Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications
and other research outputs

Haunted houses: influence and the creative process in Virginia Woolf's novels

Thesis

How to cite:

De Gay, Jane (1998). Haunted houses: influence and the creative process in Virginia Woolf's novels. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 1998 The Author

Version: Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

UNRESTRICTED

Haunted Houses

Influence and the Creative Process in Virginia Woolf's Novels

Jane de Gay, B.A. (Oxon.)

Thesis submitted for the qualification of Ph.D.

Department of Literature, The Open University

14 August 1998

AUTHOR'S NUMBER: M7104347

DATE OF SUBMISSION: 14 AUGUST 1998

DATE OF AWARD: 7 DECEMBER 1998

For Wayne Stote

and

in memory of Alma Berry

This influence, by which I mean the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that; has never been analysed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially.

— Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past'

Abstract

This thesis argues that rather than being an innovative, modernist writer, Virginia Woolf's methods, themes, and aspirations were conservative in certain central ways, for her novels were influenced profoundly by the work of writers from earlier eras. This argument is developed both by demonstrating that Woolf was influenced by other writers, and also by exploring the dynamics of how this process of influence took place. The thesis contends that this process included identification with past writers and a longing for the literary past, which complicated Woolf's attempts to negotiate the past and its values.

After a chapter examining theoretical approaches to the concept of literary influence, the thesis makes a detailed study of Woolf's engagement with her influences in eight of her novels. Woolf's responses to influence are divided into three phases. In the first phase, up to the mid-1920s, she wrestled with existing perceptions of the woman writer as she looked to female precursors as role models and struggled with their legacies. At the same time, she sought refuge from such a problematic inheritance by turning to her male precursors to try and gain covert access to the literary traditions which were thought to be the birthright of the men of her generation. In the second phase of her career, in the late 1920s, Woolf continued to deal with the absence of a ready-made tradition by elegizing writers she had known and the literary traditions they represented. In the process of mourning other writers, it is suggested, Woolf re-made them in her imagination to be like herself. This process of identification continued in the third phase, in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*, when Woolf drew on the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, respectively, to explore and develop her mature identity as a writer.

Acknowledgements

All material in this thesis is previously unpublished in its current form. A version of a short extract from Chapter 6 appeared in *The English Review,* 8: 3 (1998), as '*Orlando* and its Muse' and a version of part of Chapter 8 appeared in *Critical Survey* 10: 3 (1998), as '"The bray of the gramophones and the voices of the poets": Art and Political Crisis in *Between the Acts*'.

Most of the research for this thesis was done at the Bodleian Library: thanks to the staff there for their help over the years. The thesis draws on archive research in the United States: special thanks to Karen V. Kukil and Martin Antonetti of the Rare Books Room, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, and Stephen Crook of the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. Two research trips to the United States archives were made possible with the financial support of the Open University Arts Faculty Research Committee, one of which was co-funded by the British Academy, in the form of a Small Personal Award granted to Lizbeth Goodman and myself.

My work has benefited from conversation, encouragement, and feedback from colleagues and fellow conference delegates, particularly Katharine Cockin, Diana Henderson, Mark Hussey and board members of the *Woolf Studies Annual,* Mary Joannou and John Lucas, Andrew McNeillie, and Stephen Regan. Angela Redgwell and the Open University Academic Computing Service have helped me out with computing problems on more than one occasion; Anne Ford saved the day by lending me a replacement computer when mine was stolen. Thanks also to Joan and Edmund de Gay, Jonathan de Gay, Margaret and Winston Stote, the Goodman family, and Lisa McShine.

Special thanks to Suzanne Raitt for honest and sound advice and stimulating conversations; to Lizbeth Goodman, for her belief in my work from the start, for her continued support and encouragement, and for the countless opportunities she has thrown my way; and to Jane Rose, who was a sympathetic manager in the earlier years of my research.

Finally, many thanks to Wayne Stote, without whose constant nagging, lengthy absences, and unfailing cynicism towards my ideas this thesis might never have been started, let alone finished.

Contents

Abbreviations

Introduction i

Chapter 1. 'The influence of something upon somebody' 1

Part I: The Search for Role Models

Chapter 2. From Woman Reader to Woman Writer: *The Voyage Out* 29

Chapter 3. Tradition and Exploration in *Night and Day* 55

Chapter 4. Culture and Survival: *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* 82

Part II: Elegies

Chapter 5. *To the Lighthouse* and the Ghost of Leslie Stephen 102

Chapter 6. Reclaiming the Past: *Orlando* and V. Sackville-West 144

Part III: Identification

Chapter 7. *The Waves* as Woolf's *Prelude* 173

Chapter 8. Talking with Coleridge in *Between the Acts* 201

Conclusion: Virginia Woolf's Haunted Houses 229

Bibliography 236

Abbreviations

3G	*Three Guineas,* intro. by Hermione Lee (1938; London: Hogarth Press, 1986)
BA	*Between the Acts,* ed. and intro. by Frank Kermode (1941; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
CE	*Collected Essays,* 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966–67)
CR	*The Common Reader,* ed. and intro. by Andrew McNeillie, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1925–32; repr. 1984–86)
D	*Diary,* ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, asst. ed. Andrew McNeillie, 5 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977–84)
E	*Essays,* ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1986 –)
JR	*Jacob's Room,* ed. and intro. by Kate Flint (1922; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
L	*Letters,* ed. by Nigel Nicolson, asst. ed. Joanne Trautmann Banks, 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975–1980)
MB	*Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings,* ed. and intro. by Jeanne Schulkind (1976; repr. Triad/Granada, 1978)
MD	*Mrs Dalloway,* ed. and intro. by Claire Tomalin (1925; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

ND	*Night and Day,* ed. and intro. by Suzanne Raitt (1919; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
O	*Orlando,* ed. and intro. by Rachel Bowlby (1928; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
QB	Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography,* 2 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1972)
Room	*A Room of One's Own* (1929; repr. London: Grafton, 1977)
TL	*To the Lighthouse,* ed. and intro. by Margaret Drabble (1927; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
VO	*The Voyage Out,* ed. and intro. by Lorna Sage (1915; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
W	*The Waves,* ed. and intro. by Gillian Beer (1931; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Occasional references to editions other than those listed above are identified in footnotes.

Introduction

> This influence, by which I mean the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that; has never been analysed in any of those Lives which I so much enjoy reading, or very superficially.
> — Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' (*MB,* 93)

Many scholars of Virginia Woolf have tended to accept her view of herself as a 'revolutionist' and a 'reformer' (*MB,* 147), and have taken it for granted that her work was innovative and original. [1] She has traditionally been placed with Eliot and Joyce as a modernist, and although recent accounts by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Makiko Minow-Pinkney, and Lyn Pykett have sought to view Woolf as a woman writer first and a modernist second, they nonetheless suggest that her innovations are specifically feminist strategies for reforming patriarchy. [2] This thesis, by contrast, contends that Woolf's methods, themes, and aspirations were conservative in certain central ways, for her novels were influenced profoundly by the work of writers from earlier eras. It argues that she stays closer to the literary past than most of her contemporaries and that in her attempts to reform the novel she had to negotiate the legacy of a particularly English literary past. I will develop this argument by demonstrating that Woolf was influenced by other writers, but also by exploring the dynamics of how this process of influence took place. I argue that these dynamics included an identification with past writers and a longing for the literary past, which complicated the process of negotiating the past and its values.

Woolf engaged closely with other writers in her novels, entering into imaginative relationships with them which impacted deeply on her writing practice and on her identity as a writer. The concept of relationship is appropriate to Woolf's reading and writing practice for she approached other writers from a peculiarly personal point of view. Her essays and reading notes show that she invented personalities for the writers she read: for example, when reading Cowper she conjures up 'a slim young man, with melancholy eyes, — a gleam of humour in them — an anxious expression — beautiful hands' and sees Keats as 'gentle and strong. Most loveable character.' [3] (Conversely, Woolf's tendency to describe Austen and Shakespeare as 'impersonal' and 'inscrutable' suggests that those writers frustrate her interest in 'personalities' as much as they elicit her admiration.) In a slightly different way, Woolf personified writers she had known as characters in her novels: for example, her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, becomes Mr Ramsay, Anne Thackeray Ritchie becomes Mrs Hilbery, and Vita Sackville-West becomes Orlando. Woolf used such imaginative constructions of other writers to engage with them and negotiate her own position in relation to them (in the words of my title, these figures are the 'ghosts' Woolf meets in the 'haunted' spaces of her texts). In emphasizing such relationships and encounters, this thesis questions the assumption made by many studies of influence (endorsed especially by Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence) that an author does not know, or at least does not acknowledge, sources of influence and that she would seek to eradicate influences if she were aware of them. This study recognizes that an author can be aware of her influences: indeed, in 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf suggests that influence itself is the '*consciousness* of other groups impinging upon one' (*MB*, 93) — and that reactions to influence, the capacity to be attracted or repelled, are central to the formation of personal and writerly identity. For this reason, the thesis gives priority to Woolf's reading interests and preoccupations, as far as they may be gleaned from her essays, diaries, and notebooks, and from allusions in drafts and finished versions of her novels. Although acknowledging the omnivorous nature of Woolf's interests and the multiplicity of influences she was exposed to, the thesis sets out to identify those influences which were especially important or significant at particular times. It is not my intention, therefore, to discuss or identify all the writers Woolf refers or alludes to in her novels. That task has already been done, in part, by Beverly Ann Schlack, who identifies a number of allusions in *Continuing Presences*. [4] The clutch of scholarly editions published when Woolf's novels were (briefly) released from copyright in 1992 have also identified the sources of various quotations and allusions in the texts. This thesis aims to take the work of these editions further by bringing some of their findings to bear on the issue of influence.

---

[1] To take a series of examples over the years: Stephen Spender wrote in Woolf's obituary that 'with every new novel she was "trying to do something different"' (*Listener* (10 April 1941), 533); James Hafley views Woolf as a modernist in the light of her own suggestion that culture changed in 1910 (*The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954)); and John Mepham argues that Woolf 'moved from one experiment to another ... Her work is astonishing in its formal variety and inventiveness.' (*Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p.xiv).

[2] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century,* 3 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988–94); Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century,* Writing in History (London: Edward Arnold, 1995); Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).

---

[3] Reading notes, January 1909-1911, at the back of her [*Night and Day*] Chapters 11-17. Holograph draft, pp.4, 24. Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

[4] *Continuing Presences* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1979). Schlack discusses five novels: *The Voyage Out, Jacob's Room, Mrs Dalloway, Orlando,* and *The Waves.*

The present work is intended as an intervention in a small but growing body of research on Woolf and her influences. Much of that research has been confined to specific, local comparisons between Woolf's work and that of another writer; most of it has been presented as short articles or papers, for example, in the *Woolf Studies Annual* and at the annual conferences of the International Virginia Woolf Society. [5] A few monographs compare Woolf with just one other writer: *Covert Relations* by Daniel Mark Fogel focuses on the influence of Henry James; *The Absent Father* by Perry Meisel looks at Woolf's response to Walter Pater; and Beth Carole Rosenberg has made a comparative study of Virginia Woolf and Samuel Johnson, although all three acknowledge, to varying degrees, the additional influence of Woolf's father, Sir Leslie Stephen in these encounters. [6] Other book-length studies examine Woolf's interest in the literature of a particular period. These include Alice Fox's *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* and Juliet Dusinberre's *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance* [7] — and two unpublished Ph.D. theses — 'Textual Voyages: Platonic Allusions in Virginia Woolf's Fiction' by Brenda Lyons (University of Oxford, 1995) and 'Some Aspects of Romanticism in the Work of Virginia Woolf' by Eric Warner (University of Oxford, 1980). Not all these works address the concept of influence in detail: Juliet Dusinberre's book, for example, is 'not ... a study of literary influence' (p.5), and Eric Warner's study is more of an exercise in using New Critical classifications to place Woolf in the Romantic tradition than in exploring influence as such. [8]

---

[5] The 1997 Conference, held at Plymouth State College, New Hampshire, was entitled 'Virginia Woolf and her Influences', though the collection of papers presented was more eclectic than this title suggests. The proceedings are due for publication by Pace University Press in 1998.

[6] Daniel Mark Fogel, *Covert Relations: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990) (though the title might suggest otherwise, Fogel does not articulate a three-way connection between these writers; Joyce and Woolf are discussed in separate sections); Perry Meisel, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980); Beth Carole Rosenberg, *Virginia Woolf and Samuel Johnson: Common Readers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). There are a number of studies which compare Woolf with another writer. Examples include Alison Booth's *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[7] Alice Fox, *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Juliet Dusinberre, *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance: Woman Reader or Common Reader?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

The present work gives central consideration to Woolf's responses to influence and to her own constructions of how it works, in order to point towards a more rigorous understanding of her engagement with other writers.

As I will argue, influence is not simply a one-to-one encounter of one writer with another (this is another fiction perpetuated by Harold Bloom), for the process is mediated by institutional factors, such as historical period, class, religion, and gender, which affect the way in which one writer reads another. Thus, the cultural milieu in which an author works is also important. This thesis takes a close look at the role played by writers in Woolf's own family, such as Sir Leslie Stephen and Anne Thackeray Ritchie, in mediating tradition to her and providing her with first-hand knowledge of the Victorian literary world. Nineteenth-century writers as far back as the Romantic poets are given particular attention here, for they were important for helping to shape English literature as Woolf encountered it as a young reader in the late nineteenth century. Gender was a key institutional factor mediating Woolf's response to past writers, for, as I will argue, she had to negotiate both the representation of women in nineteenth-century literature and prevailing cultural expectations about how women should write. These issues made Woolf's engagement with past women writers more complex than has been assumed. Woolf's suggestion in *A Room of One's Own*, that 'we think back through our mothers if we are women' (pp.72–73), has become something of a cliché in feminist criticism, but a closer reading of the essay reveals that Woolf was ambivalent about this idea, for she also 'thought back' through male authors. Indeed, that quotation continues: 'It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure.' The cost of such pleasure for Woolf was that it led her to value a tradition of 'great' English writers in which women writers were marginalized. As I will argue, Woolf's attempts to relate to female precursors was compromised by her respect for a male-dominated tradition.

Since I view influence as a kind of personal relationship mediated by cultural context or milieu, I have considered certain genres of literature to be historically too remote from Woolf to

---

[8] Similarly, Patricia Laurence seeks to place Woolf in an English tradition by suggesting that the tradition is characterized by an interest in silence in *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991); Janis Paul links Woolf with the Victorians by virtue of her interest in the material world, in *The Victorian Heritage of Virginia Woolf: The External World in her Novels* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1987), but neither investigates Woolf's engagement or negotiations with writers from these traditions.

impinge upon her directly. For example, although Woolf had an intense interest in Elizabethan literature and Classical Greek literature (as testified by her extensive reading notes and several essays), her response to these literatures was intimately bound up with her engagement with more recent cultural ideas and writings. Thus, as I argue in Chapter 4, Woolf's interest in the Classics was partly motivated by an attempt to 'trespass' on the formal educational opportunities afforded to the men of her circle and denied to herself; [9] and in Chapter 6, I suggest that her enjoyment of Elizabethan literature became deeply implicated in her fascination with Vita Sackville-West and her ancient English family. The importance of her milieu in mediating the past to her means that Woolf (like any other reader) did not read the earlier literature innocently: her reading was conditioned by her own context and by those who taught her. Indeed, as Sally Greene has pointed out, it is difficult to bring Renaissance Studies scholarship directly to bear on Woolf's writing, because she often misread or misremembered Elizabethan literature when she drew on it in her writings. [10] Thus, any account of Woolf's response to the Elizabethans or the Classics must take account of her recent precursors. If I have given these areas less attention than perhaps they merit I hope nonetheless that this thesis will contribute tangentially to debates on Woolf and the Classics and Woolf and the Renaissance by offering a methodological approach to the study of Woolf and her influences.

Woolf's fascination with past literature meant that the writings of her contemporaries were less significant for her than has often been supposed. Whereas Woolf drew freely on past writings, she was more sceptical and suspicious of modern literature. This was partly due to her sense of rivalry with her contemporaries, fuelled perhaps by a suspicion that their work-in-progress was better than her own: for example, while writing *Jacob's Room* Woolf noted in her diary that 'what I'm doing is probably being better done by Mr Joyce.' (*D*, II. 69). Some professional jealously coloured her friendship with Katherine Mansfield in the early years of her career, and may have led to their increasingly frosty relationship from 1917 until Mansfield's death in

---

[9] The links between Woolf's interests in Greek literature and her relationships with her Cambridge friends is also explored by Jean Whitehead in 'A Study of the Relationship between Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Intellectual Interests of her Time' (unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1979).

[10] 'Virginia Woolf, "Poet Historical"', a paper given at the Seventh Annual Virginia Woolf Conference (Plymouth State College, New Hampshire, June 1997).

