

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This desire for balance may account for some surprising preferences in the fiction of others. Woolf's own tendency toward poetic fiction would make us expect her to prefer such predecessors as Meredith and Conrad to the coarser grained Hardy and to the almost journalistic Gissing. But she did not, and the terms in which she expressed her preferences are revealing—both of her craving for the factual and historical and of her tendency to associate history and fiction. Meredith, she says, avoids ugliness as he avoids dullness.... A touch of realism—or is it something more akin to sympathy?—would have kept the Meredith hero from being the honourable but tedious gentleman that ... we have always found him. It would have charged the high mountain air of his books with the greater variety of clouds. (G&R 51)

She goes on to suggest, "Was he, perhaps, a dramatist born out of due time?" (G&R 52). Conrad she admires, but she writes that his style is sometimes too beautiful, that "to achieve it the writer has had to shut off his energies in other directions" (B&P 17).

In contrast, where Woolf sees serious faults in Hardy and Gissing, she is quick to forgive these writers—and not, as in her remarks on Meredith, simply by reiterating that they are great. Of Hardy's style, which is "on the face of it so bad," she writes, "as well might one attempt to
rationalise the charm of a muddy country road, or of a plain field of roots in the winter" (CR2 232). Of Gissing she writes, "Partly because he had a reverence for facts and had no faculty it seems (his language is meagre and unmetaphorical) for impressions, it is doubtful whether his choice of a novelist's career was a happy one" (CR2 199). These are, indeed, alarming faults, but Woolf goes on to say, as she does not say of Meredith, "But the art of fiction is infinitely accommodating" (199). Although the content of the essays shows clearly that Woolf considers Gissing a lesser novelist, she treats him with more real affection than she can bring to Meredith.

This distrust of beauty and artifice, like so many of Woolf's critical attitudes, appears first in her early work in biography and history. The review of Maria Edgeworth and Her Circle concludes, "There are moments when we bewail the opportunity that Miss Hill seems to have missed--the opportunity of getting at the truth at the risk of being dull" (B&P 133). Shelley's letters, she remarks in another early review, are verbose and platitudinous, but "it is impossible to read the letters without an exquisite sense of faded scenes come to life again, and dull people set talking" (B&P 154). Woolf was hardly an advocate of dullness; nevertheless, she preferred dullness if the alternative was distortion or too much artifice and cleverness. She told Strachey that her one reservation
about his *Queen Victoria* was that "occasionally I think one is a little conscious of being entertained" (L II 465).

The preference for dullness over artifice is a measure of Woolf's love of fact. Her image of the muddy road in her essay on Hardy is not only an effective metaphor for the strange ugly beauty of his style but an unconscious expression of this love. She suggests further that Hardy's "moments of vision" succeed precisely because they stand out from the rest of his writing and that "the power goes as it comes. The moment of vision is succeeded by long stretches of plain daylight" (CR2 225). If for Woolf fiction was the genre that united granite and rainbow, Hardy, with his muddy roads and moments of vision, was the supreme practitioner of the art. That his style was "on the face of it so bad" only intensifies the sense of his achievement. In the passage where Woolf compares fiction to a household drudge but adds that "in return she has the priceless privilege of living with human beings," the one novelist she mentions by name is Hardy:

> When she has warmed to her task, when the fire is burning, the cat here, the dog there, the smoke rising from the chimney--then read Mr. Hardy and see whether the common prose of English fiction does not carry herself like the Queen she is....

(B&P 17)
For all Woolf wrote about history, neither the early criticism nor any of the later writing presents a sustained theory of history. The early criticism, as I have tried to show, reveals more tendencies and attitudes than theories. The novels suggest variously meliorism; anti-meliorism; cyclical history; and chaos--Stephen Dedalus's "shout in the street" (Ulysses 35), Septimus Smith's fear that "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (MD 133). In some ways Woolf remained, throughout her life, surprisingly naive about history. She trusted implicitly only primary sources and never seems to have considered that they are as subject to distortion, though of a different kind, as secondary sources. Rarely concerned with accuracy, she measured the worth of secondary sources essentially by their ability to kindle the imagination. Only four years before she died, she wrote of Gibbon (about whose work she had such mixed feelings):

If sometimes the size of the whole is oppressive, and the unemphatic story monotonous, suddenly in a flash of a phrase a detail is lit up; we see the monks "in the hazy gloom of their convents"; statues become unforgottably "that inanimate people"; the "gilt and variegated armour" shines out.... (DoM 85)

In meaning, structure, and wording, the passage is strikingly similar to her description of the Paston Letters
(See above, 45), letters written with no plan, no attempt to understand history, no weighing of evidence.

Of course, by the time Woolf wrote this, she had established herself as a literary critic, not as a historian. Clearly "The Historian and the Gibbon" is an essay written from the point of view of Woolf's persona, the common reader. It is concerned with impressions, what we would now term "reader response," not with historiography. But if it is unfair to criticize this essay by a historian's standards, the fact remains that Woolf wrote criticism of history in this vein even when she was considering a career in history. In her work in history and biography, she was from the outset, like her common reader, "guided by an instinct to create for [her]self, out of whatever odds and ends she could come by, some kind of whole..." (CR 1).

Ironically, although this passage purports to describe the common reader and does describe Woolf herself as a reader of history, it does not describe her as a literary critic. Largely because she did create by instinct her approaches to history and biography, her literary criticism is informed with theory as well as a very wide background in reading. As Bell and Ohmann have observed, "the common reader's reactions seem to dictate most of her commentary," but "the truth, of course is the exact opposite: she has shaped and elicited the reactions she posits" (52). She was able to do so with such confidence and authority (within her
non-authoritarian stance) because she had already developed her critical voice and standards in her early essays.

In that early criticism, Woolf essentially reacted against most of what she read without either posing or demonstrating an alternative, but unconsciously she was preparing to do both. As she remarked modestly in May of 1921,

Then I'm wondering how to shape my Reading book [The Common Reader].... But how I enjoy the exercise of my wits upon literature--reading it as literature. And I think I can do this better for having read through such a lot of lives, criticisms, every sort of thing. (D II 120)
1. To some extent the publishing history has been to blame. When Leonard Woolf began collecting the essays after Virginia's death, he naturally chose first those that reflected her life and works and those that discussed well known authors. Additionally, there was the practical difficulty of identifying many of the early unsigned reviews. Only gradually did he work back to the earliest essays and those that dealt with less well known authors. Thus, Granite and Rainbow (1958), the last of the four major posthumous volumes, contains two essays from 1909. Contemporary Writers (1965) contains several from still earlier but, dealing exclusively with literature, gives no hint of the range of Woolf's interests. It was not until Books and Portraits was published in 1977 that readers had a truly representative sampling of the early non-fiction.

2. An excellent discussion of Woolf's situation is Phyllis Rose's in Woman of Letters (35-37). Although Rose begins with the assumption that Woolf's resentment was somewhat excessive, she contends, as I do below, that the real issue is the difference in the treatment Woolf and her brothers received.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TRANSITION: THE VOYAGE OUT AND NIGHT AND DAY

The Voyage Out

When Woolf was in the midst of Orlando, she wrote to her nephew Julian Bell, "I am reading Michelet's History of France--God knows why. I find it fascinating, but wholly fictitious. Do you think any history is even faintly true?" (L III 465). Her suspicion that history might not be "even faintly true" is largely the impetus behind--and the meaning of--Orlando. As the early criticism reveals, it is a suspicion she entertained very early in her life. In the years 1907 to 1919, she was not ready to attempt "the new biography" or the new history, but her skepticism about the biographies and histories she was reading played an important role in her attempt at "the new fiction." The later novels are frequently examined in the light of Woolf's criticism, particularly the criticism she wrote simultaneously with whatever fiction is under discussion; but, ironically, The Voyage Out, which has nothing but criticism for its background, is generally discussed by itself. It is seen as a first work, not as something transitional.

I want to consider The Voyage Out in two ways, first as a transition from criticism to fiction, in which Woolf put
into practice some of the principles she had derived (and was continuing to derive) from her reviews of biographies and histories, and second as a transition from history to fiction, in which she used history to develop some of her lifelong themes. The first part of my discussion will be concerned not so much with history as with innovations in *The Voyage Out* that are partly traceable to Woolf's work in history. Only later will I discuss themes that are overtly historical.

Less than a year after she began *The Voyage Out*, and five years before she finished it, Woolf wrote to Clive Bell:

> I think a great deal about my future, and settle what book I am to write—how I shall re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole and shape infinite strange shapes. (L I 356)

Perhaps there is self-mockery in the extravagance of this plan, but if there is, it expresses embarrassment for the extent of her ambition, not a denial. The first letters she wrote at this time refer to *Melymbrosia* (the working title) as a novel, but increasingly Woolf substitutes the term "work of imagination." And indeed what she wrote was so original that even admiring critics were somewhat baffled. Ironically, it was so much in line with what Woolf and others wrote later that more recent critics have understood.
it almost too well. They see a more accomplished and unified work than earlier readers saw, but they also diminish its originality. A consideration of the novel set against the background of the early work in biography and history may serve to reveal some of that originality.

To read the early reviews is to sense Woolf's continual frustration with oversimplification of character and prefabricated notions of history. As we have seen, Woolf believes that much of history is "made up," and that preconceptions are passed down from one generation to the next. When imagination fails, the biographer or historian simply retreats into descriptions of furniture and clothing or discussions of "wars and ministries and legislation--unexampled prosperity and unbridled corruption tumbling the nation headlong to decay" (B&P 23). At the same time that Woolf was condemning biographers who deluded themselves with the belief that their subjects were quaint and picturesque, never, like themselves, surprising and complex, she was writing a novel that illustrated their mistake. She created what seemed to be a comedy of manners and presented to her readers what they expected, flat comic characters; then repeatedly she made these characters change and reveal themselves to be, in Forster's terminology, "round."

When Mrs. Dalloway first appears, the reader would probably agree with the comment Helen makes later--that she is "quite nice, but a thimble-pated creature" (82). But by
the time Helen makes this judgment, after the Dalloways' departure, it seems completely inadequate. The fact that we might agree with Helen if we were on board only strengthens Woolf's point: one dimensional views of people are natural, but they represent a failure of the observer, not the observed. Among the guests at the hotel, even those who come closest to caricature reveal other sides. Mrs. Paley, who seems to have no redeeming features and has so little to do with the main concerns of the novel that another view of her would seem entirely unnecessary, is suddenly observed mourning her dead and regretting that "we selfish creatures go on" (181). Evelyn Murgatroyd, egotistical, flirtatious, and emotion mongering as she is, is so disturbed by Rachel's death that she suddenly sees the foolishness of her own life and becomes, momentarily, startlingly like Rachel. She asks what Rachel has asked from the beginning—and indeed what Woolf's important characters always ask—"What [is] the meaning of it all?" (367).

There are of course precedents for sympathetic satire, the most obvious being Thackeray's novels, which Woolf admired. But Thackeray's use of sympathy is largely a rhetorical device (comparable to Johnson's in his essays) designed to draw the reader into his world view. Woolf, on the other hand, is interested in human complexity in and for itself. This interest appears again and again in her fiction—when Clarissa Dalloway thinks "she would not say of Peter,
she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that" (MD 11),
or Lily Briscoe decides that "fifty pairs of eyes were not
enough to get round that one woman with" (TL 294), or
Eleanor Pargiter considers how people must label her "an old
maid who watches birds" but concludes, "That's what they
think I am. But I'm not I'm not in the least like that" (Y
203). Perhaps the idea is best expressed in "An Unwritten
Novel": "Have I read you right? But the human face at the
top of the fullest page of print holds more, withholds more"
(HH 15). This is precisely the attitude Woolf expressed in
the early reviews: "There is no need to tease ourselves
with the suspicion that [Maria Edgeworth and her circle]
were quite different in the flesh, and as ugly, as complex,
and as emotional as we are..." (B&P 133).

Woolf's originality in her treatment of her minor
characters has been completely overlooked, and the source of
this neglect is, I think, another innovation in the novel,
its mixture of forms. The early reviewers, expecting a
comedy of manners, essentially found it. They placed an
inordinate emphasis on the role of the minor characters yet
never noticed anything unusual in their presentation: they
saw only satire. One critic, who admired the treatment of
Rachel's death, regretted that Woolf "should have
concentrated such gifts on being, for so many pages, merely
caustic" (Critical Heritage 56). Others approved of the
satire, and some made favorable comparisons to Jane Austen.
Most critics in fact admired *The Voyage Out* in 1915, but it is not our *Voyage Out*.

Later critics have recognized that the novel is not essentially a comedy of manners but a Bildungsroman. To them the comedy of manners in the novel is vestigial: it is the form from which Woolf is trying to break free. Thus, rather than revising the earlier critics' judgment, recent critics have generally disregarded the minor characters, who do not particularly interest them. Guiguet dismisses them as "mere walkers on" (198), and Fleishman calls them "the stock-in-trade of the English satirists from the Augustans to Waugh" (2). I do not wish to exaggerate Woolf's control of her material in this first novel, but I would suggest that she deliberately set up and then frustrated certain expectations in contemporary readers. It is only because we are now so familiar with the modernist tradition that her innovations with her minor characters have gone unnoticed.

Likewise we are familiar with the modernist tendency to posit reality in the inward experience of the characters, and again this familiarity makes *The Voyage Out* more comprehensible to us, but it removes some of the immediacy, the resemblance to real life that Woolf hoped readers would find. Readers no longer make the mistake of the early reviewer who remarked that, with its English guests at an English hotel, *The Voyage Out* might as well take place in England rather than in its exotic setting (Critical Heritage 68).
Now critics find the physical journey not irrelevant but central: it is symbolic of the real journey, Rachel's mental development. *The Voyage Out* is often seen now as Woolf's "Heart of Darkness," for, like Marlow, Rachel travels down the familiar Thames, out into the ocean, and up an exotic river on another continent into the dark jungle. She does not encounter her own or others' evil, but for her, as for Marlow, the real journey is inward to the mysteries of the self. So pervasive is this interpretation of the novel in recent criticism that it appears in two titles, *The Inward Voyage*, a study of Woolf's fiction, and *The Voyage In*, a study of fiction about women using *The Voyage Out* as its paradigm.

When *The Voyage Out* first appeared, however, the combination of what we would now describe as modernist content with a structure that at least appeared traditional was confusing. Even as late as 1942, David Daiches wrote that "throughout the book something is continually breaking up the solidity of events" so that "the reader wonders which he ought to believe—chronology, or the luminous fog that keeps interrupting it" (14). Familiar as he was with the later Woolf, he was trying her to consider how the novel might appear to the uninitiated—the readers of 1915—and then to show, in the light of the later novels, what Woolf actually intended. He writes, for example, that
Rachel Vinrace develops from immaturity to experience, and thence quietly to death, but the kind of meaning that Virginia Woolf is trying to get across to the reader does not really derive from that development, though at first sight it appears to. (14)

I would suggest rather that Woolf's subject is indeed Rachel's development but that she presents this development in a new form. As Avrom Fleishman has observed, this novel replaces external events with moments of vision in which [Rachel] sees less from the conventional perspective in which she has been educated and more in accord with the rhythm of life and death which underlies the lesser rhythms of daily affairs. (3)

Fleishman adds that in doing so "The Voyage Out represents a turn in the tradition of the English Bildungsroman ... toward the tracing of a metaphysical education" (3).

Perhaps the most puzzling innovation of The Voyage Out is Rachel's death. Early reviewers almost invariably saw a split between the death and the rest of the novel, a split they could not reconcile. One critic, for example, admired the treatment of the death but only in spite of what he saw as an artistic flaw in its inclusion: "Even the final catastrophe, which from a purely artistic point of view might be held to overbalance the work emotionally, may be
justified on the ground of its overwhelming reality" (Critical Heritage 63). Another wrote that the death "is made to seem like the illogic of life; it is so intense that one is desolated by a sense of the futility of life and forgets the failure of design" (50). This reviewer also believed that the death was "an evasion of the difficulties of the girl's life" (50), a view which Daiches echoes: "Rachel is sent to her death because for the moment Virginia Woolf can see no more of the quality of life by meditating on her further" (12).³

Later critics have had no such difficulties in accepting Rachel's death. Some, psychoanalyzing Woolf through Rachel, see in the novel the author's vicarious evasion of sexuality.⁴ Others, like Fleishman, see the death as the final stage in Rachel's voyage toward understanding: "Rachel reaches her final stage of vision when she expresses a desire to go beyond her intensified awareness of the the given world..." (Fleishman 13). Jean Alexander sees innovation in the novel in that it shows a woman's "flying the nets" of society rather than finding her place in it. To her, the title refers to the novel itself, which "was to be one of departure" (33). Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland interpret the death in the same way as Alexander, but they see that death as fully in line with the traditions of female fiction. As they point out, such nineteenth-century heroines as Maggie
Tulliver, Emma Bovary, and Edna Pontellier all escape confinements represented variously by society, marriage, and their own bodies. But however these critics differ, all would agree with Guiguet that the death "scarcely shocks; it surprises even less[;] it is the natural harbour in which this voyage had to end" (198).

Certainly the novel supports these later interpretations. Both realistically and symbolically it prepares us well for Rachel's death. The doctor's incompetence is mentioned casually in connection the the minor character Hughling Elliot, so that we are aware of it before we understand its importance. Rachel's illness comes on gradually and convincingly. Symbolically, there are numerous hints of early death in the allusions to Antigone and Adonais, and the reading of Comus just before Rachel realizes that she is ill is linked both to Terence's earlier remark that she seems to have come from the bottom of the sea ("I thought you were like a creature who'd lived all its life among pearls and old bones" [293]) and to the delirious dreams that follow. Indeed verisimilitude and symbolism unite perfectly in those very real and very symbolic dreams. On one level, Rachel dies simply because she has contracted a fever; on a deeper level, she dies to escape the life represented by marriage to Terence and the return to London, as surely as Catherine Earnshaw dies to escape Edgar Linton and Thrushcross Grange.
Why then did the early critics find the death "inartistic"? Unconsciously those reviewers distinguished between two kinds of realism, that of life and that of the novel. Thus, when they found the realism of the novel violated, they could partially excuse the flaw on the grounds of its faithfulness to the realism of life. What they were really reacting to was the mixture of forms in The Voyage Out. And to some extent, Jean Alexander, who sees the ending as a departure from the traditional Bildungsroman, is bothered by the same thing. Heroines do die in the Bildungsroman, but only, before The Voyage Out, in its tragic form. The Voyage Out appears to be of the other order--the comic. Readers of 1915 were no doubt more used to the death of young people through illness than we are, but, to them, Rachel's death at the end of her novel was as unthinkable as the death of Elizabeth Bennet would be at the end of hers.

Modern readers can believe that Rachel's death is "the natural harbour in which this journey had to end" because we are used to being lured into the apparently safe world of the comedy of manners only to have it turn menacingly on us in such works as A Passage to India, A Handful of Dust, and almost anything by Iris Murdoch. It is only when we can divest ourselves of the modernist sense of the "the glacier knock[ing] in the cupboard" that we can feel the surprise
and shock that Woolf intended in this novel. As she wrote to Lytton Strachey,

What I wanted to do was to give the feeling of a vast tumult of life, as various and disorderly as possible, which should be cut short for a moment by the death, and go on again—and the whole was to have a sort of pattern, and be somehow controlled. (L II 82)

Here, as in all her fiction, she wanted to present a pattern, revealed sometimes to the narrator alone, sometimes to a character as well; but it should emerge, not be imposed by the observer, and the ability to see it should be capricious. St. John Hirst sees it in the concluding pages, but Mrs. Thornbury's agitation as she tries to convince herself that "surely order did prevail" (360) shows that she does not.

The Voyage Out is a remarkably innovative first novel. It is concerned with breaking expected patterns and establishing new ones. And both before and during the time it was composed, Woolf was writing essays on history and fiction in which she continually criticized writers who adhered to set patterns and forms. The critics who hold that her literary criticism grew out of her fiction are partially right: she tried many of her principles in her own fiction before invoking them in her criticism of other novelists. But they are wrong in assuming that the origin
of these principles lies entirely in her novels: the real origin is the earlier criticism of history and biography.

As for the actual historical themes in The Voyage Out, this novel seems at first glance to be, of all Woolf's novels, the most contemporary in its concerns. Rachel, as Susan Dick has observed, seems curiously free of the past, her own or anyone else's, in contrast to Katharine Hilbery, whose situation is in other ways similar (179). Only one character, St. John Hirst, is occupied in any serious way with studying history, and his comments on the subject are often concerned with writing style. Rachel is interested in music; Terence Hewet is writing a novel. Nor is anyone trying, like Mrs. Hilbery or Lily Briscoe, to capture the past in biography or painting. Yet history is everywhere in this novel—in its setting, its symbolism, its characterization, and its development of a central theme of Woolf's fiction, the polarity of male and female.

History first appears in the scenery of The Voyage Out. As Nancy Bazin has demonstrated, the structure of the novel and its imagery reflect Woolf's reading of Raleigh's Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana. Far from being mere scenery, the passages that recall Raleigh combine with the allusions to Gibbon, Shelley, and Milton to create a sustained symbolism. All
describe conquests not worth the struggle, virgin lands not subdued, and would-be captives eluding their pursuers, often through death (Bazin 52-55). In short, Woolf uses history to foreshadow the conclusion of the novel and to hint at the meaning of that conclusion: Rachel will die, and her death will constitute an escape from the confinements of marriage, society, and her own sexuality. Thus, Woolf demonstrates at the outset of her fictional career the remarkable synthesizing and creative power of her historical imagination.

But if these references to history are perfectly integrated with the rest of the novel, there are others that do not seem to be. Because they are familiar from the later Woolf, they are easy to overlook, but when we do notice them, they seem odd. What does it matter that Ridley Ambrose, who all but disappears after the opening scenes, recites poetry about the House of Tarquin or looks to his wife like "a Viking or a stricken Nelson" (12)? Why does Rachel, listening to Mr. Dalloway describing contemporary politics, think of mammoths in Richmond High Street (67)? And what are we to make of the inordinate amount of apparently empty social chatter about history? Mr. Dalloway speaks "sententiously" about the continuity of British history, and the thought of the Empire makes Mrs. Dalloway feel that she "couldn't bear not to be English" (51). Mrs. Thornbury wishes she knew more about history because "after
all we are founded on the past"; but she finds that she is
too busy with her family to "think enough about the ancients
and all they've done for us" (114). And Gibbon, like
Charles I in Mr. Dick's memoirs, seems to crash at every
turn into the novel for no apparent reason. Critics tend to
dismiss Gibbon as a prop for the characterization of St.
John Hirst, as he is based on Lytton Strachey, who read
Gibbon frequently, but in fact everyone—even Mrs.
Flushing, who claims to hate the past—talks about Gibbon.
St. John's offer to lend a copy of Gibbon seems at first a
ludicrous response to Helen's request for help with Rachel's
education, but, ironically, Gibbon does provide Rachel with
one of her most important moments of vision.

When these apparently extraneous historical themes are
considered together, they reveal that Woolf uses history in
this first novel to explore the polarity of male and female.
She works out in fiction, with history as an important
vehicle, the very conflicts she felt as a student and a
writer. No other novel beside To the Lighthouse expresses
so fully both the polarity of male and female and Woolf's
ambivalent feelings about the masculine province of
learning.

The polarity appears at the very outset in the contrast
between Ridley and Helen Ambrose. Ridley thinks; Helen
feels. Ridley's thoughts are of the heroic past, Helen's of
the domestic present. He is a classical scholar; she might
be said rather to embody classicism (as, in Night and Day, Katharine Hilbery does not read Shakespeare because, according to William Rodney, she is Shakespeare [162]). Helen's name derives from the Greek goddess of light (which is significant for the role she plays in Rachel's education), but to the ear it suggests more generally Greek culture itself. Her beauty is described as a mixture of Greek and English styles. In appearance, Ridley and Helen are in fact prototypes of the Ramsays, Woolf's most completely developed symbols of male and female. Ridley is thin and angular; Helen is "tall, large-eyed, and draped in purple shawls" (14). Purple is the color Lily uses to represent Mrs. Ramsay.

As the novel progresses, however, the use of the Ambroses for the male-female polarity is not entirely apt. Ridley disappears, and Helen, as David Daiches complains, "keeps changing" size, shifting from foreground to background (10). As Josephine Schaefer points out, Helen's grief at the outset of the novel is out of proportion to its cause, and the cause is withheld from the reader for half the book (45). But most important, Helen does not really embody the female sensibility. Admittedly, she embroiders, which is comparable to Mrs. Ramsay's knitting; she is, like Mrs. Ramsay, compared to the Fates; and she embroiders the journey up the river as if forecasting or prescribing it. But she accepts the maternal role reluctantly, and Rachel,
though entrusted to her charge, is more attracted to the truly maternal Mrs. Dalloway. Nor is Helen in the main a unifier; she tends rather to see divisions. As Bazin observes, this appears even in the exchange with Mrs. Dalloway about bores: Mrs. Dalloway has never met one; Helen thinks the world is full of them (VO 55, Bazin 73).

If the presentation of Ridley and Helen as archetypes is flawed, Woolf nevertheless carries the contrast between male and female successfully through the rest of the novel. The polarity she establishes through the Ambroses in the first pages reappears immediately after the characters gather on the boat. The men forget the presence of the women as they reminisce about Cambridge, where there were no women; the women are adept at "promoting the men's talk without listening to it" (17). The theme is further developed when the Dalloways come aboard. Although critics have tended to see these characters as a unit, together representing West End society, they are in fact very different. Mr. Dalloway admires views, but Mrs. Dalloway says, "I don't like views. They're too inhuman" (59). She wants closeness and intimacy, and she knows, as the narrators and the female unifiers in Woolf always know, that distance distorts.

Richard and Clarissa also have different ideas of history. His vision of "King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law law" (51), with the absurd sing-song
effect of the words mocking the solemnity of the parade, reflects precisely the view of history Woolf always rejected. Clarissa's gushing about empire seems at first no improvement—until we consider that she characteristically thinks of the anonymous in history, of the boys who went out from the small villages to build the Empire (51). Her thoughts are prompted by her immediate experience, the effect of being on a boat: "Being on this ship seems to make it all more vivid" (50).

The contrast between male and female recurs in Rachel's talk with Mr. Dalloway. She is initially attracted to him because he seems to come from the "humming oily centre of the machine," but when he uses the same image to explain his plan for poor relief, she is disappointed: "It was impossible to combine the image of a lean black widow gazing out of her window and longing for some one to talk to with the image of a vast machine ..." (66). Earlier in the novel, Woolf attributes Rachel's ignorance to the randomness of women's education: "her mind was in the state of an intelligent man's in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth" (34). At this point, however, we begin to see that Rachel has a particular quality of mind that makes her see differently from Richard, a quality perhaps intensified by her lack of education but rooted in her feminine nature. Mrs. Dalloway tells her husband that he sees all around whereas she sees "only there [a spot on his hand]" (51), but
the novel says precisely the reverse. It is the female mind that cannot rest with divisions, that wants to see everything at once, not point by point—or, in the imagery of *To the Lighthouse*—letter by letter.

As Terence tells her in a moment of exasperation, Rachel has "no respect for the facts; [she is] essentially feminine" (295). In Woolf's scheme this is of course no disgrace. Rachel has no respect for the individual facts because she is driven to find something larger and more unified than they can give her. Immediately after she finds she cannot connect the widow with the machine, she begins to think very Woolfian thoughts about history:

She was haunted by absurd jumbled ideas—how, if one went back far enough, everything perhaps was intelligible; everything was in common; for the mammoths who pastured in Richmond High Street had turned into paving stones and boxes of ribbon, and her aunts. (67)

The image is so familiar from passages in the later Woolf—the narrator's vision of London as a grass-grown path in *Mrs. Dalloway*, or Lucy Swithin's vision of rhododendrons in *Piccadilly*, for example—that its full significance is easy to overlook here. Rachel and Richard have been discussing contemporary politics, not history: it is Rachel's own view that urges her, like Woolf, to seek the meaning of any one time in its relation to all other times.
The debate between the male and female mind continues when Rachel reaches South America, and at this point it is St. John Hirst who represents the masculine point of view. Again, much of the debate involves history. St. John, whom the critics have largely ignored despite his prominence in the novel, is the quintessential example of the elite male intellectual. He is contemptuous of women for failing to achieve his intellectual sophistication, yet his education was achieved, according to Terence, at the expense of his sister's:

"Can't you imagine the family conclaves, and the sister told to run out and feed the rabbits because St. John must have the school-room to himself—'St. John's working.' 'St. John wants his tea brought to him.' But St. John's sister—... No one takes her seriously, poor dear. She feeds the rabbits." (213)

Here Woolf anticipates both the imaginary portrait of Judith Shakespeare in A Room of One's Own and the discussion of "Arthur's Educational Fund" in Three Guineas. When St. John asks Rachel, "Have you got a mind, or are you like the rest of your sex?" and adds that the appreciation of Gibbon is the test (154), she feels "as if a gate had clanged in her face" (156). The imagery itself suggests Three Guineas: as the young women watch their brothers going off on the grand tour, "the guard slams the door in their faces" (3G 5).
St. John is always the masculine mind, but the characters shown in contrast to him are not always women. The scene where St. John is introduced, for example, is as emblematic of the male-female conflict as the opening scene with Ridley and Helen, but the view opposing St. John's is Terence's. At the outset St. John is reading "the immaculate Gibbon" in comfort and solitude—he might as well be in Cambridge. The reading process appears in military terms: "splendid sentences" march, "shifting their quarters" from the page to St. John's "capacious brow." The door opens suddenly, and Terence enters, saying "D'you think you do make enough allowance for feelings?" (106).

Terence is a forerunner of Ralph Denham, the "womanly man" of Night and Day. He is a mediator between the two approaches, at one point telling Rachel she has "no respect for facts" because she is "essentially feminine," but elsewhere, rejecting the masculine view. In the scene in which he describes the neglect of St. John's sister, he speaks "much at random and instinctively adopt[s] the feminine point of view" (213, emphasis mine). In the same scene Ralph mocks the masculine view of politics and history in words that closely parallel Woolf's review of Modes and Manners of the Eighteenth Century: "what an amazing concoction! 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!" (213).

But the opposition of the male and female mind appears most clearly in the scene where Rachel goes out in the morning to read. Whereas St. John retires both from nature and society to read, Rachel goes out toward the natural world, and her mind is filled with the people she has met the night before, who form "a tumultuous background" for "the present moment" (173) so exciting that she almost loses her way. St. John hates nature, which is "either very ugly, appallingly uncomfortable, or absolutely terrifying"; and he declares, "I don't know which alarms me most--a cow or a tree" (121). Rachel, on the other hand, is suddenly stopped by the sight of a tree, "an ordinary tree, but to her it appeared so strange that it might have been the only tree in the world" (174). The significance of the scene has been heralded by Rachel's recollection a few minutes earlier that these are the trees Helen said "it was worth the voyage out merely to see" (173). The sight of the tree creates a moment of vision—a moment when differences are reconciled and everything seems unified and clear: the trunk is dark, but the branches create "jagged intervals of light between them as distinctly as if [the tree] had at that second risen from the ground." Immediately afterwards, the tree "once more sank into the ordinary rank of trees" (174), but Rachel
feels that she has "seen a sight that would last her for a lifetime" (174).

Jean Alexander has suggested that Rachel's excitement is such that "even Gibbon arouses her" (47). Admittedly, Rachel opens the book with a predisposition to find it interesting, but she is clearly as moved by the beauty of the language and the awareness of names and events she has never heard of as she was by the sight of the tree. She has a second moment of vision no less significant than the first:

Never had any words been so vivid and so beautiful --Arabia Felix--Aethiopia. But those were not more noble than the others, hardy barbarians, forests, and morasses. They seemed to drive roads back to the very beginning of the world, on either side of which the populations of all times and countries stood in avenues, and by passing down them all knowledge would be hers, and the book of the world turned back to the very first page.