1923. By contrast, Woolf did not consider herself to be in competition with writers from the past (and she had no need to fear what they might be about to publish), and so she could respect them as she dared not respect her contemporaries. Woolf was also concerned to establish connections of her own with past writers, which bypassed or belittled attempts by contemporaries like Joyce and Eliot to draw on past literature. So, although Woolf's first reading of *Ulysses* in 1918–19 informed her thinking about her own method as she expounded it in 'Modern Novels' — where she takes *Ulysses* as an example of the kind of modern novel she aspires to write (a work which can convey 'life' or 'spirit', 'truth' or 'reality') — Woolf answers Joyce's obsession with tradition in *Ulysses* by continually referring to her own selection of past writers both in the essay and her reading-notes for it. She compares *Ulysses* unfavourably with the work of Sterne and the Victorians and speculates that Sterne and Thackeray are superior novelists to Joyce, for *Ulysses* excludes or ignores so much of life, and reading *Tristram Shandy* or *Pendennis* leaves her 'convinced that there are other aspects of life, and larger ones into the bargain' (*E*, III. 34). Similarly, although Woolf has often been compared with T.S. Eliot for her use of literary allusion (for example, in the connections suggested between *The Waste Land* and *Between the Acts*), [11] her engagement with the past is not simply an attempt to emulate Eliot's concept of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', but a desire to negotiate links of her own.

Woolf's sense of the differences between herself and her contemporaries meant that she found them less useful than past English writers in helping her develop an identity as a writer. The most prominent of her contemporaries — Joyce, Eliot, Yeats, Pound, and Mansfield — were not English, and they looked to Continental literature for inspiration to a much greater extent than Woolf did. Woolf's responses to Russian and French literatures were ambivalent. She admitted that she found them inhibiting at times: in 'Modern Novels', she wrote that reading Russian literature can make one feel as though 'to write of any fiction save theirs is a waste of time. If we want understanding of the soul and heart where else shall we find it of comparable profundity?' (*E*, III. 35); and in a diary entry written while she was 'embedded' in Proust, Woolf notes that 'he will I suppose both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own' (*D*, III. 7). However, Russian and French literature were ultimately too alien to her for them to influence her profoundly. Indeed, they led her to identify herself more strongly as an English writer: in 'Modern Novels', she argues that Russian literature is characterized by unresolved questions and ultimate despair, and finds that her allegiance lies with an English tradition, the voice of 'an ancient civilisation which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand' (*E*, III. 36). The kind of writerly identity which Woolf sought was essentially an English one, and was very different from those developed by her contemporaries and by continental writers.

---

[11] Alex Zwerdling, '*Between the Acts* and the Coming of War', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 10: 3 (1977), 220–36 (p.231). See also Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1965), p.141.

The one contemporary who was important to Woolf was Vita Sackville-West. Her personification as Orlando means that she is more powerfully represented in Woolf's fiction than any other writer of the time: for example, Louis in *The Waves* only shares a few biographical details with T.S. Eliot, on whom the character is said to have been modelled (*TW*, xxxiii). Sackville-West was not only English but from an ancient aristocratic family: she represented the kind of contact with English history which Woolf craved. Woolf was also more intimate with her, personally, than with any of her other contemporaries, and their friendship had a deep impact on Woolf's life and work. By the time she began to write *Orlando*, their close relationship had cooled and Sackville-West had started an affair with Mary Campbell, so the novel also reflects a sense of loss. The novel and the figure of Orlando became means by which Woolf elegized their friendship and tried to hold on to it in a fictitious figure (she never dealt with Katherine Mansfield's death, for example, in such a detailed and extensive way). As I will argue, Woolf's receptivity to the influence of past writers (like her attempt to reclaim her lost friend), was motivated by a similar elegiac impulse to reclaim and engage with something deeply personal which had been lost.

This thesis examines eight of Woolf's novels, in chronological order, identifying key influences as they emerge, exploring how Woolf deals with them, and outlining how her responses to influence shifted during her career. (The only novel not covered in this study is *The Years*. Although the novel fits in with my contention that Woolf was preoccupied with the past — it displays her characteristic concern with the past impinging on the present as the characters reminisce about the past and repeat earlier conversations — it is less concerned with the *literary* past than other novels such as *Orlando* and *Between the Acts* (even though, like all Woolf's work, it includes a number of literary echoes and quotations). [12] Woolf possibly paid less attention to literary interests in *The Years* because she began the work as a combination of fiction and essays on socio-political, rather than literary, themes. For these reasons, the novel plays only a minor role in Woolf's exploration of her writerly identity which, I will argue, she conducted more intensively in the later years of her career in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts.*) Chapter 1 sets out the context for studying influence, making a critique of existing theories and developing a theoretical perspective for the subsequent analysis of the novels. Woolf's responses to influence are then divided into three phases. In the first phase, described in Part I, Woolf wrestled with existing perceptions of the woman writer as she looked to previous female writers as role models. Chapters 2 and 3 describe how Woolf attempted to draw on Jane Austen and Anne Thackeray Ritchie in her early novels, and struggled with their legacy. Central to this inheritance was the courtship narrative, which Woolf found extremely problematic because it was popularly thought of as an appropriate genre for women writers and because it endorsed women's roles as wives and mothers. These chapters show how Woolf sought refuge from such a problematic inheritance by turning to her male precursors, Milton and Shakespeare respectively. By the time she wrote *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway,* Woolf had abandoned her attempt to follow the example of women writers, and Chapter 4 shows how Woolf tried to gain covert access to the literary traditions which were thought to be the birthright of the men of her generation.

In the second phase of her career, Woolf continued to deal with the absence of a ready-made tradition, by dealing with the problems of loss and absence. Part II argues that Woolf's novels of the late 1920s were elegies for writers she had known (Leslie Stephen and Vita Sackville-West respectively), and for the literary history they represented. Chapter 5 shows Woolf claiming a patrilineal heritage, in her close encounter with the works Sir Leslie Stephen in *To the Lighthouse.* Chapter 6 demonstrates how her elegy for her friendship with Vita Sackville-West became a way of seeking intimacy with the English past represented by her aristocratic family and stately home. In these novels, Woolf seeks to re-make Stephen and Sackville-West to be like herself: she questions Stephen's status as Victorian patriarch and Sackville-West's status as aristocrat to claim through them a more subversive and intimate access to the past. The process of identification, of making others like herself, continued in the final phase, in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*, described in Part III. Chapters 7 and 8 demonstrate how Woolf drew on the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, respectively, to explore the question of what made her a writer in her late memoir 'A Sketch of the Past' (MB, 83). The chapters show how Romantic theories of authorship ultimately informed Woolf's theory of the 'moments of being' which she articulated in 'Sketch'. The examination of Woolf's engagement with these writers suggests that her mature identity as a writer did not constitute a break with the past but was intimately bound up with past writers.

---

[12] See, for example, Gerhard Joseph, 'The Antigone as Cultural Touchstone: Matthew Arnold, Hegel, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Margaret Drabble', *PMLA,* 96:1 (1981), 22–35.

Chapter 1

'The influence of something upon somebody'

To write a thesis on Virginia Woolf and her responses to influence is to risk stepping into the shoes of Charles Tansley, who is mocked in *To the Lighthouse:*

> His subject was now the influence of something upon somebody — they were walking on and Mrs Ramsay did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there ... She could not follow the ugly academic jargon, that rattled itself off so glibly... (TL, 18-19)

If Woolf could suggest that influence-hunting was an arcane academic activity in the 1920s, the study of influence now seems to have lost credibility within scholarly circles, too. Interest in literary influence has largely given way to the study of intertextuality: a term which insists that no text functions as a closed system, but is replete with overt or hidden connections with other writings. [1] The term 'influence' posits a connection between texts which may seem too specific to be plausible, by seeking to explain passing similarities between writers or texts in terms of cause and effect. It may also invoke outmoded notions, like that of the author as a solitary genius whose work loses integrity in encounters with other writers or events of the time (along with that mythical being of the great writer who is somehow beyond influence and whose work is therefore 'superior'). The practice of 'source-hunting' (usually part of the study of influence) is often undertaken with a misguided sense that there is a stable meaning which would be uncovered if only we could discover the original context for a quotation or allusion. These difficulties need to be negotiated before the workings of influence in Virginia Woolf's novels can be explored. This chapter will defend the decision to study influence, by developing a theoretical understanding of influence and how it operates, critiquing and (where relevant) freely borrowing from currently available theories. The chapter will also consider how the theoretical understanding of influence it outlines leads to practical strategies for analysing the dynamics of influence in Woolf's novels.

---

[1] *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.1.

The view of influence I aim to develop here is one which posits and explores a relationship between the work of different writers. By invoking the concept of 'relationship', I mean to suggest that an author can argue with the work of another, challenge it, respond to it, or agree with it and emulate it; and that her/his work develops through this process of response and reaction. Although this view of influence overlaps partly with the concept of intertextuality in that it recognizes that texts are linked or connected, it implies stronger connections than the echoes, repetitions, quotations, and allusions which are a common and inevitable feature of writing. Also, since this view of influence posits a sustained interaction — over the course of a book or even a career — between writers, it necessitates a recognition of the author as a distinct individual. Thus, where Julia Kristeva (in her seminal essay on intertextuality) argued that the 'notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity', [2] the view of influence presented in this thesis seeks to reassert the importance of the encounter between one thinking and writing subject and another, through the processes of reading and writing. In my emphasis on authorial agency, I also differ from Harold Bloom, who argues that a poet's knowledge of his precursors is irrelevant to the study of influence. [3]

Authorial agency and subjectivity are contentious issues, as is the assumption that we can posit a significant relationship between two authors, so it is first necessary to consider how a theory of influence might face up to the challenges raised by theories of intertextuality. Roland Barthes aptly summarizes the objections to the idea of influence in his attack on the related notion of authorial agency:

---

[2] 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (1966), in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.37.

[3] *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973). Hereafter *AI.* The second edition of this work was issued by Oxford University Press in 1997, but, apart from the addition of a preface, this edition is identical to the first. I have chosen to refer to the first edition in the following discussion, because it has been a reference point for most accounts of influence in the past 25 years. See also *A Map of Misreading* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Hereafter *MM.*

> ... a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. [4]

In Barthes' view, the text is simply a space in which echoes from other texts are heard. Recognition of the presence of these echoes calls into question the entire concept of an origin (and, by extension, originality) and an author (hence also authority), symbolized by Barthes' dismissal of the idea of the 'Author-God': the mythical figure who possesses both 'originality' as the originator of the text (or world) and 'authority' as the source of meaning. Barthes proposes that no writing is 'original', for all texts quote other texts which are not themselves original. Although the concept of influence necessarily rejects Barthes' central premise that there is no such thing as an author, the implications of his account of the problematic nature of origins and authority cannot be ignored. When we identify one author as an influence, we imply that that writer is the source or origin of an idea or phrase expressed by another writer. But this can only be done by ignoring the extent to which that 'source' itself is also the product of other texts and influences. As Barthes notes, writing 'has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins' (p.146). Since no writer can claim words or phrases as her own, we cannot state with certainty that she took even an unusual word or phrase from another.

To address this problem, we need to consider how we might constitute the author. Barthes, of course, argued that when language is written, that is, used 'no longer with a view to acting directly on reality', we can no longer use the concept of author for 'the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins' (p.142). In order to talk about influence, we need to restore the idea of the author as a distinct entity, and restore the idea that writing, though not 'acting directly on reality' bears some relationship to the particular cultural context in which it was produced. [5] In other words, while recognizing that elements in any text potentially have their origins in the 'innumerable centres of culture', we need to posit specific cultural contexts which mediate the reception and transmission of texts. We need to establish local contexts for different writings: constructing plausible links between two texts, for example, by demonstrating that one text was written earlier than another, and that the author of the later text could be expected to know about the earlier one. In this way, we can demonstrate a chronological or cultural relationship between the work of different writers which suggests that similarities between texts are not accidents of language. Though we cannot say for certain that a phrase or idea has its origin in a particular text, we need to be able to demonstrate that the later author, in using that phrase or idea, refers or responds to its previous use by another author. So even if we agree with Barthes that a text is a 'tissue of quotations', we need to restore the idea that the text is quoting *something*: that it is possible to find sources for those quotations (though conceding that those sources may not be the absolute origin of those words or ideas).

---

[4] 'The Death of the Author' (1968), in *Image–Music–Text,* essays selected and trans. by Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp.142–48 (p.146).

[5] It can also be argued that there are valid political reasons for restoring the idea of the author, in order to recognize the agency and subjectivity of women writers. See Nancy K. Miller, 'Arachnologies' in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 77–101 and Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author', in *Influence*

The concept of 'sources', as opposed to 'origins', has important implications for the question of authority and power, since it suggests that the earlier author does not control the meaning of a phrase which survives transmission to another text. In Barthes' dismissal of the concept of the '"message" of the Author-God', the site of power shifts from the writer to the reader, who becomes the producer of the text — and so reading becomes a form of writing. When this dynamic is mapped onto the relationship between writers and their influences, the later writer is seen as the 'reader', who 'produces' the earlier text in her or his own writing. Harold Bloom makes the analogy between reading and writing in his seminal work on influence, when he suggests that strong poets deliberately 'misread' their precursors in order to produce original work: great poems are misreadings of older ones (*AI*, 8). Bloom assumes that there is a 'correct' reading which the great writer eschews in order to misread, but, as we have seen, the concept of a 'correct' reading is extremely problematic. Furthermore, reading is not a simple one-to-one encounter between writer and reader. As Barthes notes, the phrase 'I read the text' is 'not always true':

---

and Intertextuality in Literary History, ed. by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp.146–80.

> I do not make [the text] undergo a predictive operation, consequent upon its being, an operation known as *reading*, and I is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, one which will subsequently deal with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. This 'I' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost). [6]

Barthes, of course, dismissed the idea of the reader as a person, suggesting that the reading function is merely a 'plurality of texts'. However, even if we restore the idea of the reader's identity, Barthes's formulation is a reminder that reading is never done innocently, that the reading position is itself determined by outside forces. So, when we view Woolf as a reader of other writers, we have to recognize that her readings were themselves influenced by literary, social, and cultural factors; that she was not an innocent reader, for she reconstructed earlier texts in a particular way. When looking at the 'relationship' between one writer and another, we need to consider how the circumstances in which the later writer wrote may have determined the way she read her precursors. In other words, there is no 'direct' link to the past: earlier writers can only be read through the distorting lenses of other writing which has taken place in the meantime. For this reason, we also need to acknowledge that our late twentieth-century reading of Woolf is constructed, not authoritative or authentic and that modern scholarship about earlier writers is not necessarily useful for assessing Woolf's view of them. Instead, we must try to construct (as far as possible) what those writers might have meant to her: how she *constructed* their work in her own. This means that allusions or echoes cannot simply be taken as references to earlier texts, for the 'meanings' of older material are changed as it is incorporated into a new context and the act of quotation itself reconstructs both texts all over again. We must dismiss the possible use of the study of influence as a method of interpretation: we cannot elucidate the meaning of a later text through reference to a source text, since the meaning of a phrase in one context will be different from its meaning in another.

The process of literary influence can now be seen as contingent upon two factors: the relationship between the works of different writers and the cultural, historical, and personal contexts which mediate that relationship. A study of literary influence needs to be aware of how these two dimensions work together. Specific, localized resemblances between texts or writers — including, for example, shared phrases or images, or broader, more structural echoes, such as similarities in plot-line — need to be viewed against the wider cultural narratives which are themselves overdetermined by factors such as gender, race, class, religion, and historical setting. However, while recognizing that influence is itself affected by institutional factors, we need to be aware that categorizing a text (as early twentieth-century literature or 'women's writing', for example) is not the same as citing influences on it.[7] While classification may sometimes be a helpful tool for making comparisons, it would not in itself be a sufficient basis for talking about influence. We need to understand how an author and her work interacts both with culturally inscribed literary, social, and cultural narratives and with other texts or authors.

---

[6] *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller; pref. by Richard Howard (1973; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 10.

In order to explore this interaction, a theory of influence needs to view 'the author' (in this case, Woolf) as a discrete individual with a recognizable identity, while acknowledging that her work is also contingent upon that of others. In viewing the concept of influence against that of intertextuality we hit upon a paradox: influence (like intertextuality) recognizes connections between texts and authors, but (unlike intertextuality) it also seeks to view an author and her work as discrete and separate from other writers and their work. To address this paradox, I will borrow the terminology of psychoanalytic theory, which puts forward a number of accounts of how the self is constructed and how it can achieve a sense of integrity in the face of the forces which threaten it. The problem of the integrity of the self is a key paradox in psychoanalysis: as Nancy Chodorow points out, psychoanalysis is concerned with restoring the individual and the self to wholeness on the one hand, while on the other hand it threatens the integrity of the self by suggesting that we don't know our centres — or that we probably don't have centres at all.[8] I suggest that the problem of the dissolution of the self addressed by psychoanalytic theory is analogous to the idea of the 'death of the author' and is central to the relationship between authors and their influences; that the construction of authorial identity through encounters with other writers is analogous to the construction of personal identity through relationships with other people.