(175)

Again Rachel reveals her instinct for going back to the beginning of everything, the instinct to unify. Where St. John reads "the immaculate Gibbon" removed from the present (he tells Rachel he dislikes the moderns), Rachel reads Gibbon in the hope of connecting all time. Ultimately, what she is seeking is in her own imagination; and,
appropriately, she stops reading and daydreams, while the wind closes the book. Yet she has had her vision, a vision denied to the pedantic St. John, after looking into a book that the novel has clearly associated with the male view.

Here perhaps is a hint of Woolf's ambivalent feelings about the masculine mind and of the androgynous solution she would eventually envision. The hint is strengthened if we consider Rachel's feelings about St. John. He and she clash when they first meet and only gradually come to like each other, but from the outset Rachel is attracted by the very qualities in St. John most opposed to her own nature. When she criticizes Gibbon's style, saying it "goes round, round, round, like a roll of oil-cloth," she feels snubbed by his reply that "Surely it is the most perfect style ... that's ever been invented.... Every sentence is practically perfect, and the wit--" (201). She tries to take refuge in thinking how ugly St. John is, but she thinks, nevertheless, that his mind is "strong, searching, and unyielding" (201). Her mind too is searching, but so far, vague and yielding, as is Terence's ("I wonder if it's really nice to be as vague as you are," St. John says to Terence [107]). Late in the novel she realizes that "in some ways she found St. John preferable" to Terence because "he took her outside this little world of love and emotion[;] he had a grasp of the facts" (304).

Woolf, like Rachel, resists the masculine mind and the
exclusiveness of masculine learning; yet repeatedly her 
writing endows the male world of learning with beauty and 
even a kind of nostalgia, as if Woolf had lost it instead of 
never having had it at all. The university section of 
**Jacob's Room** is an example of this, as is a letter to 
Quentin Bell in which she wrote,

> Cambridge will never be to [Julian] what it was, 
even to me. Oh the sound of Grace coming through 
Adrian's windows in Nevilles court in the summer 
when we were young! But no more. You will laugh. 
(L III 555)

And in her mind, as in Rachel's, the idea of combining the 
opposing qualities of male and female emerges only to be 
rejected in *The Voyage Out* ("but then of course he [St. 
John] would never have suited Rachel" [304]); but it is the 
solution in the very next novel, *Night and Day*, and in *To 
the Lighthouse*.

As the novel progresses, other characters are 
contrasted with St. John in ways that further develop the 
polarity of male and female. Just a few pages after we 
first meet St. John, Mrs. Thornbury makes her remark about 
being founded on the past; and, like Mrs. Dalloway, she 
clothes significant insights in the language of cliche:

> "Oh, but I would give so much to realise the 
ancient world.... After all, we are founded on 
the past, aren't we, Mr. Hewet? ... One ought to
know so much more than one does. Somehow when I read the pager, I begin with the debates first, and before I've done, the door always opens—we're a very large party at home—and so one never does think about the ancients and all they've done for us." (116)

Mrs. Thornbury cannot "realise the ancients and all they've done for us because, like Mrs. Ramsay, who has no time to read even the books that are dedicated to her, she is too busy doing things for others. The needs of scholarship—and of art—are always at variance with the needs of the family for Woolf's women.7 The women allow the door to open, and they do "make enough allowance for feelings."

Only men and single women have the time to study or to pursue their art in a systematic way, but the cost to the men, and sometimes to the women, is an atrophying of emotion and vitality. Mr. Pepper has, according to Rachel, "a heart of old shoe leather" (19), and even the more kindly disposed narrator sees in him "a certain dryness of soul" (94).

William Rodney, the "manly man" of Night and Day, is "half poet and half old maid" (60). Doris Kilman, for all her knowledge of modern history, is self-deceiving and bitter. Miss Craddock in The Years is the only professional scholar treated with unmixed sympathy, and she is presented as an outsider, in contrast to the comfortable, established dons of Cambridge. Moreover, she is sensitive to the youth and
charm of her student, Kitty Malone, who has not finished her history.

In the women, Woolf persistently presents a certain muddle-headedness, particularly about history, as a virtue and an index of vitality. Mrs. Thornbury says approvingly to Miss Allan, "But you begin at the beginning" (114), and indeed Miss Allan's plan to write one paragraph on all the major poets from the Beowulf poet to Browning threatens to place her in the ranks of the dry scholars. But Miss Allan redeems herself in her confusion about the Greeks: "I think of them as naked black men ... which is quite incorrect, I'm sure" (114). She is also, we discover, a unifier: when her remark that she envies people who live in flat countries prompts Susan Warrington to suggest that Miss Allan cannot be happy at the hotel, she answers, "On the contrary, I am exceedingly fond of mountains" (112).

Mrs. Flushing, as a childless aristocrat with no scholarly or artistic interests, faces no conflicting claims on her time. She is also the character at the furthest pole from St. John. He finds her outrageous; she is visibly relieved when he is not of the company. He loves the past; she boasts at every turn of her hatred for it. And whereas Mrs. Dalloway, who is also a contrast to St. John, claimed, however effusively, that she would give ten years of her life to know Greek, Mrs. Flushing would "rather break stones in the road" (200). Yet there is an extraordinary vitality
in Mrs. Flushing, and at the thought of breaking stones, she forgets, in a rather Shandean way, that she introduced the image to express her loathing of study; she begins to expatiate on the imagined pleasures of sitting "on those nice little heaps all day wearin' spectacles" (200). The mention of Gibbon makes her forget her supposed hatred of the past, and she darts off in a reverie about reading him secretly as a child. It is she who wants to go up the river and "see things for myself" and who protests that "It's silly stayin' here with a pack of old maids as though we were at the seaside in England" (235). For all her boorishness, Mrs. Flushing has a certain refreshing exuberance, and her hostility to the past is linked to an intense pleasure in the present. Different as she is from the other women, she represents an aspect of the female sensibility.

History is, then, closely bound up with the polarity of male and female in The Voyage Out. It was perhaps natural that Woolf, having derived many of her own ideas of male and female from her reading of history, should use history to present them. But history plays another role as well in this novel. As Fleishman has observed, The Voyage Out provides [Rachel] with a short course in western literature, thereby embodying her cultural as well as emotional growth" (14). Oddly enough, this is one of the novel's innovations. The Bildungsroman is, by definition, the novel of
development, but before The Voyage Out novels of this genre that dealt with women were not generally concerned with what the protagonist learned from books. School was important but essentially as a microcosm of the larger world; the learning we actually read about is in the realm of experience. Jane Eyre, for example, is a great success at Lowood, and she begins while she is there to establish her own values, but her learning is from Helen Burns, not Helen's book, Rasselas. The Voyage Out is the first female Bildungsroman in English to weave together—and to present in images of like intensity—learning from books and learning from experience. It unites such disparate events as a kiss and a glance into Gibbon.

When Richard Dalloway kisses Rachel, she reacts at first with fear and then with "exultation": "Life seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at" (76). Later, when she reads Gibbon in the jungle and has two moments of vision, one from looking at the tree, the other from looking into Gibbon, she goes on to consider her place in nature and in history. She wonders, "What is it like to be in love?"; and "each word as it came into being seemed to shove itself out into an unknown sea" (176). At the conclusion of the scene, she is "awed by a terrible possibility in life," and the words here are a paraphrase of her thoughts about Richard Dalloway's kiss. Thus, in this one scene Woolf combines intellectual and experiential
knowledge--shows them in fact stimulating each other--and uses language that recalls still another scene of experience. In all cases, Rachel's knowledge appears in images of voyaging. Still later, the journey up the river seems a reification of the metaphorical journeying back through time. The river becomes Gibbon's "roads back."

First, we find that the river has not changed in hundreds of years: "Since the time of Elizabeth very few people had seen the river, and nothing had been done to change its appearance from what it was in the eyes of the Elizabethan voyagers" (264). Then the sense of the river's flowing steadily through time associates it with the traditional image of time as a stream: "The time of Elizabeth was only distant from the present time by a moment of space compared with the ages that had passed since the water had run between those banks" (264). The description of the shore, which becomes steadily less civilized, further suggests movement back through time: "by degrees the houses became huts, and, later still, there was neither hut nor house, but trees and grass, which were seen only by hunters, explorers, or merchants, marching or sailing, making no settlement" (265). Finally, the image of traveling into darkness suggests that this is a voyage back to the source: "They seemed to be driving into the heart of the night" (265).

But these images of liberating enlightenment through
voyages back through time along roads, up rivers, or out into what might be termed the sea of the present, are repeatedly countered by images of confinement along walled-in paths or in underground caves and tunnels.

Ironically, the enlightenment of the first kind of voyaging reveals the darkness of the second. Despite her feelings of exultation immediately after Richard Dalloway kisses her, Rachel dreams that night

that she was walking down a long tunnel, which grew so narrow by degrees that she could touch the damp bricks on either side. At length the tunnel opened and became a vault; she found herself trapped in it, bricks meeting her wherever she turned, alone with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails.... Cold as death she lay. (77)

The next morning, after Helen has explained—or rather hinted at—the meaning of the kiss, Rachel again sees an image of horror, but this time her realization concerns the nature of her own life, not fear of sexuality:

Helen's words hewed down great blocks which had stood there always, and the light which came in was cold.... By this new light she saw her life for the first time a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned side, there plunged in darkness, made dull and
crippled for ever—her life that was the only chance she had—the short season between two silences. (82, emphasis mine)

In her final illness, Rachel again sees images of enclosure, images that are linked ironically with reversed images of journeying. First, in a scene that recalls the fearful dream that followed Richard Dalloway's kiss, Rachel imagines that she is

walking through a tunnel under the Thames, where there were little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards, while the bricks of which the wall was made oozed with damp, which collected into drops and slid down the wall. (331)

Later she dreams that she is lying at the bottom of the sea: "There she lay, sometimes seeing darkness, sometimes light, while every now and then some one turned her over at the bottom of the sea" (341). Sometimes she rises to the surface, but the water is "dark" and "sticky," and a wave pulls her down again (346). Rachel is no longer walking on roads that will reveal all knowledge or journeying out to sea or up a river to the beginning of time: she is trapped under the weight of the sea, which should be her waterway, and under a river that flows, appropriately, in the heart of the modern civilized present.

Although the theme is not as fully adumbrated here as it is in the later fiction, the persistent references to
history in the course of Rachel's voyage out and her voyage in act as a subliminal message that knowledge of history is liberating but historical reality is not. The conflicting images of liberation and confinement add up to a picture of "Rachel's Room." She, no less than Jacob Flanders, is caught on a point of time; as she herself observes, she has only "one short season between two silences." This subliminal message is more to Woolf than to us, for it was to become a central theme of her later work. It is, as Gillian Beer has suggested, the true meaning behind a work that seems to be as far in spirit as possible from The Voyage Out--Orlando:

Orlando creates an order which shows the self as fantastically autonomous, jubilantly intact through changes of gender, of nation, of historical period. Orlando is play, coming immediately after To the Lighthouse and its grave exploration of sexual polarities and of the self at the mercy of its place in time. Orlando's jesting reminds us of the power of what it frees us momentarily of believing in: the determinants of gender, individual ageing, history. (90)
Night and Day

One of the oddities of Woolf's career is that her first novel is so much more innovative than her second. Critics have generally agreed that she wrote the more traditional Night and Day partly to recuperate from the illness that had delayed the publication of The Voyage Out and partly, as Phyllis Rose has put it, to prove herself the master of the tradition of the English novel, to create solid characters and place them in realized settings, to have them speak to one another in credible dialogue and to advance the plot through dramatic scenes. (96 and note)

But if Night and Day is a partial return to the traditional Bildungsroman, if it approaches traditional characterization and plot development, it also relies on moments of vision. If it is not quite the "metaphysical education" of The Voyage Out, it is nevertheless as concerned with intellectual development as it is with experience. Katharine Hilbery, like Rachel Vinrace, comes to understand her place in society and the larger scheme of life largely through moments of vision, moments remarkably like Rachel's. When, for example, Katharine looks up at the stars at Christmas, her thoughts are drawn back through time first to the journey of the Magi and then to prehistory:

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And yet, after gazing for another second, the stars did their usual work upon the mind, froze to cinders the whole of human history, and reduced the human body to an ape-like, furry form, crouching amid the brushwood of a barbarous clod of mud. (182)

In many ways, however, Katharine's progress is the reverse of Rachel's, and Night and Day, like many of Woolf's novels, seems to carry on something like a dialogue with its predecessor. As Susan Dick has suggested, Rachel is curiously free of the past at the beginning of The Voyage Out, whereas "the past threatens to engulf Katharine at the beginning of Night and Day" (179); but at the conclusion of the novels, the heroines' situations are reversed. Rachel is engulfed, and Katharine, to a large degree, breaks free. Other issues familiar from The Voyage Out also appear, suggesting a certain affinity between the two novels. Additionally, the different treatment of these issues reveals that, while the form of Night and Day represents a partial return to tradition, the ideas represent progress.

The role of history in this progress is to separate from one issue to which it was allied in The Voyage Out and to reappear in another. Again the novel explores the polarity of male and female, and again attitudes toward history are prominent; but the polarity is no longer developed through ideas of history. Mrs. Hilbery, whose
approach to history is certainly feminine, is somewhat peripheral to the main action, and there is no figure comparable to St. John Hirst representing the masculine approach to history. To the extent that there is a dialogue about history, it is carried on by two women, Mrs. Hilbery and Katharine, while the polarity of male and female appears in the interaction of the four lovers. These lovers are not simply male and female; rather they represent the manly and womanly aspects of each sex (Richter 122-23).

This is not to suggest that the rhetoric of Night and Day is at variance with that of The Voyage Out. On the contrary, the opposition of Katharine's and her mother's approach to history is consistent with Katharine's manliness, within the female mind, and her mother's womanliness. And one indication of Ralph Denham's womanliness is his plan to write the history of an English village: like Woolf's women, he is attracted to the anonymous and obscure. The only important change here is the novel's union of opposites, a solution hinted at but rejected in The Voyage Out. Whereas Rachel and Terence are suited to each other because they represent the womanly qualities of their sexes, the lovers in Night and Day must be realigned so that they balance: Katharine (manly woman) with Denham (womanly man), and Cassandra (womanly woman) with Rodney (manly man). This is an important step toward the more radical union of the womanly woman and the manly
man in *To the Lighthouse*. The separation of history from this issue does not, however, deny the importance of history. On the contrary, it suggests that Woolf's interest in history pointed her fiction toward new material which in turn became important in its own right. In *Night and Day*, she deals with male and female without reference to history; at the same time she moves on to consider other historical issues, somewhat extraneous to this novel but central to the later works.

Ostensibly the historical themes delineate the character of Mrs. Hilbery, who, like Cassandra Otway and Mary Datchet, serves as a foil to Katharine. The contrast between the mother's and daughter's minds and temperaments is largely revealed through their attitudes toward the past. Additionally, the historical themes demonstrate some of the difficulties of Katharine's situation; and, indirectly at least, they illuminate some of the changes in her thinking as the novel progresses. At the outset, the duty of helping her mother with the biography of her grandfather, a job for which she has little enthusiasm, introduces a larger psychological problem. Katharine must break away from her family and its past successes or, as Denham warns her, "never know anything at first hand" (16). In the course of the novel, Katharine rejects Rodney, accepts Denham, and develops an understanding of the "astonishing precipice" between night and day, that is, between the contemplative
and active qualities of the soul (315). But far more attention is devoted to historical themes than seems necessary to launch her into this series of actions and reflections.

It might be argued that Woolf's interest in the model for Mrs. Hilbery, and not her interest in history, lies behind the disproportionate attention given to these themes. The essay Woolf wrote on Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Leslie Stephen's sister-in-law by his first marriage, reveals her to be all that Woolf most admired in the female sensibility. According to Woolf, Anne Ritchie wrote "brilliant nonsense" that dissolves the "gloom of that familiar age [the Victorian] in iridescent mist." The essay shows too that she rivaled Julia Stephen as Woolf's greatest model for the maternal unifying figure:

Her most typical and, indeed inimitable sentences rope together a handful of swiftly gathered opposites. To embrace oddities and produce a charming, laughing harmony from the incongruities was her genius in life and letters. (M&OE 195)

I would suggest, however, that Woolf's interest in history was as important as her fondness for Anne Thackeray Ritchie in the creation of Mrs. Hilbery, for two reasons. First, Woolf makes one important change in her fictional presentation: Mrs. Hilbery is writing a biography, but, shortly before her death, Anne Ritchie told Woolf that she
was working on a novel, and it was this that she could not finish (D II 248). She wrote several sketches and introductions about her father, but there is no evidence that she had difficulty finishing these. Second, as I shall show, there is a great deal of Woolf herself in Mrs. Hilbery, as there is in Lily Briscoe. In creating Mrs. Hilbery, Woolf stumbled onto what was to become her most important fictional theme, a theme that also expressed one of the major problems she faced as a writer: how to capture the past—one's own or the historical past—without falsifying it. Mrs. Hilbery's unfinished (and unfinishable) biography allowed Woolf to deal with many of the historical themes of the early reviews and to prepare herself, unknowingly, for the later fiction.

The issue of the biography begins with Katharine, rather than Mrs. Hilbery. The opening chapters reveal Katharine making the kinds of mistakes that Woolf saw in the work of biographers and, at times, in herself. Katharine remarks that her grandfather must have been "at least twice as large as anyone is nowadays," and she goes on to think, "That magnificent ghostly head on the canvas, surely, never beheld all the trivialities of a Sunday afternoon" (13). Compare this passage from a letter of 1915, in which Woolf sees the error of such thinking but admits that she is guilty of it herself: "Do you find any charm in the 1860's? They seem--my mother's family I mean--to float in a
wonderful air—all a lie I daresay concocted because one
forgets their kitchens and catching trains and so on" (L II
69). The thought recurs in this rather sad passage from a
letter of 1929: "Happily, time makes all these past scenes
unspeakably beautiful—if one remembered the truth, life
would no doubt be unbearable" (L IV 96).

Later in the same chapter, the narrative voice calls
Katharine's comparison of the live Ralph Denham and the dead
Ruskin, preserved in a portrait, unfair, on the grounds that
a young man paying a call in a tail-coat is in
a different element altogether from a head seized
at its climax of expressiveness gazing immutably
from behind a sheet of glass, which was all that
remained to her of Mr. Ruskin. (14)
The key word here is "immutably," for the sense that change
and fluid motion are the essence of life obsessed Woolf.
She believed that historical inquiry, biography, and
portraiture were almost doomed to failure from the start
since they depend on the stop action of the photograph.8

If Katharine's perception of her grandfather and his
generation falls into one of the pitfalls Woolf identified
in her early reviews, hero worship, it seems at least to
avoid the other, condescension. But these views are only
the obverse of each other. One extols while the other
denigrates, but both deny the dead their humanity and their
complexity. Not surprisingly, Katharine occasionally takes the patronizing view:

Often she seemed to be moving among them, an invisible ghost among the living, better acquainted with them than with her friends, because she knew their secrets and possessed a divine foreknowledge of their destiny. They had been so unhappy, such muddlers, so wrong-headed, it seemed to her. She could have told them what to do, and what not to do. It was a melancholy fact that they were bound to come to grief in their own antiquated way. (105)

Her more usual attitude of reverence is no more misguided, but it is more detrimental to her development, for it threatens her ability to live her own life. The passage continues, "She very nearly lost consciousness that she was a separate being, with a future of her own" (105). Early in the novel she is found thinking,

The glorious past, in which men and women grew to unexampled size, intruded too much upon the present and dwarfed it too consistently, to be altogether encouraging to one forced to make her experiment in living when the great age was dead. (35)

Mrs. Hilbery's approach to history is almost diametrically opposed to Katharine's. Admittedly, she too
tends at times to value the past more highly than the present: "After all, what is the present? Half of it's the past, and the better half, too, I should say" (12), she says in the opening chapter. In speaking of the Victorians, she exclaims, "It's the vitality of them! That's what we haven't got!" (108). But her more characteristic attitude is complete comfort with both past and present; indeed she is frequently oblivious to the difference between the two. Again, as in The Voyage Out, vitality and exuberance are linked with the inability to deal with the most rudimentary facts of history. Mrs. Hilbery forgets whether she is discussing the Armada or the Battle of Trafalgar (11); she seems unaware that the Greeks never conquered England: "The Roman ruins—or Greek, Mr. Denham?" (216); and, despite her love of the past, living human beings—when she can distinguish living and dead—come first: "I've found something much better than ruins! ... I've found two friends" (217). Where Katharine sees differences, Mrs. Hilbery sees likenesses. The comparison between Denham and Ruskin occurs to both, but with opposite results: to Katharine, the resemblance reveals Denham's deficiencies; to her mother, it offers a pleasing reminder of the continuity between past and present (14, 12).

Mrs. Hilbery's sense of kinship with the past is her chief inspiration in her work on the biography of her father. When, for example, she realizes that she is older
than her father was when he died, the perception of a relationship different from the one they had in life spurs her on to greater industry: "I might have been his elder sister, and that seems to me such a pleasant fancy. I'm going to start quite fresh this morning, and get a lot done" (103). For Mrs. Hilbery, the imagined life she did not live frees the imagination and allows her to see more clearly what she did experience. But her imaginative powers go back far beyond the life of her father: she feels almost equally akin to Shakespeare. She says to Katharine, "D'you think he ever passed this house?"—meaning, presumably, the site of the house; but to her, if Shakespeare passed the site, he passed the house. Furthermore, she poses the question with so little preparation that Katharine thinks her mother is talking about a living person. Mrs. Hilbery replies, as if conscious of no incongruity, "I'm not talking about your William [Rodney].... I'm talking, I'm thinking, I'm dreaming of my William" (284). Past and present are all one to Mrs. Hilbery, and everything that is connected in her mind she believes is connected absolutely. She proposes, for example, to make a study of Shakespeare's sonnets as a preparation for the next chapter of the biography (284).

Mrs. Hilbery not only experiences the past intensely but is able to communicate her experience. Katharine feels, when she is with her mother, that they are both "bathed in the light of sixty years ago" (104). Nor does Mrs. Hilbery
have trouble beginning to write: she is able to "rais[e] round her the skies and trees of the past with every stroke of her pen" (103). She tells Katharine that she has all the information she needs: "It isn't that I don't know everything and feel everything (who did know him if I didn't?)..." (105). Ironically, this is the problem. The past still lives for her in all its complexity and variousness. She retains a vision denied to most biographers, but she lacks the distance necessary to shape and edit her material.

As Woolf wrote to Gerald Brenan in 1922, three years after completing Night and Day,

Perhaps at that age [thirty] one is most a writer. Then one cannot write, not for lack of skill, but because the object is too near, too vast. I think perhaps it must recede before one can take a pen to it. (L II 599)

Mrs. Hilbery cannot write because, although she is in her sixties, the past never recedes for her. When her daughter suggests that "we ought to go from point to point," she replies, "Oh, I know.... And that's just what I can't do. Things keep coming into my head" (105). Listening to her talk about the past, "once more Katharine felt the serene air all round her, and seemed far off to hear the solemn beating of the sea upon the shore" (107). The echo of the "Intimations Ode" suggests that Mrs. Hilbery retains the
freshness of a child's perception--and possibly that she is a true visionary--but these qualities are of little avail in the practical adult world. Katharine, though momentarily enraptured, knows "that she must join the present on to this past" (107).

As the poet's daughter, Mrs. Hilbery must also deal with the practical problem of how much of the truth to reveal. The question is whether to admit that her parents were separated, but, in the attempt at a solution, the issue of truth disappears. Mrs. Hilbery drafts two versions "and then liked each so well that she could not decide upon the rejection of either" (36, emphasis mine). Among the numerous pages on her father's taste in hats and on day trips and missed trains are "fragmentary visions of all sorts of famous men and women, which seemed to be partly imaginary and partly authentic" (38). As Mrs. Hilbery realizes, or perhaps intuits, the problem of the biographer is not so much whether to tell the truth but where truth resides. She likes both the true and the false accounts presumably because both reveal aspects of the truth about her father. The facts, as Woolf was to write in "The New Biography," are the granite, but the personality is the rainbow (G&R 149). The facts also carry more weight on the page than in real life. In holding up one moment, or ever several moments, they deny, as the portrait does, the fluidity of personality. But facts do provide a framework
(in Lily Briscoe's terms, the shape beneath the color),
without which biography is impossible. Mrs. Hilbery cannot
finish the biography because she can deal only in the
rainbow, never the granite; like Sterne's Yorick, she is all
sail and no ballast.

Mrs. Hilbery's biography, so prominent in the opening
chapters, disappears less than halfway through the novel.
The rest of Night and Day centers on Katharine's
development, the alternative to her existence posed by Mary
Datchet, the realignment of the lovers, and Mary's decision
to renounce happiness. Katharine, through forces that have
little to do with her attitudes toward the past (except her
desire to escape its oppression) awakens to a new perception
of life. Yet if new perceptions of history do not bring
about this change, they are symptomatic of it.

At the height of her agitation over her broken
engagement to Rodney, Katharine looks up at the portrait of
her grandfather and sees him in a new way. She realizes
that at the time of the portrait he was the age she is now.
Suddenly she sees him as a young man "full of desires and
faults"—precisely the qualities she is most aware of in
herself at this time; and "for the first time she realized
him for herself, and not from her mother's memory" (297).
She too considers that she might have been the poet's
sister. Whereas earlier the ties of blood suggested to
her the divisions of the generations, now they make it
possible for her to "interpret the sights which the eyes of
the dead behold so intently, or even to believe that they
look with us upon our present joys and sorrows" (297).
Paradoxically, Katharine's realization of her spiritual
kinship with her grandfather releases her from the burdens
of her biological kinship.

Katharine's new perception of her grandfather leads to
another important insight. For the first time she senses
"that the dead asked neither flowers nor regrets, but a
share in the life which they had given her, the life which
they had lived" (298). Here again her thoughts resemble her
mother's, for Mrs. Hilbery believes that she will come back
to "this wonderful world where one's been so happy and so
miserable" (113). Both women's thoughts anticipate Clarissa
Dalloway's belief that she will live after her death "laid
out like a mist between the people she knew best" (MD 12).
Katharine's and her mother's thoughts are not identical, but
the differences are emblematic of age only. Katharine, just
entering adulthood, thinks of the role the dead might play
in her life, whereas Mrs. Hilbery, approaching old age,
thinks of the role she will play in the lives of others.
The two views thus not only validate each other but almost
demonstrate what they describe. Katharine's use of the
phrase "the life that they had lived" is significant in
another way as well. It may simply mean that one's
ancestors gave life, just as it was given to them; but that

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meaning is already present in the previous phrase. A second possible meaning, which appears in the later works, is that human beings live one another's lives; the phrase in the poem Mrs. Ramsay recites is "and all the lives we've ever lived." Katharine's insight here has, in short, important implications for the later fiction, but it is somewhat beside the point in this novel.

Although the ending of Night and Day suggests, in Mitchell Leaska's words, "that the real work of living is about to begin" (61), Katharine's problems are for the moment solved. Mrs. Hilbery's are not. For all her exuberance, Mrs. Hilbery has some of the saddest moments in the novel. Again, a passage in Woolf's essay on Anne Thackeray Ritchie suggests parallels:

As life drew on, with its deaths and wars, her profound instinct for happiness had to assert itself to gild those grim faces, but it succeeded.... Her happiness was a domestic flame, tried by many sorrows.... (M&OE 196)

Safe in the pre-1914 world, Mrs. Hilbery does not suffer from war, but she does suffer, not so much from deaths she has seen as from the sorrows of the dead, which she cannot amend. And this is another source of her inability to finish the biography. Not only does she live too close to the past; she also wants to change it:
As Mrs. Hilbery grew old she thought more and more of the past, and this ancient disaster [her father's ruined marriage and subsequent dissipation] seemed at times almost to prey upon her mind, as if she could not pass out of this life without laying the ghost of her parent's sorrow to rest. (93)

One indication of her distress is that she has never been able to tell Katharine the whole story, and "it became less and less possible" to discuss it, for though Mrs. Hilbery was constantly reverting to the story, it was always in a tentative and restless fashion, as though by a touch here and there she could set things straight which had been crooked these sixty years. Perhaps indeed she no longer knew what the truth was. (93)

If Mrs. Hilbery cannot tell the story to Katharine, she certainly will not be able to put it in the biography, and this is a source of almost greater anguish. On the morning when she feels inspired by the thought that she might have been her father's sister, her hope is followed by despair: "Things keep coming into my head.... [B]ut I can't put it down, you see. There's a kind of blind spot," she said, touching her forehead, "there. And when I can't sleep o' nights, I fancy I shall die without having done it." (106)
Here Mrs. Hilbery seems to become a blend of Anne Ritchie and Virginia Woolf—and even, in a sense, the Virginia Woolf who did not yet exist, the author of To the Lighthouse. For after completing To the Lighthouse, Woolf wrote of her parents,

I used to think of [them] daily; but writing The Lighthouse laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true—that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; & writing of them was a necessary act.) He comes back now more as a contemporary. (D III 208)

Mrs. Hilbery's fear of dying before finishing the biography also has a parallel in another diary entry, written when To the Lighthouse was in progress: "Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on & say 'This is it'? ... And shall I die before I find it?" (D III 62).

The passage from the diary is similar in both wording and emotional intensity to the passage from the novel because, for Woolf, the drive to create meaning and the drive to find meaning in existence were almost one and the same. Like Septimus Smith, she feared that "it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (MD 133), but she also believed (or hoped) that the human ability to create meaning might be an indication that a larger meaning
existed. It was not enough, however, to create in those realms, such as music and mathematics, where order can exist independently from the historically determined, temporal world. For her, the testing ground was always the areas of study and of art where the world and the human element resisted the student's or artist's impulse to find or create meaning. Mrs. Hilbery's struggle with her biography is at the heart of Woolf's fiction—and of her criticism—because she represents the visionary impulse condemned, by her own desire for meaning, to deal with that most refractory material, the human past.

The need to find meaning in history is responsible for a curious split in the creation of Rachel Vinrace and Katharine Hilbery. Despite obvious autobiography in their makeup, they are each interested in pursuits other than Woolf's own—Rachel in music and Katharine in mathematics; but both characters, as we have seen, achieve important insights from thoughts about history—insights that affect their maturation but have no apparent effect on their chosen field of study. Rachel is attracted to music because it is impersonal, but all the thinking we observe revolves around her need to connect with other people and to connect the present with the past. Katharine, similarly, turns to the impersonal world of mathematics and astronomy, but, as Alice van Buren Kelley has observed, her stargazing (See above, p. 97) leads her back to the world of humanity and history, and
she has a "vision that defies the laws of historical time and absorbs the individual into a universal, spiritual whole" (Kelley 48). Lily Briscoe, as an abstract painter, seems to deal in a realm where human reality should not be an issue; yet throughout To the Lighthouse, Lily's problems with her painting seem to be the problems of the biographer. In this novel, however, the split between the character's intellectual and artistic pursuits and her needs as an evolving person disappears. Lily struggles simultaneously with the recalcitrant facts of Mrs. Ramsay's life and death and the equally recalcitrant material of her painting—and resolves the one by resolving the other.

At the time that she wrote Night and Day, Woolf did not know how to write the kind of biography she found lacking when she wrote her early reviews. Nor, I suspect, did she really know why she was devoting so much of the novel to Mrs. Hilbery's biography. Two years after she finished Night and Day, she recorded in her diary what she had said to Lytton Strachey about its value to her: "Oh, its a dull book, I know, I said; but don't you see you must put it all in before you can leave out" (D II 121). And this comment bears an interesting relationship to a passage in "Modern Fiction," completed almost immediately after Night and Day: The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall to provide a plot, to
provide comedy, tragedy, love, interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole.... (CR 153)

When the two statements are considered together, a certain irony appears, for by the time she wrote her next novel, Woolf had decided that what had to be left out were such matters as plot, comedy, tragedy, and love. What she left in included, among other things, Mrs. Hilbery's biography, the apparently extraneous material of Night and Day—that is, the issue of how to capture another person's life. There is no Mrs. Hilbery in Jacob's Room because Woolf took on the role herself—and retained it for the rest of her life.
Chapter Notes

1. Woolf actually applied the term to Harold Nicolson's Some People, not to her own work (G&R 149-56), but James Naremore appropriates the term for his chapter on Orlando, as I do below for my chapter on To the Lighthouse.


3. Daiches does suggest another reason as well, however, for his sentence continues, "--and also, it might be added, because death for this writer was always the illuminator and commentator on life" (12).

4. Roger Poole writes that when Leonard Woolf read The Voyage Out, he "must have decided to close his eyes to what is open to every reader: the novel is about the tragedy of an engagement which cannot be consummated" (72). Louise De Salvo concludes her study of the making of novel: "each voyage through The Voyage Out ended in a cul-de-sac where the completion of the dumb show entailed the near extinction of its chief mummer--and of its creator" (159).

5. See The Voyage In, pp. 3-4, 11-12. I would add Catherine Earnshaw here as the archetype and refer the reader to Gilbert's and Gubar's discussion of Wuthering Heights in The Madwoman in the Attic, pp. 248-398. Although Abel et al. refer elsewhere to Gilbert and Gubar, they do not include Catherine Earnshaw in the passages to which I refer.

6. Schaefer, for example, criticizes Woolf's use of "external tags"--Gibbon for St. John, Moore for Helen (46).

7. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf points out that of the four great female novelists in nineteenth-century England, two never married, and none had a child.

8. Tolstoy makes the same point in War and Peace, which may have influenced Woolf:

   It is impossible for the human intellect to grasp the idea of absolute continuity of motion.... The first proceeding of the historian is to select at random a series of events and examine them apart from others, though there is and can be no beginning to any event, for one event flows without any break in continuity from another. (II 975)
But what century have we reached? Has this procession from the Surrey side to the Strand gone on forever? — *Jacob's Room*

Night and Day is the only novel Woolf wrote during the First World War; ironically, it is one of the few she wrote that never mentions that event. It is comfortably set in the pre-war world, and if it were possible to read the novel without knowing that war broke out soon after the story's conclusion, we would think, as people at the time did, that peace would last forever. Thus, although *Night and Day* was published in February of 1919, *Jacob's Room* is often considered Woolf's first post-war novel. It is sometimes grouped with *Mrs. Dalloway*, and occasionally with *To the Lighthouse*, primarily because of certain similarities of method. Some critics have dealt with recurring themes and issues, but they seldom more than mention the presence of the First World War. This chapter and the two that follow will consider Woolf's treatment of the war in particular, as well as her dealings with history in general.

One of the first sad ironies one usually learns about the home front in the First World War is the popular myth that the soldiers would be home by Christmas, a hope that was renewed every spring for four years. It comes as
something of a shock, therefore, to discover that a number of people realized very early that the war would be different from anything in modern history and that it would destroy a whole way of life. It was on August 3, 1914 that Edward, Viscount Grey made his prophetic remark, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our life-time" (II 20). H. G. Wells's novel Mr. Britling Sees It Through, published in 1916, contains a passage equally remarkable for its foresight:

And indeed at the very moment when Mr. Britling was saying these words, in Sarajevo in Bosnia, where the hour was somewhat later, men whispered together, and one held nervously to a black parcel, a black parcel with certain unstable chemicals and a curious arrangement of detonators therein, a black parcel destined to shatter nearly every landmark of Mr. Britling's and Lady Frensham's cosmogony. (48)

Wells's novel, moreover, dwells longingly on the summer of 1914, that summer which, according to Paul Fussell, "for the modern imagination ... has assumed the status of a permanent symbol for anything innocently but irrevocably lost" (24).1 Woolf's own response to the war was complex, but her letters and diaries suggest that the war confirmed rather than changed her views. If previously she had scoffed at historians for ignoring "our point of view," now she moved
closer to the position she would advocate in *Three Guineas* in 1938: history does not merely fail to tell the whole story; by glorifying past wars it makes future wars thinkable and finally acceptable. Thus, in a letter of January 1916 that recalls her early reviews, she refers to "this preposterous male fiction," and wonders that it "keeps going without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching us through it" (L II 76). A diary entry for April 1918 reads in part:

> A cold dismal day, & very bad news in the newspapers. Stout red-faced elderly men are visibly perturbed. And Ireland has Conscription. If one didn't feel that politics are an elaborate game got up to keep a pack of trained men for that sport in condition, one might be dismal. One sometimes is dismal. (D I 138).

Often too she recorded a sense of being detached, unable to react to the events that were supposed to matter. On Armistice Day, for example, she felt "immensely melancholy" (L II 290); and in February of 1921 she wrote in her diary concerning the aftermath of the war:

> I have long been meaning to write a historical disquisition on the return of peace; for old Virginia will be ashamed to think what a chatterbox she was, always talking about people, never about politics. Moreover, she will say, the
times you lived through were so extraordinary. They must have appeared so, even to a quiet woman living in the suburbs. But indeed nothing happens at one moment rather than another. The history books will make it all much more definite than it is. The most significant sign of peace this year is the sales.... (D II 92)

An entry from the following month shows her questioning, as she had in her early essays, the traditional priorities in the reporting of events:

In the way of history the Germans have gone back to Germany. People go on being shot & hanged in Ireland.... The worst of it is the screen between our eyes and those gallows is so thick. So easily one forgets— or at least I do. For instance why not set down that the Maids of Honour shop was burnt out the other night? Is it a proof of civilisation to envisage suffering at a distance—and then the faculty of seeing that laws matter—the constitution of Cheko-Slovakia for example—is that an important one? Anyhow very little bestowed on me. (D II 100).

In these remarks we can find the germ of the ideas that led eventually to the method of "Time Passes"; but for the moment the important point was that Woolf was proving to herself what she had always suspected—that people do not
react to history in quite the ways that the history books
would have us believe.

The major shift in Woolf's thinking is one she observed
herself: "I become steadily more feminist" (D II 76). Always
suspicious of causes and enthusiasts, she now
overcame her antipathy to the suffragists. She even did
some volunteer work for them, although she was not very
interested when the vote was finally won. "I don't feel
much more important," she wrote, "perhaps slightly so. Its
like a knighthood; might be useful to impress people one
despises" (D II 104). Critics often assume that Sally Seal,
the silly ineffectual suffragist in Night and Day, reveals
Woolf's continuing distaste for political causes. In doing
so, they overlook Mary Datchet, who is intelligent and
sensitive and who consciously renounces the happiness of
marriage and family without denying how much she wants it.

Woolf's attitudes toward fiction, like her attitudes
toward history, were essentially confirmed rather than
changed by the war. As her early reviews—and, I would
argue, her first novel—demonstrate, she was a modernist
before the war. She did not yet see herself as such: even
those who consciously embraced a particular movement such
as vorticism or imagism could not yet see that they were
part of the larger movement we would call modernism. She
was aware, however, that she was trying to write in a new
mode and that most of the popular writers of her day
could not serve her as models. Moreover, in looking back in 1923, she fixed the date for the beginning of the change in art and literature at 1910, not 1914 or 1918. Referring to the First Post-Impressionism Exhibition in London, she wrote with an intentional hyperbole that did not conceal a serious point, "on or about December, 1910, human character changed" (CDB 96). Later critics have tended to agree, for if some harbingers of the new era appeared before 1910, (in the last works of Hardy or the poetry of Hopkins, for example) and many of the most important modernist works appeared in the 1920's, a remarkable number of the seminal works were published or begun in the years between 1910 and the beginning of the war. *Swann's Way*, *Sons and Lovers*, and *Dubliners* were published; Eliot wrote "Prufrock," and Joyce began *A Portrait of the Artist*.

But if Woolf and others were modernist before the war, they were even more so afterwards. What happened to her and to her art is what Malcolm Bradbury has suggested happened to modernism generally. Siding with the critics who maintain that the modern period predates the war, Bradbury argues, nevertheless, that "the war undoubtedly changed style, and it helped to justify modernism." He suggests, that

the war, in fact, became a turning-point in the implicit historiography of modern fiction; that is to say, many novelists wrote it into their novels

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as a sufficient explanation for modern style, for the spatialisation of form, the jump from the diurnal to the symbolist world, as well as for their newer, harder techniques of expression, their rapid cutting, their mechanisation of human figures, their indifferent urbanisation of the landscape. (193)

Bradbury, whose subject is Dos Passos and Ford, never mentions Woolf, but there can be no better representative of what he describes here. Although there are many indications of the concerns and methods in The Voyage Out, the leap to Jacob's Room (published in 1922, the annus mirabilis of modernism, the year of Ulysses and The Waste Land) is still remarkable. Whether Woolf wrote about the war out of a desire, perhaps an unconscious one, to justify her innovations in Jacob's Room is impossible to know. But we can see from her letters that, on the one hand, she tried repeatedly to defuse criticism with the argument that the novel was only an experiment (L II 546, 573, 581) while, on the other, she wrote, "There's no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice" (D II 186). When discussing the failures of the book, she maintained that "the method was not so much at fault as my ignorance of how to use it psychologically" (L II 588). From the outset, Woolf seems to have seen this novel as an integral step in the development in her fiction.
The diffidence she evinces in her letters, excessive even for Woolf, who was extremely sensitive to criticism, suggests that the war offered some kind of justification for the direction in which she was already determined to go.

There are, however, other and more compelling reasons for considering Woolf an ideal representative for Bradbury's theory. In the first place, she was deeply affected by the horror and senselessness of the war. As Holtby observes, the war is mentioned in almost every work of fiction Woolf wrote after 1919, "as though its memory were the scar of an old wound she could not hide" (82). She had not been, like Wells's Mr. Britling, a believer in nineteenth-century meliorism whose hopes were dashed by the events of July and August of 1914. Nevertheless, she retained throughout her life a certain cast of thought that demanded the holistic approach to life characteristic of meliorism. Like Septimus Smith, she never paused in her quest for meaning, and for her, as for him, the fear that there might be no meaning only intensified the search. Everything she saw or felt she placed in evidence. Thus, she recorded in her diary that she felt "a particular touch of horror" on hearing a rumor that women were flying bombers because their size allowed more room for bombs than men's; and in the next sentence she wrote, "I went to the Magic Flute last night and thought rather better of humanity for having that in them" (D I 154).
But however the war may have horrified Woolf, and however she sympathized with the losses of others, the catastrophes of her life—events that destroyed her world as effectively as the First World War destroyed the British Empire, began almost twenty years earlier. In 1895 her mother died, and Virginia, aged thirteen, suffered her first breakdown. The following nine years saw the deaths of her half-sister Stella (the eldest of the three girls and clearly a surrogate mother), her father, and her brother Thoby. Moreover, following his wife's death, Leslie Stephen sold the summer house at St. Ives, Cornwall, the scene of Virginia's happiest memories, and plunged the household into a morbid "Oriental gloom" (MoB 40. See also Quentin Bell 42-43).

In Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway, and To the Lighthouse, Woolf grafts these private sorrows onto the collective sorrows of the nation, making all occur simultaneously with the approach, duration, or aftermath of the First World War. Her brother, in the guise of Jacob Flanders and Andrew Ramsay, dies in battle. Her own madness and her attempted suicide appear in the madness and realized suicide of Septimus Smith, a victim of shell-shock. Her mother and her half-sister, portrayed as Mrs. Ramsay and Prue, die just before the war, and symbolically these deaths seem to cause the war. Finally, the Ramsay family's long absence from their summer house is attributed to the war. The war might
be termed, then, an objective correlative in all three novels. I would argue, however, that it is something more intense and less intellectualized than this, that Woolf saw in the war (as James Ramsay saw in a happier image, the lighthouse) something that confirmed what she already knew and felt deeply. Like Yeats, Woolf believed that "we begin to live when we have conceived of life as a tragedy"; and in a sense we begin to live when we have seen or imagined the end of it. In any case, something Woolf wrote very late in life reveals that she viewed the first of her private disasters, her mother's death, very much as others viewed the outbreak of the war:

the common life of the family [was] very merry, very stirring, crowded with people; and she was the centre; it was herself. This was proved on May 5th 1895. For after that day there was nothing left of it.... It was a beautiful spring morning, and very still. That brings back the feeling that everything had come to an end. (MoB 84)

And, as Jacob's Room and To the Lighthouse reveal, those early years--particularly the summers at St. Ives--retained for Woolf that sunlit quality that others associated with the summer of 1914.

Jacob's Room has provoked an unusual degree of critical disagreement, not about its merit--most critics see it as a
glorious failure that suggests in the attempt what Mrs. Dalloway would later achieve—but about its subject. Many regard it as Woolf's war book. Winifred Holtby suggests that "it is as much a war book as A Farewell to Arms or Death of a Hero," for it shows "what life looked like to those young men who in 1914 and 1915 crossed the channel and vanished out of English life for ever"; it asks "what was lost then?" (116). Carolyn Heilbrun calls it "the civilian All Quiet on the Western Front," though she notes that it has been little recognized as such (164). Jane Novak also believes it is a war book and suggests that it has not been so recognized because "the social criticism of the earlier novels is greatly muted" (96). James Hafley sees a great deal of social criticism and in fact argues that society itself threatens Jacob before the war does (54). Alice van Buren Kelley disagrees with all these views, arguing that neither the threats of society nor those of war receive enough attention to be considered the major issue: the real issue is the unknowability of Jacob (64).

The unknowability of Jacob is, admittedly, an extremely important issue, but there are in fact many references both to the impending war and to previous wars; and even if there were not, suggesting that a paucity of references to the First World War limits its importance in the novel is rather like saying that striking the iceberg and sinking occupied only a few hours of the voyage of the Titanic. To extend my
analogy, there is in this novel a ghastly sense of what Hardy called in his poem on the Titanic "the convergence of the twain." In the penultimate chapter, for example, Jacob's activities are juxtaposed with the Kaiser's without comment:

"Jacob," wrote Mrs. Flanders ... "is hard at work after his delightful journey...."

"The Kaiser," the far-away voice remarked in Whitehall, "received me in audience." (173)

This passage is, additionally, a perfect mockery of Rupert Brooke's line "Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His Hour" (107).

We might ask why critics have come to such contradictory conclusions about Jacob's Room. There are two answers, I think. First, Woolf simply attempted too much in this novel. The issue of the central character's unknowability is itself very complex; the thought that Conrad needed all of Lord Jim for the subject gives one pause, the difference in styles not withstanding. Second, the major themes of the novel are somewhat at cross purposes: they are not irreconcilable, but in a novel of such brevity, they seem to be. And this is one of the reasons Jacob's Room is a glorious failure: the conflicting themes make it rich and complex but too cryptic. The feminist interpretation of the First World War suggested all through the novel pulls one direction, the long range
historical perspective another, the unknowability of Jacob still another.

In Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, as well as in Jacob's Room, the war is associated with large, blind, superhuman forces—with darkness, storms, and ultimately chaos. There is a Shakespearean equation of elemental and human destructiveness. Jacob's Room and To the Lighthouse are also united by a sustained feminist interpretation of the war, an interpretation already familiar to us from Woolf's letters and diaries. Carolyn Heilbrun has observed strong parallels between Orlando and Strachey's Elizabeth and Essex, both published in 1928, both celebrations of androgyny. "Possessed by Elizabeth," Heilbrun writes, "the androgynous mind saved England once, and might yet save the world, or so Virginia Woolf suggests" (149).

What Heilbrun does not say, but may intend to imply, is that Eminent Victorians (1918) and Jacob's Room have similar parallels. "Eminent Victorians," she observes, "forced admirers of the manly virtues to contemplate these qualities unadorned"; similarly, "the constant recurrence of the First World War in Woolf's books is perhaps her most damning and pointed condemnation of the masculine world" (164). For it is indeed the whole "masculine world" and not simply the blunders of a few years or months that Woolf holds responsible for the war. Although she achieves an emotional shock with the death of Jacob, she does not spring this
death on us in the last pages: she posits the tendency toward war at the outset and strikes that ominous note repeatedly. Like Strachey, she knew that the peace was lost on the playing fields of Eton—in all the institutions that inculcate the manly virtues.

In addition to the many harbingers of the impending war (the most important being the name "Flanders"), there are continual reminders of past wars in Jacob's Room. Captain Barfoot is missing two fingers, lost in war (23); the poor of Dods Hill have left their village only once in their lives, to fight in the Crimea (17); there is a Roman camp on Dods Hill; and the museum nearby contains cannon-balls and arrow-heads (19). There are ironic references to the tombs of Wellington and Nelson (65-66); and when Big Ben strikes, "Nelson receive[s] the salute" (171). The statue of Achilles is mentioned three times near the close of the novel, and less than twenty pages from the end we are told, "Violent was the wind now rushing down the Sea of Marmara between Greece and the plains of Troy" (160). Here Woolf fuses the ancient and the modern in a tragic vision of warfare endlessly repeated: the Sea of Marmara is joined to the Mediterranean by the Dardanelles, Rupert Brooke's destination when he died, the place where the disaster known as Gallipoli began.

Less than thirty pages into the novel, the blame for war is laid on men. The narrator, thinking of Captain
Barfoot, appears to be torn, like Rachel Vinrace and Lily Briscoe, by conflicting emotions of admiration and resentment. She represents the two emotions, not in one character, as she does in The Voyage Out and To the Lighthouse, but in two—Mrs. Jarvis and Betty Flanders. It is a strange scene, as neither woman is actually present: Captain Barfoot is alone, awaiting Betty Flanders' return. First we are told that "women would have felt, 'Here is law. Here is order. Therefore we must cherish this man. He is on the Bridge at Night,'" and that women's minds "would run on visions of shipwreck and disaster." At the end of the passage, we find that Betty Flanders is one of these women when, having given Mrs. Jarvis's opinion, the narrator concludes, "But Betty Flanders thought nothing of the kind."

Mrs. Jarvis's opinion is rendered thus:

"Yet I have a soul," Mrs. Jarvis would bethink her, as Captain Barfoot suddenly blew his nose in a great red bandana handkerchief, "and it's the man's stupidity that's the cause of this, and the storm's my storm as well as his" .... (28)

Like Mr. Ramsay's recitation of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Mrs. Jarvis's thoughts reveal Woolf's view that men are both the heroes and the blunderers who make heroism necessary. The use of the storm image is significant here too: Mrs. Jarvis seems to slide unconsciously from the natural disaster, which no one can help, to the human, for
which men are culpable. It is as if the metaphor of the storm is so pervasive in the human consciousness that the thought of literal storms inevitably brings to mind the metaphorical storm, war.

The conflict between Mrs. Jarvis and Captain Barfoot, although reminiscent of Rachel's and St. John's and precursive of Lily's and Mrs. Ramsay's, has a sharper, more bitter edge than either. Rachel feels snubbed by St. John's arrogance but admires his "grasp of facts" and eventually likes him personally. Lily admires—and even loves—Mr. Ramsay, in spite of herself; and the reader too becomes sympathetic. Captain Barfoot, however, is never anything but ridiculous, and repellent. If we have read *The Years*, he reminds us of Abel Pargiter, similarly wounded and also unfaithful to his wife; and the image of the wife he abandons is haunting and disturbing:

For Ellen Barfoot in her bath-chair on the esplanade was a prisoner—civilisation's prisoner—all the bars of her cage falling across the esplanade on sunny days when the town hall, the drapery stores, the swimming bath, and the memorial hall striped the ground with shadow.

(25, emphasis mine)

Imprisoned in sunlight, Mrs. Barfoot is like a photographic negative of the several Antigones in Woolf's fiction imprisoned in sunless vaults.

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The feminism of Three Guineas, which Jacob's Room foreshadows, has had many detractors; that of Jacob's Room has had none. Partly this is because there are many issues in the novel: the feminist message is embedded in other, less controversial, concerns. Then there is the very atmosphere of the novel: "strident," the word applied so often to Three Guineas (even, surprisingly by Heilbrun [164]) can hardly be used in connection with this romantic, tentative, and poetic novel. But most important, Jacob's Room deflects such criticism because it so poignantly portrays men themselves as the victims of society. Jacob's sex opens to him doors closed to Clara Durrant, but it closes all doors when he is twenty-six years old. As Manly Johnson observes, Jacob is both inheritor and victim (45).Repeatedly, the blessings of male privilege are linked with its curses. In the Cambridge chapter, for example,

The stroke of the clock even was muffled; as if intoned by somebody reverent from a pulpit; as if generations of learned men heard the last hour go rolling through their ranks and issued it, already smooth and time-worn, with their blessing, for the use of the living. (45)
The sound "conveyed to him (it may be) a sense of old buildings and time; and himself the inheritor; and then to-morrow" (45). The reader has a far different response.

As Holtby has suggested, there is an ominous echo here of
Rachel's and Terence's anticipation of seeing London in The Voyage Out: "And we're certain to have it too,' she said. 'It isn't as if we were expecting a great deal..." (VO 301, Holtby 125). The word "muffled," suggests the drums of execution, and "ranks" is one of numerous military and quasi-military terms that appear throughout the novel. Because we guess from the start that a boy named "Flanders" will die in the war, the word "inheritor" carries bitter irony.

As in The Voyage Out, martial imagery is associated with male education specifically in the description of the old professor's brain, which recalls St. John Hirst reading Gibbon:

what a procession tramps through the corridors of his brain, orderly, quick-stepping, and reinforced, as the march goes on, by fresh runnels, till the whole hall, dome, whatever one calls it, is populous with ideas. Such a muster takes place in no other brain. (40)

But a new element occurs in the proposition that excluding women is not only unfair but may endanger society. This theme first appears in the scene where Jacob, attending chapel, remembers the childhood incident of the pistol shot (32). Josephine Schaefer cites this passage as an example of the virtuosity of the treatment of time in the novel, for in it Woolf blends Jacob's past, the past of the college,
and the present of both (79). The image of the shot ringing out in the dark woods without warning and apparently to no purpose is, of course, a perfect metaphor for Jacob's random death in a senseless war; and the image carries further weight because it is a memory the reader shares with Jacob (23). But the passage is also significant for a strange juxtaposition. Immediately after remembering the incident of the pistol, Jacob thinks approvingly of the exclusion of women and dogs from the chapel service. Here, obviously, Woolf has begun to formulate a central idea of A Room of One's Own, but for this novel the important point is that she links the exclusion of women with war. The apparent disconnectedness of Jacob's thoughts simultaneously conveys a verisimilitudinous sense of the random wanderings of the mind and a symbolic sense of deep connection.

The theme of the exclusion of women develops further in the scene in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Here we find that, workmen having finished the final letter of "Macaulay," the names of important men "stretch[ed] in unbroken file round the dome" while, "at a considerable depth beneath, many hundreds of the living sat" (105). The feminist scholar looking up thinks, "Oh damn ... why didn't they leave room for an Eliot or a Brontë?" (106). Her choice of female novelists is doubly significant. She might have chosen a famous political writer--Mary Wollstonecraft, for example. The choice of "an Eliot or a Brontë" implies
that not only the female but the fictional—or, in broader terms, the artistic—vision of reality is needed to balance the factual, historical tradition represented by Macaulay and the rest of the great men.

The image of the dome of the museum is important too, as it recalls the professor's dome-like mind. The museum in turn is described as "an enormous mind" (108) and a "vast mind sheeted with stone" (109). Thus, the martial imagery is subtly transferred to the accumulated knowledge of civilization, which is the exclusive property not only of men but of upper class men. Ironically, the custodians of knowledge are "poor highly respected men, with wives and families at Kentish Town, [who] do their best to protect Plato and Shakespeare, and then are buried at Highgate" (109). Twice in this section a drunken woman cries "Let me in!"; but "Plato continues imperturbably" for Jacob. The repeated cry takes on symbolic weight, first, when we find that Jacob reads,

\begin{quote}
straight ahead, falling into step, marching on,
feeling himself to be part of this rolling imperturbable energy, which has driven darkness before it since Plato walked the Acropolis (110)
\end{quote}

and, second, when we are told that, because of the difficulty of the reading, "it is impossible to see to the fire" (109). The theme of light struggling against darkness intensifies as the novel progresses, and Woolf
shows light and dark following each other with ever
increasing speed from Greece across Europe to England
(160-63). Whereas early in the novel, men roll the light
against the darkness, toward the conclusion, the wind
rolls the darkness. Additionally, the wind has "a sort of
trampling energy of mood which forbids too close an analysis
of the feelings of any single person, or inspection of
features" (162). The description contains too the
disquieting observation that "all faces--Greek, Levantine,
Turkish, English--would have looked much the same in that
darkness" (162). It is a vision of the loss of all feelings
and features: the darkness represents war itself. When, in
the last pages, the war begins, "darkness drops like a knife
over Greece" (175). At first through images rather than
words, Woolf alludes to Lord Grey's pronouncement that the
lamps were going out all over Europe; then finally the
allusion appears in words as well: "Now one after another
lights were extinguished. Now great towns--Paris--
Constantinople--London--were black as strewn rocks" (160).
That Jacob should have been unable to attend to the fire (a
symbol both of light and of women's work) is tragically
ironic.

If the danger of excluding women from positions of
power and influence appears symbolically throughout the
novel, it is defined overtly in the description of war in
Chapter Twelve. In her answer to the men in clubs and
cabinets who complain that "character-drawing is a frivolous
fireside art, a matter of pins and needles" (155), Woolf
gives a description of battleships and soldiers which, in
its precise and objective horror, recalls Stephen Crane
(156). Then the passage concludes,

These actions, together with the incessant
commerce of banks, laboratories, chancellories,
and houses of business, are the strokes which oar
the world forward, they say.... It is thus that
we live, they say, driven by this unseizable
force. They say that the novelists never catch
it; that it goes hurtling through their nets and
leaves them torn to ribbons. This, they say,
is what we live by--this unseizable force. (156)

This passage is generally taken as an apology for the
method of Jacob's Room. The reference to "the novelists"
and to firesides, pins, and needles, however, makes it a
more general plea for fiction and for women's fiction in
particular. Novelists, and the women especially, must be
seen, not as portrait miniaturists, but as truth tellers
with a message as important as that of a Macaulay or a
Gibbon. It is both a passage about war and a refusal to
write about war. Moreover, the conflict between the
novelists and the historians (and between the novelists who
deal with pins and needles and those who deal with war) is
emblematic of a larger struggle. As Manly Johnson has
suggested, *Jacob's Room*, like its two predecessors, deals with "the confrontation between two approaches to life— one intuitive, valuing personal relationships; the other analytical, coveting power, and zealous to control events" (45).

Earlier in the novel, the narrator remarks,

The strange thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to every one for hundreds of years, no one has left an adequate account of it. The streets of London have their map; but our passions are uncharted.... As frequent as street corners in Holborn are these chasms in the continuity of our ways. Yet we keep straight on. (96)

At least one critic, Jean Guiguet, has seen in this passage an assertion of victory over discontinuity" (223). It suggests to me, rather, the narrator's wonder at the incomprehension of human beings: we fail to see that there is no adequate account because our life is too complex and too varying for us to understand it. Toward the conclusion of the novel, Woolf shows the politicians in Whitehall "keeping straight on" to disaster in the belief that they can impose order on the wilderness of world events:

and then the sixteen gentlemen ... decreed that the course of history should shape itself this way or that way, being manfully determined, as their
faces showed, to impose some coherency upon Rajahs and Kaisers and the muttering in bazaars, the secret gatherings plainly visible in Whitehall, of kilted peasants in Albanian uplands; to control the course of events. (172, emphasis mine).

Throughout the scene in Whitehall, the busts of Pitt, Chatham, Burke, and Gladstone—like the gilt names in the museum—seem to preside over the actions of the living. As the title of his unfinished essay indicates, Jacob believes, or at least considers the possibility, that history "consist[s] of the biographies of great men" (39). Evan Wentworth Williams is similarly impressed with great men: living "much in company with Chatham, Pitt, Burke and Charles James Fox," he "could not help contrasting himself and his age with theirs" (143). Repeatedly, he sighs, "Yet there never was a time when great men are [sic] more needed" (143). The narrator feigns agreement, commenting that "altogether [the sixteen men] looked too red, fat, pale or lean, to be dealing as the marble heads had dealt with the course of history" (172). The point is, of course, that the memories of the great dead are as far from the truth as marble is from flesh, and that inadequate human beings have always dealt with the course of history—or, more often, been engulfed by it. It is the later generations who both deny their humanity and attribute to them superhuman control and understanding.
We have seen in *Night and Day* how Katharine Hilbery comes to recognize her grandfather's humanity, how she is released from the burden of her biological kinship by the recognition of a spiritual kinship. In *Jacob's Room*, with catastrophic results, no one achieves such a recognition. At the very moment when the cabinet members are making their plans, their ability to impose order is belied by the sounds of confusion outside their own window. In this novel at least, Woolf seems to agree with Stephen Dedalus that history is "a shout in the street" (*Ulysses* 35): the statues in Whitehall have "an air of immortal quiescence, which perhaps the living might have envied, the air being full of whistling and concussions" (172). On the last page of the novel, "a harsh and unhappy voice crie[s] something unintelligible" outside Jacob's window; and Betty Flanders, ostensibly describing her dead son's room but actually describing the times, the room in history, exclaims, "Such confusion everywhere!" (176).

With the Whitehall section of the novel, Woolf brings her feminist anger into line with the position held in fact by many of the men who fought in the war. The image of the old men, their heads "red-veined, hollow looking" (172), is familiar from the poetry of Sassoon in particular. Woolf reviewed *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems* in May of 1917 and *Counter-Attack* in July of 1918.³ She was almost certainly influenced by such poems as "Blighters" in the first volume
and "The Fathers," "Base Details," and "The General" (one she specifically mentions) in the second. Like Sassoon and Owen, Woolf sees the older generation of men as so many Abrahams needlessly sacrificing Isaacs to a god who does not want them (Owen, "The Parable of the Old Men and the Young" 57). Her sympathy in Jacob's Room, and indeed everywhere in her fiction, is with the grieving mothers—Betty Flanders, Lady Bexborough, and Mrs. Foxcroft. For grieving fathers we must turn to others, to Wells, for example, who shows in Mr. Britling the father eager to do his part in the war who realizes with horror that the war wants his son, not him.

Yet, lack of interest in grieving fathers notwithstanding, when we compare Jacob's Room with the war poetry or Three Guineas, the anger seems strangely muted. All the condemnation is there, but the dominant mood is a large-eyed, world weary sadness. In contrast to the feminist interpretation of the war runs a vision of the long sweep of history which encompasses but ultimately subsumes anger. When Leonard Woolf told Virginia that he found the philosophy of Night and Day "very melancholy," she answered that melancholy is inevitable "if one is to deal with people on a large scale" (D I 259). In what sense Night and Day deals with people on a large scale, she did not say; perhaps she meant that it deals with the long-range possibilities of its characters' lives in a way that the conventional comedy of manners, which it resembles, does
not. But the scale of *Jacob's Room* is incontestably large: the characters' lives are repeatedly set against a backdrop of the whole of human and natural history.