---

[7] Northrop Frye's 'archetypal paradigm' of influence, which concentrates on the persistence of literary forms rather than on the activity of writers, is an example of influence scholarship which is more akin to classification. See Christopher Beach, *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p.10.

[8] *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp.154–56.

Freud presented two overlapping but slightly different solutions to the problem of the dissolution of the self. The more famous one, which forms part of his theory of the Oedipus Complex, concentrates on how the individual constructs and defends an illusion of its own autonomy. This is achieved through fantasies such as a child's dream of killing his father and mating with his mother, or of saving his father's life to repay his debt to his father for giving him life in the first place. When the Oedipus Complex is shattered, influence becomes repressed into the superego — for example, parental injunctions are internalized — and so the conscious mind defends an illusion of uniqueness. The second version takes greater account of the fact that not all influences are, or can be, repressed and that they continue to form an integral part of the individual's development. Freud articulates this dimension in 'On Narcissism', where he suggests that the libido can be directed both at the self and at others and that a balance between the two must be maintained for psychic health.[9] He uses this hypothesis to argue that the self is not autonomous, but fundamentally related to others. This model has been taken up by post-Freudians to form the basis of object-relations theory, which views individual development not as a process of asserting autonomy, but as one of interacting with others and developing a sense of 'connectedness or belongingness' along with a sense of self. As Nancy Chodorow describes it, object-relations theory suggests that 'knowledge of the other and knowledge of the self, construction of the self and construction of the other, are intimately related' (p.162). Where the first solution emphasizes the autonomous self, the second suggests a self which is fundamentally related to others, stressing 'belongingness or connectedness' over 'ego autonomy and control' (Chodorow, p.156). Of the two, the version put forward in 'On Narcissism' provides a more detailed model for exploring the paradox that the author is both a distinct entity and intimately connected with other writers by their common use of language, that her texts are intimately connected with other texts. As Chodorow explains, the object-relations view

---

[9] *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Standard Edition*, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1948–74), hereafter *SE*: 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' (XIV. 73–102).

> suggests that no one has a separateness consisting only of 'me' – 'not me' distinctions. Part of myself is always that which I have taken in; we are all to some degree incorporations and extensions of others. (p.107)

Applied to literary influence, this formulation suggests that while all texts are intertextual (they are incorporations and extensions of other texts), the individual text and the identity of the authorial self may be constructed within and because of these interconnections.

Most accounts of influence, by contrast, have tended to foreground Oedipal issues and it is worth pausing to consider some of the problems created by that view. The popularity of the Oedipus Complex in influence studies is largely due to Harold Bloom, who uses it as an analogy for a poet's response to influence. Bloom sees the relationship between a poet and his precursor as essentially oppositional and structures it along the lines of Freud's version of the family romance.[10] (The male pronoun is used advisedly because, as I shall argue, Bloom's account of influence is based specifically on the father–son relationship.) Where, in Freud's scheme, the son dreams of killing his father and mating with his mother in order to claim responsibility for his own existence, Bloom depicts the later poet wrestling with his precursor in order to claim originality for his own writing, a fantasy he depicts as the quest for direct access to the Muse (a fictitious site of originality). Both lover and mother, the Muse is the object of sexual desire and sexual jealousy and the later poet tries to claim a direct relationship with her by fighting and pushing aside his precursor. Where, in Freud's account of resolution of the Oedipus Complex, parental influence is repressed and thought to emanate from the self, in Bloom's account, a poet represses his influences in order to claim an illusory originality for his work: the attempt 'to re-beget one's own self, to become one's own Great Original' is important to the poet because his 'stance, his Word, his imaginative identity, his whole being *must* be unique to him, and remain unique, or he will perish, as a poet' (*AI*, 64, 71). The 'anxiety of influence' is the poet's fear that his work is not original and will not achieve posterity because he is preceded by stronger poets, particularly by one prominent figure, the strong precursor. In his quest for survival, the poet tries to establish an unique literary identity by appearing to be the influential rather than the influenced writer.

---

[10] Although Bloom claims in the preface to the second edition of *The Anxiety of Influence* that he 'never meant by "the anxiety of influence" a Freudian Oedipal rivalry, despite a rhetorical flourish or two' (p.xxii), Freudian theory (especially the family romance) is used as an extended metaphor throughout the book. Bloom's disclaimer seems to be a strategy for making his work acceptable at a time when Freudian theories have largely been discarded by critics.

The figure of the one great precursor which underlies Bloom's theory is extremely difficult to defend in view of the complex and problematic nature of the concept of *origins* for elements in a text. Although Bloom places his emphasis 'less upon phallic fatherhood and more upon priority', his theory nonetheless posits one important influence (the precursor or father), and one chain of influences (tradition or the family). [11] Bloom's familial model is an extremely narrow one for considering a writer's relationship to her influences: it is unashamedly canonical and hierarchical, for it assumes that writers will only be influenced by 'great' writers of the past. Any writer (but particularly one so well-read as Woolf) will have any number of other writers, both canonical and obscure, who might be considered significant others. Such multiplicity of influences also poses a challenge to the elaborate system Bloom devises to map out a poet's response to his precursor. Bloom argues that the 'true poet' sustains the illusion of having priority over his precursor by making defensive misreadings of the precursor's work. He invents six 'revisionary ratios' to describe these misreadings and mark out successive stages in a poet's development. Briefly, in *clinamen* and *tessera,* the least mature of the reactions, the poet echoes an earlier text, but makes changes or 'swerves' which appear to criticize or correct the earlier work. In *kenosis* and *daemonization,* the earlier work is echoed in a way which makes it appear inadequate, fragmented, or unoriginal. In the last two ratios (*askesis* and *apophrades*) the later writer asserts and establishes his identity; in the latter, he overcomes his precursor by repeating the precursor's work in a way that makes it look as though the later poet had written the earlier poet's characteristic work (*AI,* 14–16; *MM,* 92–105). Although the 'revisionary ratios', in isolation, are potentially useful in so far as they provide a terminology for viewing a text as a reaction against an earlier one, the system is too rigid for examining the complex network of influence in which all writing takes place.

---

[11] *AI*, 94. In addition to Freudian imagery, Bloom also freely plays with metaphors drawn from Jewish scripture. Bloom uses allusions to the Freudian father-figure and to the Jewish Patriarchs to develop a theory which is patriarchal in the most fundamental sense of the term: power passed down through the male line.

The centrality of the father–son relationship to Bloom's scheme makes it particularly unsuitable for viewing a woman writer's response to influences, as can be seen in the succession of attempts to apply his ideas to women writers. Part of the problem is that the only 'female' figure in Bloom's scheme is the Muse, who features as the object of the rivalry between strong, male poets. Joanne Feit Diehl tries to apply Bloom's ideas to women writers by suggesting that the Muse for a woman is father, male lover, and literary precursor: women poets are torn between a belief that they must open up to male influence if they are to become poets, and a desire to break free from this influence even though it could deprive them of their ability to write poetry. [12] While Diehl's model begs the question of whether the gender of a narrator's voice is the same as the sex of the writer, it also says very little about literary precursors as such and focuses instead on how women writers respond to fictional, composite images of masculinity. It thus evades the complex question of what might happen if a woman writer identified herself with a male writer as she submitted to his influence, and what language or images in the male precursor she might find uncongenial or problematic to use. Diehl's account exposes the further problem that the Bloomian model does not allow for the possibility of same-sex attraction: as Lilien Faderman has pointed out, Diehl assumes that all female poets are heterosexual. [13] Faderman's suggestion that a theory of influence needs to take account of the sexual orientation of the later poet is not an adequate solution because there is not necessarily a direct correlation between what (we think) we know about a writer's sexual orientation and the dynamics of attraction operating in her texts. Nonetheless the issues of identification and women's relationships with other women, which are not addressed by Bloom, are important, for, as

---

[12] '"Come Slowly — Eden": An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse', *Signs*, 3:3 (1978), 572–87.

[13] 'Comment on Joanne Feit Diehl's "'Come Slowly — Eden': An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse"', *Signs* 4:1 (1978), 188–91.

Louise Bernikow has noted (also in response to Diehl), the figure of the muse as female, as a mother and as a lover appears in the work of a number of women writers, including Christina Rossetti, Edna St Vincent Millay, and Sylvia Plath. [14]

The centrality of the family romance to the Bloomian model also leads to an excessive emphasis on the rivalry between writer and precursor. The problems with the oppositional approach are illustrated by the attempts of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar to adapt Bloom's ideas for women writers in *The Madwoman in the Attic* and later in *No Man's Land.* In *Madwoman,* they start from the Bloomian premise that 'literary history consists of strong action and inevitable reaction' and assert that, if the male poet faces the anxiety of influence, then the female writer faces the more debilitating crisis of the 'anxiety of authorship': 'a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor", the act of writing will isolate or destroy her'. [15] Focusing on nineteenth-century women writers, they recast Bloom's account of the poet's battle with his father-figure as the woman writer's struggle with patriarchy and its view of women. In particular, they argue that when nineteenth-century women wrote, they had to grapple with unhelpful predominant stereotypes of women which were inscribed into language and culture. Such stereotypes include the image of woman as angel, adored for being self-effacing, sexless, and spiritual; and the monster, feared for being self-motivated, scheming, and often overly sexual. Adapting Bloom's theory of the 'revisionary ratios', Gilbert and Gubar suggest that women re-write literature by men to subvert these unhelpful images and accommodate or express women's experiences. (Their view of women writers is analogous to Judith Fetterley's account of the female 'resisting reader' who challenges patriarchal assumptions in the work she encounters. This suggests that the processes of reading other people's work and writing one's own are closely related.) [16]

---

[14] 'Comment on Joanne Feit Diehl's "'Come Slowly — Eden': An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse"', *Signs* 4:1 (1978), 191–95.

[15] *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. xiii, 49.

[16] *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). Annette Kolodny also proposes a feminist version of revisionist reading, in response to Harold Bloom, in 'A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts' in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory,* ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp.46–62.

In adapting Bloom, Gilbert and Gubar inadvertently replicate his neglect of women writers, for they accept that the 'strong action' which prompts reaction will be that of male writers (here grouped without differentiation under the heading of 'patriarchy'). Their view of the role of female precursors is also generalized: they suggest that female writers turn to earlier women writers as models for subversive writing and that the relationship between a female writer and her precursor is helpful, for women writers can take inspiration from one other to resist the impediments presented to them by patriarchy. By assuming a homogenous group of female precursors in *Madwoman,* Gilbert and Gubar succumb to the very mistake they identified in patriarchal narratives: substituting an *idea* of women for specific individuals. As Judith Butler has suggested, 'the construction of the category of woman' — in this case, the woman writer — might be 'an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations'.[17] As a result, their theory does not allow for the variations which might arise as a writer responds to particular influences. Furthermore, many of the metaphors they use suggest that the female tradition they posit is more fictional than actual. For example, they adopt from Mary Shelley the mythic figure of the Sibyl as a 'parable' of women's writing: 'the story of the woman artist who enters the cavern of her own mind and finds there the scattered leaves not only of her own power but of the tradition which might have generated that power' (*Madwoman,* p.98). By positing an inspiring but essentially mythical female tradition, they ignore the problem of what happens when a woman writer identifies with actual female precursors who, as Gilbert and Gubar themselves point out, were undervalued and marginalized by society. Their analysis of unhelpful and inhibiting stereotypes may appear relevant to Woolf's writing — after all, their image of the angel is closely related to Woolf's satire of the Angel in the House, the Victorian ideal of women as 'intensely sympathetic' and 'utterly unselfish', which was an inhibiting stereotype she needed to counter before she could become a writer (*CE,* II. 285). Yet, by attributing these stereotypes to patriarchy, Gilbert and Gubar ignore the role of earlier women in transmitting these stereotypes and the extent to which women might have internalized these ideas: Woolf's description of the angel advising her to be 'sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of your sex ...' (ibid.) was, after all, an internalized voice.

---

[17] *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.4.

Gilbert and Gubar come closer to accounting for the complexities of women writers' response to actual female and male precursors in *No Man's Land.*[18] While they begin to move away from Bloom by adapting Freud's account of 'Female Sexuality' to women writers, their revised theory retains the ideas of rivalry and attraction which structure the family romance. They argue that women writers are both attracted to father-figures and fear and need to resist and oppose them, so that a 'vexed, nostalgic, and guilt-ridden service to sustain [the father's] name and fame, sometimes becomes an unpremeditated usurpation of his primacy, and sometimes becomes a fearful and guilty propriation of his outraged authority' (I. 171); ultimately, women writers may find that 'threatening male precursors and contemporaries must be annihilated' (I. 214). Gilbert and Gubar structure women writers' responses to their female precursors in terms of Freud's theory of the 'masculinity complex': a continued attachment to a mother-figure after puberty. They argue that this is a strong position for women writers to hold, because they can take a voyeuristic look at their female precursors thereby escaping the 'inexorable chain of inheritance' implicit in Bloom. However, Gilbert and Gubar's idea of viewing precursors from a distance does not fully concur with their argument that a later writer can encounter problems when she struggles with her foremother's autonomy, and that she may feel threatened by the perils of her foremother's position in patriarchy. By emphasizing the 'masculinity complex', Gilbert and Gubar's revised theory does not fully explain the engagement between female writers, because it does not explain how a writer might be attracted to, or identify herself with, someone she sees as 'like' herself.

---

[18] Gilbert and Gubar recognize the existence of female precursors somewhat belatedly. Their argument that early twentieth-century women writers were the first to have 'a uniquely female literary history' (I. 167), and real (rather than mythical) precursors to turn to is historically inaccurate because nineteenth-century women writers also had very real precursors to follow. For example, reviews of women writers from the mid-nineteenth century made comparisons with Jane Austen: Charlotte Brontë was described by J.G. Lockhart as 'far the cleverest since Austen and Edgeworth were in their prime', while Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* was described as a 'coarse imitation' of Jane Austen. The Brontës themselves became 'a measure of comparison when discussing George Eliot' (*The Brontës: The Critical Heritage,* ed. by Miriam Allott (London and New York: Routledge, 1974; repr. 1995), pp.82, 233, 42). Valerie Sanders has demonstrated that a number of nineteenth-century women writers (Charlotte Yonge, Eliza Lynn Linton, M.A. Ward, and Margaret Oliphant) were at their most 'emotionally involved' in their relationships with their female predecessors (*Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p.31.)

To explore the issue of identification further, we need to move away from issues of the Oedipus Complex and the family romance and turn to Freud's other account of the development of the self, in 'On Narcissism'. This version comes closer to examining the problem that the self is formed out of the forces which shape it, than the classic Oedipal narrative which plays down those forces by confining them to the repressed region of the unconscious. It also allows for greater flexibility than the rigid, narrowly heterosexual power structure of the family romance by suggesting that the ego can be attracted to itself (or something like itself) as well as to its opposite. Also, as Ellen Bayuk Rosenman has pointed out, the object-relations theory which has been developed from 'On Narcissism' is appropriate to women writers because it concentrates more on the mother–daughter unit than the father–son dyad emphasized by Freud. [19]

The object-relations view may be developed into a theory of literary influence which suggests that authors may have interactive rather than oppositional relationships with their influences. To do this, however, it is firstly necessary to consider how the object-relations view, which postulates primarily social and emotional contact with the other, might be accommodated with textual encounters with the other in the reading process (Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex, after all, emphasizes myths and myth-making and the shaping and changing of narratives). Judith Kegan Gardiner has suggested a solution to this problem by demonstrating that Nancy Chodorow's account of object-relations theory provides a model for exploring the connection between gendered experience and narratives used to describe personal development. Gardiner argues that Chodorow offers a fluid and relational account of identity to replace the linear, Oedipal narrative of a child's development, which views 'the *process* of identity formation as a developmental *progress* toward the achievement of a desired product, the autonomous individual, the paradigm for which is male'.[20] Gardiner argues that sociological and psychoanalytic accounts which tend to divide life-histories into rigidly-defined stages (such as the resolution of the Oedipus Complex) are inappropriate to women. Events in a woman's life such as marriage and motherhood might confer identity, but they do not impinge upon her sense of identity, which she never really achieves. Instead, Gardiner builds on Chodorow's thesis to suggest that 'female identity is a process' and not defined by clear stages (p.179). Applied to literary influence, Gardiner's view suggests that, instead of a Bloomian account of the one-to-one battle between poet and precursor (resolved by the successful deployment of one or more of the revisionary ratios), we could posit a complex and fluid process, where the later writer engages and negotiates with her precursors, without necessarily achieving resolution. Revisionary ratios may form part of this negotiation, but they need not be structured along the rigid, developmental lines posited by Bloom. Instead, engagement with influences continues throughout a writer's career: the evolution of an individual novel and a writer's development over the course of a career are both contingent upon this process. A processual model for the workings of literary influence would replace the repression and resistance model with a cyclical movement, where the psyche alternates between separation from and connection with others.