Throughout the novel, this backdrop unites life and death. For example, in the first chapter, less than ten pages into the novel, Jacob sees a couple on the beach and, nearby, a skull. The skull is itself an obvious *momento mori*, but the narrator does not rest with this; she reminds us that even the skull will not last: "The sea holly would grow through the eye-sockets; it would be turned to powder, or some golfer, hitting his ball one fine day, would disperse a little dust" (10). The passage has a certain beauty, with its union of beach, sea holly, and skull; but the introduction of so banal an image as a golfer undercuts that beauty and hence shortens the distance between the passage and our ordinary lives. Woolf intensifies this effect by taking up Mrs. Flanders' thoughts with no more than a dash for transition: "--No, but not in lodgings, thought Mrs. Flanders" (10).

As Manly Johnson has observed, the association of life and death in *Jacob's Room* is often very subtle, as in the passage describing Jacob's butterfly collecting. The names, Johnson points out, include "painted ladies" and "white admirals," which "associate the ephemeral life of butterflies with the ephemeral life of man" (43). But Johnson sees a measure of optimism in this that I am not
sure is warranted: "Jacob finds the butterflies near some old Roman ruins, suggesting both mortality and persistence through succeeding generations" (Johnson 43). An intact Parthenon is one thing: "in its silent composure," we are told later, it appears "likely to outlast the entire world" (JR 148); ruins are another matter.

Harbingers of death are everywhere in the novel, and, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Jacob's Room* seems obsessed with time. The worn voices of clocks "repeat[ed] the fact of the hour all night long" (99); the hour issued to Jacob by the generations of Cambridge men is "already smooth and time-worn" (45). Fanny Elmer walks through a "disused" graveyard, where the tombstones lean against the wall (114); trucks pass carrying tombstones "recording how some one loved some one who is buried at Putney" (112). Pedestrians cross eternally from the Surrey side of the river to the Strand, and their motion is presented as the stream of time itself: "But what century have we reached? Has this procession from the Surrey side to the Strand gone on for ever? The old man has been crossing the Bridge these six hundred years, with the rabble of little boys at his heels" (113). The people on the Cornish coast stand motionless forever, the smoke above their cottage seeming to mark a grave (49). Betty Flanders sighs "like one who realizes, but would fain ward off a little longer--oh, a little longer!--the oppression of eternity" (164). Late in the
novel we are told what we have felt all along: "the suck and
sighing of the waves sounded gently, persistently, for ever" (174).

The contrast between human mortality and the endless
cycles of time appears in the very verb tenses of the
novel. As Josephine O'Brien Schaefer has pointed out, the
narrative alternates between past tense, used for the
individual life, and present, used variously for humankind
as a species, natural history, and works of art. An example
she cites is the passage in which Jacob reaches for a crab
in the past tense while the crab crosses the bottom of the
pool in the present tense (JR 9, Schaefer 77). Schaefer
believes that the use of the present tense for the
Parthenon, which "appears likely to outlast the entire
world" (148), and for Plato, who "continues imperturbably"
(109), suggests that the individual can survive death
through works of art or literature (77). But this
interpretation, like Johnson's comment on the ruins, is
unduly optimistic. Nothing in the lives of these characters
suggests that any of the them will separate from what Avrom
Fleishman has called the "mound or compost" of history that
we see in this novel. Citing the passage in which Betty
Flanders and Mrs. Jarvis climb to the Roman camp at night,
Fleishman suggests that "history emerges as a great mound or
compost of artifacts, lives, deaths, and time, and it is
with this accumulation that the individual is ultimately

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identified" (62). Like the Roman skeletons and Betty's lost brooch—and like Betty's husband, Seabrook—the characters in the novel will be "in safe keeping" (134); but they will be inseparable from the earth, "rolled," like Wordsworth's Lucy, "round in earth's diurnal course,/ With rocks, and stones, and trees."

The very shape and structure of Jacob's Room, as much as the content, expresses the obscurity and futility of human life. As Alice van Buren Kelley has observed, the novel begins in early fall (September) and ends in late summer, with Jacob's death, "circling from the season of dying to death itself" (Kelley 75). In contrast to the slowly moving natural cycle, the randomly glimpsed events of Jacob's life make human existence appear chaotic and fragmentary. Moreover, although Woolf seems to be in the company of the historical novelists in some of her views, she builds their argument into the structure of her novel in a wholly new way. Tolstoy may have said that there is no beginning or end to events (see above, p. 116, note 8) and that ordinary life goes on despite great historical events; nevertheless, he presents a story that has a traditional beginning and end; rounded, developed characters; and conventionally accepted crises, joys, and sorrows. Jacob's Room begins on a note of conclusion: "'So of course,' wrote Betty Flanders ... 'there was nothing for it but to leave'" (7); it devotes more time to Seabrook Flanders' death, which
occurs before the novel opens, than it does to Jacob's; it shows that even a mother of soldiers worries about whether the chickens are safe or her servant has a toothache (175); and it concludes in medias res, not with the death of the hero, but with the ongoing life of his mother. The novel ends as it begins, with Betty Flanders' grief; there is no sense of completion, only of desolation and meaninglessness.

Woolf further conveys this tragic sense of futility in one of the most successful innovations of this novel, the quick, seemingly random sketch of an entire life. A few sentences are enough to contain all the essentials of Mr. Floyd's life after he leaves the Flanders family, essentials that none of them ever knows: to them, Mr. Floyd is reduced to the kitten he gave John "to remember him by" which is now very old and "one of these days would have to be killed" (22). We find too that Mr. Floyd has kept Mrs. Flanders' letter all these years, apparently never suspecting how little regard she had for him (22). Jacob thinks Cruttendon and Jinny Carslake "the most remarkable people," but the narrator adds sardonically, "--being of course unable to foresee how it fell out that" Cruttendon never gets beyond painting orchards and is deserted by the wife for whom he does it; and Jinny lives in pensions in Italy (131). The wife of the Cambridge don, who knows her social climbing is despicable, thinks, "It was none of her fault--since how
could she control her father begetting her forty years ago
in the suburbs of Manchester...?"; and, as for her two
plain daughters, "it was none of their fault either" (35).

Thus, when the narrator reveals that Jimmy refused to
marry Helen (two characters we hear of only once) and that
now "he feeds crows in Flanders and Helen visits hospitals"
(97), these lives ruined by war seem indistinguishable from
all the other ruined and unhappy lives in the novel. The
implied answer to the question Betty Flanders asks about
Seabrook, "Had he then been nothing?" applies equally to
everyone. "I am Bertha Ruck" or "I am Tom Gage"--is finally
all that remains of anyone, and even this will not last
long: "Tom Gage cries aloud so long as his tombstone
endures" (134).

The civilian death of Seabrook and the war death of
Jacob frame the action of the novel, and the futility of the
long life undercuts the tragedy of the short. In addition,
one of the early harbingers of Jacob's death generalizes
that death and places it clearly in the natural order.
Looking across the water at the Scilly Islands, Jacob sings,
"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,/ Let me hide myself in thee."
Immediately, "like the blunt tooth of some monster, a rock
[breaks] the surface." Jacob, missing the point, continues:
"'Rock of ages,' sang Jacob" (52). The following paragraph
contains this similarly ominous passage: "Infinite millions
of miles away powdered stars twinkled; but the waves slapped
the boat, and crashed with **appalling solemnity, against the rocks*" (52, emphasis mine). Late in the novel, when the omens of war have been mounting steadily and we might be tempted to view the deaths of young men like Jacob as an unusual catastrophe, we find Julia Eliot walking in the park "on a summer's afternoon, when the trees are rustling, the wheels churning yellow, and the tumult of the present seems like an elegy for past youth and past summers..." (168). The narrative continues, "and there rose in her mind a curious sadness, as if time and eternity showed through skirts and waistcoats, and she saw people passing tragically to destruction" (168). This passage recalls the passage in the second chapter where a young man imagines a woman's skirts changing as his mind ranges back to the time "when none of this had any existence" (19). The two passages, one occurring early, the other late, validate each other. Jacob dies in a war that might have been avoided, but the rock is cleft for no one; existence itself contains the blunt tooth of the monster. As Fleishman observes, "the absurdity of [Jacob's] demise before realizing his potentialities represents an attenuated form of the human condition. In this way, *Jacob's Room* ... establishes a general symbol of man's fate" (54).

In addition to the sense of tragedy in life, and at times running counter to that sense, there is in *Jacob's Room* a persistent theme of weariness with all human history.
Describing the Cambridge students reading "as if they held in their hands something that would see them through," the narrator comments, "and those long histories in many volumes--surely some one was now beginning in order to understand the Holy Roman Empire, as one must" (43). Apropos of Jacob's reading about "a strike, a murder, bodies found," she remarks, "When a child begins to read history one marvels sorrowfully, to hear him spell out in his new voice the ancient words" (98). Later Jacob writes a note "upon the importance of history--upon democracy," which is "one of those scribbles upon which the work of a lifetime may be based; or again, it falls out of a book twenty years later, and one can't remember a word of it" (150).

Wordsworth tells us that love of nature leads to love of man, but Woolf shows people loving nature and feeling sick of human beings and their history:

to feel the earth spin; to have--positively--a rush of friendship for stones and grasses, as if humanity were over, and as for men and women, let them go hang--there is no getting over the fact that this desire seizes us pretty often. (141)

The past is sometimes magnificent in Jacob's Room: "Long ago great people lived here [in Southampton Row], and coming back from court past midnight stood, huddling their satin skirts, under carved door posts..." (64). Sometimes the past is horrifying: the basin in the boulder was formed,
according to the historians, to hold the blood of human
sacrifices (53). As in *The Waste Land*, the present is
frequently banal: "Southampton Row is chiefly remarkable
nowadays for the fact that you will always find a man trying
to sell a tortoise to a tailor" (64), and the basin in the
boulder has become a seat for tourists (53). Again as in
*The Waste Land*, the magnificent and the horrifying past are
equally remote from the living, who "can connect nothing
with nothing." The old woman rests by the tomb of
Wellington, "whose victories mean nothing to her, whose name
she knows not" (65). Spicer, the jute merchant, visiting
the cathedral for the first time in his life, though he has
worked within sight of it for fifty years, says, "So that's
all? Well, a gloomy old place.... Where's Nelson's tomb?
No time now--come again--a coin to leave in the box" (66).
Jacob thinks the Greeks solved the problems of civilization
"very remarkably" but "their solution is no help to us"
(149).

This melancholy for all human life and history--the
ironic sense that it is always the same and yet human beings
cannot communicate even that sameness across time--
inevitably qualifies the feminist interpretation of the war.
If society reformed tomorrow--if the authorities admitted
women to the chapel, made room for an Eliot or a Brontë, let
the drunken woman in out of the rain, and stopped glorifying
old wars and stumbling into new wars--people would still be
seen "passing tragically to destruction."

The feminist protest of the novel is further qualified by another issue, the unknowability of Jacob. We would expect a novelist seeking to arouse our anger to involve us emotionally with a rounded, developed character. When Woolf gives us instead a character who is still unknown to us at the time of his death, she seems to defeat her own purpose. Some critics have suggested that Jacob's Room seems to be from the outset about the attempt to recapture someone already dead. Indeed many have seen a ghostly quality in Jacob and in the novel as a whole. Leonard Woolf, according to Virginia, commented immediately after reading the novel, that the characters were "ghosts" (D II 186). E.M. Forster wrote in 1942, "What wraiths, apart from their context, are the wind-sextet from The Waves, or Jacob away from Jacob's Room!" (Two Cheers 250). And Jean Guiguet suggests that the germ of the idea for Jacob's Room may have been this passage from Night and Day:

She [Katharine] heard them [voices] as if they came from people in another world, a world antecedent to her world, a world that was the prelude, the antechamber to reality; it was as if, lately dead, she heard the living talking. The dream nature of our life had never been more apparent to her, never had life been more
certainly an affair of four walls.... (N&D 327, Guiguet 218)

The available biographical information also supports the idea that Jacob represents the attempt to capture one dead, for Jacob is certainly based, at least in part, on Woolf's brother Thoby. Like Jacob, Thoby was tall and distinguished looking but rather shy and awkward; he spent his childhood summers in Cornwall; he went to public school and Cambridge; and he died at the age of twenty-six shortly after a trip to Greece. Moreover the Cambridge chapter, which Holtby calls "pure magic," has, as she observes, the quality of that world as Woolf must have seen it when she visited her brother during May Week (123). Immediately after reading Jacob's Room, Lytton Strachey wrote, "Of course I see something of Thoby in him, which I suppose was intended" (Woolf-Strachey Letters 144).

I would suggest that Rupert Brooke also figured in the creation of Jacob. Not only had Woolf reviewed his poetry in August of 1918, but Brooke had been a childhood friend of the Stephens. The review concludes, "One turns from the thought of him not with a sense of completeness and finality, but rather to wonder and to question still: what would he have been, what would he have done?" (B&P 89)—a comment which applies equally to Jacob at the conclusion of the novel. And of course the indirect reference to the Dardanelles in the passage concerning the Sea of Marmara may
be an indication that Brooke as well as her brother was a model for Jacob.

Oddly enough, the one date mentioned in Jacob's Room could point either to Thoby Stephen or to Rupert Brooke. Jacob goes to Cambridge in 1906, as Rupert Brooke did, some eight years after Thoby went. But 1906, as Woolf could never forget, was also the year of Thoby's death. Particularly in view of the vagueness of the rest of the novel, it is possible that Woolf was in fact thinking of Thoby, not Brooke, in including this detail. Or, alternatively, she was thinking of both; if so, the character of Jacob represents a further union of public and private symbols within a whole novel built on this union. For by the time Woolf wrote Jacob's Room, Rupert Brooke had become the symbol he is to this day of the whole generation destroyed by the war; and Thoby was for her, as Clarissa Dalloway's sister was for Clarissa, a symbol of the permanent threat of death.

To continue for a moment to consider the novel as biography, Jacob's origin in the brother who died of typhoid as well as the friend who died in war may partially explain why Woolf undercuts the anger of the novel. It is difficult to remain outraged by the death of your subject in war when beyond that subject you see the brother who died of an illness almost twenty years earlier. But, to return to the novel as fiction, we might also say that it is a measure of
Woolf's art that she would not settle for the simpler traditional portrait that would be consistent with a polemical purpose. In trying to combine what Lyndall Gordon has called "a modernist portrait" (170) with several other major themes, she took on too much; but, in doing so, she expanded and deepened the determinist vision of history she had only partially adumbrated in The Voyage Out.

For if, as Guiguet suggests, the germ of the novel lies in the passage he cites from Night and Day, and if Jacob is based on Thoby Stephen and Rupert Brooke, the rhetoric of the novel is nevertheless concerned with the difficulty of capturing one living. And a major obstacle to knowing Jacob is separating him from his "room," his place in history. The narrator says, for example: "Part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy--the room, the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history" (73). Critics have seen parallels to Wordsworth's "Intimations" in Jacob's Room (Johnson 44, Blackstone 63), and it is true that the words "We start transparent, and then the cloud thickens" (49) recall the "clouds of glory." Likewise "shades of the prisonhouse" appear in the passage where the world of the elderly is said to be "thrown up in such black outline upon what we are" (36). But more often Woolf's point is that the world enmeshes and camouflages Jacob, not that it changes him. In the words "All history backs our pane of glass" (49), her vision is close to Thomas Wolfe's in Look
Homeward, Angel, although her view is more pessimistic. In both novels there is the sense that we cannot know the world of the protagonist—and ultimately we cannot know him either—unless we know all the events that have made that world. All history surrounds Jacob and is carried within him, and the line where it ends and he begins is imperceptible.

Whether Woolf believed in anything comparable to Jung's Collective Unconscious or Yeats's Great Memory is not clear, but a letter she wrote from St. Ives to Saxon Sydney-Turner when she was working on Jacob's Room contains this odd juxtaposition: "I think a good deal about the Phoenicians and the Druids, and how I was a nice little girl here...." She goes on to say that she cannot separate her childhood self from its surroundings when she asks, "Do you like yourself as a child?" and adds, "I like myself.... Still I expect I muddle it all up with Cornwall" (L II 462). And years later, in her article on Walter Sickert, she wrote, "For as the rocks hide fossils, so we hide tigers, baboons, and perhaps insects, under our coats and hats" (CDB 189).

There is another connection between history and the unknown Jacob, a subtle connection that runs through all of Woolf: communication among the living is almost always linked in her work with communication between the living and the dead. Frequently the desire for one type of communication involves the desire for the other—whether or
not the character knows it—and success or failure in one is usually an index of a like success or failure in the other. Thus, Rachel Vinrace, "who wants to turn the world back to the first page," also resists the barriers between the living. She dislikes being "in the dark about another person," being "shut up all by oneself in a room" (VO 302). Mrs. Hilbery, who sees the past clearly but seems completely unequal to daily life ("beautifully adapted for life on another planet" [N&D 39]), is the only one who can sort out the difficulties of the four lovers. Katharine Hilbery comes to understand herself at the same time that she recognizes her grandfather as a human being.

In Jacob's Room, as we have seen, no one achieves such an understanding of the dead or the past; and the characters are equally incapable of communicating with one another. James Hafley and Jane Novak have both pointed out that the method and rhetoric of the novel are at odds, that, as Hafley puts it, there are two narrators, one disclaiming the ability to enter Jacob's mind, the other entering effortlessly into everyone else's (Hafley 52; Novak 96, 100). But if the narrative voice is inconsistent in its power, there is absolute consistency in the characters' lack of power: no one is able to enter the mind of another. Moreover, as T. E. Apter has observed, "emotion-laden perception," usually a source of understanding in Woolf's fiction, only misleads in Jacob's Room (42). Clara Durrant
thinks Jacob is "so spiritual" at the exact moment that he is telling an obscene joke (71). Betty Flanders thinks "Jacob's letters are so like him," but we know the letters reveal nothing (131). Similarly, her letters to him do not say what she wants to say—"Don't go with bad women, do be a good boy; wear your thick shirts; and come back, come back, come back to me." They only relay dull news about illnesses and deaths, shopping, and the weather (91).

With its presentation of people locked in their rooms--in their own consciousnesses and their own times--Jacob's Room is the most despairing of the early novels. There is, admittedly, much beauty--so much in fact that Woolf feared the novel was too romantic. "Of course," she wrote to Strachey, "you put your infallible finger upon the spot--romanticism. How do I catch it? Not from my father. I think it must have been from my Great Aunts" (L II 569). Indeed so seductive is this beauty that at least one critic, Bernard Blackstone, has found the world of this novel brighter than that of Mrs. Dalloway (98). Certainly a sense of nostalgia pervades the novel, nostalgia which Dorothy Brewster has captured in her description of Jacob's "room": "His room is a bench on a sunny day in Hyde Park; a seat on the upper deck of an Oxford Street bus; a pew in King's College Chapel; a box at the Covent Garden Opera" (101). But it is the beauty of a lost world, and the brightness Blackstone sees is the sunlight of the summer of 1914--and
of the years before 1895 for Woolf herself. The simplicity of the pleasures of this lost world call to mind the everyday life remembered by Sassoon's "dreamers," the soldiers

Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train. (70-71)

The novel sounds a repeated note of desperation over the limitations of life, though it is the narrator, not the characters, who feels this. It is she who wants to have a share in every life—to be, or at least to "sit beside," everyone; who laments that "wherever I seat myself, I die in exile" (69); and who seeks to unite living and dead, past and present. She, not the characters, sees the timbers of the church "strain[ing] to hold the dead and the living" (133); and she knows that "if all the ghosts flocked thick and rubbed shoulders with Mrs. Flanders, a live English matron growing stout," there would be no incongruity in the scene (133). She is the one who sees that "every face, every shop, bedroom window, public-house and dark square is a picture feverishly turned" (97).10

The characters do of course share intermittently in the narrator's vision, as they do in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. Betty Flanders imagines that the church bell is "Seabrook's voice--the voice of the dead"; and when she
hears it blended with Archer's voice, she feels that life and death are mixed "inextricably, exhilaratingly" (16). But the narrative voice is supreme; confined in the earlier novels to the concerns of the characters, now it seems to wander at will. The narrator suggests that the bells make Jacob think of "old buildings and time," but she adds the parenthetical phrase "it may be" (45). Similarly, she seems to attribute to him the thought that sorrow "is brewed in the earth itself," but again she hedges: "whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob's gloom ... it is impossible to say; for he never spoke a word" (49). All that is certain is that the narrator, hearing the bells, thinks of "old buildings and time" and, seeing the Cornish coast, thinks of sorrow brewing in the earth. Ostensibly her purpose is to convey the unknowability of Jacob, but inevitably these passages center attention on the one mind we are entering. Even Julia Eliot's vision of people passing tragically to destruction begins with the narrator's reflections and for a time keeps us in doubt as to Julia's part in them: "she had the rapt look of one brushing through crowds on a summer's afternoon when the tumult of the present seems...." Only when we reach the words "and there arose in her mind" (168) do we know for certain that we are in Julia's mind—or, more accurately, in both minds.

Woolf did not succeed in pulling together the many strands of Jacob's Room, but this is the first of her novels
to present in its very structure certain ideas she had been
developing all her life—that the real events of life are in
the mind—that one "acts one's drama under the hat" in spite
of the "marryings, bearings, and buryings" (L I 79-80), that
"nothing happens at one time rather than another, and that
"the history books ... make it all much more definite than
it is." And she succeeded in creating the narrative voice
which, however flawed here, reached perfection in Mrs.
Dalloway and To the Lighthouse.

There are many possible interpretations of Woolf's
statement that in Jacob's Room she had begun to "say
something in my own voice" (D II 186), but perhaps the most
important is the most obvious: the narrative voice itself is
the greatest achievement of Jacob's Room. To a large extent
Woolf developed this voice to deal with history. She uses
it too in situations where the imagery alone could make her
point—where she could be paring her fingernails. Consider,
for example, the image of the skull on the beach, which
could be presented without authorial comment. Woolf is
easily skillful enough to make her point through imagery
alone—as she does with the butterflies and ruins, for
example. Instead she stops to describe the future decay of
the skull, and what is particularly odd is that the future
she projects is immediately negated by the action of the
story. The skull is not finally dispersed by a golfball;
Jacob picks it up and takes it home. Small as this incident
is, it suggests that the narrator exists not so much to reveal events as to brood over them. Continually this voice looks beyond the characters or situations as if seeing a larger reality that might or might not be manifested in them. Woolf achieves here, however imperfectly, that curious blend of omniscience and subjectivity which in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* assumes the very authority it denies. She was on the way to arguing in her fiction what she had always believed—that the real truth, about present and past, is the truth of the imagination.
Chapter Notes

1. Vera Brittain is the best representative of this mood that I have found. In 1916, shortly after the death of her fiancé, she wrote "May Morning," which concludes with this stanza:

Often I wonder, as I grieve in vain,
If when the long, long future years creep slow,
And war and tears alike have ceased to reign,
I ever shall recapture, once again,
The mood of that May Morning, long ago.

Seventeen years later, in Testament of Youth, she reprinted the poem and wrote, "The concluding speculation is answered now—not only for me but for all my generation. We never have recaptured that mood; and we never shall" (270).

2. I assume the narrator of the novel is a woman primarily because of two passages at the end of Chapter Five that deal with the difficulty of knowing another person. In the first, Woolf presents the problem in general terms, referring to Jacob indirectly, almost as if he is only an example:

Captain Barfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why.... It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are young, or growing old. (72)

In the second passage, however, Woolf writes specifically about the problem of knowing Jacob at the present moment and considers what appear to be obstacles particular to this case, including the narrator's sex, which is, apparently, opposed to Jacob's:

But though all this may very well be true ... there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself. Moreover, part of this is not Jacob but Richard Bonamy—the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history. Then consider the effect of sex—how between man and woman it hangs wavy, tremulous.... (73)

3. Both reviews, reprinted in Books and Portraits (97-100), are favorable, although Woolf sees more potential than achievement. The first review concludes,
Here we have evidence not of accomplishment, indeed, but of a gift much more valuable than that, the gift of being a poet, we must call it; and we shall look with interest to see what Mr Sassoon does with his gift. (99)

The second concludes,

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; but his contempt for palliative or subterfuge gives us the raw stuff of poetry. (100)

4.

He was prepared to perish upon the battlefield or cut a valiant figure in the military hospital. But what he perceived very clearly and did his utmost not to perceive was this qualifying and discouraging fact, that the war monster was not nearly so disposed to meet him as he was to meet the war, and that its eyes were fixed on something beside and behind him, that it was already stretching out a long and shadowy arm past him toward Teddy—and toward Hugh. (231)

5.

Meanwhile life--actual everyday life with its essential concerns of health and sickness, work and recreation, and its intellectual preoccupations with philosophy, science, music, love, friendship, hatred, passion--ran its regular course, independent and heedless of political alliance or enmity with Napoleon Bonaparte and of all potential reforms. (11490)

6. This passage has an interesting parallel in a diary entry of November 1917, in which Woolf writes of her nephew Julian's remarks on history, "Suddenly to find a child reasoning & inheriting these old puzzles gives one rather a shock. It seems a pity there can't be a new history for each generation..." (DI 70). The idea seems to have preyed somewhat on Woolf's mind for its inclusion at this point in Jacob's Room is not quite accurate; Jacob is a university student, not a child.

7. Oddly enough this contradicts somewhat Forster's earlier reaction to Jacob:

The impossible has occurred. The style closely resembles that of Kew Gardens. The blobs of colour continue to drift past; but in their midst, interrupting their course like a closely sealed jar,
rises the solid figure of a young man. In what sense Jacob is alive— in what sense any of Virginia Woolf's characters live—we have yet to determine. But that he exists, that he stands as a monument is certain... (Abinger 110).

8. Alice van Buren Kelley argues that Jacob is a visionary:

Where Mr. Flanders, by dying physically, becomes merged with everything that surrounds him, Jacob in his more visionary death in life becomes a part of everything he relates to, and so emerges as a force for unity in a disjointed world. (69)

Her view depends on interpreting what I see as mere harbingers of Jacob's death as if they are consonant with his very being, and she attributes to him, erroneously, I think, the vision of the narrator.

9. Wolfe makes similar use of the image of the glass: "Each minute is the fruit of forty thousand years. The minute winning days, like flies, buzz home to death, and every moment is a window on all time" (3). And when he writes of Eugene's birth, he gives a random list of trivial and important events stretching back from the news of the moment to the emergence of our ancestors from "the primeval slime" (29-30). I am not concerned with influence here—if there was any, Woolf influenced Wolfe—only with similar attitudes of mind.

10. Two months after beginning Jacob's Room, Woolf wrote an entry in her diary that reveals how closely the narrative voice resembles her own. It concerns an old beggar woman, that figure which seems to haunt Woolf's fiction: "How many Junes has she sat there, in the heart of London? How she came to be there, what scenes she can go through, I can't imagine. O damn it all, I say, why can't I know that too?" (D II 47).
CHAPTER FOUR

MRS. DALLOWAY: UNWRITING HISTORY

There is the ancient day, spread out before us, hour by hour.
--The Common Reader

In almost every way imaginable, Mrs. Dalloway begins where Jacob's Room leaves off. Like most of her critics, Woolf herself saw in this novel the realization of the technique for which she had been struggling in its predecessor. In the diary entry in which she recorded that "Mrs. Dalloway has branched into a book," she wrote that she wanted this novel "to be more close to the fact than Jacob," but she added, "I think Jacob was a necessary step for me, in working free" (D II 208). A few days later she wrote, "I expect I could have screwed Jacob tighter ... but I had to make my path as I went" (D II 210). Again, as in Jacob's Room, the unknowability of character is a major theme, and again the narrative voice is able to range far beyond the characters' consciousness. But now the narrative is able to satisfy our need for flesh and blood characters while yet conveying their essential mystery. Now, additionally, Woolf allows her characters a substantial share in the debate over life and human nature, a debate she had generally reserved to the narrator in Jacob's Room.

Mrs. Dalloway also begins in the most literal terms
where *Jacob's Room* ends: the First World War is the writing on the wall in both novels, the writing of prophecy in one, of memory that will not relent in the other. Death "looks gigantically down" on the world of the two novel equally. If, as Winifred Holtby suggests, *Jacob's Room* shows "what life looked like" to men like Jacob, if it asks "what was lost" when they died (116), *Mrs. Dalloway* shows what life looked like to the survivors; it asks what remained. In *Jacob's Room* Woolf began to render in fiction what she had come to believe when she read history and biography, as well as much conventional fiction: "the moment of importance came not here but there." It is for this reason that the novel begins on a note of conclusion, ends with a question, and accomplishes the hero's death offstage.

In *Jacob's Room*, however, Woolf was somewhat limited, not only by her inexperience—her need to "make my way as I went"—but also by the confinement of the war itself to the very last pages. There is much foreshadowing, but only the narrator and the reader know the war is impending. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the war reverberates in the characters' minds as well, and the author is free to deal with the effects of a major historical event from the perspective of almost five years. She is finally able to deal extensively with what she once called "our point of view." The vision of *Mrs. Dalloway* is consonant with that of *Jacob's Room*, but it is more comprehensive, and Woolf pushes the experiment further.
Again, as in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf blames male institutions and male attitudes for the war. We are on familiar ground when we find that Septimus "developed manliness" when he went to war and that the war smashed Mr. Brewer's cast of Ceres and "ploughed a hole" in his geraniums (129-30). The goddess Ceres and flowers are of course archetypally feminine images, and the ironic use of the word "plough" to describe destruction recalls the eternal opposition of swords and ploughshares. Within the novel, flowers are particularly associated with Clarissa, who is feminine both in conventional terms and in Woolf's private scheme of male and female principles. The opposition of male and female is sounded repeatedly in *Mrs. Dalloway*--for example, in the passage which treats military action as a part of the natural world, thereby underscoring its monstrous unnaturalness: "June had drawn out every leaf on the trees. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty" (9). Male and female are opposed in the very striking of the hours: Big Ben strikes "with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that" (71) while St. Margaret's comes "shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends" (193). "Some grief for the past holds it [St. Margaret's] back; some concern for the present" (74).
The image of the soldiers looking "as if one will worked legs and arms uniformly" and as if "life with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a still and staring corpse by discipline" (77) recalls the first mention of war in Jacob's Room, the horrifying description of battleships in the North Sea and soldiers in cornfields:

The battleships ray out over the North Sea, keeping their stations accurately apart. At a given signal all the guns are trained on a target which ... flames into splinters.... Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save that through fieldglasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of a broken match-stick. (JR 156)

Again hero-worship plays a direct role in society's penchant for self-destruction. Peter Walsh, who observes the soldiers, is oblivious to their ghastly appearance: he thinks, "It is ... a very fine training" (76), and he looks with sadness and nostalgia at the statue of Gordon, "Gordon whom as a boy he had worshipped" (77). If Jacob's Room shows an apparently safe, sunlit world that was in fact marching blindly toward its own destruction, Mrs. Dalloway shows the tragic postwar world marching equally blindly
toward the same end.

Yet now, terrible as the war was, it appears as only one manifestation of society's assault on the private self. In *Mrs. Dalloway* we see an unholy alliance of political, military, economic, and social power. Pointing to the "subtle paralleling of the dove gray car of Sir William Bardshaw to the royal car," Manly Johnson observes that it is the powers of Whitehall "who provided the shambles of war in which [Septimus's] sanity was damaged, and it is Sir William Bradshaw who completes the job" (60). Against such powers Septimus and Rezia are helpless, terrifyingly isolated and, paradoxically, terrifyingly exposed. "Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you" (148). "People must notice; people must see" (22), thinks Rezia, and "I am alone, I am alone!" (35), but "she could tell no one" (33).

The victims are not, however, confined to war veterans, the lower classes, or the powerless; nor are the oppressors always rich or powerful. Lady Bradshaw is herself a victim of the Goddesses Proportion and Conversion, and the simplicity and brevity of the announcement that "fifteen years ago she had gone under" (152) makes such things seem a matter of course. Peter Walsh flatters himself that he is a rebel, that his independence of spirit has been the cause of his failures, but he threatens Clarissa's privacy in a way that the far more conventional and successful Richard never
has. With his constant judging and criticizing, Peter is not the maverick he imagines himself to be but an exemplar of the society he derides. "But with Peter, Clarissa thinks, "everything had to be shared; everything gone into" (10).

The outcast Miss Kilman is, ironically, both a perpetrator and a victim of society's threats to the self. Clarissa imagines her as "one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life blood" (16-17), a view well supported by her possessive attitude toward Elizabeth in the Army Navy Stores, as well as her persistent proselytizing. Yet the one virtue ascribed to Miss Kilman is her refusal during the war to condemn all Germans, a position she maintained so firmly that she lost her teaching post. And her very appearance may have made her a victim, perhaps cankered her spirit years earlier, for she is ugly in a society that values beauty over intelligence in its women.

The suggestion that the war revealed simply a more blatant use of the power which society always keeps ready to inflict on citizen and enemy alike appears in the odd and apparently irrelevant short passage about the "seedy-looking nondescript man" on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral. He considers going inside to rest,

for within was what balm, how great a welcome, how many tombs with banners waving over them, tokens of victories not over armies, but over, he
thought, that plaguy spirit of truth seeking which
leaves me at present without a situation. (41)

No explanation of the man's experience is given. He may,
like Miss Kilman, have lost his job because of unorthodox
opinions, and he realizes that his own "plaguy spirit of
truth seeking" is no match for the powers of society. Or he
may have been dismissed for dishonesty, which has led him to
reflect on the discrepancy between the standards applied to
the powerful and the powerless. At a higher level, his
dishonesty might have been overlooked or even applauded, for
to the powerful lying is diplomacy; stealing is conquest--
or, even worse, taking up the white man's burden, "walking
penitentially disguised as brotherly love" (151); and
killing is legitimized as war. The lack of detail here and
the apparent randomness of the man's appearance suggest that
his plight, like Lady Bradshaw's, is to be found everywhere.

Woolf herself saw social criticism as a central issue
in Mrs. Dalloway: "I want to criticise the social system, &
to show it at work, at its most intense" (D II 248). But
for many years critics ignored the social criticism in this
novel and in fact in most of Woolf's fiction. Among the
early critics only Winifred Holtby recognized the importance
of political issues in Woolf's work (see below, p.198 and
note 8). As sympathetic a reader as Strachey told Woolf
that there was "a discordancy between the ornament
(extremely beautiful) & what happens (rather ordinary--or
unimportant)" (D III 32). More than fifteen years later, another sympathetic reader, David Daiches, wondered,

Is there not, one asks, a certain over-refinement here, has not reality been whittled down to almost nothing? And why, if the aim is to present a subtle lyrical-cum-philosophical interpretation of experience, is the action set so solidly in upper middle-class urban life? (77)

Indeed until the late 1960's, Woolf criticism reflected the assumption that her world is narrow and effete, that, if her skill is great, her scope is "limited."³

Recent critics have reversed these judgments. Guiguet and Fleishman argue that Woolf's originality in Mrs. Dalloway lies precisely in her successful grafting of social and metaphysical concerns onto the traditional comedy of manners (G 235, F 80).⁴ Fleishman suggests further that the novel may be read as "in part a political novel in the modern mode--updating Trollope's milieu, in effect" (73). Alex Zwerdling has pointed out that there are numerous references to contemporary politics which early readers would have recognized. As the novel was published in 1925, they would have known, for example, that the Conservative Prime Minister Asquith, who was in power in June of 1923, was replaced in just six months by the first Labour Minister, MacDonald. He also notes that the move for Indian independence was beginning at this time and that in
June of 1923, in particular, India figured in the news constantly. The references to India provided by Peter Walsh, Lady Bruton, and Miss Parry would have reminded readers of Mrs. Dalloway that the Empire was "crumbling fast." Zwerdling suggests further that the party, "for all its brilliance, is a kind of wake," with its arriving ladies "wrapped like mummies," and with the appearance of old Miss Parry, who Peter thought was dead (Zwerdling 70-71).

J. Hillis Miller sees the party as "a perpetuation of a moribund society" (119).

But the modern emphasis on the political in Mrs. Dalloway raises as many questions as it answers. First, although one group of critics can hardly be held responsible for the mistakes of another, we might ask why, if the topical references were more obvious to contemporary readers than to us, so many readers missed them. Second, the recent criticism has led to anything but agreement on the interpretation of Clarissa. Zwerdling suggests that the novel "is finally a sympathetic picture of someone who has surrendered to the force of conventional life and permitted her emotions to go underground" (78). Guiguet believes similarly that "Clarissa, by marrying Richard, has condemned herself to a compromise" (235). In Guiguet's scheme, Peter is a more admirable figure than Clarissa: "Peter Walsh, the solitary traveller, half-way between Clarissa's surrender and the intransigence of Septimus, is doomed to social
failure" (235). At the other extreme are the critics who see Clarissa's social qualities as compensation for the world that political forces have created. Suggesting that Peter's intended insult, "the perfect hostess," takes on a meaning he did not intend, Randolph Perrazzini argues that, "in the world of the novel, shattered by the First World War, the perfect hostess, the mediator between people is the closest thing to a holy person that there is" (410). Lee Edwards agrees but takes the argument further, finding politics in Clarissa's non-politics:

Could we create an alternative motion and set of social patterns based neither on systems nor on power but deriving instead more directly from individuals...? Could we see that the perfect hostess has a history and a heritage both honorable and, at least potentially, political? (176)

The source of these opposing alternatives lies, I think, in a bifurcation in the very plan of the novel, rather like the trifurcation in the plan of Jacob's Room. At the same time that Woolf recorded her intention to criticize the social system, she also wrote, "I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity" (D II 248). The two plans are in violent contradiction: when novelists write social criticism, they do not place the normative vision of the work in the mind of a Conservative Member of Parliament's
wife whose arduous day consists of buying flowers, mending a
dress, and giving a party—a party, for which she has so
little to do that she can regret not being asked out to
lunch. By centering the narrative on Clarissa's inner
consciousness, and revealing attitudes and feelings that
make her sympathetic, Woolf softened whatever criticism of
Clarissa herself she originally intended. The early critics
were in one sense on the right track, for they saw the
sympathy in Woolf's portrait of Clarissa; but they
apparently assumed, perhaps unconsciously, that such
sympathy precluded social criticism—even of the world
around Clarissa. Later critics, observing the social
criticism, have tried to reconcile it with the sympathy in
the portrait of Clarissa by presenting her as something of a
Lily Bart, a good character caught up in a system she is too
weak to resist.

The obvious virtue of Perrazzini's and Edwards'
interpretation is that it reconciles the social criticism
and sympathy for Clarissa, without diminishing her, because
it sees her as an instrument of the criticism, not one of
its objects. For Clarissa is not a Lily Bart. In her
dislike of anything—even love—that threatens the private
self, she takes positions in complete accord with the
narrator's discourse on Proportion and Conversion. She is
also the only character who understands Septimus: while Peter
remarks complacently that the ambulance is "one of the
triumphs of civilisation" (229), never suspecting that the man inside is dead and that death, not rescue, is the triumph of Holmes's and Bradshaw's civilization, Clarissa intuits the truth. She not only guesses what Septimus felt; she knows she has guessed it: "Might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?" (281). Peter, whose tendency to criticize intensifies the value of all his praise, unwittingly revises the meaning of "the perfect hostess" himself. Clarissa, he says, "had always that extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own, wherever she happened to be" (114). He imagines her saying, "As we are a doomed race ... let us, at any rate, do our part, mitigate the sufferings of fellow-prisoners ... decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions" (117). Ironically, it is also Peter whose remark "Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to" (231) prepares the reader for Clarissa's clairvoyant understanding of Septimus.

But there is a certain distortion—no matter what conclusions are reached—in the perception of Mrs. Dalloway as essentially a political novel. I wonder, for example, if Fleishman is justified in referring to the "consistently political ambience" of the novel (75). I suggest that just as Clarissa knows the poor on their doorsteps "can't be dealt with ... by Acts of Parliament" because "they love
life" (5), Mrs. Dalloway cannot be dealt with as a political novel because its real subject is "life itself"—something that includes politics but includes much more as well. For if, as Edwards suggests, there are often political implications in Clarissa's non-political stance, many of the references to politics and history in Mrs. Dalloway constitute a denial of the political in life. The novel reveals that "real life" is much larger and more varied than is commonly supposed, and that even such events as the greatest catastrophe in modern history, the First World War, make themselves felt in the human consciousness in unexpected and largely uncharted ways.

Fleishman bases his interpretation of the novel as a political one partly on the contention that it grew out of the short story "The Prime Minister" (73). I believe that it grew as much out of "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," which, according to the diary, predates "The Prime Minister" (D II 205) and which corresponds to the opening scenes of the novel. In any case, the most important point here is that the novel did indeed "grow out of" Woolf's original plan. Beginning as a "sketch,"5 Mrs. Dalloway developed into a culmination of Woolf's work to date, an extraordinary synthesis of her art and thought to its inception in 1922. Although she recorded in her diary in June of 1923 that she had "almost too many ideas" (D II 248), the results justify what she wrote in October of the same year, "I am stuffed
with ideas.... I feel I can use up everything I've ever thought" (D II 272), and in the following February, "I have found my mine this time I think. I may get all my gold out" (D II 292).

It seems fitting that the novel in which Woolf thought she could use up everything she had ever thought should contain characters from all three previous novels--the Dalloways from The Voyage Out, Mrs. Hilbery from Night and Day, and Clara and Mrs. Durrant from Jacob's Room. And although Mrs. Dalloway has the most in common with Jacob's Room, certain themes from the earlier novels that seem to lie dormant in Jacob's Room reappear. In The Voyage Out Rachel escapes sexuality through death, and this escape is foreshadowed in readings from Gibbon and Raleigh which describe cold regions and dense forests that resist conquest. Clarissa has not escaped sexuality, but she "could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet" (46). She knows that she has failed her husband sexually and that now, in preferring often to sleep by herself in the attic, she will find her bed "narrower and narrower" (45-46). Her lack of "something central which permeated" has defeated both would-be conquerors, the undemanding Richard as well as the possessive Peter. As she lies in bed alone, Clarissa reads of Napoleon's retreat from the Russian winter (46).

Again, as in The Voyage Out, Woolf presents a polarity
between competence in the academic study of history and competence in "life itself." Although Doris Kilman is, from the outset, a far less appealing character than St. John Hirst, and, unlike him, she does not improve, she recalls the St. John of the early chapters in her intellectual sophistication and emotional retardation. She pursues history, as he does, not to understand life, but to escape it. Thinking, "I am plain, I am unhappy," she consoles herself with the reflection that "her knowledge of modern history was thorough in the extreme" (190). Woolf also goes to history to undercut this thought, for Clarissa is thinking at the same moment that the expert in modern history looks "like some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare" (190).

Clarissa, whom Miss Kilman instinctively recognizes as her enemy, represents the opposite pole. She "muddled Armenians and Turks ... and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know" (185). At the very point where this is disclosed, we find Clarissa thinking,

All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. (185)

On the same page is the novel's first reference to that
other Woolfian muddler, Mrs. Hilbery. Clarissa's thoughts are interrupted by the return of Elizabeth, whose dark coloring reminds her of Mrs. Hilbery's theory that Mongols wrecked on the Norfolk coast might have intermarried with the Dalloways. Like most of her theories in Night and Day, this is of dubious historical value. It offers instead of historical accuracy Mrs. Hilbery's interest in people and the connections that join them over time. When Mrs. Hilbery actually appears in the novel, she walks into the party saying that Clarissa looks "so like her mother as she first saw her walking in a garden in a grey hat" (267).6

The roots of Mrs. Dalloway go back, however, much further into the past. I suggested in my first chapter that Woolf's description of Elizabeth I going to her coronation anticipates the concluding words of Mrs. Dalloway, "For there she was." As a "fictional biography" (Fleishman 80), Mrs. Dalloway represents in part Woolf's attempt to avoid the oversimplification and the deceptive omniscience of the biographies she disliked. James Hafley calls the narrative method "fallible omniscience" and Woolf's art "a celebration of the unfinished, of contradiction, of the discontinuous, of something always breaking in and nothing ever getting settled" (Freedman 40). Randolph Perrazzini agrees, observing that,

The narrative moves around people and events, molding them through their reflections in a number
of mirrors.... The process of multiple mirroring permits the narrator to present her characters in their simultaneous otherness and union and to present them without trying to explain any of the mystery, the miracle of being a human being. (408)

To return to the conclusion of the novel, there is a deliberate tension in the last two sentences: "It is Clarissa, he thought. For there she was" (emphasis mine). The conclusive "was" expresses only our preception: it cannot efface "is."

Now the advances over the method of Jacob's Room, and particularly the increased role the characters play in the vision of the novel, allow Woolf to argue her concept of human complexity far more persuasively. Clarissa ponders "this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway, not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (14), but she continually resists categories: "she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this I am that" (11). Nor is Clarissa the only character whose thoughts about human nature correspond thus to the narrator's. Although Peter Walsh continually tries to say "this" or "that" of Clarissa, he too finally endorses the narrator's position. He tries to tell himself that he saw "the death of the soul" in her youthful prudishness (88-89), that she has now "grown hard and a trifle sentimental" (73), that he should not have come to the party because "Clarissa was at her
worst--effusive, insincere" (254). But he belies all these pronouncements when he is overcome by the excitement of her presence in the concluding scene. "Mrs. Dalloway" begins the novel, but "It is Clarissa, [f]or there she was" ends it. Ironically, Peter himself unwittingly anticipates this assertion of Clarissa's private and unique self (just as he unwittingly reverses the meaning of "the perfect hostess") when he thinks, "not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was" (115).

Mrs. Dalloway contains also much of the visionary quality that Woolf revealed in her earlier writings on history. For example, in its strange synthesis of visual images and human feelings, the following passage recalls her 1917 essay on Sir Walter Raleigh:

The white busts and the little tables in the background covered with copies of the Tatler and syphons of soda water seemed to approve; seemed to indicate the flowing corn and the manor houses of England; and to return to the frail hum of the motor wheels as the walls of the whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of the whole cathedral.

(26)

Compare this passage from the essay, quoted above (13):
Those vast rivers and fertile valleys, those forests of odorous trees and mines of gold and ruby, fill up the background of [Shakespeare's] plays as, in our fancy, the blue of the distant plains of America seems to lie behind the golden cross of St. Paul's and the bristling chimneys of Elizabethan England. (G&R 162)

The roots of Mrs. Dalloway may go back much further, however, possibly as far as 1903. It was at this time, Quentin Bell believes, that Woolf made plans for a play about a man and woman who never meet (131). The description of the projected play indicates it would have been very different from Mrs. Dalloway: the failure to meet was apparently to be the major point of the play, rather than the condition which allows the characters to be shadow characters of each other. Yet the idea of a pattern created out of two patterns that fail to intersect, except in the mind, was obviously a significant step toward Mrs. Dalloway.

Two years after Woolf made plans for the play she never, as far as we know, even began, she wrote to Violet Dickinson of her ambition to "produce a real historical work this summer," and she added, "for which I have solidly read and annotated 4 volumes of medieval English" (L I 202). A month later she wrote that she was working on "two large works," one of which dealt with the letters of the Paston family (L I 206). She did not write that real historical
work that summer; she turned guiltily to fiction writing instead. Her work on the Pastons did not go to waste, however; almost twenty years later she wrote "The Pastons and Chaucer." It was at this time that she discovered that she could work on fiction and criticism simultaneously, using each as a break from the other. The work of fiction she was composing when she wrote "The Pastons and Chaucer" was "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" (D II 205-06).

Jean Guiguet, commenting on Woolf's plan to make The Years an "essay-novel," has remarked that "we may surely interpret this formula as the long deferred synthesis to which, at the time of Mrs. Dalloway, she was not ready to adhere" (130). But if the fiction and criticism are not formally combined at the time of Mrs. Dalloway, there are strong connections between them. In "The Pastons and Chaucer," which, as the first essay in The Common Reader, sets the tone for the whole volume, Woolf seems to dream over the past, building it in her imagination, just as John Paston dreams over the same time, his present, and sees in the poetry of Chaucer his own world but "rounded and complete" (11). Chaucer writes, according to Woolf, "as if poetry could handle the common facts of Tuesday, the sixteenth day of April 1387, without dirtying her hands" (CR 16). Of the Paston letters she writes, "And then suddenly they blaze up; the day shines out, complete, alive, before our eyes.... There is the ancient day spread before us hour
by hour" (CR 22). Is it coincidence that Woolf's working
titles for *Mrs. Dalloway* were, briefly, "The Tenth of June"
and then, for several months, "The Hours"? I suggest that
*Mrs. Dalloway* is that "real historical work" Woolf did not
write in 1905, and that a central purpose of the novel is to
spread the ancient day before us hour by hour.

But, it will be objected, *Mrs. Dalloway* is about the
present, not the past. It is not even set, as *Jacob's Room*
is, in that recent past, the pre-war world, Mann's "long ago ...
the old days, the days of the world before the Great
War." The date of the novel, June of 1923, is ten months
after Woolf began work on it and just sixteen months before
she finished it. Yet, if *Jacob's Room* shows the
"presentness" of the past, *Mrs. Dalloway* shows the
"pastness" of the present. It is not simply that Woolf
knows her novel set in contemporary London will be in a
sense historical to future readers: again and again in *Mrs.
Dalloway* she looks at the present from the vantage point of
the future. Continually in the course of the day, the
characters' memories of their past are balanced by an
awareness, sometimes theirs, sometimes the narrator's, that
they are going toward a time when this will be the past.

Maria DiBattista has suggested that,

The novel's specific purpose is to unite in one
body the memories of the past, symbolized by
Bourton, the scene of Clarissa's youth and the
legacy of a familial heritage, with the present
and near, symbolized by the city of London, which
incarnates "this moment in June." (25)
This is true, but it does not go far enough, for the novel
unites all these layers of present and past with the future.
Just a few pages into the novel Clarissa's remembering
Bourton is balanced by her looking forward to her own death:
"Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking toward Bond
Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease
completely ...?" (12). She goes on to imagine herself
surviving in others, "being laid out like a mist between the
people she knew best" (12). Later, thinking of the present
moment and reviewing the day, Clarissa again considers her
death: "After that, how unbelievable death was!--that it
must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she
had loved it all" (185).

Similarly, Peter thinks of Clarissa at times as if she
were already dead: "It was her heart, he remembered; and the
sudden loudness of the final stroke that tolled for death
that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where
she stood, in her drawing room" (75). He too thinks of his
own approaching death: "No! No! he cried. She is not dead!
I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall, as if
there rolled down to him vigorous, unending, his future"
(75). The present and future are linked again in Peter's
feeling that he is haunting the square when he senses "the
strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar" (78). The present as memory occurs again for Peter, when he thinks over his landlady's advice that he should not marry Daisy:

in short it might be happier, as Mrs. Burgess said, that she should forget him, or merely remember him as he was in August 1922, like a figure standing at the crossroads at dusk, which grows more and more remote as the dog-cart spins away...." (240)

At several points minor characters share in Clarissa's and Peter's perception of the present as past. Maisie Johnson, in London for the first time, thinks, and now walking through Regent's Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer; so that should she be very old she would still remember and make it jangle among her memories how she had walked through Regent's Park on a fine summer's morning fifty years ago. (38)

The lyrical quality of the passage and its repetitions, in particular, give the effect not only of something to be remembered but of memory itself. The progressive present at the beginning of the passage becomes past perfect at the end, and the repetition with variation suggests both the completed action of the event and the repeating action of
memory: "now walking through Regent's Park" becomes "how she had walked through Regent's Park" (emphasis mine). Moreover, "the morning" is by the end couched in the conclusive terms "on a fine summer's morning" and placed precisely where it will appear in the old woman's memory--"fifty years ago."

Like Clarissa at several points in the novel, Maisie momentarily experiences her life and simultaneously looks back on it: like Clarissa, she is "young[,] at the same time unspeakably aged. She slice[s] like a knife through everything; at the same time [is] outside, looking on" (11). This imaginative vision of the old woman looking back on her youth is suddenly reified in the appearance of old Mrs. Dempster, who sees her former self in Maisie (39-40).

Elizabeth Dalloway appears to have the most striking vision of time going forward, although we cannot be absolutely certain that it is her vision and not the narrator's, for there is no reassuring "she thought" or "it seemed to her" in the passage. It is significant, however, that the passage arises out of her ride up the Strand after she escapes from Doris Kilman. As Howard Harper suggests, her journey "re-enacts Clarissa's journey on the omnibus years before (when she had revealed her theory of immortality to Peter) and is a similar commitment to the 'divine vitality' of life" (231). While she is standing on the Strand looking for a clock, she hears music and imagines an old woman dying high above the street, watched
over by someone to whom the music would be "consolatory, indifferent" (209). The pronouns suggest, although they do not prove, that the watcher is a man, and that we are witnessing a reversal of the actual outcome of the novel. Here, at least in someone's imagination, a man watches over the death of an old woman, as later the old woman, Clarissa, will in spirit watch over the death of a man, Septimus. The music becomes an image of time itself carrying all life before it:

Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on. (210)

The distance Elizabeth's (or the narrator's) mind has traveled is ironically underscored when Elizabeth suddenly sees the clock and realizes "it was later than she thought" (210).

Whether we have been witnessing the workings of Elizabeth's mind or not, the omission of the qualifying "she thought" makes it clear that the narrator at the very least shares Elizabeth's vision and is not merely reporting. And, as in Jacob's Room, the narrator continually ranges beyond
the characters' perceptions into the far future and the far past. No character participates, for example, in the passage where the narrator suddenly projects the scene forward to the time "when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth" (23). Again we are asked not merely to look into the future but to look from that future back on this present, for the narrative continues, "the face in the motor car will then be known" (23).

The image of London as a grass-grown path (and as grass-grown without the path, as it was in ancient time) recurs later in the novel in the song of the battered woman. At first the song seems to refer only to the past, and it unites the woman's individual past with the entire human and even the prehuman past: she sighs of walking with her lover "once in some primeval May" (124). But the narrator states that she "would still be there in ten millions years, remembering how once she had walked in May, where the sea flows now" (124). As she sings, the generations are "passing"—that is, literally walking by her, but also, like Yeats's "dying generations," living and dying while she sings on.

J. Hillis Miller has observed that the section on the singing woman seems to take up an inordinate amount of space.
in the novel until we identify her song, Richard Strauss's "Aller Seule." He suggests that the lines which are omitted from the narrator's description of the song offer a key to the novel, for the song concerns an "All Souls' Day," one day of the year when people from one's past—literally the dead—are allowed to return:

As in the song the lady's memory of her dead lover may on one day of the year become a direct confrontation of his risen spirit, so in Mrs. Dalloway the characters are obsessed all day by memories of the time when Clarissa refused Peter and chose to marry Richard Dalloway, and then the figures in these memories actually come back in a general congregation of figures from Clarissa's past. (115)

But the song has another significance as well. Occurring just before noon (the bells have struck 11:30), the song occupies a moment in the day analogous to the day's place in the year some weeks before the middle. Like the novel, the song begins by looking back to the past but asks us ultimately to look forward into the future when this present will be past. The song, like the novel, represents what Eliot would later term the "intersection of now and forever."

It is not only what the characters and the narrator say, however, that makes us see the present as past in Mrs.
Dalloway. The very structure of the novel places the reader in the future looking back. To demonstrate by contrast, many readers have seen a cinematic quality in Jacob's Room, for, as Miller has suggested, it is difficult to give a sense of past in film and of present in fiction (112). Holtby, one of the critics who call Jacob's Room cinematic, suggests that the method of that novel depends on its chronological order: "Picture can follow picture when the chronology is comparatively straightforward" (140). But if the method requires chronology, the effect of this method is to downplay the passage of time. The presentation of brightly colored scenes passing in sequence, and frequently conveyed in the present or present progressive tense, gives Jacob's Room an atmosphere very much like that of a film, an atmosphere we might term "progressive present."

Mrs. Dalloway, which both Holtby and Naremore compare to music (H 140, N 82), has almost the opposite effect. Everything is subordinated to narrative and to a prevailing preoccupation with time, however vague the divisions of time may be. Although, as several critics have observed, the narrator's relationship to the material is continually shifting in Mrs. Dalloway (See especially Naremore 97 and Perrazzini 408), the tone of the narrative is consistent and melodic. The novel moves away from direct dialogue, which, if it is realistic, necessarily involves abrupt changes in
tone. Thus, the scene of Clarissa talking with Hugh Whitbread, which is rendered as dialogue in the story "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" (MDP 20), is summarized in the novel. We can see the outlines of the conversation, but they blend with the lyrical flow of narrative:

his wife had some internal ailment, nothing serious, which as an old friend, Clarissa would quite understand without requiring him to specify. Ah yes, she did of course; what a nuisance; and felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat. Not the right hat for the early morning, was that it? For Hugh always made her feel.... (8)

Even in the conversations where there is direct dialogue, as in the scene where Richard returns home with flowers for Clarissa, only a fraction of the dialogue is rendered formally in quotation marks. The rest is filtered, along with the characters' thoughts, through the narrative:

"Hugh was at lunch," said Richard. She had met him too! Well, he was getting absolutely intolerable. Buying Evelyn necklaces; fatter than ever; an intolerable ass.

"And it came over me 'I might have married you,,'" she said, thinking of Peter sitting there in his little bow-tie; with that knife, opening it, shutting it. "Just as he always was, you
know." They were talking of him at lunch, said Richard. (But he could not tell her he loved her. He held her hand. Happiness is this, he thought.)

(180)

The effect is very much like the image of time as music or as a glacier carrying bits of bone, flowers, and trees. If Jacob's Room has the brightly colored quality of the present moment, Mrs. Dalloway has the monochromatic quality of memory. There are sudden shifts and contrasts—things that startle, like the backfiring of the car, but all is subordinated to the sense of memory playing over time. R. L. Chambers suggests that we see the novel as if through water:

For looked at through the windows of the mind, the world is a landscape seen through water; the hard lines of hedge and skyline, roof-top, pavement and wall, are smudged, soften, dissolve; time itself, which in fact measures and so divides, becomes fluid by the catalysis of memory and thought, and suffers itself a kind of sea change; Big Ben strikes, and "the leaden circles dissolve in the air." (6)

Miller suggests that the very tenses of Mrs. Dalloway tend to place the reader in the future. He points out that the present moment in the novel is rendered, conventionally,
in the imperfect and the perfect, but that when the narrative reaches back into Clarissa's past, although it begins with the past perfect, it slides again into the imperfect and the perfect. Thus, there is a fluid relationship between the past and the present. Most important, the tense used most consistently for the present moment, the perfect, places that present moment in the past (112, 125).

Of course, most novels present their characters' present moments in the past tenses: the consistent use of the present tense in fiction is extremely rare. The difference in Mrs. Dalloway lies in its continually drawing our attention to the pastness of Clarissa's present, most importantly in the conclusion. At this point, as Miller observes,

the circle of narration is complete--past joining present--the apparently living characters reveal themselves to be already dwellers among the dead.... With [the last sentence] "is" becomes 'was,' and Clarissa along with all the other characters recedes into the indefinitely distant past. (125)

Compare for example, Ulysses, which closes with Molly's memory of a past moment yet carries more sense of the present, in spite of its repeated "said": "Yes I said yes I will Yes." Mrs. Dalloway would have precisely the same
effect as this if it had ended with "It is Clarissa, he thought," again despite the use of the past tense in "thought." But it ends instead with the one sentence paragraph "For there she was," which seems to hold the moment out to us—"shining, complete, alive," but, above all, complete: we see it as past. Like Mrs. Ramsay looking over her shoulder at the empty dining room, the narrator seems to record the present moment knowing it has "become already the past" (TL 168).

If Woolf seems to emulate Chaucer and the Paston Letters by spreading the ancient day before us, she does not seem to do something else she admires in Chaucer: he writes "as if poetry could handle the common facts of Tuesday, the sixteenth day of April, without dirtying her hands" (CR 16). Although recent critics have exonerated Woolf from the charge of effetism, she can hardly be said to "dirty her hands" with the common facts of Wednesday, the tenth (or thirteenth) day of June, 1923.7 I would suggest, however, that there is something akin to the dirtying of hands in the unashamed presentation of "our point of view" in Mrs. Dalloway.

Chaucer wrote of "real life" in his poetry for an audience that expected romance. As Woolf saw it, he wanted to show that world, not an idealized one, "rounded and complete." While she was at work on Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf wrote of her struggle to "make people talk about everything
in the whole of life, so that one's hair stands on end, in a drawing room" (L III 36). We might ask why she attempted it at all, particularly when we consider that just two years after publishing Mrs. Dalloway she wrote that, "If the English critic were less domestic, less assiduous to protect the rights of what it pleases him to call life, the novelist might be bolder too. He might cut adrift from the eternal tea-table" (M&OE 112). As Holtby suggests, the war itself seemed to make the protected world of the comedy of manners obsolete, so that even when, in Might and Day, Woolf adopted the device of setting in the pre-war world a novel written in the postwar era, it seemed dated (82, 83, 90).

What Woolf achieves in Mrs. Dalloway is a breaking away from the metaphorical tea-table—the materialism and superficiality of the Edwardians—which does not abandon the real tea-table where we sit. As in Orlando, where the skeleton hand is unidentifiable as to its owner's sex, she asserts the equality of the hand that "plies the needle" with the hand that "urges the war horse" (O 71). But more than this, she insists that for everyone, the things that we call trivial make up real life. It is in this that she follows Chaucer's example, as she saw it, in giving us a pleasure "different from the pleasure that other [poets] give us, because it is more closely connected with what we have ourselves have felt or observed" (CR 19).

Early in Mrs. Dalloway occurs a strange, apparently
In a public house in a back street a Colonial insulted the House of Windsor which led to words, broken beer glasses, and a general shindy, which echoed strangely across the way in the ears of girls buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings. (26)

It may be coincidence only that Septimus, trying to deny the importance of the war in his sufferings, refers to it as "that little shindy" (145)—he is of course affecting the kind of bravado Sassoon satirizes, for example, in "Base Details": "'Poor young chap, '/ I'd say—'I used to know his father well/ Yes, we've lost heavily in this last scrap.'" (75). But in any case the war does indeed echo strangely throughout Mrs. Dalloway. Repeatedly, in this novel, Woolf's critical theory that in real life "the moment of importance came not here but there" coalesces with her criticism of the history books that ignore "our point of view."

"The history books will make it all much more definite than it is," Woolf wrote of the war. Mrs. Dalloway is one book that does not. Critics have made much of the fact that we know, usually within a half hour, what time it is all through Mrs. Dalloway: we know the day of the week, the month, and the year; originally, we were to know the exact date. If we consider that the method is close to
stream-of-consciousness, we are surprisingly well-oriented throughout the novel, for Woolf supplies the information that explains the characters' thoughts, usually exactly when we need it. Yet we are kept entirely ignorant of the actual year of "this moment in June" for a full third of the novel. We are in fact encouraged to assume that the time is June of 1919, an impression which Daiches, for example, never revises (63, 77).

Mindful of this five year gap, we might be critical of Alex Zwerdling's suggestion that Clarissa and all her class make the "easy assumption" that the war is over (71). Perhaps Zwerdling is encouraged in this view by the juxtaposition in the short story of war deaths and gloves in Clarissa's mind: "Thousands of young men had died that things might go on. At last! Half an inch above the elbow; pearl buttons; five and quarter" (MDP 28). It may be that Woolf's motive in omitting this passage from the novel was to stave off such criticism. If, however, she had kept the passage in the novel, it would still be wrong to see Clarissa making easy assumptions about the war. The gap of five years suggests that her thoughts are anything but callous. It reveals instead a grief so deep that it threatens to break the surface of the mind at any time. At the outset she thinks, "The war was over except..."; the words could be the motto of the novel.