---

[19] *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother–Daughter Relationship* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

The connection which Gardiner makes between gendered experience of the world and of narratives suggests a way in which the institutional dimensions of influence might impinge upon encounters between reader and writer. However, we need to take a closer look at how the two kinds of experience might be aligned. Margaret Mahler's account of the relationship between self and other as an intrapsychic process is useful here:

> For the more or less normal adult, the experience of being fully 'in' and at the same time basically separate from the 'world out there' is among the givens of life that are taken for granted. Consciousness of self and absorption without awareness of self are the two polarities between which we move, with varying ease and with varying degrees of alternation or simultaneity ... *As is the case with any intrapsychic process, this one reverberates throughout the life cycle.*[21]

---

[20] 'On Female Identity and Writing by Women', in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp.177–91, (p.182).

[21] Quoted by Chodorow, p. 10 from Mahler, 'On the first three subphases of the separation–individuation process', in *Essential Papers on Object Relations*, ed. by Peter Buckley (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

Mahler's account can be taken as an analogy for the reading process, for readers can experience 'absorption without awareness of self' (the feeling of being 'lost' in a book) and 'consciousness of self' (an awareness of the effect a book is having, and how that effect is achieved). This analogy is indicated by Kate Flint in her theory of reading (particularly as practised by the 'woman reader'), which draws on the object-relations account of personal development. Flint uncouples her theory from the primarily sociological perspective indicated by Chodorow, by suggesting that the mother is not the only significant other who can influence personal development: 'one need not just see the formulation of the female subject through bonding and self-identification with others as taking place in relation to her biological mother'. [22] Neither does personal development take place through social intercourse alone: when we read, we identify with a broader community of readers, through shared reading material. Reading involves both identification with the point of view articulated in a book and distancing from it. The reading experience (like Mahler's account of self–other relations) is cyclical: in Flint's account, the reader is enabled 'to withdraw into the passivity enduced by the opiate of fiction' but also, 'to assert her sense of selfhood, and to know that she was not alone in doing so' (p.330). Rachel Brownstein describes a similar tendency in viewing the woman reader's experience as one in which she 'feels for, and feels her distance from, the literary-feminine ideal she confronts' in fictional heroines. [23] The cycle of engagement with and distancing from the text thus partly involves shifts between reading a text and reading the world.

If a writer's response to influence is a function of the way in which she reads, then this account of the reading process can be mapped onto a theory of how a writer might enter into relationship with other writers. The process of literary influence can be seen as analogous to the reading process, the result of an interaction between the two positions indicated by Mahler and Flint. On the occasions where an individual's self-awareness is low, the influence of the other is absorbed passively. This is not to say that the reader receives the text 'as it is', for the construction of a text in the reading process will always be overdetermined by other factors; but the reader's experience is one of empathizing with the writer, accepting her/his point of view (as the reader sees it) without question. This 'passive' response might be found in a writer when she provides a 'reading' of an earlier text in her work, re-constructing that earlier work for herself, perhaps replicating a plot or idea or phrases from the earlier writer. This polarity might be labelled 'unconscious', not to indicate that the author is unaware of the process, but because consciousness of self and consciousness of other as separate entities is less important.

---

[22] *The Woman Reader: 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.42.

[23] *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.xxvi.

This process is congruent with Woolf's own prescription for reading, in 'How Should One Read a Book?':

> If we could banish all ... preconceptions when we read, that would be an admirable beginning. Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. If you hang back, and reserve and criticise at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read. (*CE,* II. 2)

Woolf's account of the reading process is strongly based in a sense of identity with the other writer: attempting to 'become' the other writer, or enter into relationship with him as 'his fellow-worker and accomplice'. (Woolf generally used the masculine pronoun as generic; but this statement suggests that she engaged with all writers, not exclusively female ones.) Furthermore, this statement actually practises the method it preaches, for it effectively repeats advice given by Leslie Stephen in 'Hours in a Library': 'To read a book in the true sense — to read it, that is, not as the critic but in the spirit of enjoyment — is to lay aside for the moment one's own personality, and to become part of the author'.[24] While advising readers to 'try to become' the author, Woolf becomes her father. Educated by Stephen, Woolf learned to empathize with the writers she read: to imagine those writers as people, but also (as a consequence of this empathizing process) as projections of herself.

Woolf and Stephen both imply that an empathetic reading is the first stage in the critical process (it is an 'admirable beginning', a position taken for 'the moment'), which must then be followed by assessment from a critical distance. As Woolf goes on to say, the process of reading is 'completed' when we 'pass judgement upon [our] multitudinous impressions' (*CE,* II.

---

[24] Quoted by Andrew McNeillie in *E,* IV. xxi.

8). This second reaction is analogous to the other polarity indicated by Mahler — when the individual experiences consciousness of self and thus an awareness of difference from the other. The corresponding action in writing is found when the writer enters into dialogue and comparison with the work of another — often specifically naming or parodying the work of the precursor — so as to define herself in opposition to that other. The kind of dialogue envisaged by this theory suggests greater participation by the later writer than the Bakhtinian understanding of dialogue, as it has been adopted by critics such as Beth Carole Rosenberg, whereby a writer is 'a reader who is in dialogue with a precursor, and whose writing is the function of the inevitable pressure felt in that relationship'. [25] Bakhtin's theory of dialogics, which is based in linguistic theory and focuses on how words respond to other words as a function of language, is essentially intertextual. The understanding of dialogue given here aims to restore the element of intersubjectivity, where the later writer envisages and enters into conscious relationship with the earlier writer. This relationship is in part imaginary, for it is mediated by the later writer. As Patrocinio Schweickart has noted, the 'subjectivity roused to life by reading, while it may be attributed to the author, is nevertheless not a separate subjectivity but a projection of the subjectivity of the reader'. [26] When the later writer enters into a dialogue with the precursor, she stages both sides of the conversation, and as a result, she develops her own position (her own identity as a writer) in relation with, and in contrast to, another. So, although this kind of response could embrace the 'resistant reading' described by Gilbert and Gubar and some of the 'swerves' outlined by Bloom, the precursor's work is not always suppressed, but may be articulated and signalled within the later writer's work. This polarity is 'conscious', in that the later writer negotiates her relationship with others in a way that is conscious of self and other and of the processes of writing itself.

---

[25] *Virginia Woolf and Samuel Johnson*, p.xvi. Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic is also used by Suzan Harrison to theorize Virginia Woolf's influence on Eudora Welty in *Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf: Gender, Genre, and Influence* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

[26] 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading' (1986), in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, revised edition, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp.609–34 (p.627).

This account of writing as a process of 'reading' or re-constructing a text offers a theory of influence which meets the challenge posed to influence studies by intertextuality while also acknowledging authorial agency and identity. However, it presents new complications to the question of how gender affects the workings of influence. It has usually been assumed that female writers experience influence differently from male writers. However, the example of Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf unsettles the idea that women read (or respond to texts) in a different way from men. Kate Flint's theory of 'the woman reader', for example, is applicable to both Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen. The example also complicates the question of whether women writers react differently to female and male precursors. Such a distinction is central to feminist theorists of influence such as Gilbert and Gubar and Schweickart, who argue that women writers resist male precursors and adopt or defend female ones. The distinction could only be maintained if it were possible to assert that women readers could never empathize with writings by men — and the example of Woolf suggests that such empathy is possible. A solution lies in the recognition that empathy is in part actively achieved by the reader as she puts the text together in her own reading experience. So the woman reader can, if she wants to, choose to engage with women writers and imagine herself as part of a community. The idea of a community of women readers and the 'female tradition' can thus be re-interpreted not as a pre-determined transmission of influence across generations, but as an enabling fiction. Gilbert and Gubar's theory of affiliation is relevant here, for it suggests that women writers choose to identify with certain precursors, and to distance themselves from others, which enables 'an evasion of the inexorable lineage of the biological family' and 'implies a power of decision'. [27] Virginia Blain's suggestion that the female literary tradition is more accurately described in terms of an aunt–niece relationship than a mother–daughter one is appropriate here. Blain argues that the aunt–niece paradigm is appropriate precisely because it does not rely on biological determinacy but instead it enables precursors to be *adopted* as role models. [28] Woolf's famous speculation in *A Room of One's Own* that 'we think back through our mothers if we are women' (pp.72–73) can be reinterpreted in these terms, for 'thinking back' is an active process and not simply a recognition of a predetermined order.

---

[27] *No Man's Land*, I. 171.

[28] 'Thinking Back Through Our Aunts: Harriet Martineau and Tradition in Women's Writing', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 1:3 (1990), 223–39.

On closer inspection, *A Room of One's Own* can be seen as Woolf's attempt to actively and selectively construct a tradition rather than acknowledge her debts to her precursors. Her constructed tradition is not specifically female for she interrupts her discussion about women and writing to introduce the problematic idea of 'androgyny', or the presence of masculine and feminine attributes in the same mind in order to admit male precursors into the tradition she has invented: she takes the concept of androgyny from Coleridge and claims Shakespeare as one of the great androgynous writers.[29] Woolf characterizes the female tradition as a lost and silenced one, which the later writer must reconstruct. The tradition is represented by the fictitious figure of Judith Shakespeare, who was denied the chance to become a writer, and when Woolf refers to actual female precursors such as Lady Winchilsea, the Duchess of Newcastle, Dorothy Osborne, and Aphra Behn, she names them as though they have been forgotten. Even when she mentions her more recent and better-known precursors such as Jane Austen and George Eliot, Woolf emphasizes the ways in which they have been suppressed or silenced. She narrates the anecdote about Jane Austen feeling compelled to keep her writing secret by hiding her manuscripts when visitors arrived and she stresses George Eliot's suffering as a woman, particularly the social ostracization brought about by her relationship with a married man, George Lewes. When Woolf suggests that Eliot's later novels are to be admired for expressing 'the ancient consciousness of woman, charged with suffering and sensibility, and for so many ages dumb', she does not invoke an active female tradition but a history of women who have not been able to express themselves.

Once Woolf's idea of a female literary tradition is seen as a construct (which she distorts at will to include male precursors too), then her idea of a 'literary mother' can be deconstructed. It no longer applies specifically to a female writer nor does it suggest direct inheritance — but it does suggest that the later writer identifies with the earlier one in some way. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman has suggested that a woman writer's significant other is a mother-figure who collaborates with her in creation, so that 'literary influence becomes an act of mutual creation between mother and daughter' (p.139). My analysis of the female literary tradition has suggested that the reader (or later writer) creates the earlier writer for herself, but this in itself does not allow for *mutual* creation. How, therefore is it possible that the earlier writer helps to create (that is, *influences*) the later writer? This question is bound up in the wider issue of how the 'other' can influence the 'self'. Margaret Mahler's account of the relation between self and other in terms of that between child and mother is helpful here:

---

[29] Elaine Showalter argues that Woolf should not be considered as part of a 'women's tradition', and that her concepts of 'androgyny' and 'thinking back through our mothers' are ambivalent, in *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), pp.263–97.

> One could regard the entire life cycle as constituting a more or less successful process of distancing from and introjection of the lost symbiotic mother, an eternal longing for the actual or fantasied 'ideal state of self' with the latter standing for a symbiotic fusion with the 'all-good' symbiotic mother, who was at one time part of the self in a blissful state of well-being. [30]

Mahler interprets the mother-figure as a fantasy, a projection of an 'ideal state of self' which is now lost. In longing for the maternal presence, a child longs for something in itself: the 'mother' is both a projection of the self and a means of reaffirming the self. This is analogous to the fantasy of a lost female literary tradition which a writer (such as Woolf in *Room*), might construct to endorse her own views or reify her own position in literary history. But this also means that the 'other' is made an object of identification, a fictional object resembling the self in which the self is understood: this may happen when the later writer adopts an earlier one as a precursor. This adaptation of Mahler's account of self–other/child–mother relations pushes aside a familial model of influence, and replaces it with a fantasy-figure who need not be female but any writer with whom the later writer can identify.

The role of gender difference in literary 'parenting' can be deconstructed further. Nancy Chodorow's account is relevant here because it does not rely upon biological difference (as the Oedipal narrative does) but upon the social construction of gender. Chodorow makes a connection between the development of identity through engagement with others and the social roles a person enacts. Her account of how parents affect their children's development centres on the roles they play: the mother is the primary caretaker, a continuing presence in the child's early life, and the formative influence to which the mature psyche returns throughout life. (This role is traditionally performed by one woman, but Chodorow points out that this does not have to be the case.) The traditional role of the father is to teach the social skills which are needed outside the home — work such as hunting in primitive societies or business skills in metropolitan ones. Hence, one parental role (in western societies, the mother's role) is concerned with 'being' or identity, and the other (the father's) with 'doing' or agency. [31] The former marks a position of identification, the latter one of differentiation.

---

[30] Op. cit. Quoted Chodorow, p. 10.

The practice of writing does not easily fit into this account of socialization, for writing is practised both inside and outside the home by both male and female authors. However, the different roles played by precursors can be seen as analogous to the different kinds of parental role sketched by Chodorow. Issues of identity and agency are relevant to a writer's development: an author might look to precursors for guidance on how to be an author (or how to establish authorial identity) and how to practise writing (or how to assume agency). But unlike the parental roles sketched out by Chodorow, being and doing are closely related in the writing process: 'doing' or practising writing is a function of 'being' a writer. So when Chodorow's theory is removed from the social context it addresses and applied to a literary one, its gender-specific outline breaks down. The two parental roles, one influencing identity and one influencing action, may be fulfilled by the one precursor.

I have been arguing that the concept of the 'gendered division of labour' is irrelevant to the acts of reading and writing; and that there are no specifically 'male' or 'female' ways of writing and reading. However, this is not to say that gender is irrelevant to the process of literary influence entirely, for, as stated earlier, literary influence may be mediated by social and historical circumstances. Gender (along with other social factors) may impinge upon the ways in which a writer identifies with others. So, a woman reader might respond more positively to a woman writer who describes experiences they share as women *in a particular society*, and a woman writer may wish to allude to or build on a female precursor's social commentary or critique. Social factors may, equally, make a woman writer's identification with her female precursor ambivalent as well as affirming. As Nancy Chodorow suggests, a daughter's relationship with her mother may be problematic because, while identifying with her mother, she realizes that the maternal role is devalued by society. While a woman's identification with her mother can encourage her to seek to become a mother herself, it is also inhibiting because it threatens to initiate her into a role which society undervalues. I suggest that the social role of the mother is comparable to that of the woman writer, for the term has often been used derogatively. Woolf's ambivalence about actual (rather than imaginary) female precursors such as George Eliot and Jane Austen might be viewed as a function of the cultural undervaluing of the role of the 'woman writer'. Chodorow's theory of socialization also suggests that a daughter might, in reaction, look to 'father-figures' to teach her non-domestic skills which enable her to succeed in the wider world. Thus, women writers who are ambivalent about the example set by earlier women writers might seek to emulate male writers and avoid negative criticism incurred by their female precursors. This, in turn, may result in the sorts of problems typified by Gilbert and Gubar as the Angel/Monster dichotomy, where the male precursor's world-view and view of women are at odds with the woman writer's view of the world and of herself.

---

[31] Chodorow sets out this definition in 'Being and Doing: A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Socialization of Males and Females', in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, pp.23-44.

Gender thus emerges as one factor which can impact on the relationship between writers and thus affect the process of influence. A writer may identify with or experience difference from writers of either gender: in some instances, gender will not matter, in others, it could make the encounter problematic. By drawing on Chodorow's view of gender difference — which stresses the different roles society gives women and men, and the different values attached to these roles — this theory moves away from the essentialized account of gender found in many of the approaches to influence discussed in this chapter. In doing so, it also resists the emphasis placed on (heterosexual) attraction or rivalry between writers which plays a key role in many theories of influence, leaving us free to discuss the range of different kinds of relationships encountered by a writer in her reading and writing.

Influence can now be theorized as a writer's intimate encounter with her/his precursors through reading and consequently through writing (for writing, like reading, is an act of interpretation or reconstruction). The process is intertextual in two ways: since all writers are firstly readers, they are marked by their encounters with other writers before they begin to write; when they write, they enter a discourse shared by other writers, and so their practice of writing takes place in relation to that of others. Influence, as it is defined here, is concerned with the implications and dynamics of this relationship, dynamics which include both identification (where the writer is not self-conscious) and differentiation (when the writer is conscious of herself and her precursors). The relationship may be coloured by a variety of attitudes including ambivalence, resistance, attraction, or indifference; and ultimately it has an impact on the development of authorial identity and the specific character of a text.

How, then, might this theory help us develop critical approaches to identifying and exploring the workings of influence? Since the view of influence developed in this chapter stresses authorial identity, it suggests a critical practice which takes into consideration all of an author's writings, so that creative works are read in conjunction with secondary materials such as letters and diaries. And since authorial agency is also emphasized, it is important to use written evidence to show that the author was aware of the work which is said to have influenced her. Although it is difficult not to read Woolf and her influences teleologically, this approach seeks to counter the danger of critics claiming to identify 'influences', when in fact what is happening is that they are pointing out similarities apparent to them from their own knowledge of literature. [32] The critic-centred approach is encouraged by Bloom's contention that it is not important whether the later writer knew his precursor or not; it is practised by Perry Meisel in *The Absent Father,* where he argues from Bloom that Woolf's infrequent references to Walter Pater suggest that she had repressed him as a profound influence. By contrast, the practice outlined here encourages the use of secondary documents in conjuntion with creative writings to decide which authors influenced Woolf and how she read their work.