Woolf does in fact include the passage from the story,
slightly revised, but she attributes the thought to Richard, well into the novel when sympathy for him, as well as for Clarissa, has been established. As he crosses the park, carrying flowers for Clarissa, he thinks, "Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle" (174). Thus, once in Richard's mind and repeatedly in Clarissa's, we see the operation of psychological time, with all its blending, blurring, stretching, and contracting--counterpointed with the precision of the clock. When we read Mrs. Dalloway, it seems strangely ironic that the First World War should, of all wars, be famous for ending precisely at eleven o'clock on the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

It is not only in the vagueness of the war's conclusion that Mrs. Dalloway shows the accent falling in unexpected ways. We discover, for example, that one change Clarissa has seen is in the quality of gloves: "before the war you could buy almost perfect gloves. And her Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves" (15). The thought of Uncle William also brings to Clarissa's mind the fact that some final straw broke the back of his patience during the war, but we do not find out (perhaps Clarissa does not know) what that straw was: "He had turned in his bed one morning in the middle of the war. He had said 'I have had enough'" (15). When the date of the
novel's setting is revealed, the information appears in the most mundane detail. Peter is thinking that people look different and that newspapers are different. He bases these thoughts on the observation that "even the most respectable" women are wearing rouge and powder" and that he has seen an article discussing water-closets in "one of the respectable weeklies" (107-08). Similarly, Septimus's motive for enlisting in the army turns out not to have been to fight the war to end all wars but "to save an England that consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (130). Even the highly symbolic passage describing the smashing of Mr. Brewer's cast of Ceres conveys a sense of the random and trivial ways great events echo in human lives:

Mr. Brewer ... advised football, invited
[Septimus] to supper and was seeing his way to consider recommending a rise of salary, when something happened which threw out many of Mr. Brewer's calculations, took away his ablest young fellows, and eventually, so prying and insidious were the fingers of the European War, smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's nerves at Mr. Brewer's establishment at Muswell Hill. (130)

Toward the end of the novel even the very
unconventional role Woolf has granted to the war is given an odd twist. Old Miss Parry, who seems so out of date that Peter has fantasized a transformation into glass, beginning with her glass eye (246), suddenly reveals her view of reality. The mention of India brings the 1860's to her mind, and we discover first that she sees not "Viceroy, Generals, Mutinies" but "orchids ... and mountain passes and herself carried on the backs of coolies" (271) and second that the First World War was remarkable to her chiefly for its annoying tendency to obstruct her memories of what seems to her the really important history, the events of her youth. She is "an indomitable Englishwoman, fretful if disturbed by the War, say, which dropped a bomb at her very door, from her deep meditation over orchids and her own figure journeying in the 'sixties in India..." (271).

Even when we turn to Clarissa, whose life seems profoundly affected by the war, there is some ambiguity. Clarissa says that the war "had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (13). Yet Peter traces the permanent change in Clarissa's outlook on life to the death of her sister many years before the war (117-18). Clarissa's own thought that "it was very, very dangerous to live even a single day" (11) supports Peter's belief, for nothing could express more intensely the persistent threat of death than the sight of someone killed
by a falling tree. The name of the victim, Sylvia, symbolically suggests that she carries her death within her, that all life is "consumed by that which it was nourished by."

The death of Sylvia may in fact be one of the overlooked parallels between Clarissa and Woolf. Perhaps Clarissa too saw the end of her safe, pre-war world many years before the war broke out; perhaps she too found that the war confirmed rather than reshaped her outlook. In any case, the death of Sylvia is just one of many elements in *Mrs. Dalloway* that serve to generalize experience. In this novel Woolf seems to rewrite history from "our point of view," but ultimately she shows that this rewriting involves a kind of unwriting. At first glance, the very primacy of the First World War in her fiction might seem to belie her contention that history consists of things other than wars and politics; but she shows, first, that these events affect people in odd ways—echo strangely in their lives—and, second, that real life is ultimately much the same from one time to another. The great public events are not really the crucial points in our lives any more than, as she said in 1903, "our births, bearings, and buryings" are.

The commonality of experience appears most strikingly in the parallels between Clarissa and Septimus. No other characters are as preoccupied with the war as these two, yet their spiritual bond, which is underscored by their physical
similarities—Clarissa having "a touch of the bird about her" (4), Septimus looking "beak-nosed" (20), hawklike (222)—goes beyond any bond the war could create between them. He was a participant who lost first his best friend and then his sanity; she was an onlooker who, however sympathetic to the losses of others, apparently lost no one. Septimus is generally viewed as a symbolic figure, although his illness is seen to be realistically drawn from Woolf's own experience; but few critics have noted the symbolic qualities of Clarissa. This is in fact one of the important meeting points of the two characters, for Clarissa is more symbolic, and Septimus more realistic, than has generally been assumed.

As in Jacob's Room, Woolf transfers private sorrows to public events in Mrs. Dalloway. Both Clarissa's health and Septimus's madness derive from her own experience. J. K. Johnstone has suggested that Clarissa's happiness on the morning of her party "is ultimately derived from the relief, transformed by art, that Virginia Woolf herself felt that she had survived [the war] sane, and with increased powers as a writer" (538). I am not convinced that the war itself occupied this place in Woolf's extremes of joy and sorrow or in her feelings about her writing. She had had her first breakdown in 1895, and her second before the war broke out—in fact she was recuperating by August of 1914 (L II 36). As for "increased powers," most readers have preferred
her pre-war novel, *The Voyage Out*, to her first post-war novel, *Night and Day*. Michael Rosenthal is, I think, closer to the truth in calling *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf's "most personal" though not her most autobiographical novel: "No novel of Woolf's is as saturated with the pain and exultation of living, the obsession with death, the terror of loneliness as is *Mrs. Dalloway*" (87). But whatever are the origins of Clarissa's sensibility, Woolf does attribute Clarissa's happiness to a joy in the moment which is constantly qualified by grief for the men lost in the war.

Lewis Mumford, commenting on the post-Civil War era in America, has offered an interesting comparison to the twenties in Europe:

> There was, to begin with, the sudden absence of youth that one felt so keenly in Europe after the last war; the loss of youthfulness was a necessary consequence of this fact. Even those who were left after the conflict ... had a doubled sense of responsibility: one sees their grave anguished faces, their bleak troubled eyes, in the portraits of the time, and one reads with astonishment the subject's age: it is not fifty but thirty. (10)

Although Mumford is no longer discussing Europe after the first half sentence, the whole passage might be applied to *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa is in her fifties, but she looks older, having "grown very white since her illness" (4).
Fleishman, one of the few critics to see symbolic qualities in Clarissa as well as in Septimus, suggests that her heart trouble is symptomatic of a "society sick at heart," and he finds that the image of heart trouble "takes on the symbolic proportions it had acquired in Ford's *The Good Soldier*" (75). The symbolic meaning of Clarissa's illness is enhanced by its origin in a public event, in that major civilian catastrophe that broke out, ironically, with the peace, the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. The central character of this novel about "this late age of the world's experience" is, thus, aging, suffering from an afflicted heart, grieving vicariously for lost sons, and bearing a strange resemblance to that most unyouthful young man, Septimus Smith. Throughout the novel, Clarissa moves between those real mothers who mourn for lost sons--Lady Bexborough and Mrs. Foxcroft--and those purely symbolic figures, the maternal watchers--the grey nurse, the champion of the rights of sleepers" (85), and the elderly woman seeking "over a desert, a lost son" (87).

The symbolic qualities of Septimus are admittedly even greater. He is a Hamlet unwilling and unable to cast his nighted color off, bearing witness to the dead while the living, such as Lady Bruton, talk about "what we owe the dead" as they make plans for disposing of "superfluous youth" (166). The parallels to Hamlet are intensified by extension through Rezia, whose pathetic bewilderment and

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terror recall Ophelia, though at one point the parallel appears in an echo of Gertrude. Rezia says, "Everyone has friends who were killed in the war" (99); in other words, "Why seems it so particular with thee?" Septimus is, moreover, a Christ-figure--"the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer" (37), the "colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone ... the giant mourner" (106). As Fleishman observes, he is also Eliot's Lazarus and drowned Phoenician sailor (77). Northrop Frye terms Septimus a pharmakos, one who is "neither innocent nor guilty ... innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes ... guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society" (41).

Olga Vickery, seeing in the world of modern literature the landscape of Dante's Inferno--a secular, humanly created hell--observes that there are Christs, but never a Christ the redeemer: there is only "Christ the scapegoat, a scapegoat barely witnessed and officially ignored" (162).

Yet for all his symbolic power, Septimus is very much rooted in the actual situation of the shell-shocked veteran. The verisimilitude of Septimus's illness has always been recognized, and Woolf herself tells us that it is closely based on her own experience. In May of 1925, she wrote to a friend who had read an advance copy of the novel, "It was a subject I have kept cooling in my mind until I felt I could touch it without bursting into flame all over. You can't
think what a raging furnace it still is to me--madness and
doctors and being forced" (L III 180). But it is not
simply clinical accuracy that Woolf achieves in Septimus:
she renders in fiction a surprisingly accurate portrayal of
the plight of thousands of veterans; and the transfer of
private experience to public events that we saw in Jacob's
Room becomes in Mrs. Dalloway something closer to social
history.

Septimus is usually assumed to be suffering from shell­
shock, but at least one critic, Mitchell Leaska, has
disputed this assumption. Shell-shock, he points out, is
Bradshaw's diagnosis; Leaska suggests rather that Septimus
is suffering, as Woolf did at the time of her mother's
death, from a grief so profound that the mind refuses to
accept it, because he was homosexually attracted to Evans
(108). Nancy Topping Bazin, who also finds evidence of
homosexuality, suggests that Septimus may have felt relief
when the death of Evans seemed to release him from a
guilt-laden relationship. Bazin argues further that guilt
may have caused Septimus to desire Evans's death and then to
react to the death, as children react to the death of a
parent, by feeling responsible for it (109-10).

Leaska's and Bazin's interpretations have much to
recommend them. They explain in realistic terms Septimus's
perception of himself as scapegoat and eternal mourner. If
he felt guilt at his apparent escape from guilt through the
death of Evans, nothing could be more natural than his trying to atone by actively seeking martyrdom and by mourning obsessively. Moreover, the possibility of homosexuality accords well with a central theme of the novel—the cruel and paradoxical ways in which society enforces conformity. Ironically, Septimus is guilty of love, whereas Bradshaw, who is "without sex or lust" is guilty of nothing (281). Bradshaw is innocent of love, guilty only of cruelty and power-seeking, which society condones.12

There is in fact every reason to accept Leaska's and Bazin's interpretation of Septimus's disorder, but their arguments do not, as Leaska claims, preclude shell-shock. Guilt for surviving a comrade, regardless of the nature of the relationship, is one of the most common emotional problems of war. Shell-shock was initially a very broad term, applied to virtually any breakdown attributable to battle. Sassoon, for example, was sent to what was specifically termed a shell-shock hospital, where he saw men in a wide variety of conditions. (His own condition appears to have been abnormal sanity.) Yet to the extent that certain behaviors were seen to be typical of men suffering from shell-shock, the condition bears an odd resemblance to Woolf's own illness. In their social history of the period between the wars, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge describe shell-shock as,
a condition of alternate moods of apathy and high excitement, with very quick reaction to sudden emergencies but no capacity for concentrated thinking.... Shell-shock, which brought distressing night-mares with it, often affected its victims with day-visions and warped their critical sense. (27)

This, of course, seems a very mild description of Septimus's mental state, but Graves and Hodge also observe that shell-shock was a condition "from which all suffered to a greater or lesser degree," and that many men who did not break down during the war did in 1921 or 1922 (27). Vera Brittain, who suffered almost unbelievable personal losses--her brother, her fiancé, and almost all the male friends the three had in common--and who saw the war at first hand as a nurse, survived remarkably sane. Nevertheless, she wrote that on her return to Oxford she answered the question "How are you?" with the conventional "Quite well, thank you," being "as yet unaware that the War's repressions were already preparing their strange neurotic revenge" (Testament 475).

The death of Septimus unites the realistic--he jumps in a panic to escape from Holmes and Bradshaw--and the symbolic--his martyrdom. But again the realism of the presentation goes beyond the believable need to escape unsympathetic doctors. Septimus's treatment at the hands of
Bradshaw is based, of course, on Woolf's own experience, but it accords fully with the situation of the demobilized soldiers. In a chapter entitled "Survivors Not Wanted," Brittain describes the appalling indifference, even cruelty, of the civilians toward the veteran soldiers and nurses. After recounting her own chilly reception at Oxford, "which had become, for me, the last refuge of hope and sanity" (Testament 475), she tells of a man who also returned, after three years at the front, only to be told by his college president, "Let me see, Mr. X., you've been away a long time, I think; a very long time? It's a pity--a great pity; you'll have to work very hard to catch up with the others" (477). As Richard Aldington wrote in Death of a Hero,

The casualty lists went on appearing for a long time after the Armistice--last spasms of Europe's severed arteries. Of course, nobody bothered much to read the lists. Why should they? The living must protect themselves from the dead, especially the intrusive dead. But the twentieth century had lost its Spring with a vengeance. So a good deal of forgetting had to be done. (3)

Graves and Hodge explain that the soldiers had been led to believe that the fact of having served honourably at the Front would be a safe coupon for employment; whereas, on the contrary, the more exhausting their service had been,
the smaller was the peace-time demand for them.

(27)

Significantly, Septimus was "one of the first to volunteer" (130). "A shambling broken figure, who signals institutional guilt whenever he appears" (Johnson 61), Septimus is indeed an unknown warrior, alternately ignored and hounded while people put wreaths on the Cenotaph and "shuffle by the tomb of the Unknown Warrior" (202). He re-enacts the war deaths just as the Londoners re-enact the betrayal that caused those deaths in the first place. Like Jacob's Room, Mrs. Dalloway is a "civilian war book," and Septimus suffers a delayed or civilian war death, throwing himself down of those civilian bayonets, the spikes of the area railings—a fact that Rezia vaguely realizes when she sees aprons flying like flags and thinks, "Men in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War" (228).

Septimus's insane pronouncements—"No one kills from hatred" and "there is no death" (35-36)—are also directly traceable to the factual world. If Septimus had his own eccentric vision of the cause for which he fought, an England consisting of Shakespeare and Miss Isabel Pole in her green dress, this vision accords perfectly, nevertheless, with the war propaganda, which proclaimed that the Germans were monsters to be hated and that killing in war was an act of love and devotion. As Fussell puts it,
"Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant." If people could have known that Hemingway would call such terms "obscene," he continues, "[i]n the summer of 1914, no one would have understood what on earth he was talking about" (21).

Frequently those who, like Hemingway, retained their sanity, like him, attacked the propaganda, "the old lie," as Wilfred Owen called it. Septimus responds instead by trying to reconcile the cruelty of killing with the belief in killing for love. Suffering a kind of moral vertigo, he can only say up is down and down is up—or there is no up or down. Alternately, the world is all good: "No one kills from hatred," "there is no death" (35-36), and "We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create" (104); or it is all evil: "The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair" (134).

The neglect of the meeting of the realistic and the symbolic in Mrs. Dalloway is odd, particularly in light of all Woolf had to say on this subject. She admired, for example, Emily Brontë and Melville, for creating characters with "a meaning that they stand for without ceasing to be themselves" (G&R 138). She admired Ibsen, similarly, because "a room to him is a room," but he has the power to make "the paraphernalia of reality ... the veil through which we see infinity" (DoM 168). This leap from the real
to the symbolic is what she suggests Forster is unable to do: the bookcase that falls on Leonard Bast should, she says, represent "the dead weight of a smoke dried culture"; the Marabar Caves should be the soul of India; and Mrs. Moore should be "the nice old lady" and "the sibyl." But, she says, we are not sure about this, "and the hesitation is fatal" (169). Of her own work on Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf wrote in June of 1923:

Of course the mad part tries me so much.... It's a question though of these characters. People like Arnold Bennett say I can't create, or didn't in J's R, characters that survive. My answer is—but I leave that to the Nation: it's only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now: the old post-Dostoevsky argument. I insubstantiate, willfully to some extent, distrusting reality—its cheapness. But to get further. Have I the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself? (D II 248)

Perhaps it is because Septimus makes the leap to the symbolic so successfully that critics have understated the topicality of his situation. But because he is both real and symbolic, existing so firmly in 1923 and in the eternal, his character is one of the means by which Mrs. Dalloway "unwrites" history. He sees himself as "some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the
desert alone ... the giant mourner" (106); thus he, like Clarissa, joins with the elderly women who lament sons lost, not in the Great War, but in "the battles of the world" (87). His fate, by bringing death to Clarissa's party, recalls the way the war itself brought death to the party of the pre-war world, but it also suggests life itself, where a tree falling is as fatal as a bullet.

The literary allusions that punctuate the novel, such as "If it were now to die" and "Fear no more the heat of the sun," also express "life itself," the commonality of experience. The way in which "Fear no more," in particular, keeps changing its significance--its seemingly endless applicability--suggests that human lives are only variations on a theme. Fleishman suggests that readers miss the point when they see in the use of this line Clarissa's "self-encouragement to face life and the demands of the social world" because in its source, Cymbeline, the line is part of a dirge "congratulating the (supposed) departed for escaping the rigors of nature, history, age, of life itself." He suggests that "Clarissa's affinity for the refrain may be taken as a mark of her strong propensity for death" (86). But surely the point is that Clarissa uses the line both ways--as an encouragement to face life and as an encouragement to face death, both of which are aspects of "life itself." For the meaning of the lines keeps changing throughout the novel. In the passage where Clarissa thinks,
"Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea" (59), she seems to rest from life but to enjoy it, experiencing Wordsworth's "blessed mood, in which the burden of the mystery ... is lightened." At the same time there is the suggestion of dissolving in the sea, of dying, reminiscent of Rachel Vinrace's premonitory dreams.

When Septimus repeats the line several hours later, he too seems at first to endorse life:

Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more.

He was not afraid. At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall--there, there, there--her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning. (212)

Yet within less than an hour he kills himself. Just before jumping, he suggests still another variation on the line when he hesitates, thinking, "Life was good. The sun hot" (226). Thus, in two minds the sun appears both as threatening force, from which death releases, and as emblem of what makes life good. Through such theme and variation, the novel again suggests the common ground of human experience.
The amount of telepathy and coincidence is another indication of this commonality. Clarissa and Peter communicate thought by thought as much as sentence by sentence. When Clarissa thinks she "could have bitten her tongue for thus reminding Peter that he had wanted to marry her," he answers in thought: "Of course I did, thought Peter; it almost broke my heart too, he thought" (62). Later she thinks, "and now at his age, how silly!; and the next sentence reads, "I know all that, Peter thought" (69). More significant is the affinity between Clarissa and Septimus, who echo each other's thoughts all day and quote the same lines from Shakespeare. Even such a minor character as Maisie Johnson, whose part in the novel takes two pages, shares Clarissa's thought. Suddenly panicking at being so far from home, Maisie thinks, "Horror! horror! she wanted to cry" (39). Clarissa speaks the words almost absentmindedly, as if what is troubling her has not quite broken the surface of her mind: "'Oh, this horror!' she said to herself" (53). Fleishman suggests that "the clearest indication that multiple points of view make up an underlying structure of experience--if not a group mind or unity of consciousness--are the instances of eerie coincidence." He points, for example, to the day-dream Rezia has after Septimus's death in which she seems to tap into Clarissa's memories of Bourton: "it seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out
into some garden. But where?" (MD 227, Fleishman 81).

The very nature of the narrative voice in Mrs. Dalloway, which some early critics found too beautiful or rarefied, encourages the sense that the life portrayed in the novel is eternal. The subordination of events and dialogue to the flow of the narrative is, of course, one of the means by which the novel simultaneously describes the present moment and transcends it. Additionally, there is the use of well-known literary allusions, also blended into the flow of the narrative. The narrator remarks, for example, that the people watching the royal car "seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth" (26), which evokes that quintessential expression of the eternal and inevitable in human life, Shakespeare's "seven ages of man" speech—even as it comments ironically on the folly of the First World War. Peter's thought that "the sudden loudness of the final stroke which tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life" (75) foreshadows the novel's death at the party and links that death with the familiar words of the burial service.

In the passage which I have suggested recalls the mood of "Tintern Abbey," the actual wording is more akin to "Dover Beach": the sea to which the heart commits its burden "sighs collectively for all sorrows, renews, begins, collects, lets fall" (59). "Dover Beach" in turn hinges on thoughts which Arnold believed inherent in the sea itself
and heard by Sophocles on the Aegean. In the same passage in the novel, Woolf joins "says the heart" to "Fear no more"; thus, she creates something which itself, when repeated in the novel, reverberates as something ancient and remembered. Simultaneously, Woolf describes one particular day, measuring it out hour by hour, and collapses the walls separating one era from another. Like Hopkins' vision of a world "mounted in scarlet," the world of Mrs. Dalloway seems to be all one color, not scarlet but the blurry blue-green of memory.

Two years after publishing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf wrote an essay on the diary of a country parson, which concludes, far away, with a sound like distant thunder, we hear the guns of the French Revolution. But it is comforting to observe that the imprisonment of the French king and queen, and the anarchy and confusion in Paris, are only mentioned after it has been recorded that Thomas Ram lost his cow and that Parson Woodforde has "brewed another Barrell of Table Beer today." We have a notion ... that Parson Woodforde goes on. It is we who change and perish. It is the kings and queens who die in prison. It is the great towns that are ravaged with anarchy and confusion. But the river Wensum still flows; Mrs. Custance is brought to bed of yet another baby; there is the first

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swallow of the year. (CDB 27)

Here Woolf seems to put herself on the side of those who see life as a series of great events--births and deaths, revolutions and anarchy--against the Parson Woodfordes, quaint and charming but benighted. That is, she seems to until we consider the title of the essay, "Life Itself." In placing herself on the side of those who seem to believe history lies in great events, she is not suggesting she does believe this, but rather that this is inevitably what we do see of the past. This finally is the meaning of Woolf's vision of the present moment as past. Although she pleads for a new kind of history that will deal with "our point of view" and "life itself," she knows that the goal is hopeless. The future generations will know the face in the motor car (23), but they will not know that this was a warm June morning with its "pressure of all the other mornings" upon it (54), or that the people at the time felt the same sense of prosaicness that people always feel about the present moment, "this matter-of-fact June morning" (45). Nor will they know that the trivial event that made the crowd miss the face in the car was an airplane with the message "Kreemo Toffee."

Peter's inability to articulate Clarissa's enchantment over him becomes in fact an analogue for all the characters' response to life itself. This is the only answer Woolf offers to the query raised in Jacob's Room: "The strange
thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to anyone for hundreds of years, no one has left an adequate account of it" (95). People cannot get at the truth of history because they cannot articulate the truth about the present moment. They can respond to life; they can even to some extent know what it is, but they cannot say what they know. Mrs. Dalloway is oddly reminiscent of Mansfield's "The Garden Party" (1922), and it is not surprising that, although critics continually compare Woolf and Joyce (and Mrs. Dalloway and Ulysses in particular), Woolf herself identified Mansfield as the only writer she ever envied (D II 227). At the conclusion of "The Garden Party," the adolescent heroine, who has, like Clarissa, experienced death at the party, says to her brother, "Isn't life—? Isn't life?" Knowing none of the details of her encounter, he yet replies knowingly, "Isn't it, darling" (301).
Chapter Notes

1. Tuchman's history of the years 1890 to 1914 argues that the First World War did not, as has often been believed, erupt suddenly out of a tranquil period, that rather these were years of great turmoil and dangerous diplomacy. She takes her title from Poe's "The City in the Sea," and uses these lines for an epigram: "While from a proud tower in the town/ Death looks gigantically down."

2. Daiches makes a similar point about Rachel's death in The Voyage Out. Although I disagree with him about Rachel because I believe that she is more the center of the narrative (rather than a subject for the narrator's contemplation, as he suggests), I believe I am indebted to him for the idea, which I have applied instead to Jacob's death. See Daiches, p. 14.

3. See, for example, Walter Allen, The English Novel. Allen first groups Woolf with Joyce, Lawrence and Richardson as "novelists with an entirely different and new approach to fiction" (412), but a few paragraphs later, he suggest that Woolf and Richardson "have probably already fallen into perspective as the smallest talents of the four" (413). Daiches refers to what Woolf's fiction accomplishes "within its limits" (78).

4. Fleishman makes a similar claim for The Voyage Out. See Fleishman, pp. 1-3, and above, p. 69. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland have suggested that Mrs. Dalloway is a Bildungsroman with its "developmental tale ... concealed in coded memories" (12). This interpretation is of course entirely compatible with Guiguet's and Fleishman's: it simply suggests even greater richness in the novel than has been previously observed.

5. In September of 1924, when the novel was nearing completion, Woolf recorded in her diary, "Suppose one can keep the quality of a sketch in a finished & composed work? That is my endeavour" (D II 312).

6. This image of the mother in a grey hat must have had private significance for Woolf in her memories of her mother because it reappears in the scene in To the Lighthouse in which Lily remembers walking with William at Hampton Court.
while he described seeing Mrs. Ramsay for the first time (TL 264).

7. Although one of the working titles for the novel was "The Tenth of June," Fleishman has identified June 13 as the Wednesday closest to the middle of the month in 1923.

8. Holtby entitles her chapter "Virginia Woolf is not Jane Austen," and her argument is similar to one Robert Langbaum makes about Forster in The Modern Spirit (128).

9. For the fullest discussion of the relationship between Woolf's method and the various types of stream-of-consciousness, see Naremore 60-76.

10. Fleishman discusses the ways in which the birdlike qualities of the two central characters are woven into the entire fabric of the novel (84-85).

11. Fleishman notes that in manuscript passages Septimus's christological significance was even more obvious than it is in the final version (77 and note).

12. Vera Brittain's semi-autobiographical novel of the war years, Honourable Estate (1936), offers an interesting parallel. The brother of the heroine deliberately gets himself killed in battle because he knows he is about to be accused of homosexuality, "a moral offense." Receiving after his death the letter in which he tells of his intention to die, his sister ponders the irony of the situation: "What was a moral offence? she asked herself. Cruelty? Treachery? Exploitation? Oh, no; it was giving expression to your love for a person whom the law didn't permit you to feel about in that way." And she concludes, "Surely it's a worse crime to be a statesman and involve a whole nation in war" (346).

13. Ann L. McLaughlin is one critic who has compared Woolf and Mansfield. In her recent essay, "An Uneasy Sisterhood: Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield," she too sees parallels between Mrs. Dalloway and "The Garden Party," but she also notes that Woolf said in 1922 that she would not read "The Garden Party " and Other Stories (L II, 514-15; McLaughlin 159, 156).
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE: THE NEW BIOGRAPHY

It is thus ... in the mirrors of our friends, that we chiefly live.
--"The New Biography"

For anyone interested in Woolf's use of history, To the Lighthouse is most significant--at least at first--for its continuation of World War I themes. As in the two preceding novels, Woolf uses the war as the objective correlative for events in her own life, but now she does so on a much larger scale. Whereas in Jacob's Room she drew on one family disaster, the death of Thoby, and in Mrs. Dalloway another, her own mental illness, in To the Lighthouse she uses no fewer than three of the four family deaths that occurred between 1895 and 1906. Thoby, represented earlier as Jacob Flanders, reappears as Andrew Ramsay, and again his death from typhoid is recast as death in battle in the early days of World War I. Woolf's mother and half-sister appear as Mrs. Ramsay and Prue, and the deaths of the fictional characters occur, not, as in real life, in 1895 and 1897, but just before the war. Mrs. Ramsay and Prue are associated with Demeter and Persephone, which recalls Mr. Brewer's plaster cast of Ceres in Mrs. Dalloway, but the use of the myth is extended and deepened. And, as in the two preceding novels, in To the Lighthouse
Woolf seems to consider the possibility that the First World War marked a great turning point in life— that it was in fact all that the history books claimed—but again she rejects this possibility. Again she unwrites history.

It seems at first that unwriting history is the last thing Woolf is about in *To the Lighthouse*. "Time Passes," the "line down the middle" (L III 385), seems to give symbolic, indeed almost graphic representation to that feeling Paul Fussell has attributed to those who witnessed the war and especially to the participants: that the war split their lives in two. On one side was the innocent idyll represented by the summer of 1914; on the other was postwar reality—the Inferno and the Wasteland (Fussell 24). "Time Passes," with its abrupt change in tone and point of view, is the shortest section of the novel, but it divides the world of *To the Lighthouse*, placing on one side a time when James endows a simple picture of a refrigerator with "heavenly bliss" (9) because he might go to the lighthouse, and on the other a time when he is forced to go against his will. On one side Lily is "in love with this all" (32); on the other, she is, like Sassoon's "Dreamers," "mocked with hopeless longing to regain": "to want and not to have" (266) she thinks, remembering Mrs. Ramsay.

The content of "Time Passes" also seems at first to reveal the importance of World War I. The first half of this middle section expresses an almost Shakespearean
equation of human and cosmic disorder. It begins with a description of darkness and destruction in the natural world that moves steadily toward identification with human destruction. As Carolyn Heilbrun observes, "Andrew and Prue, the doomed Ramsay children, announce that it is almost two dark to see, that one can hardly tell the sea from the land," and Mr. Carmichael keeps his candle burning as he reads Virgil. "Dante," she notes, "chose Virgil for his guide in hell" (161). Again Lord Grey's remark that "The lamps are going out all over Europe" appears, as in Jacob's Room, both symbolically in the coming on of darkness and explicitly: "One by one the lamps were all extinguished" (189).

As "Time Passes" continues, disaster and premonitions of disaster are interwoven in such a way that, although only one of the deaths is attributable to war, all three are associated with it. Before Mrs. Ramsay's death, "the nights now are full of wind and destruction" (193); before Prue's, there are "imaginings of the strangest kind--of flesh turned to atoms" (198). In late summer, following Prue's death, the imagined fears take shape in "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt" (200). Silence ensues, but then "there seemed to fall into this silence this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling" (201). The next paragraph announces Andrew's death.
The use of myth in "Time Passes" also seems at first to support the importance of the war, for the elevation of Mrs. Ramsay to a Demeter figure in turn associates the war with the blasting of summer after the loss of Persephone. Joseph Blotner, who has written the most extensive article on the Demeter/Persephone myth in To the Lighthouse, observes that this myth is a variation or development of the Kore myth, in which there are three goddesses in one, representing three women at different points in the life cycle. Further, he points out that in some versions of the Persephone story both women are raped, and that all versions attribute to both women characteristics that one would expect to see divided between them—the joy and beauty of youth and innocence, the sorrow and wisdom of age and experience (547, 555). The sorrowful beautiful mother, Mrs. Ramsay, is primarily Demeter, but when she dies, leaving a mourning daughter, this Demeter figure merges into Persephone. Prue, who never lives to be a mother, is primarily Persephone, but symbolically she too is both virgin and mother. She dies "in some illness connected with childbirth" (199), and the two descriptions of spring, one before her marriage and one before her death, suggest the transition from Persephone to Demeter. The spring in the first passage recalls Diana, beautiful but untouchable, uninitiated into the world of sex and death

The spring without a leaf to toss, bare and bright
like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in her purity, was laid out on fields wide-eyed and watchful and entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders. (198)

In the second, the spring is sorrowful and maternal:
softened and acquiescent, the spring with her bees humming and gnats dancing threw her cloak about her, veiled her eyes, averted her head, and among passing shadows and flights of small rain seemed to have taken upon her the knowledge of the sorrows of mankind. (199)

The description that follows is of a summer in which humanity has no part, in which even beauty is sinister, with its flowers "eyeless and so terrible" (203). If modern life has no Demeter with the power to destroy the summer, human sorrow can make that summer appear a mockery, as in August 1914. Like the spring of Shakespeare's Sonnet 98, which Mrs. Ramsay prophetically recites, such a time is winter to the mourners.