---

[32] Melba Cuddy-Keane drew attention to the difficulties in reading an author in relation to her influences, in 'Thinking Historically about Historical Thinking', a paper given at the Seventh Annual Virginia Woolf Conference (Plymouth State College, New Hampshire, June 1997). She suggested that the study of influence could be thought of in terms of a three-dimensional diagram: if Woolf was placed on the vertical axis and her influences on the horizontal axis, then the position of the critic is in a third dimension. A critic's position affects her perception of the relations between Woolf and her influences.

This approach seeks to distinguish the analysis of influence from comparative studies, by attempting to set out plausible links between the work of different writers and by seeking to interpret similarities and differences between bodies of work in terms of cause and effect. In terms of the theory outlined above, similarities can be understood as the assimilation of influences or as an author's identification with her influences. Points of contrast can be read as reactions against an influence, or an author's attempt to differentiate herself from her influences. Differences are neglected in conventional comparative approaches to influence and are over-emphasized in Bloom's 'antithetical criticism'; in looking at both identification and differentiation, the approach outlined here recognizes that the two responses are linked as polarities in a cyclical process. It recognizes that one reaction may give way to the other, and that a shift between the two constitutes a significant moment in a writer's response to influence.

Identification with a precursor may be detected in extended echoes of narrative patterns, verbal phrases, or names found in a precursor's work. [33] Such echoes may, of course, invoke a web of intertextuality: the repetition of narrative patterns, such as the courtship plot which Woolf employs in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, can invoke motifs found in the work of many writers. But if there are specific resemblances between two works and if it can be shown that the later writer had a strong awareness of a particular writer's work, then it can be said that an author is responding to the particular version of that narrative found in another writer's work. As I will demonstrate in Chapters 2 and 3, verbal echoes from Jane Austen and Anne Thackeray Ritchie in Woolf's first two novels, taken together with her critical writings about them, suggest that they were important foci in her attempt to deal with the issues and narratives of courtship. Thus the appearance of conventional narratives or stereotypical characters (in this case, courtship and the heroine) is an indication of how relations between precursor and later writer are mediated by a wider background (nineteenth-century ideas about marriage), which can determine the way in which the precursor's work is received.

---

[33] This kind of extended repetition differs from plagiarism: since influence involves an encounter between self and other, the later writer *participates* in re-telling a narrative or echoing phrases found in an other's work. Plagiarism is the copying of an other's work without such a process of construction or interpretation.

The concept of influence, as it is developed here, overlaps to some extent with Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as 'extended repetition with critical difference'.[34] Hutcheon advocates a wider definition of parody than is generally accepted, to argue that it need not involve an element of ridicule or comedy — although it can be used to satirize the precursor's work (the 'backgrounded text') or contemporary life. Hutcheon argues that parody necessarily contains an element of intentionality: the author means something by invoking another text, and the reader 'decodes' that meaning by reference to the earlier text. The study of influence does not require the elements of intentionality and certainty of meaning which are central to parody as Hutcheon defines it. However, parody and influence can overlap: as Hutcheon suggests, parody may be used as a strategy for overcoming the 'anxiety of influence', for it is a means of reinforcing the 'critical difference' between author and precursor (p.96). In my scheme, such a strategy would take place at the second, 'self-conscious' polarity: where the later writer invokes the precursor (sometimes in a critical way) in order to differentiate herself from him/her. For example, when Woolf ridicules the romantic notions of Mrs Hilbery (who represents Anne Thackeray Ritchie) in *Night and Day*, she distances herself from certain aspects of the courtship plot which structures the novel.

This second kind of response — differentiation or self-consciousness — may be detected in very specific references in a text: mentioning other writers or their work by name; providing an extended parody of their work; or even making a character-sketch of them (as in the cases of Anne Thackeray Ritchie or later, Leslie Stephen in *To the Lighthouse*). Such references demonstrate a conscious awareness of precursors and their work. Yet, even in this conscious phase, the later writer remains engaged with the precursor and seeks to define herself in relation to that precursor. This process can be detected when the later author argues against the work of another, or attempts to differentiate her work from it, by subverting or revising the earlier version. The response to influence may be cyclical, for the process of dialogue or argument may result in a recuperation of the precursor and a renewed sense of identification with him/her: in Margaret Mahler's terms, the interpsychic exchange between self and other may reverberate throughout the 'life-cycle' of an author's career. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, although Woolf sets Leslie Stephen at a distance and criticizes him and even ridicules him in the figure of Mr Ramsay, his philosophical ideas perculate through *To the Lighthouse* and play an important role in the process by which Woolf reconciled herself with her dead father. The circle turns again in *Orlando* (as I show in Chapter 6), when Woolf parodies, examines, and ridicules Stephen's ideas on biography and history and defines her own position in opposition to his.

---

[34] *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), p.7.

The object-relations model, on which this theory is based, suggests that the self develops in relation to the other. In terms of the scheme sketched out above, an author develops her own position and style (in other words, her authorial identity): reaffirming it by drawing on the work of an other or defining it by distinguishing her own approach from that of an other. Authorial identity can develop in relation to many others and the pattern of this development involves vicissitudes, rather than the progressive development prescribed by Bloom's six revisionary ratios. The following chapters aim to chart the course of Woolf's development as a writer through engagement with her precursors. By exploring how Woolf's identity as an author developed in relation to the writers who influenced her, I aim to detect the tensions and resolutions within her work which give it its distinctive character.

Part I

The Search for Role Models

Chapter 2

From Woman Reader to Woman Writer: *The Voyage Out*

The year after *The Voyage Out* was published, Woolf wrote in 'Hours in a Library' that 'the great season for reading is the season between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four' (*CE,* II. 34). In her own case, that six-year period led up to her beginning *Melymbrosia*, the first draft of *The Voyage Out,* in 1907, at the age of twenty-five (*L,* I. 315 n.; QB, I. 125). [1] In the essay, she notes that 'scarcely any of the contemporary writers' are among the authors she read during that time, except George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James, who (she argues) had classic status, although they were still alive (*CE,* II. 36). This insight into Woolf's reading habits suggests that she began her own writing career by immersing herself in the work of others, especially writers from past eras. The process of writing *The Voyage Out* can thus be seen as a period of transition for Woolf, from reading other people's texts to writing her own. As I will argue in this chapter, Woolf's reading of other people's texts and her meditations on the nature of reading play a pivotal role in the novel. *The Voyage Out* begins by exploring the courtship narrative, particularly as it was practised by Jane Austen, as Woolf charts the progress of her heroine, Rachel Vinrace, towards marriage. However, Woolf violently rejects that convention, not only by killing off her heroine shortly after she becomes engaged, but by turning to the poems of John Milton and providing a reading of them in the closing scenes of the novel. The shift from attempting to identify with Austen as a role-model to seeking to appropriate Milton marks out the trajectory of Woolf's frustration with her female precursor and her legacy of the courtship narrative towards an equally problematic attempt to engage with a great male precursor.

Woolf's reception of Austen and Milton was complicated by social and cultural factors, chiefly by the important role played by her father, Leslie Stephen, in mediating these writers to her. As she recalls in an appreciation written for Frederic Maitland's *Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (1906), he frequently read Austen's novels and recited Milton's poems to Woolf and her siblings. [2] Stephen had memorized — or as Woolf puts it 'acquired', or appropriated — the work of 'Wordsworth, Tennyson, Keats, and Matthew Arnold, among moderns. Milton of old writers was the one he knew best; he specially loved the "Ode on the Nativity", which he said to us regularly on Christmas night.' (Maitland, p.475). The result was that Woolf identified her father with the great writers: 'many of the great English poems now seem to me inseparable from my father' (Maitland, p.476). The phrase 'said to us' itself implies that Stephen was speaking his own words rather than reiterating those of Milton. This characteristic is reflected in *The Voyage Out* in Ridley Ambrose, who is heard to recite Milton's 'Nativity Ode' (and also later in Mr Ramsay, who declaims lines from Cowper and Tennyson, among others). Thus, Woolf's identity as a reader was bound up with her father and masculine ideas, and with the male voice. This voice has the power to appropriate literature, but also to mark out male and female terrain: the male voice later appears in *To the Lighthouse* as the chorus which tells Lily that 'women can't paint, women can't write' (*TL,* 67).

---

[1] Quentin Bell suggests that *Melymbrosia* 'may have had its beginnings in Virginia's imagination' in 1904 (QB, I. 125), which would mean that the novel was conceived in the midst of this period of intensive reading.

Woolf thought of reading as a male preserve, and particularly as the property of her father. In 'Hours in a Library', Woolf describes the 'true reader' as a '*man* of intense curiosity', and a close reading of the essay reveals that Leslie Stephen is deeply implicated in Woolf's description of the reading process. Not only does the essay share its title with Stephen's three-volume collection of critical essays, but Woolf's description of the 'true reader' in the essay reads as a character-sketch of him. Such a reader, she says, is 'essentially young. He is a man of intense curiosity; of ideas; open-minded and communicative, to whom reading is more of the nature of brisk exercise in the open air than of sheltered study; he trudges the high road, he climbs higher and higher upon the hills until the atmosphere is almost too fine to breathe in; to him it is not a sedentary pursuit at all' (*CE,* II. 34). Woolf's equation of reading with physical exercise — walking and climbing — recalls Leslie Stephen, who was a keen walker and alpine climber. He is even invoked by the youthful character of the 'true reader', for Woolf remarked that, 'My impression as a child always was that my father was not very much older than we were.' (Maitland, p.474)

---

[2] Frederic W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London: Duckworth, 1906), pp.474-76.

In addition to seeing the written word as a male preserve, Woolf viewed it as something alien to femininity. This is seen in a comparison of Woolfs memoirs of her father and mother. Although Woolf was taught at home by her mother in her early years, she associated books and reading far more closely with her father, who took over her education on her mother's death and allowed her to use his library. [3] In her 1906 memoir, Woolf attempts to recall her father through the books he read, and the article reads as a catalogue of Stephen's reading interests. Woolfs memoirs of her mother tend to recall physical details, such as the memory of sitting on her mother's lap and looking at the flowers on her dress. Even her memory of lessons with her mother focuses on 'the lights in [her opal ring] as it moved across the page of the lesson book when she taught us' (*MB,* 74, 95). The two pieces suggest that while Woolf associated her father with the symbolic order of books and reading, she thought of her mother in more semiotic terms, in memories of physical contact, shapes, and colours. [4] This analysis suggests that feminist accounts of the reading process, such as those of Flint and Schweickart, are inappropriate to Woolf. Flint, for example, suggests in *The Woman Reader: 1837–1914* that a woman entered into female communities by identifying with female characters in the works she read, and through her relationships with the women (such as mothers and sisters) with whom she read and discussed what she read. Woolf, by contrast, saw reading in terms of entering a male community and rejecting a female one.

Woolf entered this male-oriented readerly community from a position of inequality. She had to take the passive position of listening to Stephen's recitations in childhood, and even when she began to read books for herself, he continued to mediate her access to literature. Recalling a scene from her childhood for Vita Sackville-West several years later, Woolf pictured herself

---

[3] Maitland, p.476. Leslie Stephen's role in Woolfs education is discussed at length by Katherine C. Hill, in 'Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution', *PMLA*, 96 (1981), 351–62.

[4] The terms 'symbolic' and 'semiotic' are taken from Julia Kristeva's theory of language, as set out in *Revolution in Poetic Language,* trans. by Margaret Waller, intro. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

> tapping at my father's study door, saying very loud and clear 'Can I have another volume, father? I've finished this one'. Then he would be very pleased and say 'Gracious child, how you gobble!' ... and get up and take down, it may have been the 6th or 7th volume of Gibbons complete works, or Speddings Bacon, or Cowper's Letters. 'But my dear, if its worth reading its worth reading twice' he would say. (L, IV. 27)

Here, Leslie Stephen is the custodian of literature; Virginia, the daughter, has to knock for permission to enter his study and ask for another book. Her reading earns paternal praise, but also admonishment, for he advises her to read the volume twice. Woolf plays out a similar scene, more critically, in *The Voyage Out,* where the scholar Ridley Ambrose sits behind a closed door 'alone like an idol in an empty church', and other members of the household are expected to be quiet when they pass. The daughterly interruption comes when Ambrose's niece Rachel enters his room, calls him twice, and asks for Gibbon's *History of the Roman Empire* (which has been recommended to her by a man, St John Hirst, in the first place). Ambrose does not oblige, for he does not have a copy, and anyway disapproves of the choice — 'Gibbon! What on earth d'you want him for?' — and instead makes a series of recommendations of his own (*VO,* 191-92). The scene draws attention to the paternal custodianship of literature and the unequal position of the young woman reader.

In *The Voyage Out,* Woolf suggests a number of strategies by which a young woman might seek to be empowered by reading, but these accounts are also tempered by an awareness that such empowerment might not be possible. Central to the novel's *Bildungsroman* of Rachel Vinrace's progress from an 'unlicked girl' (*VO,* 19) to a young woman about to be married (and the curtailment of that process in her death from an unspecified tropical disease), is an exploration of the part played by reading in her growth into womanhood. Early in the novel, we find Rachel sitting in a room of her own reading Ibsen's *A Doll's House.* She is totally engrossed in the play and continues to feel part of it, even after lifting her eyes from the page. She stops reading to ask aloud, 'What's the truth of it all?', a question asked 'partly as herself, and partly as the heroine of the play she had just read' (*VO,* 136). As her absorption in the book fades, Rachel goes on to formulate her own ideas about its themes, for 'she went on thinking of things that the book suggested to her, of women and life' (*VO,* 137). The process of alternation between being carried with the flow of a book, and standing back to think for herself contributes to Rachel's development as a person:

> She came to conclusions which had to be remodelled according to the adventures of the day, and were indeed recast as liberally as anyone could desire, leaving always a small grain of belief behind them. (*VO,* 138)

As Flint notes, this passage combines an acknowledgement of the degree to which a reader can become absorbed in a book with 'a recognition (which the reader is expected to share) that such habits of identification, slipping into the skin and mind of a fictional character, can go hand in hand with a self-awareness of the process which is taking place.'[5] The fact that Rachel is reading drama emphasizes the degree to which she 'acts out' the text she reads: as Brownstein comments on this scene, she learns about life 'by doing mysterious solitary researches into her own importance by becoming, as she reads fiction, a heroine'.[6] Rachel's attempt to read beyond the text of *A Doll's House* is appropriate, for that play presents Nora's decision to leave her husband as an attempt to step outside received, or written, wisdom: 'I've had enough of what most people say, what they write in books. It's not enough. I must think things out for myself, I must decide.'[7] The play cannot give Rachel guidance on what to do: although, like Nora, Rachel steps outside the institution of marriage, it is by dying and not by leaving to start a new life.

In addition to outlining the problems of thinking beyond the written word, Woolf also points to difficulties of resisting patriarchal valuations and interpretations of literature. This is demonstrated in a series of references to Gibbon, whose work becomes a form of currency in the cultural economy of Rachel's circle. Gibbon is first mentioned when St John Hirst urges Rachel to read him, a recommendation which shows his ignorance of and patronizing attitude towards women:

---

[5] *The Woman Reader,* pp.272–73.

[6] *Becoming a Heroine,* pp.8–9.

[7] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House,* Cambridge Literature series, trans. by Kenneth McLeish, ed. by Mary Rafferty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), III. 574.

> 'About Gibbon,' he continued. 'D'you think you'll be able to appreciate him? He's the test, of course. It's awfully difficult to tell about women,' he continued, 'how much, I mean, is due to lack of training, and how much is native incapacity...' (*VO,* 172)

St John assigns women a negative value in the patriarchal system: they 'lack' education and are intrinsically incapable. Rachel is understandably offended by this conversation, but Gibbon becomes a means of dividing male and female experience, and asserting male dominance. Woolf describes how a number of female characters try to deny Gibbon's cultural value. Mrs Thornbury remembers trying to resist fatherly influence and Gibbon himself: 'My dear father was always quoting [Gibbon] at us, with the result that we resolved never to read a line.' (*VO,* 224) Rachel similarly reads Gibbon in a resistant, disinterested way. She opens a page and finds the words 'vivid and so beautiful'. Savouring sounds like 'Aethiopia' and 'Arabia Felix', she sets off on a flight of imagination along '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'. Her excitement takes her away from the book, for 'she ceased to read' (*VO,* 196). However, instead of resisting patriarchal valuations, Rachel's lack of interest marks her as an outsider to the patriarchal cultural economy, for when she tells Hirst that she does not like Gibbon, she feels as though 'her value as a human being was lessened because she did not happen to admire the style of Gibbon.' (*VO,* 226)

Woolf further exposes the perils of imaginative, resistant reading, in a passage where she describes Rachel reading Cowper's *Letters:*

> Next, she had picked up *Cowper's Letters,* the classic prescribed by her father which had bored her, so that one sentence chancing to say something about the smell of broom in his garden, she had thereupon seen the little hall at Richmond laden with flowers on the day of her mother's funeral, smelling so strong that now any flower-scent brought back the sickly horrible sensation ... (*VO,* 33)

Like Gibbon, Cowper was an author Woolf encountered through her own father. The idea of a 'prescribed' text in this passage indicates that Willoughby Vinrace seems to think that the book will somehow do Rachel good, whether she likes it or not. *Pre-scribing* literally means the writing of a plot in advance: it suggests that the book marks out the course Mr Vinrace wants Rachel to follow. Rachel's attempt to resist such prescription is ominous, for she retreats from this recommended text into funereal thoughts, which, centring on her dead mother, emphasize female mortality.

Woolf's descriptions of Rachel reading Ibsen, Gibbon, and Cowper suggest that though there are no sanctions against a woman reading texts by men, the positions from which she may read them are limited. She can identify with Nora in *The Doll's House,* and follow her to an indeterminate future not prescribed by the text; or she can read against the grain (as Rachel does with Gibbon and Cowper), a position which puts her outside society and even allies her with mortality. The connections between a resistant reading and female mortality are further reinforced at the end of the novel when Woolf alludes to yet another of Leslie Stephen's favourite writers, Milton, as she works quotations from 'Comus' and 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity' into her account of Rachel's illness and death.

This patriarchal custodianship and mediation of literature structures and complicates Woolf's encounter with Jane Austen in the novel. Woolf illustrates this in her description of Rachel's reading experience, when the chauvinistic, prosaic MP Richard Dalloway persuades her to read Austen, whom he describes as 'incomparably the greatest female writer we possess', because 'she does not attempt to write like a man. Every other woman does; on that account, I don't read 'em.' Dalloway pushes Austen outside masculine configurations into the marginalized category of 'woman writer'. As Dalloway's wife Clarissa points out, he does not read Austen himself: 'it's no good *your* pretending to know Jane by heart, considering that she always sends you to sleep!' (*VO,* 64). Thus Dalloway advises Rachel to read Austen, whom he dismisses as a woman writer (or a 'woman's writer'), thereby marginalizing women's writing and their reading experience. Dalloway's opinions reflect a view of Jane Austen which had been widespread since the nineteenth century. For example, George Lewes criticized those women writers who wrote 'from the man's point of view, instead of from the woman's ... women have too often thought but of rivalling men. It is their boast to be mistaken for men, — instead of speaking sincerely and energetically as women.' [8] Thus it can be seen that the 'female' perspective was itself defined by patriarchy and that Jane Austen's popularity stems from the fact that, by keeping to that perspective, she was thought not to rival men in literary territories they claimed as their own. Lewes also advocated Austen's seeming passivity as an antidote to angry women writers, and he famously prescribed for Charlotte Brontë 'a course of reading in Jane Austen' in order to teach her to counterbalance her powerful feelings with observation of human nature.[9]

---

[8] *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, p.162.

Although Woolf critiques a patriarchal critical tradition which mediated her own reception of Jane Austen in her satire of Dalloway, Austen's legacy was too pervasive and wide-ranging to be dismissed so easily. The Jane Austen that Dalloway praises was in many ways an invention of the Victorian culture into which Woolf was born: not only was Austen held up as a paradigm of a woman writer, but her novels were strongly approved because they were seen to endorse the values of marriage and domesticity. As B.C. Southam points out, Austen was reinvented and her popularity soared with the publication in 1870 of the first extended biographical account, a memoir by her nephew, J.E. Austen-Leigh. Woolf's step-aunt, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, famously reviewed the memoir in the *Cornhill* magazine and became influential in the popularization of Austen. Leslie Stephen also played a part in establishing her as a prescribed author, by writing the entry on her in the *Dictionary of National Biography.* Southam notes that after 1870, Jane Austen was 'prescribed in ... salutary terms'. Her novels were hailed as approved reading for the family circle because they conformed to John Ruskin's ideas of 'good books': they were seen to lack sensation and to endorse a domestic role for women.[10] Such approval marginalized Austen as much as it praised her. Leslie Stephen (like George Lewes and Woolf's Dalloway), praised her for her awareness of 'the precise limits of her own powers', limits which confined her to the home, and produced the 'unconscious charm of the domestic atmosphere of the stories'.[11] Stephen did not value the domestic sphere highly: 'allowing all possible praise to Miss Austen within her own sphere, I should dispute the conclusion that she was therefore entitled to be ranked with the great authors who have sounded the depths of human passion, or found symbols for the finest speculations of the human intellect, instead of amusing themselves with the humours of a country tea-table.' [12] Critical opinions such as these sought to define Austen as a 'woman writer', suitable reading material for 'women readers'. That definition was restrictive: as Bonnie Costello notes, 'Male praise [often] undermined women writers by isolating them in conventional gender categories that diminished their power', for example, by associating them with confined spaces and domesticity. [13]

---

[9] Ibid., p.24.

[10] *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols., ed. by B.C. Southam (London and New York: Routledge, 1968–87; repr. 1995), II. 8-9.

[11] *Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols., ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917–), I. 732.

Woolfs reaction to Austen as the paradigmatic 'woman writer' was complex, because she was both uneasy about Austen's legacy and identified herself with her. On the one hand, Woolf was wary of Austen as a role-model whose novels were sanctioned and prescribed by patriarchal culture in general and by her own father in particular. As Janet Todd has argued, 'for Woolf, Austen's art is one of enclosure', because she was 'annoyingly comfortable within the patriarchy'. [14] On the other, Woolfs essays suggest that she had internalized the male critics' views of Austen. She echoes Lewes in *A Room of One's Own,* when she praises Austen and Emily Brontë because they 'wrote as women write, not as men write', preferring them over Charlotte Brontë whose books are 'deformed and twisted' because she is 'at war with her lot' (*Room,* 71, 67). Woolf followed Stephen by admiring Austen's acceptance of her limitations and her use of a narrow environment to its fullest potential. She later wrote that from infancy, Austen 'knew not only what the world looked like, but had already chosen her kingdom. She had agreed that if she might rule over that territory, she would covet no other' (*CE,* I. 146). Woolf took Austen as a model in *The Voyage Out,* when she used the sort of limited, enclosed environment she associated with Austen — a ship, an isolated villa, a hotel, and a river-boat — and developed her narrative through a series of exchanges at dances, expeditions, dinners, and social gatherings. Even the motif of a 'voyage out' is not a longing 'for a power of vision which might overpass that limit' which Woolf criticized in *Jane Eyre* (*Room,* 66), for the voyage ultimately leads only to Rachel's death. Like Austen, Woolf mentions world events tangentially when they impinge upon domestic life: for example, characters in *The Voyage Out* refer obliquely to political events in conversation, as the Napoleonic Wars only impinge on *Pride and Prejudice* in so far as they bring a troupe of soldiers into the social circle of Austen's characters. Woolf never rebelled against this kind of limitation: from *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway,* through *To the Lighthouse,* to *The Years* and *Between the Acts,* events such as the two world wars are only mentioned as they filter in to the domestic lives of ordinary people. For example, we barely glimpse Jacob at Cambridge University; and we do not see Richard Dalloway at work in the House of Commons or Giles Oliver in his London business.

---

[12] 'Humour', unsigned review in *Cornhill Magazine,* 33 (1876), 318–26 (pp.324–25).

[13] Quoted in *No Man's Land,* I. 148 from 'Response to [Gilbert and Gubar's] "Tradition and the Female Talent"', in *Literary History: Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the Northeastern University Center for Literary Studies,* 2, ed. by H.L. Sussman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), p.28.

[14] 'Who's Afraid of Jane Austen?' in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives,* ed. by Janet Todd, Women & Literature, New Series 3 (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1983), pp.107–27 (pp.121, 122).

Woolf looked to Austen as a role-model for a form of writing which could make social criticism in a veiled way while keeping within the limited range and focus which were culturally accepted for women writers. Thus, although Daniel Fogel has argued that the satire in *The Voyage Out* owes more to Henry James's comedies of manners than to those of Austen, the complexities of Austen's position as a *female* role-model make her a more powerful point of reference than James.[15] Woolf recognized that Austen's greatest strength was her ability to satirize: 'when she is pointing out where [things and people] are bad, weak, faulty, exquisitely absurd she is winged and inapproachable' (*E,* II. 13), and a number of comments in *The Voyage Out* suggest that Woolf had studied Austen's method and put some of her techniques into practice. As Virginia Blain notes, Woolf looked to Austen as a model for her narrative stance in her early novels.[16] Like Austen, Woolf belittles characters by using reported speech to imply that what they actually said is not worth repeating. Austen, for example, dismisses the bookish Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*:

> [Elizabeth and Jane] found Mary, as usual, deep in the study of thorough bass and human nature; and had some new extracts to admire, and some new observations of thread-bare morality to listen to.[17]

---

[15] *Covert Relations,* p. 124. For James's influence on Woolf, see also Carol M. Dole, 'Oppression, Obsession: Virginia Woolf and Henry James', *Southern Review,* 24:2 (1988), 253–71.

[16] 'Narrative Voice and the Female Perspective in Virginia Woolf's Early Novels', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision, 1983), pp.115–36 (pp.118–19, 122–23).

[17] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice,* edited by Tony Tanner (1813; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.105 (hereafter *PP*).

Woolf gives similar short shrift to the pedantic Mr Pepper who gives a 'discourse ... upon the unplumbed depths of the ocean.' He goes on 'with considerable detail and with such show of knowledge, that Ridley was disgusted, and begged him to stop' (*VO,* 18–19). In both quotations, the satire is intensified by the ironic combination of praising and diminishing phrases. Although we are told that Mary's collection of quotations is to be admired, the implication is that she asks for, rather than deserves, admiration; similarly Pepper does not impress people with his knowledge, but self-indulgently shows it off.

Austen also combines a demonstration of folly with a direct comment on it, extending the comic effect but also giving a false sense of authorial naiveté by directly acknowledging something which the reader will have noticed much earlier on. Austen spends two chapters in *Pride and Prejudice* presenting the pompous and sycophantic Mr Collins in a thoroughly ridiculous light, but rounds it off with the direct authorial comment that 'Mr Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society' (*PP,* 114). Woolf treats Evelyn Murgatroyd in *The Voyage Out* in a similar way: she begins by depicting Evelyn's excessive keenness to become friendly with every man she meets, but then goes on to gloss this account with an ironic authorial statement:

> The full and romantic career of Evelyn Murgatroyd is best hit off by her own words, 'Call me Evelyn and I'll call you St John.' She said that on very slight provocation — her surname was enough — but although a great many young men had answered her already with considerable spirit she went on saying it and making choice of none. (VO, 143)

There is a conservative dimension to this satire, for Woolf implies that Evelyn flouts socially accepted standards of female behaviour. Rather than arguing for sexual freedom, Woolf treats Evelyn with the suspicion that Austen directs towards man-hunters such as Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* or Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park.*

However, Woolf's use of Austenian satire and irony is uneven, for *The Voyage Out* lacks the didactic structure found in Austen's novels. Austen makes clear distinctions between characters who have her approval and those who do not. Austen's novels usually have a select group of characters who are taken seriously, chief among whom is the heroine, who is never mocked and, even when she is shown to be in the wrong, comes to realise it *herself.* (A rare exception is

Emma, who is mocked, although she also possesses the ability to laugh at herself.) In *Pride and Prejudice,* for example, Elizabeth Bennet is led by examination of her own attitudes as well as by events to revise her opinion of two men: Fitzwilliam Darcy, to whom she takes an instant dislike but comes to see as respectable, kind, and trustworthy; and George Wickham, whom she admires and trusts because of his charming manner, but discovers to be duplicitous and deceitful. At the other end of the scale, there are minor characters who are mocked, whose motives are never fully explained and whose actions thus appear absurd. For example, much is made of Lydia Bennet's infatuation with the soldiers, and this is the sole reason given for her elopement with Wickham. Authorial perspective is used to make distinctions between characters: the reader only really enters the consciousness of the heroine, and is never told the thoughts of the minor characters, making it easier for them to be ridiculed. By contrast, Woolf enters the consciousness of most of her characters, even the minor ones, and displays sympathy for many of them. For example, we are introduced to a variety of minor figures staying at a hotel in Santa Marina, by an omniscient narrator who passes from room to room and reports characters' thoughts as they prepare for bed. Woolf's perspective can be read as a reaction against Austen's didacticism by disrupting the kind of distinctions found in her novels.

Central to Woolf's reaction against Austen's didactic structure is her unease with the courtship narrative, for all six of Austen's major novels trace a heroine's progress towards marriage. This is the key reason why they had such strong approval from Victorian society, and it probably informs Leslie Stephen's praise of 'Miss Austen's gift for clearness, proportion, and neatness'. [18] Narrative conventions can be used to reinforce social conventions. As Rachel Blau Du Plessis argues: 'Narrative outcome is one plane where ... the word "convention" is found resonating between its literary and social meanings.' [19] She argues from Louis Althusser that narrative is prescriptive, for it 'may function on a small scale the way that ideology functions on a large scale — as a "system of representation by which we imagine the world as it is".'[20] The prescription of Jane Austen by Victorian society can thus be seen as an attempt to 'pre-scribe' the lives of its young women.

---

[18] *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book.* With an intro. by Alan Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 14. Woolf quoted this comment in her obituary of Anne Thackeray Ritchie (*E,* III. 17).

[19] *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p.3.

The Voyage Out is structured as a disruption and rejection of the courtship narrative of *Pride and Prejudice:* it thus implicitly rejects Victorian attempts to prescribe marriage in the reading material and the lives of young women. In *Pride and Prejudice,* Austen brings about four marriages: Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy; Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley; Lydia Bennet and George Wickham; and Charlotte Lucas and William Collins. The serious side of the novel explores and justifies Elizabeth and Jane's motivations for choosing their husbands. The more satirical side criticizes Lydia and Charlotte: the former brings scandal on her family by eloping, the latter makes the 'disgracing' decision to marry a man she does not like for the sake of material comfort (*PP,* 166). Austen also makes it clear that marriage is an economic imperative in her society: Elizabeth, Jane, and Lydia cannot expect to inherit money because their father's estate is entailed on their cousin William Collins. Charlotte, cynically, sees marriage as an economic necessity only one step removed from prostitution: 'the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune' (*PP,* 163). Austen brings the moral and economic dimensions of marriage together when she hands out a system of 'rewards' to her four couples: Elizabeth wins the richest man in the book, with the highest social standing. Jane, the secondary heroine, marries Bingley, the 'single man in possession of a good fortune' described in the famous opening sentence, who keeps an elegant house and is highly regarded in the community. Charlotte marries Collins, a clergyman of only moderate social standing and income; and Lydia marries Wickham, a servant's son who is deeply in debt.

In *The Voyage Out,* Woolf begins to parallel this structure by suggesting romantic relationships within four couples (Susan Warrington and Arthur Venning; Evelyn Murgatroyd and Mr Perrott; Helen Ambrose and St John Hirst; and Rachel Vinrace and Terence Hewet), but then pulls the structure apart. The first couple, Susan and Arthur, become engaged and will presumably be married, but Woolf's satirical treatment of their engagement suggests her discomfort with the centrality of marriage in Austen's novels. Woolf's picture of Susan and Arthur exhibits a tension between ridiculing them and sympathizing with them. Her description of the couple begins sympathetically. In the scene when we first meet Susan, we are made privy to her thoughts (*VO,* 114–15), and she cuts a sad figure as a thirty-year-old spinster who would very much like to be married but has to endure the hardship of looking after her selfish invalid aunt Mrs Paley. It is made clear that she is genuinely very fond of Arthur, and in the scenes that follow, we see his kindnesses towards her and his attempts to draw her out of servitude to her aunt. Not only are we shown that their relationship is founded on genuine affection, but Woolf implies that Susan stands to gain, rather than lose, freedom, by getting married. Such close and sympathetic treatment, reserved by Jane Austen for a few select characters, is applied here to peripheral characters. In their engagement scene, there is an uneasy transition when Woolf reverts to treating Susan and Arthur in the mocking way in which Jane Austen treats her minor characters. The sequence starts sympathetically by presenting Susan's feelings as genuine and intense:

---

[20] Du Plessis p.3. Quotation from *For Marx,* trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), p.233.

> Susan had been conscious of the excitement of intimacy, which seemed not only to lay bare something in her, but in the trees and the sky, and the progress of his speech which seemed inevitable was positively painful to her, for no human being had ever come so close to her before. (*VO,* 154)

Then it lapses into ridicule. Susan asks Arthur what first attracted him to her; Elizabeth Bennet poses a similar question when she asks Darcy what made him fall in love with her (*PP,* 388). Whereas Darcy replies that it was a gradual process, Arthur states that he was attracted by a buckle Susan had worn and by the fact that she did not take peas with her meal. The Austenian satire continues: 'From this they went on to compare their more serious tastes, or rather Susan ascertained what Arthur cared about, and professed herself very fond of the same thing.' (*VO,* 155) The phrase 'professed herself', which is often used by Austen to expose hypocrisy, implies that Susan is trying hard to impress Arthur in order to secure him as a husband, so that she can 'escape the long solitude of an old maid's life' (*VO,* 155). This is an odd interpretation of Susan's behaviour since she has just secured an offer of marriage and so does not need to try any more; and it conflicts with the tone Woolf had taken towards the couple before they were engaged.