If the grand scale destruction of "Time Passes" suggest the emotional devastation of the war, the novel also expresses the intellectual devastation with an explicitness unusual in Woolf's work. Immediately after the death of Andrew, the narrative identifies the war as a major obstacle to anyone wishing to believe in an ordered and benevolent universe:
There was the silent apparition of an ashen-coloured ship, for instance, come, gone; there was a purplish stain upon the bland surface of the sea as if something had boiled and bled, invisibly, beneath. This intrusion into the scene calculated to stir the most sublime reflections and lead to the most comfortable conclusions stayed their pacing. It was difficult blandly to overlook them; to abolish their significance in the landscape; to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within. (201)

We might be reading about Wells's Mr. Britling looking at the ruins of his nineteenth-century meliorism.

Yet Woolf does unwrite history in To the Lighthouse, as surely as she does in Jacob's Room and Mrs. Dalloway. "Time Passes," the line down the middle of the story, contains the war years; it is not contained by them. The imagery of natural destruction, which gathers ominously and moves toward identification with human destructiveness, having made that identification, moves on. The imagery transcends the war in favor of larger, vaguer forces. What had been metaphoric becomes literal: we see destructiveness in the nature itself. While the Ramsays stay away specifically because of the war ("what with the war and travel being so difficult these days" [204]), the concentration on the
clothes hanging in the closet and the shawl slipping off the skull encourages us to see that time itself, as the title of the chapter suggests, is the real source of change.

Even the use of myth cuts two ways in "Time Passes." On the one hand, it raises the war to the cosmic level; on the other, it brings it back to earth. If we compare the effect of the Demeter myth with the allusions to the Inferno so common in literature about the war, an obvious difference appears. The Inferno suggests the monstrous unnaturalness of war. The Demeter/Persephone story, with its resonance of the eternal cycle of birth and death, suggests something entirely natural. Myth aside, although the narrative reports all three deaths with shocking brevity, it gives the most attention to Prue's. Her death in "some illness connected with childbirth," is, like Sylvia Parry's from a falling tree, intensely symbolic of "death which surprises in the midst of life." The association of the three deaths serves to pull Andrew's death by unnatural causes back into the realm of the natural and inevitable.

In still another way the use of myth in this section helps to unwrite history. T. E. Apter has seen a flaw in "Time Passes" in that it "purports two interchangeable causes for this destruction [of the harmony of "The Window"]--Mrs. Ramsay's death and the war" (Apter 88). But this is to confuse two kinds of truth that the novel explores--the factual, which makes sense to the rational
mind, and the mythical, which makes sense to the subconscious. On the rational level, "Time Passes" chronicles a time when, by the chance workings of an indifferent universe, the Ramsay family suffers a series of calamities; and this indifference appears in the brackets which trivialize what to them and to the reader is so important. On the mythic level, which makes its appeal to the subconscious, Woolf suggests not interchangeable causes but a chain reaction: Mrs. Ramsay's death is the source of all the unhappiness of "Time Passes," including the war itself. Because Mrs. Ramsay is a universal mother, and not merely the mother of her own eight children, the causal connection between her death and the disasters that follow expresses psychological truth through myth. For to a child a parent's power to protect often seems boundless, and nothing reflects the child's inevitable disillusionment more profoundly than the parent's own death. For a short time Mrs. Ramsay can transform skulls into hanging gardens, but she knows that by the very act of giving birth she has sentenced her children to the horrors of passing time: "You shall go through it all. To eight people she had said relentlessly that" (92). Woolf does not suggest two interchangeable causes of destruction in "Time Passes": she shows that the proximate cause is the war, the ultimate cause is life itself, and the cause that the subconscious insists on is the loss of protecting mother.
Indeed much of what is often taken in To the Lighthouse to refer specifically to the war refers instead to the large, eternal sorrows of life itself. J. K. Johnstone has cited Mrs. Ramsay's "impulse of terror" when she hears the waves sound "like the ghastly roll of drums" (27) as the first premonition of war, analogous to the random pistol shots in Jacob's Room (534); but the context in which this thought appears suggests simply knowledge of the world:

the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, "I am guarding you--I am your support," but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly ... had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea and warned her whose days had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow.... (28)

One might ask why Woolf keeps returning to the First World War only to deny its importance. Why particularly does she specifically identify "ashen-coloured ships" as obstacles to optimism (201) and then substitute for these
ships large, universal forces? I would suggest first that, if the summer of 1914 was for survivors of the war "a permanent symbol for anything innocently but irrevocably lost" (Fussell 24), it is also obviously a powerful symbol for life itself. Every life, Woolf suggests, has its pre-war and post-war eras. Second, she seems to say that, although the war is not the event it is often believed to be, it can be seen—like the Lisbon Earthquake or the death of Arthur Henry Hallam—as a symbol of the forces that continually menace human beings and their needed belief in order. It represents the "reign of chaos" that they seek to "subdue" (74) by reading to a child, performing a scientific experiment, or painting a picture. Like Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf is of the Keatsian persuasion that the world is a place "where but to think is to be full of sorrow," but she recognizes that certain events—the death of one's mother or the eruption of a world war—make one more inclined to think.

The presence of the war in To the Lighthouse is important for another reason. If the treatment of war is similar in this and the two preceding novels, nevertheless a certain progress in Woolf's acceptance of death appears in the course of the three novels, and this progress centers around the issue of the war. Betty Flanders' desolation as she holds out Jacob's shoes at the end of Jacob's Room gives a belated and discouraging answer to the question she asked
about her dead husband at the outset of the novel: "Had he then been nothing?" The only consolation Woolf offers in this novel is that the long life is no better or more meaningful than the short. In Mrs. Dalloway, what I have termed Septimus's civilian war death suggests to Clarissa that the suffering and the transience of life are what make its joys so precious. Additionally, Clarissa holds out the hope that she will survive in others' memories and in the places she has loved; and the novel offers partial confirmation of this hope in that Clarissa and Peter have already survived a kind of death in living in each other's memories through years of separation. In To the Lighthouse, despite the elegiac tone which pervades even the joyful time represented in "The Window," Clarissa's views are finally vindicated in Mrs. Ramsay's return, the trip to the lighthouse, and the completion of Lily's picture, which makes of the "moment" something eternal.

There are, then, certain innovations in the technique of unwriting history in To the Lighthouse, and there is progress in a debate centered on, if not actually dependent on, World War I. Yet the topical interest of To the Lighthouse is far less than that of Mrs. Dalloway, and knowledge of the social and political history does little to enhance our pleasure in the novel. Woolf achieves a brilliant marriage of granite and rainbow, but this time the granite is not the political and social world of her
era but the facts of her own life, the life of her family, and, above all, the life of her mother. Certain attitudes toward history and biography—attitudes Woolf had been formulating since childhood—lie at the heart of both novels, but where Mrs. Dalloway combines fiction and social history, To the Lighthouse combines fiction and biography.

As we have seen, Woolf never abandoned biographical writing, but heretofore she had kept it separate from her fiction. The possibility of combining the two forms had always intrigued her, however; and a month after publishing To the Lighthouse, she praised Harold Nicholson's semi-fictional, semi-biographical Some People. "I can't make out how you combine fact and fiction as you do. I am jealous—I can't help it—that all these things should have happened to you, not to me" (L III 392). But she was not entirely easy with the combination, as she showed in the review of Some People that she wrote later:

Mr. Nicolson makes us feel, in short, that he is playing with very dangerous elements. An incautious movement and the book will be blown sky high. He is trying to mix the truth of real life with the truth of fiction. He can only do it by using no more than a pinch of either. For though both truths are genuine, they are antagonistic; let them meet and they destroy each other.... Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the
imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously. (G&R 154)

Of course we might conclude here that Woolf really was jealous—and that in the months intervening between the letter and the review her jealousy did its subterranean work on the critical faculty of her mind. But even if we take the article as Woolf’s unbiased judgment, it does not completely contradict the praise in her letter. She goes on to suggest that the biographer who stays too close to the facts is still less likely to succeed:

And here we again approach a difficulty which, for all his ingenuity, the biographer still has to face. Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible; yet he is now more than ever urged to combine them. For it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act. Each of us is more Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, than he is John Smith of the Corn Exchange. (155)

She concludes the article with at least a degree of approval for Nicolson’s method:

Nor can we name the biographer whose art is subtle and bold enough to present that queer amalgamation of dream and reality, that perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow. His method still remains to
be discovered. But Mr. Nicolson with his mixture of biography and autobiography, of fact and fiction, of Lord Curzon's trousers and Miss Plimsole's nose, waves his hand airily in a possible direction. (G&R 155)

This review has important implications for To the Lighthouse. First, it is revealing that the term "granite and rainbow," the perfect expression for the aims and methods of Woolf's work, appeared in an essay on biography. This is just one more indication of how closely Woolf's theories and practices in fiction were allied with her theories of biography. Second, although this essay contains some of Woolf's most important ideas, it is one of her most tentative, least well organized pieces of criticism. We seem to catch Woolf thinking aloud—changing her mind, qualifying, contradicting. She has not made up her mind about this subject. Finally, the essay suggests that a truly faithful biography is impossible, that it hovers forever somewhere between the factual and the fictional. Such an attitude obviously leaves the door open for a work of fiction to claim validity as a work of biography.

Admittedly, by writing a work which the world labels fiction, Woolf could avoid altogether the kind of charge she brought against Some People. But her debate over what genre To the Lighthouse should belong to suggests that she wanted to think of it—and perhaps wanted others to think of it—as
something other than fiction. When she was beginning *To the Lighthouse*, she wrote in her diary, "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel.' A new ___ by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (D III 34). She hoped, I think, to claim both the truth of fact and the truth of fiction. From the outset, *To the Lighthouse* was to be something different from her earlier novels:

This is going to be fairly short; to have father's character *done complete in it*; & mother's; & St. Ives; & childhood; & all the usual things I try to put in—life, death etc. (D III 18, emphasis mine).

The results show that, although she changed her emphasis and made her mother the central character, she did not, as she had earlier, use the real people as mere preliminary models. Where Lytton Strachey saw "something of Thoby" in Jacob Flanders, and people who knew them well debated for years whether Kitty Maxse or Ottoline Morrill might be the model for Clarissa Dalloway, Vanessa Bell wrote of *To the Lighthouse*,

it seemed to me that in the first part of the book you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could ever have conceived of as possible. It is almost painful to have her so raised from the dead. You have made one feel the extraordinary beauty of her
character, which must be the most difficult thing in the world to do. It was like meeting her again with oneself grown up and on equal terms and it seems to me the most astonishing feat of creation to have been able to see her in such a way. (L III, appendix 572)

Perhaps I should explain at this point why the rest of this chapter uses biography in ways that still might be frowned on, even when New Criticism is on the wane. As a novel, To the Lighthouse can be understood and appreciated whether one knows everything or nothing of the Stephen family. Like Mrs. Dalloway, it is, in Fleishman's terms, "fictional biography," and its closer adherence to true biography is irrelevant. If, however, we consider it as biography, obviously we have to examine the facts and see how Woolf puts her theories into practice. But even as fiction, To the Lighthouse deals with biography: it is about biography in ways that Mrs. Dalloway is not. It is not only, as Ruby Cohn suggests, "a work of art about art" (73), but also a work of biography (whether fictional or factual) about biography. Repeatedly, it calls attention to its own method and to the central question of how we know other people—and, in particular, the dead—and how we make their lives meaningful to us. While we do not need the biographical facts to interpret the novel, we do need them to interpret it as biography and to understand the parallels.
between what Woolf the biographer does and what the novel implicitly argues she should do.

To the Lighthouse is such an evocative novel, so little dependent on fact, it seems, that the number of details based on fact comes as a surprise. Quentin Bell has suggested that readers may find the "donné" of the novel in an article in the Stephen children's newspaper, which describes Adrian's disappointment at not being allowed to go on a trip to the lighthouse at St. Ives (33). The family in the novel is sketchily drawn, but there are, as there were in the Stephen family, four boys and four girls; and the youngest girl, the second youngest child, is a tomboy, as Virginia was. The name of the child has private significance, for Leonard's novel The Wise Virgins, published in 1914, concerns two sisters based on Virginia and Vanessa, and named Camilla and Katharine. Lily Briscoe, who shares Woolf's aesthetic theories, her anxieties about realizing her vision, and her fear of criticism, is forty-four in the third section, "The Lighthouse," (244), Woolf's own age when she wrote most of the novel. In fact Woolf adheres so closely to autobiography here that she makes a slight miscalculation. Lily is thirty-three in "The Window," which takes place just ten years before "The Window." Admittedly, if September happens to be Lily's birthday month, she could be thirty-three on one September day and forty-four on another.
day in the same month ten years later; but there is no reason to introduce such a complication. The discrepancy makes sense, however, if we consider that Woolf began the novel in May of 1925, at the age of forty-three, with the intention of making Lily her own age in the third section, then turned forty-four in January, with the novel still in progress, and forgot to reconcile the ages. Other facts and dates that correspond to autobiography are the abandonment of the house at St. Ives immediately after the mother's death (though in real life there was no going back, as Leslie Stephen sold it), the eldest daughter's marriage in the spring and death the same summer, the return of the surviving children ten years later (in life to visit the town, in the novel to stay in the house).

These are some of the parallels we know from such sources as Bell's biography. The autobiographical fragments, published in 1976 as Moments of Being, reveal many more. The Stephen children chose their mother's jewelry at night, and Virginia and Adrian argued over sleeping conditions. The issue was not a ram's skull but the fire, which pleased Adrian but frightened Virginia: "I dreaded that little flickering flame on the walls" (MoB 78). Compare the passage in To the Lighthouse: "She could see the horns, Cam said, all over the room. It was true. Wherever they put the light (and James could not sleep without a light) there was always a shadow somewhere" (172). Often
the imagery and even the wording of To the Lighthouse appears in the early "Reminiscences" (1907) or the later "Sketch of the Past" (1939). In "Reminiscences," Woolf wrote that her mother "seemed to watch, like some wise Fate, the birth, growth, flower, and death of innumerable lives all round her" (34); "Sometimes with her natural impetuosity, she took it upon herself to despatch difficulties with a high hand, like some commanding Empress (35); it seemed "as though she heard perpetually the ticking of a vast clock and could never forget that some day it would cease for all of us" (35); she wore "a long shabby cloak" (36); and still, twelve years after her death, she was at times "closer than any of the living are, lighting our random lives as with a burning torch" (40). Mrs. Ramsay too appears as a Fate when, "Flashing her needles, confident, upright, she created drawing-room and kitchen, set them all aglow" (59); and she seems to be "boasting of her capacity to surround and protect" (60). Twice she is compared to a queen (14, 124); she is sometimes "highhanded," according to Lily, who sees her "presiding" over others' destinies (75, 78); repeatedly we see her thinking, "It will end, it will end" (97); she wears a shabby coat. Most important are the several images of Mrs. Ramsay as a lightbearer or as light itself. She carries "the torch of her beauty ... into any room she entered" (64); she soothes her husband "as a nurse soothes a
fractious child" (60); "she praise[s] herself in praising the light" (97); the long beam of the lighthouse is "her stroke" (96).

In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf records that Adrian, the youngest, was Julia's favorite: "Him she cherished separately" (83). Compare this passage in To the Lighthouse: "What demon possessed him, her youngest, her cherished?" (43). In "A Sketch," Woolf also writes that after her mother's death, "the grown up world into which I would dash for a moment and pick off some joke or little scene and dash back again upstairs to the nursery was ended" (94, emphasis mine). In the first section of the novel, Cam has only a small role, but it consists largely in dashing around: she is "that wild villain, Cam, dashing past" (83), and "she would not stop for Mr. Bankes and Lily Briscoe ... she would not stop for her father ... nor for her mother, who called 'Cam! I want you a moment!' as she dashed past" (84).

Woolf's general method in To the Lighthouse is to take an event from her life and either draw out of it or impose on it symbolic meaning. Although we cannot know what she is doing in every instance, we can guess, for example, that the return to St. Ives ten years after her mother's death and a year after her father's carried inherent symbolic meanings for Woolf. We can gather that the episode of the fire was one where she imposed meaning, for the simple reason that
covering the disturbing object—which seems the perfect expression of Mrs. Ramsay's character—was the nurse's idea, not Julia's. Moreover, the nurse covered the fender with a towel, rather than an article of her own (Mrs. Ramsay feels cold soon after covering the skull because she uses her shawl); and the skull is a *momento mori*, which the fire is not. But if much of the autobiographical material consists of external events carrying or made to carry symbolic meanings, some of it consists of psychological events or states reified. Jane Novak has suggested, for example, that Lily's burden of "undischarged sympathy" for Mr. Ramsay after he has set off for the lighthouse recalls the distraught letters Woolf wrote after the death of her father: "I know that it [his death] wasn't really wrong; it had to be—but I can't bear to think of his loneliness, and that I might have helped and didn't.... If I could only tell him once—but it's no use writing it" (L I 136, Novak 135). This same meaning is suggested in Lily's thought that "There was no helping Mr. Ramsay on the journey he was going" (230). Presumably, she is merely expressing sympathy for his loneliness; but Woolf's letter contains this same feeling for her dead father, and the profundity of the emotion, combined with the traditional association of the one journey everyone takes alone, is suggestive of death. Another hint that Leslie Stephen's death is the secret subject of the scene appears in his reciting the line
from "The Castaway"—"We perished each alone." We respond to this recitation, I believe, much as Cam does, as Lily would if she were present, and as Woolf did in the actual situation it represented for her—with irritation at the histrionics qualified by sympathy. The scene recaptures the source of resentment and love Woolf felt for her father, re-enacts what she believed was her own failure of sympathy, and presents the alternative response which she now wishes she had made—or made more often.

Lily, watching Mr. Ramsay sail away and then turning to her picture, is thus symbolic of the adult Virginia coming to terms with both parents' deaths. Cam's (and perhaps James's) journey to the lighthouse reifies an earlier state of mind. Cam, vacillating between love and resentment of Mr. Ramsay, finally gives way to love. We can gather that the conflict will recur many times, but the outcome here suggests a temporary resolution, to be completed finally when Cam is an adult. Thus, Woolf is not only Lily on the shore and Cam in the boat but Lily watching Cam crossing the water, the adult watching her adolescent self.

To read biographies of Woolf and particularly her autobiographical writings simultaneously with To the Lighthouse is to experience the sense that the novel contains layers and layers of autobiography, and to conclude that it does indeed combine the truth of fact with the truth of fiction. Even the changes that Woolf made contain
curious vestiges of truth. They enhance the novel, and presumably this is why Woolf kept them, but they also allow the reader familiar with the life to read the book more completely as both biography and fiction. For example, because the Ramsays are intended to be archetypal husband and wife, father and mother, it would make no sense artistically to make theirs a second marriage; thus, there is no Minny Thackeray or Herbert Duckworth figure. There are, however, rumors that Mrs. Ramsay had a previous lover and hints that her eyes are turned on some past sorrow. In "Reminiscences" Woolf describes her belief that Julia Stephen's sad vision of life, though inevitable, had ripened prematurely after the early death of her first husband (33). None of this is explained in To the Lighthouse, but the remark by an unknown observer, "Never did anybody look so sad" and the rumors of the earlier lover appear in consecutive paragraphs (46); and Mrs. Ramsay herself believes that her view of life is more melancholy than her husband's (91). An even more striking example of telling some of the truth but not enough to explain it involves Lily's vision of Mrs. Ramsay after her death. The first time the narrative describes Lily remembering this, the passage reads, "For days after she had heard of her death she had seen her thus, putting her wreath to her forehead and going unquestioningly with her companion, a shade across a field" (270). In keeping with the novel's use of the
Persephone story, this figure should be Hades (Blotner 556). But Lily remembers the vision again some time later, and this time there are two companions, which Blotner calls "problematical." He suggests that Lily may be unconsciously joining Prue's death with her mother's, and he points out that "the unity of the two divine persons is central to the concept of the Kore" (557). I would agree that the second figure may be Prue and add that the language of the passage allows for the possibility that Lily first remembers her earlier vision and then sees a second, altered, vision. One paragraph begins, "She had let the flowers fall from her basket, Lily thought," but the next begins, "She let the flowers fall" (299, emphasis mine), and it is this second paragraph that introduces the image of the second companion. It is even possible that the Persephone myth has been partially succeeded by an allegorical presentation of Mrs. Ramsay leading her two children, Andrew as well as Prue, to death: "They went, the three of them together, Mrs. Ramsay walking rather fast in front, as if she expected to meet some one round the corner" (299). The vagueness of possibilities is, as Blotner observes, part of Woolf's plan, her "avowed intention of making her symbols work 'not in set pieces ... but simply as images, never making them work out; only suggest'" (AWD 165, Blotner 557).

These interpretations of the novel as novel are valid, but the germ of the idea for the unknown companion lies in
Woolf's memories of her mother's death. In "A Sketch of the Past" she describes how she told Stella, who was regretting that she had taken Virginia in to see the body, "When I see mother, I see a man sitting with her." Then in a rather confusing passage, she admits that she might have said this to get attention, but she goes on, "But certainly it is true that when she [Stella] said: 'Forgive me,' and thus made me visualize my mother, I seemed to see a man sitting bent on the edge of the bed" (92). Although I offer this as pure speculation, I suggest that in the private world of the novel one of the companions is Herbert Duckworth. If one myth succeeded another in the private world as it does in the novel, he is also the person Mrs. Ramsay is hurrying to meet around the corner.

Even Woolf's use of myth in the novel is, in a sense, autobiographical, for her memories, as she recorded them in the autobiographical writings, were couched in the same images. I suggested above that the destruction unleashed by Mrs. Ramsay's death succeeds as myth because it expresses universal feelings about parents' illusive power to protect their children from reality. Yet it is surprising to find the myth articulated by one writing about the actual death of her mother:

it was as though on some brilliant day of spring the racing clouds of a sudden stood still, grew dark, and massed themselves; the wind flagged, and
all creatures on the earth moaned or wandered aimlessly. (MoB 40)

Twenty years before she published To the Lighthouse, Woolf was comparing her mother's death to the cosmic destruction wrought by the loss of Persephone. A similar if less developed anticipation of myth in To the Lighthouse occurs later in the same piece when Woolf describes her feelings of hope at the time of Stella's marriage:

We went to Brighton, and letters began to come from Stella in Florence and from Jack giving promise, stirring as Spring, of happy new intimacies in the future. (51)

That myths and imaginings were to Woolf aspects of the truth and not simply literary devices and metaphors for the truth appears in her answer to Vanessa's praise of the novel:

I was so pleased and excited by your letter that I trotted about all day like a puppy with a bone.... But what do you think I did know about mother? It can't have been much.... I suppose one broods over some germ, but I specially refrain either from reading her letters, or father's life. (L III 379)

Three days later she wrote,

I'm in a terrible state of pleasure that you should think Mrs. Ramsay so like mother. At the
same time, it is a psychological mystery why it should be: how a child could know about her, except that she has always haunted me, partly, I suppose, her beauty; and then dying at that moment, I suppose she cut a great figure in one's mind when it was just awake, and had not any experience of life—Only then one would have suspected that one had made up a sham—an ideal. (383)

Here Woolf expresses a belief in the imagination not simply to remember but to create the truth. Even a sharply etched memory is less reliable than what she creates by brooding. When we consider the novel as biography, this faith in the imagination appears most clearly in the narrative point of view. Because Woolf uses several characters based on family member and provides two personae for herself, we might expect to see Julia Stephen almost entirely through the memories of others, but we find in addition several long passages devoted to Mrs. Ramsay's private thoughts. To borrow from Rosellen Brown, much of "The Window" might be termed "the autobiography of my mother," for Woolf's only avenue to these thoughts was imaginative identification with her mother.

This belief in the truth of the imagination, so important to the genesis of the novel as biography, is also a central concern of the novel as novel. The work itself
not only uses the imaginary—myth, metaphor, events that never occurred—but argues for its validity. Through the thoughts of numerous consciousnesses—singular and collective, named and unnamed—and through its very form—from the structure of the individual sentence to the shape of the entire novel—it advocates a new type of biography, one which comes at the truth by way of the imagination.

Of the many characters who think about Mrs. Ramsay, the most important is, not surprisingly, Woolf's adult persona, Lily. As many readers have observed, her aesthetic theories are Woolf's own. When Lily speaks of butterflies on cathedral arches (75) and compositions that are "feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing" but "clamped together with bolts of iron" (255), she echoes Woolf on Proust: "He is as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom" (D III 7). But her words also anticipate "the marriage of granite and rainbow," Woolf's term for the ideal biography. Ruth Temple suggests the connection with biography when she observes that the passage in which Lily defends her painting to William Bankes "constitutes an apologia for the book."

When Lily says that "a mother and child might be reduced to a shadow without irreverence" (82), "So," writes Temple, "the daughter writing of her parents pleads the case for a biographical book in which design represents instead of
reproducing subject" (98).

Indeed so closely allied are the concerns of Lily the painter and Woolf the biographer that some critics have found Lily's preoccupation with Mrs. Ramsay excessive. Irene Dash, for example, writes, "The one inconsistency, I think, is Lily's intense involvement with the personality of her subject, Mrs. Ramsay, while painting her" (181). I would suggest that this involvement is based, convincingly, on the deep connections between emotion and intellect. Mrs. Ramsay is by nature a surrogate mother, as we see, for example, in her sympathy with Charles Tansley, a person she does not even like. Lily has no mother and no siblings; and, much like one dealing with her own mother, she wants to live a life different from Mrs. Ramsay's and at the same time win her approval. Philosophically, Mrs. Ramsay's death poses questions that obliterate the lines between biography and art. If the answer to Betty Flanders' question—"Had he then been nothing?"—is "yes," Mrs. Ramsay's "making of the moment something permanent" is a delusion, and Lily's attempt to do the same "in another sphere" (241) is futile. From the outset Lily tries to paint "what I see" and not, for example, what Mr. Pauceforte sees. Her vision necessarily involves not only technical problems but emotional and philosophical issues as well.

The technical problems confronting Lily unite her painting with the method of the novel--and with modernism
generally. The long section of "The Lighthouse" devoted to her preoccupation with Mrs. Ramsay returns to the unfinished business of Night and Day, biography. Like Katharine thinking of her grandfather, Lily alternately worships Mrs. Ramsay (both living and dead), and condescends to her. In "The Window," she imagines her to have some secret of life:

she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of the woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kinds, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out, would teach one everything. (79)

Yet she laughs at Mrs. Ramsay for "presiding with immutable calm over destinies which she completely failed to understand" (78). In "The Lighthouse" Lily is equally ambivalent. At one point she thinks, "That woman sitting there writing under a rock resolved everything into simplicity" (239) and "she owed it all to her" (241); but soon afterwards she thinks,

But the dead ... one pitied them, one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at our mercy. Mrs. Ramsay had faded and gone, she thought.... At that all her being, even her beauty, became for a moment, dusty and out of date. (260)

These, for Woolf, are attitudes absolutely antithetical to
vision: from her earliest reviews she had condemned equally hero worship of the dead and condescension toward them, on the grounds that both attitudes denied the dead their humanity. Katharine Hilbery realizes the error of both attitudes when she suddenly notices that her grandfather's portrait shows him at her own age. Lily has a similar realization when Mrs. Ramsay returns like an avenging angel:

Was there no safety? No learning by heart the ways of the world? ... Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?--startling, unexpected, unknown? (268)

Mrs. Ramsay did not have all the answers, but neither is she old-fashioned or out of date. Like the early reviews of biographies and histories, the novel asserts the absolute equality of living and dead.

At this point, Lily's state of mind is suddenly like Mrs. Hilbery's: she is too close to her subject. For the space of a few moments she is so overwhelmed by love for Mrs. Ramsay that she travels back to the feelings of early bereavement. Losing the perspective that comes with the passage of time, when the dead seem to come and go naturally and easily in the survivor's thoughts, she feels only painful absence. The physical scene becomes "like curves and arabesques flourishing round," not Mrs. Ramsay, but "a centre of complete emptiness" (266). Immediately after this, however, the two states of detachment and closeness
seem to unite, and Lily experiences a catharsis: "And now slowly the pain of the want and the bitter anger lessened; and their anguish left, as antidote, a relief that was balm itself." She now senses Mrs. Ramsay's presence but without pain, and when Mrs. Ramsay departs, again there is no pain. Lily sees her relieved for a moment of the weight that the world had put upon her, staying lightly by her side and then (for this was Mrs. Ramsay in all her beauty) raising to her forehead a wreath of white flowers with which she went. Lily squeezed her tubes again. She attacked the problem of the hedge. It was strange how clearly she saw her.... (270)

As Fleishman observes, "There is at work [in "The Lighthouse"] an extended metaphor of optical and emotional perspective, so that remoteness in sight matches remoteness in attitude" (133). Lily thinks at various points in this chapter, "Distance had an extraordinary power" (279) and, "So much depends ... upon distance" (284). She creates a metaphor from the two views of the sea that one gains from observing on the cliff and actually swimming in the waves (235), a metaphor that refuses to grant superiority to either perspective. For biography, the point seems to be that there must be a union--rather like Donne's "felt thought"--through which one uses distance to see the subject but at the same time keeps the closeness of love and
identification—closeness that denies the passage of time or the separation of living and dead.

The issue of detachment and closeness is, however, only one of the many biographical concerns in To the Lighthouse. The nature of memory, the question of the truth of the imagination, the coexistence of fact and vision—all these are issues that Woolf explores not only through Lily but through the other characters and the narrative as well. Lily is the solo instrument in an orchestral work: her voice is most important, especially in "The Lighthouse," but its melody has parallels and variations throughout the piece. When we turn to the various characters whose consciousnesses are revealed to us, we find the thoughts of one character corroborating the thoughts of another or of the narrator. This corroboration argues for precisely the position Woolf herself took so many times when she spoke of creating historical characters out of scraps of information or "brooding over some germ" of memory. Again and again, the novel presents myths, imaginings, and fictional memories as evidence equal to the evidence of fact.

For example, when, after finishing the novel, we think of Mrs. Ramsay as a Demeter figure, we probably think first of her death in "Time Passes." But the first hint of this association appears in the thoughts of Charles Tansley, who sees Mrs. Ramsay "with stars in her eyes and veils in her hair." His disclaimer — "what nonsense was he thinking?
She was fifty at least; she had eight children"--only strengthens the mythical connotations, first because it suggests the miraculous dual nature of Demeter and Persephone, the eternal mother and the eternal virgin, and second because he goes right back to what he was originally thinking. The image also becomes more clearly the image of a goddess: "Stepping through fields of flowers and taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen; with stars in her eyes and wind in her hair ..." (25). Much later, in "The Lighthouse," the image of Mrs. Ramsay as Demeter recurs, as we have seen, in Lily's imagination--both in her remembered vision from a few days after Mrs. Ramsay's death and in the present as she seems to see her again walking across the field with her companions. Charles and Lily are united in their desire for a surrogate mother, but beyond that they are at opposite poles. He is the cold rationalist, literal minded to the point of absurdity--wincing when Mrs. Ramsay exaggerates the number of glasses cases she has lost, feeling his sleeve to see precisely how damp he is; she is the artist, the imaginative sensitivity whose reality is shapes, lines, and shadows. Yet these opposed sensibilities see the same in Mrs. Ramsay.