Woolf's treatment of the other three couples in *The Voyage Out* resists marriage as a possible closure altogether. The second relationship, between Evelyn Murgatroyd and Mr Perrott, ends in a proposal, but no engagement. Evelyn spends the whole of the novel trying to win a husband, but when Perrott proposes in the closing pages, her romantic notions wither away and she finds that 'she felt less for him than she had ever felt before' (*VO,* 426). The reasons she gives for her refusal reject the monogamy inscribed in the marriage contract: 'I sometimes think I haven't got it in me to care very much for one person only.' (*VO,* 427) The third couple, Helen Ambrose and St John Hirst, represent a radical opposition to marriage in themselves, for Helen is already married. Their relationship is never developed beyond flirtation and a feeling of mutual understanding, but they are frequently seen together and like Jane and Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice,* they make a central quartet with the two main protagonists. The fourth couple are Terence and Rachel, who get engaged — but whereas Elizabeth and Darcy have the greatest wealth and social status, economic considerations never enter the thoughts of Woolf's central couple and they face the greatest emotional problems. Rachel and Terence's relationship is beset with doubts as to whether it is possible for men and women to communicate with one another, and their engagement ends not in marriage, but in Rachel's death.

The process by which Woolf initially adopts but then subverts and rejects the courtship narrative suggests that she had partly internalized prevailing ideas about the role of the 'woman writer', but was also uneasy about accepting the limitations inherent in that role. It also suggests an ambivalence towards winning patriarchal approbation by following the paradigm set by Jane Austen. Woolf's reaction against Austen as a literary 'mother' parallels the kind of ambivalence which Phyllis Rose has argued characterized Woolf's relationship with her own mother, Julia Stephen, whom she saw as an ideal Victorian wife and mother. [21] Woolf's rejection of Austen's narrative may be seen as part of the process she later described as 'killing the angel in the house' (*CE,* II. 285–86), or rejecting Victorian pressures on a woman to be ladylike and to assume the roles of wife and mother. Woolf's invocation and rejection of Austen's narrative suggests a violent assault on the legacy of her female precursor. As Du Plessis has argued, there is an

---

[21] *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf* (1978; repr. London: Pandora, 1986), pp.161–62.

'aggressive' element in Woolf's rupturing of the marriage narrative with Rachel's death; it reacts against narrative convention — 'the plot "tyranny", that avalanche of events moving to "satisfactory solutions"' (p.50). It is more extreme than the Bloomian swerve *clinamen*, whereby a later writer begins to follow a precursor's text, but provides an ending which 'corrects' the original version, for Rachel's death is hardly a corrective.

The ending of *The Voyage Out* belies the extent to which Woolf engages with Austen as a precursor, for Woolf's novel represents an attempt to think beyond the ending of *Pride and Prejudice.* This is analogous to the account of Rachel reading Ibsen and 'thinking of things that the book suggested to her' after putting it down (*VO,* 137). *Pride and Prejudice* effectively ends with Elizabeth and Darcy's engagement: the brief final chapter which reports their wedding focuses mainly on the fate and opinions of the other characters. By placing Terence and Rachel's engagement part-way through *The Voyage Out,* Woolf attempts to probe what happens when a couple sets out towards marriage, and much of the central part of the book is concerned with their conversations together and their attempts to get to know one another better. From their engagement until Rachel's illness, their doubts about whether they can ever have a satisfactory relationship, and indeed whether any married couple is truly happy, pick up on Jane Austen's more cynical comments about marriage, such as Charlotte Lucas's speculation that marriage is 'uncertain of giving happiness' (*PP,* 163). Woolf's emphasis on the difficulty women and men experience in relating to one another probes an area on which Austen is silent in *Pride and Prejudice.* Darcy and Elizabeth are apart for much of the novel: he is in London and she is in the country at Longbourne, and the key shifts in Elizabeth's attitude towards Darcy happen in his absence, such as when she is reading a letter from him or when Darcy's aunt Catherine De Bourgh convinces Elizabeth of the seriousness of his feelings by trying to force her to break off relations with him. There are hints that it is easier for partners to relate to one another when they are apart. For example, Elizabeth's feelings towards Darcy intensify while looking at his portrait, 'as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before' (*PP,* 272); but when she meets him face-to-face moments later, she feels only embarrassment and is unable to communicate with him. Rather than rejecting Austen's narratives outright, Woolf affirms what Austen hints at: that happiness can only be found in the hypothetical space of the conclusion, as in *The Voyage Out* it is only found after Rachel's death.

Woolfs exploration of Terence and Rachel's efforts to get to know one another constitutes an effort to explore a subversive and what might be called a feminine aesthetic. In their exchanges, Terence and Rachel try to communicate through ideas which reach beyond language: he tells her of his plans to write a novel 'about Silence .. the things people don't say' (*VO,* 249), and she talks about finding expression in music, for 'music goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once.' (*VO,* 239). These constitute hints at a semiotic order beyond the symbolic order. Shortly after finishing *The Voyage Out,* Woolf suggested that Austen provided a role-model for this exploration:

> Only those who have realised for themselves the ridiculous inadequacy of a straight stick dipped in ink when brought in contact with the rich and tumultuous glow of life can appreciate to the full the wonder of her achievement, the imagination, the penetration, the insight, the courage, the sincerity which are required to bring before us one of those perfectly normal and simple incidents of average human life. (*E,* II. 14)

Here, Woolf seeks to claim Austen as a positive role-model, as a female novelist who is able to wield the phallic 'straight stick' in order to capture the semiotic 'rich and tumultuous glow of life'. Woolf seeks to identify herself with Austen as a fellow-novelist: the qualities she picks out for comment — imagination, penetration, insight, courage, and sincerity — are not technical but personal, and so she seeks to restore the woman behind the writer. As Judith Lee argues, Woolf claims privileged knowledge of Austen and tries to '"express" a character through whom we can understand experience instead of describing a figure we merely observe'. [22] Yet Woolfs essays on Austen also suggest that she found her impossible to know: she describes her as 'inscrutable', yielding only 'blankness' despite Woolfs wish 'to know everything that it is possible to know about her' (*CE,* II. 275; *E,* II. 10). In effect, Austen comes to represent what Woolf seeks for herself: her analysis of Austen's writing prefigures her own ideas about using fiction to explore the 'luminous halo' of 'life' in 'Modern Fiction' (*CE,* II. 106). Thus, as in

---

[22] '"Without Hate, Without Bitterness, Without Fear, Without Protest, Without Preaching": Virginia Woolf Reads Jane Austen', *Persuasions,* Journal of the Jane Austen Society of North America, 12 (1990): 111–16 (pp.111, 112).

Schweickart's theory of reading, the 'subjectivity roused to life by reading', although it is attributed to Austen is 'not a separate subjectivity but a projection of the subjectivity of the reader' (Woolf). [23] Woolf's identification with Austen is in part made possible because Austen is an unknown quantity, for her works have been marginalized and circumscribed by patriarchal culture.

Thus Woolf does not challenge the marginalization of the female point of view, but works within it. This acceptance of marginalization makes it difficult to read the ending of *The Voyage Out* as a positive outcome. Although Nancy K. Miller argues that novels which depict the failure of romance enact a '*bypassing* of the dialectics of desire' to produce 'a peculiarly feminine "act of victory"', [24] the ending of *The Voyage Out* suggests that narrative resolution can only be achieved through the suppression of the heroine. This is analogous to the suppression of the semiotic order: as Makiko Minow-Pinkney notes, 'language, the symbolic order, representation itself' is 'made possible by the repression of "woman"'. Femininity is the 'term which has been repressed into marginality and silence by the order of representation, this constituting the very condition for the functioning of the symbolic order' (pp.16–17). Even before Rachel's death, Woolf suggests that the hope for a successful relationship lies in a form of negation: a renunciation of life, of individuality, of heterosexual attraction. In a rare moment of happiness, just before she falls ill, Rachel feels 'detached and disinterested as if she had no longer any lot in life'; it is as though she and Terence had 'ceased to be little separate bodies; they had ceased to struggle and desire one another', and that the love they share is 'not the love of man for woman, of Terence for Rachel' (*VO,* 367). This negative view is reaffirmed at the end of the novel, after Rachel's death, when Terence experiences 'happiness ... perfect happiness. They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived.' (*VO,* 412) It is ironic that 'their' happiness is only achieved after the elimination of the female character.

---

[23] 'Reading Ourselves', p.627.

[24] *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp.31–32.

Woolf's attempt to read and then read beyond Austen is not sustained to the end of the book, for she turns to Milton in the final chapters, and echoes of 'Comus' and 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity' permeate the account of Rachel's illness and death. [25] The shift can be seen as Woolf's final rejection of the romance narrative: as Nancy Miller suggests, novels which resist romance often justify the manoeuvre in a form of rewriting, 'an emphasis placed "elsewhere"', which often takes place in a dream-world or improbable situation (p.32). Woolf does not simply rupture the courtship narrative by turning to Milton, as though as a relief from Austen, for she also enacts a radical rewriting of Milton's two poems. The allusions to 'Comus' problematize the ideal of female chastity which is central to the poem's narrative about a virgin threatened by a lustful spirit; the allusions to the 'Ode' in the context of Rachel's death question the theme of Christian consolation in that poem.

The first quotation from 'Comus' occurs as Rachel falls ill while Terence recites the poem to her:

> There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,
> he read,
> That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream.
> Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure;
> Whilom she was the daughter of Locrine,
> That had the sceptre from his father Brute. [26]

The lines come from the end of Milton's masque, when Sabrina, a chaste river-nymph, is summoned to save a virginal young Lady who has been entrapped by the lustful spirit Comus. Terence continues his recitation with the song in which the Lady's Attendant Spirit calls for Sabrina to come from under the 'glassy, cool translucent wave', and 'Listen and save' the Lady (*VO*, 381; 'Comus', ll.858–65). Rachel finds that the words 'sounded strange', and instead of experiencing the reassurance of this moment of rescue, she sets off 'upon curious trains of thought suggested by words such as "curb" and "Locrine" and "Brute", which brought unpleasant sights before her eyes, independent of their meaning' (*VO,* 380–81). While listening to the poem, Rachel begins to suffer from the headache which proves to be the first symptom of her illness: the disjuncture between the happy conclusion to Milton's poem and Rachel's illness is emphasized by setting the last line of the quotation, 'Listen and save', against Rachel's response, 'But her head ached' (*VO,* 381).

---

[25] The Miltonic allusions are identified by Schlack, *Continuing Presences*, pp.20–27; and DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), pp.137–46, 149–52.

[26] *VO*, 380. John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Longman, 1968), 'Comus', l.823.

From this point, Milton's poem is thoroughly disrupted, as fragments are woven into Woolf's text: as Schlack notes, the quotations are 'no longer set off with quotation marks as ... "foreign"' but are 'thoroughly integrated into Woolf's own narrative'; and as they are repeated, are subjected to 'further development and expansion' (p.24). Schlack suggests that the theme of Milton's poem — chastity threatened but saved — is relevant to Rachel's dilemma as an inexperienced young woman terrified at the prospect of marriage, and reads Rachel's death as a means of both escaping marriage and preserving her chastity. However, Woolf's reading of 'Comus' is not this straightforward, for in Milton's poem the Lady's life and chastity are saved, and she is returned to her brothers and to the patriarchal sexual economy (for, with her virginity intact, she is still available for marriage); by contrast, Rachel dies, and is lost to Terence and St John, whose position parallels that of the brothers. The paradox that Rachel might be saved by dying makes Woolf's reading of 'Comus' a troubled one.

A closer reading of Woolf's use of the poem reveals that she twists Milton's ideas and wrenches them out of their original context. Sabrina does not appear in *The Voyage Out* unequivocally as a saving force, because images associated with her consistently appear in the novel in a negative light. In 'Comus', the Lady trusts in 'the sun-clad power of chastity' (l.781) to protect her, but Rachel cannot bear sunlight or whiteness, for she finds her bedroom wall 'painfully white' (*VO,* 382), as her illness takes hold. Whereas the Lady is released from Comus's spell by Sabrina's 'chaste palms moist and cold' ('Comus', l.917), Rachel shrinks from the touch of the nurse's cold hands (*VO,* 385). Sabrina is associated with positive, underwater images: she lives under a 'glossy, cool, translucent wave' (l.860), and she once jumped into the Severn to escape from the wrath of her stepmother. On the other hand, Rachel imagines her nurse living 'under a river', but pictures her in slimy tunnels; she later experiences her fever as a submarine world, but sees it in ugly images of an underwater tunnel with 'little deformed women sitting in archways' and walls that 'oozed with damp'. Her fever becomes 'a deep pool of sticky water, which eventually closed over her head', although this does free her from the faces of her 'tormentors' (*VO,* 386, 397–98).

Allusions to 'Comus' provide an underlying structure for the episode, as Woolf's negative readings of 'Comus' extend from Rachel's delirium into Terence's thoughts, where they become even more troubled. Schlack and DeSalvo do not appear to notice that, in general, the allusions to 'Comus' appear in the reverse order from Milton's poem, so that Milton's tale of an encounter with danger and a rescue is re-written as a flight from safety into danger. As we have seen, the first reference to 'Comus' comes from the conclusion of the poem, when the Lady is about to be saved. Rachel distorts Milton's hopeful words into signs of danger, and when she announces that she has a headache, Terence hears 'the shiver of broken glass which, as it fell to earth, left him sitting in the open air' (*VO,* 381). This sequence echoes an earlier scene from 'Comus' when the Lady's brothers try to rescue her, but though they shatter Comus's glass of potion and cause him to flee, they cannot release her from his paralysing spell. Schlack argues that this action could be read as Rachel's refusal to give Terence sexual pleasure (for Comus's potion has aphrodisiac properties), but Woolf's narration emphasizes Terence's distress rather than Rachel's potential freedom. The shattering of the glass in 'Comus' is the first stage in the Lady's rescue, but in *The Voyage Out* it sounds an ominous note at the onset of Rachel's illness.

The next allusion to Milton comes as Rachel wakes with a fever, a few hours later. This corresponds to the scene in 'Comus' which precedes the glass-breaking episode, in which the Lady is tempted by Comus. That encounter is suggested both by Rachel's fear that there is an animal in the room (Comus is here elided with the effect of his potion, which turns people into animals) and by the visit from Dr Rodriguez, the untrustworthy doctor, who is frequently described as hairy and is a purveyor of potions like Comus. The next cluster of allusions occurs when Terence confronts Dr Rodriguez about his treatment of Rachel. His loss of trust in the doctor is confirmed as he becomes aware of 'his insignificance, his dirty appearance, his shiftiness, and his unintelligent hairy face' (*VO*, 393), his bestial appearance recalling Comus's ability to turn people into animals. Shortly afterwards, Terence also loses trust in Nurse McInnes, who 'seemed to shrivel beneath one's eyes and become worthless, malicious, and untrustworthy' (*VO*, 401). The process of unmasking alludes to a scene earlier in Milton's masque, when the Attendant Spirit tells the brothers that he has seen the Lady with Comus, and 'knew the foul enchanter though disguised' as a shepherd ('Comus', l.644).

The allusions culminate in a scene where Terence and St John fear for Rachel's life, which parallels a sequence towards the beginning of the masque where the Lady's brothers fear for their missing sister. Like the brothers, who are not significantly distinguished from one another (they are not named and are only ever seen as a pair), Terence and St John are mistaken for one another as Dr Lesage addresses them 'equally, as if he did not remember which of them was engaged to the young lady' (*VO*, 406). By distorting the sequence of 'Comus' in her allusions, Woolf takes the Lady's story back to the brothers' wanderings in search of their sister. Going back further might present Rachel, like the Lady, wandering freely; but instead Rachel effectively disappears from the narrative. By showing both Rachel and Terence re-reading 'Comus' (one in a state of delirium and the other in an equally troubled world where 'pain lies, quiescent, but ready to devour' (*VO*, 402)), and by gradually shifting the emphasis away from Rachel towards Terence, the novel emphasizes loss and desolation, rather than escape.