Similarly, the important image of Mrs. Ramsay as light or lightbringer occurs several times both in the narrative and in the characters' consciousnesses. Her association with the lighthouse in "The Window" has already been
mentioned, as has the darkness that is both harbinger and consequence of her death in "Time Passes." At the beginning of "Time Passes," "a downpouring of immense darkness began" (189), and Mr. Ramsay stumbles "along a passage one dark morning" (194), the morning after Mrs. Ramsay's death. Mrs. Ramsay presides over the dinner party, where "the candle flames burnt brighter now that the panes were black" (165), and her mind goes around the table "like a light stealing under water" (160). In "Time Passes," Mrs. McNab's vision of Mrs. Ramsay recalls the image of the lighthouse:

She could see her now, stooping over her flowers; faint and flickering, like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall..." (205).

In "The Window," James sees her in a "a room where in a blue light, as if the reflection came from many china dishes, she talked to somebody" (278).

The memory of the room of blue light appears to be an actual memory, but it may in fact be a recreation—an imaginary event based on a combination of memories and symbolic representations. As his father reads, James imagines himself moving "stealthily, as if he were stealing downstairs in bare feet" and thinking "what was she like, where did she go that day?" (278). When the next sentence begins "He began following her from room to room" (278), we
cannot be sure if he is remembering or imagining. This passage is important too because it follows James's memories, or imaginings, about the wheel crushing the foot in the garden. Maria DiBattista suggests that this is not a real garden but the mythical garden of childhood (71), a position supported by James's question, "in what garden did all this happen?" and his observation that "Everything tended to set itself in a garden where there was none of this gloom" (276).

Cam too has memories of a garden, and this we recognize as the garden her mother created imaginatively out of the shawl and the skull. We know that the shawl is symbolic of Mrs. Ramsay's vision of life and that Cam's memory is proof of the enduring power of that vision, but Cam knows only that when she feels sleepy "things simplify themselves":

and nothing was left but a pale blue censer
swinging rhythmically this way and that across her mind. It was a hanging garden; it was a valley, full of birds, and flowers, and antelopes....

(303)

The blue censer swinging rhythmically is symbolic of Mrs. Ramsay whispering monotonously and repetitiously to put Cam to sleep. Thus both children combine actual memories with symbolic representations of Mrs. Ramsay and their childhood, representations which validate each other.

That the imaginary is no less valid than the factual
appears also in the memories of "The Window." For example, in this section we find William Bankes creating an amalgam of fact and fiction in his memories of his friendship with Mr. Ramsay. The first image is of Mr. Ramsay "striding along a road by himself hung round with that solitude which seemed to be his natural air" (34). That this is a created rather than a remembered scene appears in its interruption by another scene which Mr. Bankes thinks "must refer to some actual incident" (34, emphasis mine). This, the sight of Mr. Ramsay with a hen and her chickens, is important to Bankes because it seems to him an index of Mr. Ramsay's character, of "his simplicity, his sympathy with humble things" (34). Such an approach to biography may remind us of Woolf's comment in "The New Biography" that Harold Nicolson, rather than telling the facts about his characters "waits till they have said or done something characteristic" (G&R 153). The words "but then he remembered" appear just before the comment that this is an actual incident; by implication, an incident that never occurred is no less a part of the memory than one that did, and it has no less validity. The use of "actual" suggests merely sorting things out.

Another source of the truth in To the Lighthouse lies in imaginative identification of one person with another. Erich Auerbach has proposed that "the multiplicity of persons [whose thoughts are revealed to us] suggests an
endeavor to investigate an objective reality, that is, specifically, the real Mrs. Ramsay"; and he sees a multipersonal method with synthesis its aim" (536). His view is well supported by the often quoted "fifty pairs of eyes" passage in which Lily seems to comment directly on the method of the book: "One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought" (294). But there are limitations to Woolf's belief in synthesis. Why, if she is interested in synthesis, are we never taken into the consciousness of Mr. Carmichael, the one character who, according to Mrs. Ramsay herself, dislikes her? We do hear of her faults but, ironically, only from herself and from those who love her. The "fifty pairs of eyes" passage goes on to imply that there is a truth available only, if at all, to one who can enter imaginatively into the consciousness of the subject:

One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in a window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires. What did the hedge mean to her, what did the garden mean to her, what did it mean to her when a wave broke? (Lily looked up, as she had
seen Mrs. Ramsay look up; she too heard a wave falling on the beach. (294, emphasis mine)

The novel does encourage us to weigh and compare what the narrator and the characters say, and, as I have suggested, it seeks to validate their observations through parallel thoughts. It also cautions against subjectivity, but the passage that does so concerns Lily's thoughts about Charles Tansley, whom she dislikes, not Mrs. Ramsay, whom she loves: "Half one's notions of other people were, after all, grotesque. They served private purposes of one's own" (293). And the passage concludes, with a plea, not for objectivity, but for the sympathetic subjectivity Lily attributes to Mrs. Ramsay: "If she wanted to be serious about him she had to help herself to Mrs. Ramsay's sayings, to look at him through her eyes" (293).

There is also in the novel a suggestion that just as love can yield knowledge of another person, so knowledge can yield love. Lily, looking at Charles Tansley at the dinner table, thinks "it was almost impossible to dislike one if one looked at them" (128), and Cam, wishing James would sympathize with their father as they sail to the lighthouse, wants to say "Look at him now" (282). Love for another person can lead, additionally, to knowledge of things beyond the two people--of history and the world in general. When Minta holds her hand, Nancy sees the "whole world spread out beneath her, as if it were Constantinople seen through a
mist" (112). Cam, after subduing her anger against her father, feels that "From her hand, ice cold, held deep in the sea, there spat up a fountain of joy." As she continues to think,

the drops falling from this sudden and unthinking fountain of joy fell here and there on the dark, the slumbrous shapes in her mind; shapes of a world not realised but turning in their darkness, catching here and there, a spark of light; Greece, Rome, Constantinople. (281)

Lily, wonders, when she leans her head against Mrs. Ramsay's knee,

What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers [of another mind]? ... for it was not knowledge but unity she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge.... (79)

If Lily tentatively distinguishes between love and knowledge, she brings them together at the end of the passage. Her thoughts, together with Nancy's and Minta's, suggest the old polarity in Woolf between the facts written in books and the power of the imagination. They recall Rachel Vinrace imagining history as the breeze flutters the pages of Gibbon and Woolf herself hoping to find the truth
by becoming other people—even the dead she has never known.

It is Lily who not only formulates the theory of imaginative identification with another but also most successfully achieves this identification. Throughout the novel Lily demonstrates, often unknowingly, an extraordinary kinship with Mrs. Ramsay. She admires Mrs. Ramsay for "making of the moment something permanent," for doing what she is trying to do herself "in another sphere" (241); but she does not know that Mrs. Ramsay herself thinks continually of "the moment"—thinks of eternity as she serves the meat, seems to "see things truly" when they are "robbed of colour" (126), and sees the present as if were "already the past" (168). The parallels go beyond mere similarity of outlook or interests. Late in the novel, Lily remembers how she painted Mrs. Ramsay, who was sitting on the beach, and felt at the same time as if she were sitting next to her. As she painted, she recalls, she "felt as if a door had opened, and one went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place, very dark, very solemn" (255, emphasis mine). Her metaphor recalls the feelings Mrs. Ramsay has when she sinks into her deepest self:

one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.... [S]he felt
herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. (96)

The wedge-shaped core, together with the ecclesiastical imagery, also suggests the triangular purple shape and the image of the dome that Lily associates with Mrs. Ramsay.4

Although early in the novel Lily despairs of mixing one identity with another, later she does so effortlessly. As she works on the second painting, she speculates about what Mrs. Ramsay "must have thought," and the way this speculation is presented is important:

Mrs. Ramsay sat silent. She was glad, Lily thought, to rest in silence, uncommunicative; to rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships. Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? Aren't things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked (it seemed to have happened so often, this silence by her side) by saying them? (256)

Because the passage comes after a long interior monologue, we know from the outset that the point of view is not omniscient, a point underscored by "Lily thought." Yet the structure of the passage is identical to several passages in the first section of the novel which we accept as reliable. Repeatedly in "The Window," Woolf presents what seems at first to be a comment by an omniscient, or at least
objective, narrator; only after we have accepted its validity do we find it attributed to a fallible human being. "Never did anybody look so sad" begins a whole paragraph of apparently objective observations about Mrs. Ramsay, but the next paragraph, after beginning with what appears to be a continuation--"But was it anything but looks"--goes on with the words "people said" (47). The next two paragraphs use quotation marks, but the pattern is otherwise identical: "'Nature has but little clay,' said Mr. Bankes once.... "Yet she's no more aware of her beauty than a child,' said Mr. Bankes, replacing the receiver..." (48). Midway through this latter paragraph, the pattern is repeated without the quotation marks: "For always, he thought, there was something incongruous to be worked into the harmony of her face" (47).

In such passages Woolf achieves the benefits of both omniscience and first person narration--the authority of omniscience and the persuasive power of the eyewitness. When we are not to take a particular view as reliable, the narrative makes it very clear. Consider, for example, the triteness of the passage describing reactions to Prue's death: "which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well" (199). Perhaps some of the people have genuine feeling for Prue, but their words sound mechanical and gossipy. When Lily tries to pity the dead Mrs. Ramsay, her words are belied both at the time--for she
is obsessed with Mrs. Ramsay even as she speaks—and moments later when Mrs. Ramsay suddenly returns. By the time we reach Lily's speculations on Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts, we are accustomed to accepting the truth of most of what the characters think. The words "Lily thought" serve, not to qualify her thoughts, but to show that she is having an important insight.

Telepathy, which seems to have fascinated Woolf all her life, appears in various forms in To the Lighthouse. At the dinner party, for example, Lily imagines Mrs. Ramsay asking her to be kind to Charles Tansley and then realizes that she has read Mrs. Ramsay's mind: "if Mrs. Ramsay said to her, as in effect she did..." (138). When Mr. Ramsay, demanding sympathy, thinks "any other woman in the whole world would have done something," Lily answers in thought, "all except myself"(226). Perhaps more extraordinary is the power Lily in particular has to see clearly images communicated to her by another mind. Early in the novel she "look[s] along the level of Mr. Bankes's glance" at Mrs. Ramsay, then shows herself able combine his vision and her own: "Looking along his beam she added to it her different ray" (76). Late in the novel she shows even greater powers when she sees the young Mrs. Ramsay she has never known merely on the strength of a memory of William Bankes's description. She recalls that, as she and William walked at Hampton Court, he told her of his first sight of Mrs. Ramsay and that he "stood
looking down the avenues at Hampton Court as if he could see her there among the fountains" (264). So powerful is the image in Lily's mind that it is as if it were part of her own memory, so much her own that she can bring it out at will, examine it, and superimpose it on the present scene—as William superimposed the first image on the fountains:

She looked now at the drawing-room step. She saw, through William's eyes, the shape of a woman, peaceful and silent, with downcast eyes. She sat musing, pondering (she was in grey that day, Lily thought). Her eyes were bent. She would never lift them. Yes, thought Lily, looking intently, I must have seen her look like that, but not in grey; nor so still, nor so young, nor so peaceful. (264, emphasis mine)

The case for a new approach to biography appears throughout the novel in the parallels both among the characters' thoughts and between their thoughts and those of the narrator. But the structure of the novel and the narrative method in themselves are also strong forces in the argument. By the time we finish the novel, the overall structure encourages us to see the action of "The Window" as a moment seen first as present and later as past. "The Window" describes in rich detail what "The Lighthouse" only briefly recalls, and this not only satisfies our need for
verisimilitude but allows us a degree of participation. The characters' memories in the third section are a wholly convincing mixture of clarity and vagueness, and we feel as if we too have both experienced and remembered the events of the first section. Yet if we re-examine "The Window," we find some odd reversals of expectation.

For a chapter that seems to be concerned with one day, "The Window" is, in the first place, strangely preoccupied with the past. Mrs. Ramsay haunts the Mannings' drawing room in life "like a ghost" (132), as she will later haunt her own house in death. Mr. Bankes remembers the end of his friendship with Mr. Ramsay and, like Wordsworth at Tintern Abbey, studies the ways the present view affects his memory: "Mr. Bankes was alive to things which would not have struck him had not those sandhills revealed to him the body of his friendship lying with the red on its lips laid up in peat" (36). Mr. Ramsay reminisces not only about his past but about his past thoughts and his pleasure in learning, "thinking up and down and in and out of the old familiar lanes and commons" (68).

The fact that the people in the story often think of the past does not in itself deny the presentness of the action in "The Window." Woolf was always alive to what people remembering old times so often forget--that one of the chief pleasures in any time is remembering the past. As Mrs. Hilbery put it, "After all, what is the present? Half
of its the past, and the better half I should say" (N&D 12).
But even when characters in To the Lighthouse are thinking
about the present, they think in what might be termed the
memory mode: the pattern is very like remembering. Either
they are storing thoughts, sights and feelings as, to invoke
Wordsworth again, "food for future thought," or they are
spontaneously experiencing those intense moments Wordsworth
called "spots of time" and Hardy and Woolf called "moments
of vision." At the very outset of the novel James in his
excitement about the trip to the lighthouse "endow[s] the
picture of a refrigerator with heavenly bliss" (9); Lily,
"in love with this place," closes her paintbox, "and the
nick seem[s] to surround in a circle forever the paint-box,
the lawn, Mr. Bankes, and that wild villain, Cam, dashing
past" (83). Repeatedly, the characters seem to stop the
action and frame a picture this way. Lily, looking at Mr.
and Mrs. Ramsay, suddenly sees them frozen in a "symbolical
outline which transcend[s] the real figures":

And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at
all, as perhaps they are stepping out of the Tube
or ringing a doorbell, descends on people, making
them symbolical, making them representative, came
upon them, and made them in the dusk standing,
looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and
wife. (111)

Prue has a similar feeling when she sees her mother standing

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on the stair: "That's my mother'.... That is the thing itself, she felt as if there were only one person like that in the world; her mother" (174). In particular, the sight of Mrs. Ramsay reading to James is not only the subject of Lily's painting but, for two others, real life captured in an unpainted painting. Mr. Bankes watches Mrs Ramsay, feeling "that barbarity [is] tamed, the reign of chaos subdued" (74); Mr. Ramsay thinks, in effect, the same thing when he finds the sight "consolation" for "human ignorance and human fate" (68).

The "Window" contains, moreover, much of that poignant looking on the present as past that we find in Mrs. Dalloway. Lily feels sad looking at the dunes "partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest" (34). Mr. Ramsay thinks "The very stones one kicks with one's boots will outlast Shakespeare" and "His own little light would shine, not very brightly for a year or two" (56). He sees himself standing "on his little ledge facing the dark of human ignorance" and thinking "how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on" (69) Mrs. Ramsay thinks of the end of her own life, of the house, and of the island: "they would laugh when she was not there" (164); the island would be destroyed and engulfed by the sea (28). And, again as in Mrs. Dalloway, certain passages push the
scene into the past as we watch:

With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past. (168)

The narrative voice itself suggests that while in one sense the action of "The Window" unfolds as we watch, in another it is already past. And here a comparison with Mrs. Dalloway is helpful. Both novels have a narrative voice that alternately joins with and transcends individual consciousnesses; they have the same poetic prose style, and the same union of actual and symbolic, prosaic and spiritual: Mrs. Dalloway simultaneously mourns the dead and plans her party; Mrs. Ramsay thinks of eternity and frets over the bill for the greenhouse. The styles of these novels are in fact so similar that it is easy to overlook important differences. Many events appear in incomplete or confusing form in Mrs. Dalloway, but the obvious reason for this is that we are being taken into one consciousness after another and following its thought patterns. Things are simplified, additionally, by the narrative's generally moving forward with only occasional flashbacks. In contrast, the first chapter of To the Lighthouse presents a
truly disturbed chronology and a montage of thoughts from many consciousnesses. The novel begins in the early evening and, only periodically anchoring the narrative in a particular consciousness, weaves back and forth through the afternoon and earlier times as it slowly progresses forward through the evening. Ironically, it is in "The Lighthouse," the chapter in which characters remember the events of "The Window," that Woolf employs a straightforward chronological narrative; like Mrs. Dalloway, "The Lighthouse" emphasizes equally thinker and thought. "The Window," in contrast, imitates the random motion of memory; and because it often omits either the identity of the person remembering or the circumstances of the memory, the stress is on memory itself. It is for this reason that "The Window," though recalling the tone of Mrs. Dalloway, is so much more complicated.

I suggested earlier that Jacob's Room and Mrs. Dalloway each have a characteristic tense which both appears often and might be said to describe the mood of the novel. We look at the world of Jacob's Room through the progressive present, Mrs. Dalloway through the future perfect. The mood of To the Lighthouse, and particularly of "The Window," is a rich blend of all the past tenses; in addition, there is something of the future perfect quality of Mrs. Dalloway. Frequently the narrative confuses the tenses, blurring the edges of time and events. Sometimes, as I suggested above, a passage simply omits details about a speaker and his or
her circumstances, which in turn makes us uncertain about what is narrated just before or after. When, for instance, the narrative moves abruptly from Mrs. Ramsay's comment that the stocking is too short to the paragraph beginning "Never did anybody look so sad" (46), we assume that this refers to Mrs. Ramsay holding the stocking and looking off into space. But with the next paragraph, which begins "Was it nothing but looks, people said?" the narrative moves off into the indefinite world of repeated action and unspecified time—the imperfect. With this, the middle paragraph is let loose from its moorings: it seems to refer to Mrs. Ramsay with the stocking, and we think her expression has called up in someone's minds the repeated comments on her sadness, but we cannot be sure.

Woolf also takes advantage of a certain ambiguity in the structure of the language. Often where another language would force her to choose between two clearly defined past tenses, English relies on contextual details and temporal adverbs, which Woolf simply omits. When, for example, section vii of "The Window" closes with Mrs. Ramsay's question "Going indoors, Mr. Carmichael?" (63), we assume that the opening sentence of section viii, "He said nothing" (63) refers to the same moment. As the paragraph continues, however, we realize that this is a general comment on Mr. Carmichael's character: "He took opium. The children said ..." (63). The tense is not perfect, as it appeared at
first, but imperfect.

Another instance is a complicated passage in which Lily reviews both events and her thoughts of a few nights before. In this passage there are places where we cannot be sure which thoughts occurred to her then and which are occurring now. The beginning of the passage, with its verbs in the past perfect, is unambiguous: "Then she remembered, she had laid her head on Mrs. Ramsay's lap" (78). The next sentence is equally clear in spite of being in the perfect tense: "There she sat, simple, serious"; it is natural for the writer to begin to omit the auxiliary when the time has been established. But what are we to make of the following sentences? "She had recovered her sense of her now—this was the glove's twisted finger. But into what sanctuary had one penetrated?" Is this a revelation of the past or of the present? The return to the past perfect does not help us since it may express either an earlier event or a just completed one.

The next paragraph begins with a similar ambiguity: "Was it wisdom? Was it knowledge?" (78). As the paragraph moves forward, we gather that this is the thought that Lily experienced the other night, because the narrative begins to refer to events and thoughts in the same sentences. And it closes with the words "she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (79). Earlier parts of the passage remain uncertain, however; and whether Woolf resolves the
ambiguities or not in any given instance, the effect throughout "The Window" is to create the fluid world of memory.

Other characteristics of the narrative encourage this sense that events are summarized by various consciousnesses rather than unfolded before us. Often dialogue and thought are blended so that, as James Naremore points out, "even a passage ... which combines authorial comment with the thought and speech of two different characters reads like a single flow of words" (122). Another suggestion that "The Window" is memory comes, surprisingly, from what seems to be the entirely objective narration of "Time Passes." The penultimate section of this chapter ends with a one sentence paragraph enclosed in parentheses: "Lily Briscoe had her bag carried up to the house late one evening in September" (213). Thus, the next sentences--"Then indeed peace had come. Messages of peace breathed from the sea to the shore" (213)--are out of sequence. Symbolically, as Maria DiBattista observes, it is fitting that the artist is the first to awake after the nightmare of war (101): she brings peace and order as Mrs. Ramsay's death brought war and destruction. But equally important, the effect of the disturbed chronology is to suggest the mind's own ordering of events.

Certain other narrative details--and sometimes the lack of them--add to this sense of "The Window" as memory. As
James Hafley points out, Mrs. Ramsay is never called by a first name ... and she wears grey clothes during the day and black at night, so that the reader is given the odd impression of looking at once upon her and through her whenever she appears.... (80).

Lily sees her in life, as later she sees her in death, as a shadowy figure; and, as we have seen, Mrs. Ramsay often appears in repose or in the stop action of the mental photograph. Mr. Bankes says that she runs across the lawn in galoshes to snatch children out of danger, but we never see her doing this; and most of her actions are or could be repeated actions. As Holtby puts it, "... To the Lighthouse is a ghost story. Its characters move in a radiant, half-transparent atmosphere, as though already suffused into the spiritual world" (160).

Thus, the richness of detail in "The Window" does not derive so much from events themselves, the raw material of memory, as from the wealth of memory itself. "The Lighthouse" is limited to the thoughts of a few characters on one day, albeit an important one, but "The Window" is a composite of many memories gathered, stored, and re-examined over time—what might be termed "master memory." The narrative is not only, in Jean Love's words, "disembodied consciousness" (170) in general but disembodied memory in particular. Memory itself is set free from the minds that
created it, and it lives on after both rememberer and remembered are gone. Many years after writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wrote in "A Sketch of the Past":

> At times I can go back to St. Ives more completely than I can this morning. I can reach a state where I seem to be watching things happen as if I were there. That is, I suppose, that my memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen. In certain favorable moods, memories—what one has forgotten—come to the top. Now if this is so is it not possible—I often wonder—that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? (MoB 67)

This passage of course recalls Clarissa Dalloway's belief that "somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived" (MD 12). Mrs. Ramsay imagines for herself a less supernatural survival, envisioning being "wound about the hearts" of others (170), but the novel itself suggests spiritual survival in places as well as in others' minds. Mrs. Ramsay haunts the house in "Time Passes," as Mrs. McNab's vision of her, with its reference to a beam of
light, symbolically suggests. Lily's several images of her, particularly the vision of her standing by her side, the raising her wreath to her head and vanishing, suggest far more than memory or fancy. And the physical survival of past life appears in less dramatic form several times in the novel. Cam imagines that the paths and lawns are "thick and knotted with the lives they lived there" (248). The lanes and commons Mr. Ramsay walks in the memories of his youth are "all stuck about with the history of that campaign there, the life of this statesman here" (68). Lily thinks about "waters" as she paints, and although it is not certain whether these are metaphorical waters or the water she is looking at, her thoughts make the same connection between the abstract, life, and the concrete, the physical setting:

into them had spilled so many lives. The Ramsays'; the children's; and all sorts of waifs and strays and things besides. A washerwoman with her basket; a rook, a red-hot poker; the purples and grey-greens of flowers; some common feeling held the whole. (286)

This physical union of lives and places is most strongly asserted in the very passages where it seems to be denied, as in the following passage, reminiscent of Woolf's first ghost story, "A Haunted House":

What people had shed and left--a pair of shoes, a
shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in
wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in
the emptiness indicated how once they were filled
and animated; how once hands were busy with hooks
and buttons; how once the looking-glass had held a
face; had held a world hollowed out in which a
figure turned, a hand flashed, the door opened, in
came children rushing and tumbling; and went out
again. (194)

To the Lighthouse, and "The Window" in particular, is
the biography that its own rhetoric advocates. It is not an
account of the facts, nor one person's recollections, nor
autobiography—though it contains all these things. It is
the disembodied memories of the subject as well as of those
who knew her, and memories include here the imaginary as
well as the real. The structure of the novel, like the
structure of the characteristic sentence I discussed
earlier, achieves the double authority of omniscience and
first person narration. Just as the sentence begins as a
declarative statement and concludes by acknowledging a
source—"people," Mr. Bankes, Lily—so the novel presents
its memories in the seamless but fluid narrative of "The
Window" and then shows its characters remembering after a
gap of ten years.
Intermittently in "The Window" Mrs. Ramsay hears others recite and herself recites lines from various poems, the most important being Shakespeare's Sonnet 98 and Charles Elton's "Luriana Lurilee." The couplet from the sonnet, the last lines she recites, is a harbinger of her own death and of the desolation that follows. But just previously she quotes lines from "Luriana Lurilee," lines which she said earlier seemed "like music ... to be spoken by her own voice, outside herself, saying quite easily and naturally what had been in her mind the whole evening while she said different things" (166): "And all the lives we've ever lived/ And all the lives to be,/ Are full of trees and changing leaves" (178). These lines are most important as a hint that Mrs. Ramsay will survive after death, and in the few pages which include them and the recitation of the couplet we have in reverse the shape of the novel: triumph to mourning to absence.

But the lines from "Luriana Lurilee" also point to Woolf's concept of biography. Each person lives countless lives within one lifetime by experiencing in some form the lives of others, then lives again many more times in other people's memories. The lives are changing leaves in the sense that each interpreter creates a different life and, additionally, continually rearranges that life in the light of new experience. Woolf really expresses her own belief when she writes of Harold Nicolson in "The New Biography,"
"It is thus, he would seem to say, in the mirrors of our friends, that we chiefly live" (G&R 154). Yet she maintains that each life has its own reality, something that exists independently of what others and even the person who lives it imagine: each life is the solid tree as well as the changing leaves. Ultimately, both its fixed reality and our changing interpretations of it are beyond our grasp: we cannot know it all, and even what we do know we cannot entirely express. But the very fact that there is a fixed reality beyond or within all the interpretations is what makes the act of interpreting so urgent. As Woolf wrote in "Reminiscences," immediately after describing the devastation of her mother's death,

But what figure or variety of figures will do justice to the shapes which since then she has taken in countless lives? The dead, so people say, are forgotten, or they should rather say, that life has for the most part little significance to any of us. But now and again on more occasions than I can number, in bed at night, or in the street, or as I come into the room, there she is; beautiful, emphatic, with her familiar phrase and her laugh; closer than any of the living are, lighting our random lives as with a beautiful torch, infinitely noble and delightful to her children. (MoB 40)
Chapter Notes

1. Note also that Virginia used the name Katharine for the central character in *Night and Day*, a character based on Vanessa. That Camilla is Cam's real name we can assume from the reference to "Aunt Camilla" in Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's conversation before dinner (107).

2. See Poole, who sees James as another mask for Virginia, p. 11 and note).

3. See also Fleishman, who concurs with Blotner but notes that Mr. Ramsay is also associated with Hades, "For, in death as in life, Ramsay is the companion, the shadow of his wife: She could feel his mind like a raised hand shadowing her mind" (TL 189, Fleishman 129).

4. The cathedral image may have a private meaning as well, for in "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf wrote of Julia, "There she was in the very centre of that great Cathedral space which was childhood" (MoB 81).

5. Fleishman discusses the relevance of the lines Mrs. Ramsay omits as well as those she recites from "Luriana Lurilee" (117-18).
CHAPTER SIX

THE QUEST FOR MEANING

There is a certain irony in Woolf's assumption in 1910 that in beginning her career in fiction she was turning away from history (L I 440). That she would instead incorporate the two interests was dictated by her profound and largely unquestioned belief that the metaphysical meaning she searched for all her life was to be found in history. In the years bracketed by The Voyage Out to To the Lighthouse, Woolf battered her way through from despair to a hope that simultaneously accepted and triumphed over the tyrannies of time and history. Like Lily Briscoe with her painting, she succeeded in To the Lighthouse in making something permanent from the past and seemed to find in that the solace she had always sought.

But to reread the last lines of To the Lighthouse after reading the rest of the novels is, I find, to feel a great sadness beyond that which lies beneath Lily's triumph (and indeed gives value to that triumph), for never again does Woolf achieve that transcendence over time and history in the real world. Orlando's exuberant romp through history takes place in fantasy. The Years, the most realistic novel Woolf had attempted since Night and Day, ends with Eleanor's optimistic view of the future, but it is too late: we may
admire the heroism of Eleanor's belief, but we cannot share it. The last words, "The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary peace" (435) seem overshadowed by the mood of the whole novel, summed up by the opening sentence: "It had been an uncertain spring."

The last words of Between the Acts also suggest beginning again, but the preparation for these words is anything but encouraging. Ironically, Lucy Swithin is reading about prehistoric man, and the discord between Isa and Giles is rendered as savage fighting and lovemaking. The ancient house, which had stood for order and civilization and which in the early pages seemed merely debased by modern life, has now "lost its shelter"--in effect has disappeared, with civilization:

It was the night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.

Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (219)

But in the thinking that lay behind the novels, not much had changed. Throughout her life, Woolf saw time as, "janus-faced--an image of freedom and an image of fate. As a series of occasions on which to make and build up one's moment, time guarantees the freedom to create life "each moment afresh." But the series is inscribed on "a dial cut in impassive stone." (DiBattista 32).
Likewise, in human history, the past can be recreated by the imagination, but it is also finished and fixed forever. Thus, within novels whose prevailing mood and rhetoric are quite different, Woolf holds out the same possibilities. Rachel Vinrace feels trapped in her own life, with the sky like a curtain and "all the things one wants ... on the other side" (302); but she has a vision of a tree and a glimpse into Gibbon that she believes will last a lifetime. Lily Briscoe triumphs over time by finishing her painting, but what answer is there to her earlier realization that "distant views seem to outlast by a million years ... the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest" (34)?

For Woolf, as for Rachel Vinrace, the study of history illuminated darkness: it revealed the walls of one's room in the world. But the study of history (and more often one's imaginative vision of history) also liberated: it allowed one to "become" one's own ancestors, to sit, not "in exile" (JR 69), but everywhere.

If, as I have suggested, history played both a formative and a continuing role in Woolf's art, the perception of her as an artist removed from everyday life and politics, largely accepted until the late sixties and early seventies, is ironic. And other facts of her life intensify this irony. It would be hard to name a novelist, particularly among non-combatants, who dealt more often with
the First World War than Woolf--and this despite the fact that she suffered no personal losses in the war. In other words, the war interested her largely as a public issue. Its relation to her own life was, as we have seen, essentially metaphorical.

Woolf's suicide, in one of the worst periods of the Second World War, reflects this same public view of reality. We must, I think, take her at her word that she committed suicide to save both Leonard and herself from another of her periods of insanity--one from which she feared she would not recover (L VI 486-87); but the war added immeasurably to her despair. In our time, it is so well accepted that World War I was more disillusioning than World War II that we may overlook the cumulative effect of witnessing both wars. Now, for the first time, these public events truly did encroach on Woolf's life. Her nephew Julian Bell was killed in the Spanish Civil War; and because Leonard was Jewish, he and Virginia faced an added terror, particularly in early 1941, when invasion seemed inevitable. They kept extra gasoline in the garage so that they could kill themselves with exhaust fumes if the Nazis landed.

Yet despite her personal stake in the war, Woolf's diary still reflected a largely public concern. Less than three months before her death, she recorded with a matter-of-factness that does not conceal her horror this ironic coincidence:

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On Sunday night, as I was reading about the Great Fire, in a very accurate detailed book, London was burning. 8 of my city churches destroyed, & the Guildhall. (D V 351)

And almost a month later she wrote again,

There's a lull in the war. 6 nights without a raid. But Garvin says the greatest struggle is about to come—say in the next three weeks—& every man, woman, dog, cat, even weevil must girt their arms, their faith—& so on. It's the cold hour, this: before the lights go up. A few snowdrops in the garden. Yes, I was thinking: we live without a future. That's what's queer: with our noses pressed to a closed door. (D V 355)

Woolf was trapped by her own sensibility. She could not put her quest for meaning in abeyance, as many people do in times of crisis (the suicide rate in fact declines in wartime); nor could she use her art as a means of escape. Tragically, her art and her vision of the world around her were inextricable.
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