This shift in emphasis continues when Woolf goes on to describe Rachel's death and its aftermath from Terence's point of view, using a series of allusions to Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity'. As with 'Comus' the poem is recited by a character in the novel: Terence and St John overhear Ridley Ambrose reciting the Ode as Rachel's illness nears its crisis. As with 'Comus', their reaction to the poem imposes negative meanings on a hopeful poem: the 'Nativity Ode' is a celebratory poem about the birth of Christ, but Terence and St John find its words 'strangely discomforting' (*VO*, 409). The poem reappears in buried allusions during Woolf's description of Rachel's death:

> It was nothing: it was to cease to breathe. It was happiness, it was perfect happiness. They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived. ... It seemed to him that their complete union and happiness filled the room with rings eddying more and more widely. (*VO*, 412)

The 'rings' of happiness echo Milton's song of celestial jubilation at the Nativity, 'Ring out, ye crystal spheres' ('Nativity Ode', l.125). The moment of happiness and union with Rachel which Terence experiences at her death ironically echoes Milton's description of Christ's birth:

> Nature that heard such sound
> Beneath the hollow round
> Of Cynthia's seat, the airy region thrilling,
> Now was almost won
> To think her part was done,
> And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
> She knew such harmony alone
> Could hold all heaven and earth in happier union. ('Nativity Ode', l.101)

Cynthia, the moon goddess mentioned in this stanza, is invoked in the moonshine which lights the scene in Woolf's novel. The description of Rachel's death closely matches the Ode rhetorically: each presents a brief moment of stasis when all is peaceful before it gives way to pain. Milton cuts across the jubilation with the reminder that Christ's death, not his birth, will save mankind, for the smiling infant 'on the bitter cross | Must redeem our loss' ('Nativity Ode', l.152). Milton balances the joy brought by the birth of Christ against the sorrow of the pagan gods as they are forced to relinquish their posts. In *The Voyage Out,* Terence's moment of happiness is shattered when he is dragged by anonymous hands from Rachel's side, and realizes with horror that 'here was a world in which he would never see Rachel again' (*VO,* 413). Terence's grief echoes the sorrow of the pagan gods in Milton's poem, for as he is jostled from the room, he 'shrieks' Rachel's name, echoing the departure of the pagan gods: 'Apollo from his shrine | Can no more divine | With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving' (l.176). The ending of *The Voyage Out* is one of loss without consolation: it emphasizes desolation akin to the departure of the pagan gods, and makes no mention of the poem's affirmation of Christian hope. Rachel's absolute disappearance from the narrative and the lack of consolation for her death make it difficult to claim the ending of her story in Miller's terms as a 'feminine "act of victory"' (p.32). Even the dream-world of the delirium in which Rachel rereads Milton is not sustained, for the novel ends with an account of the ordinary lives of the minor characters at the hotel.

Woolf's extended reading of Milton 'against the grain' in her account of her heroine's death seems to amount to the same as Rachel's reading of Cowper, which strayed from the text to thoughts of her dead mother. However, something more dynamic has happened in this series of allusions. In her adaptation and internalization of Milton's words, Woolf does not refer *out* to another text, but brings elements of that text *in* to her own novel (the negotiations of meaning involved in this process suggest that it is more akin to the kind of relationship implied by influence than simple reference). This radically alters the nature of authority implicit in the act of reference. In non-fiction, reference to an author implies that his/her authority is invoked to reify a position or argument. Reference is also said to lend weight to a creative work: for example, Annette Wheeler Cafarelli suggests that Miltonic allusions in Ann Radcliffe serve the dual purpose of promoting 'an intellectual lineage for the novel' at a time when it was becoming increasingly associated with women writers and women readers; and of staking 'territory for women in the mainstream of male literature'.[27] Cafarelli suggests that women novelists such as Radcliffe did not reject male texts but appropriated them in order to claim access to the mainstream of literature. By contrast, Woolf's use of Miltonic allusions in *The Voyage Out* suggests that the opposite process is taking place: that she appropriates Milton's words for a kind of writing which is constructed as an alternative to 'mainstream' literature.

Milton's words become vulnerable in the process of being incorporated into *The Voyage Out*. This vulnerability is seen when the 'Nativity Ode' is introduced as Terence and St John overhear Ridley Ambrose reciting it while Rachel lies dying:

> Ridley paced up and down the terrace repeating stanzas of a long poem, in a subdued but suddenly sonorous voice. Fragments of the poem were wafted in at the open window as he passed and repassed. (*VO*, 409)

In this sequence, the 'Ode' (which is not named) is broken down from a 'long poem' into 'stanzas', and as Ridley's voice, 'subdued but suddenly sonorous', fades in and out, it is interrupted and broken into fragments. These fragments become part of Woolf's own text, as Milton's words become absorbed into her own.

---

[27] 'How Theories of Romanticism Exclude Women: Radcliffe, Milton, and the Legitimation of the Gothic Novel', in *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism*, ed. by Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.84–113 (p.87). Cafarelli also notes that women gothic novelists tended to refer to Milton's shorter poems such as 'Comus', which were thought to be suitable reading for women, rather than to his epics.

In the process, Woolf also adjusts her relation to her father as a reader, for this sequence has an elegiac dimension which extends beyond the subject-matter of this part of the novel. Discussing Leslie Stephen's enjoyment of Milton in her memoir of 1906, Woolf added that the 'Nativity Ode' was the one he 'specially loved': it was 'the last poem he tried to say on the Christmas night before he died; he remembered the words, but was then too weak to speak them.' [28] The incident suggests that, although Woolf associated Stephen with the great writers to the extent that he shared their greatness, those great writers also shared his vulnerability. In his failed recitation, the words of Milton's poem are interrupted and silenced; this incident is replayed in Ridley's broken recitation in *The Voyage Out*. Viewed in this way, Woolf's allusions can be seen to exhibit a tension between subverting the authority of Stephen and Milton, and mourning their absence.

The foregoing analysis of *The Voyage Out* suggests a trajectory by which Woolf engaged with Jane Austen to delineate the courtship narrative, but then turned to John Milton as if to escape from the problems of identifying with a role-model whose art was simultaneously praised and undermined by critics. Woolf has to negotiate the problem of absence in both relationships: Jane Austen's 'inscrutability' and 'impersonality' make her difficult to emulate; Milton, who is not an obvious role-model for a woman writer to follow, can be claimed only in fragments. The conjunction between Austen and Milton in *The Voyage Out* was not accidental, for Woolf continued to associate them with one another. Years later, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf urged women readers and writers to look back through Austen as a literary mother, and to 'look past Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view' (*Room*, 72-73, 108). However, although Woolf appears to polarize their influence into female/supportive versus male/threatening here, an earlier allusion in the essay suggests a more fluid connection.[29] Woolf characterized the lost female tradition in the figure of 'some mute and inglorious Jane Austen': as Alice Fox has pointed out, this is a complex literary allusion which parodies a line in Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard' which speculates that 'Some mute and inglorious Milton here may rest.'[30] In Woolfs phrase, Austen takes the place of a silenced Milton, only to be silenced herself. The tradition Woolf envisages thus depends upon both precursors being silenced and remade in her imagination. Yet, the silence of past writers is problematic, for absence generates desire; the absolute nature of death when Rachel ceases to breathe leads to mourning in the emptiness of a world in which Terence would never see Rachel again. Such longing for the past and need to compensate for absence can thus be seen as characteristics of Woolfs engagement with her influences.

---

[28] Maitland, p.475. Earlier versions of the novel make it clear that Woolf wanted to use a quotation she associated with her father at this point in the narrative. DeSalvo points out that a margin note in the holograph reads: 'Keats The Ode to a Nightingale or the poems of Milton' (*Virginia Woolf's First Voyage*, p.141): Keats, like Milton, was named by Woolf as one of Stephen's favourite poets in her memoir for Maitland. In the typescript, Ridley Ambrose quotes a line from Henry Newbolt's 'Drake's Drum', another favourite poem of Stephen's which he often read aloud (ibid., pp.147–48; *L*, I. 47 & n.).

---

[29] Lisa Low questions Woolfs view of Milton as a 'bogey' and suggests that Woolf echoes the 'feminist' dimensions of his work in her fiction, in 'Two Figures Standing in Dense Violet Light: John Milton, Virginia Woolf, and the Epic Vision of Marriage', in *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk (New York: Pace University Press, 1992), pp.144–45.

[30] *Thomas Gray, Complete Poems,* ed. by H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), l. 59. Alice Fox, 'Literary Allusion as Feminist Criticism in *A Room of One's Own*', *Philological Quarterly,* 63 (1984), 145-61 (p.150).

Chapter 3

Tradition and Exploration in *Night and Day*

It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learned anything about making literature. We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving, now a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle.
— Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Novels' (1919; *E*, III. 31)

Night and Day appears to be an aberration in Woolf's development as a novelist: as a courtship drama which reaches a comic conclusion in the engagement of two couples, it has a more structured plot and more conventional ending than *The Voyage Out* which preceded it; and with its rounded characters and setting in a solidly realized world of pre-war London, it is an unlikely predecessor to *Jacob's Room,* in which character and plot are fragmented and decentred. It also conflicts with the ideas Woolf was developing at the time about the novel as a genre, particularly in 'Modern Novels' (later collected as 'Modern Fiction'), published shortly before *Night and Day.* In the essay, Woolf speculates about the kind of novel which might be written 'if one were free and could set down what one chose', and suggests that (unlike *Night and Day*) such a novel would have 'no plot, little probability, and a vague general confusion in which the clear-cut features of the tragic, the comic, the passionate, and the lyrical were dissolved beyond the possibility of separate recognition' (*E,* III. 33). 'Modern Novels' has been taken as Woolf's rejection of *Night and Day;* [1] her criticism of novels in which 'we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our thirty-two chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds' (*E,* III. 33) could be read as a hint at her frustration in writing the thirty-four chapters of *Night and Day.* However, as this chapter will argue, *Night and Day* is not a capitulation to convention, but is a negotiated return to the literary past, and this negotiation plays a key part in Woolf's attempts to reform the novel. I will suggest that Woolf consciously invokes the plots of her female precursors in *Night and Day* in order to make their legacy easier to deal with; but that she also points to the legacy of male writers, particularly Shakespeare and the Romantic poets, thus continuing the process, begun in her re-reading of Milton in *The Voyage Out*, of drawing on male as well as female precursors. As this chapter will demonstrate, Woolf's representation of the Victorian novelist, her step-aunt Anne Thackeray Ritchie, in the figure of Mrs Hilbery (*D*, I. 247 n2) is central to her engagement with both these strands of her literary past in the novel. [2]

---

[1] For example, James Hafley (p.38) argues that '"Modern Fiction" denies the value of *Night and Day* as a work of art, but justifies it as an exercise in classicism'; it is a 'negative demonstration' of the need to reshape the novel as a genre, 'just as her achieved works of art are positive demonstrations'.

Night and Day is consciously retrospective, both in its narrative style and in the social world it evokes. Such retrospection is a function of the tension in Woolf's work between a longing for a lost past and a need to deal with that past. Katherine Mansfield commented that *Night and Day* was old-fashioned when it was written, it was 'a novel in the tradition of the English novel ... we had never thought to look upon its like again!'. E.M. Forster later suggested that Woolf had deliberately chosen an outmoded style when he described the novel as 'a deliberate exercise in classicism'. [3] Woolf's choice of an old-fashioned style goes hand-in-hand with her depiction of a social world which no longer existed. As Suzanne Raitt notes in her introduction to *Night and Day*, 'Virginia was simply too fragile mentally to allow herself to document the destruction of the pre-War world towards which she had such intense and complex feelings' (*ND*, xv). Although Woolf wrote the novel during the closing stages of the First World War, many details (for example, the mention of the Welsh Harp Reservoir, a place of recreation which was closed to the public in 1910 (*ND*, 546n)), as well as the absence of any reference to the war, set the action in a pre-war world. In turning back time to overlook the destruction caused by the war, Woolf also evokes the gender relations of an earlier era. For example, although women over 35 were enfranchised while Woolf was writing *Night and Day*, her description of a suffrage society in the novel depicts a campaign in disarray with little prospect of success. By employing the outmoded literary style of the courtship narrative (which in itself placed central importance on marriage, domesticity, and the reproduction and replication of the patriarchal family) and by writing about the pre-War world, Woolf immersed herself in, and sought to examine in writing, the social order into which she had been born.

---

[2] For a detailed account of ways in which Mrs Hilbery represents Ritchie, see Joanne P. Zuckerman, 'Anne Thackeray Ritchie as the Model for Mrs Hilbery in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly* 1:3 (1973), 32–46. See also Carol Hanbery MacKay, 'The Thackeray Connection: Virginia Woolf's Aunt Anny', in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.68–95.

[3] Katherine Mansfield, review of *Night and Day*, *Athenaeum* (21 November 1919), 1227. E.M. Forster, *Abinger Harvest* (London: Edward Arnold, 1936), p.106.

Woolfs depiction of Anne Thackeray Ritchie in the character of Mrs Hilbery is central to her attempt to recall and deal with a pre-war world which resonated for her personally and as a writer. It is also a function of her longing for a lost past. Ritchie was the sister of Leslie Stephen's first wife Minny; she lived with the couple at Hyde Park Gate and stayed on for two years after Minny's death in 1875. Although Ritchie was alive when Woolf began to write *Night and Day,* her death in February 1919 prompted Woolf to reflect that she had lost a link with her personal past: 'Father cared for her; she goes down the last, almost, of that old 19th Century Hyde Park Gate world.' (*D,* I. 247) This comment suggests that Woolfs feelings for Ritchie were strongly overdetermined by her relationships with other people. Woolf found Ritchie as a person 'a little distant, & more than a little melancholy', and felt that she 'showed very little anxiety to see one' (*D,* I. 247), but she values her because Leslie Stephen liked her, and because she represented a kind of family pre-history: Stephen's life with Minny, before his marriage to Julia Duckworth and the births of Virginia and her siblings. Woolf also recognized that Ritchie provided links with, and even embodied, a literary past which included both female and male precursors. She was the daughter of William Makepeace Thackeray, and a friend of several literary figures, including Henry James, Tennyson, Thomas and Jane Carlyle, and Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.[4] In an obituary published in the *Times Literary Supplement,* Woolf suggested that Ritchie would become 'the transparent medium through which we behold the dead. ... Above all and for ever she will be the companion and interpreter of her father, whose spirit she has made to walk among us not only because she wrote of him, but because even more wonderfully she lived in him. It would have pleased her well to claim no separate lot for herself, but to be merged in the greater light of his memory.' (*E,* III. 18) Where Woolfs personal memories of her aunt were intimately connected with her feelings for Leslie Stephen, she saw Ritchie as integrally linked with her father, William Thackeray.

---

[4] Winifred Gérin, *Anne Thackeray Ritchie: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.v.

In the character of Mrs Hilbery, Woolf transcends the sense of Lady Ritchie as a cold and distant person to forge an identification with her as a writer, through their shared experience as daughters of famous men. Woolf uses Mrs Hilbery to explore the difficulty of living under the weight of the literary past, particularly the problems arising from having a great writer as a father. Mrs Hilbery's father, Richard Alardyce, was a famous poet, and she and her family live under his shadow. A room in the Hilbery home is set aside as a shrine containing a collection of Alardyce's manuscripts and possessions, and Mrs Hilbery, assisted by her daughter Katharine, spends her life trying to write his biography. Woolf shows that the weight of the past can be oppressive on one hand, for the writing of the biography is a stifling and frustrating activity, and on the other a source of pleasure. Katharine enjoys dreaming of her ancestors, seeing herself as 'the companion of those giant men, of their own lineage', but these dreams make her devalue her own experience as 'insignificant' and dismiss herself as one of the 'small people' (*ND,* 10). Woolf's account of Mrs Hilbery's attempts to write, in particular, show how illustrious ancestors can inhibit the writing of those who come afterwards, particularly if they are women. Mrs Hilbery's problems are akin to the predicament of the Victorian woman writer which Gilbert and Gubar have called the 'anxiety of authorship': the fear that 'the act of writing will isolate or destroy her'.[5] Mrs Hilbery's biography of Alardyce seems destined never to progress beyond disjointed fragments: there is 'a great variety of very imposing paragraphs' to start the book, followed by a lengthy digression which is 'very beautifully written, although not essential to the story' (*ND,* 38). This disjointed biography partly alludes to Ritchie's episodic writings on Thackeray: in deference to his wish not to be the subject of a biography, she contented herself with publishing *Chapters from Some Memoirs* (Gérin, pp.227–28). Like Ritchie, Mrs Hilbery worries about being disrespectful to her father, because producing a biography is potentially a way of insulting a person's memory by exposing personal facts to public scrutiny. Mrs Hilbery's struggle also reflects an anxiety that children of eminent parents can offend their parents' memory indirectly by the failure of their own ventures: Ritchie was 'terrified of failure' in composing the *Memoirs* (Gérin, pp.228). Mrs Hilbery's problems also reflect Woolf's difficulties in writing about her father: as Zuckerman has suggested, the portrait of Mrs Hilbery is partly a projection of Woolf's own sense of frustrations with writing (p.38). Shortly after Leslie Stephen's death in 1904, Woolf wrote that 'all this stupid writing and reading about father seems to put him further away' (*L*, I. 131). She told Violet Dickinson that she found it difficult to write her memoir of Stephen for Maitland's *Life*: 'I really did get depressed about that thing, as I especially wanted it to be good' (*L*, I. 176). Whereas Jane Marcus has suggested that Woolf was bowed down by the volume of writings by her family and that she had 'volumes and volumes of the father's text and the family's text to write *against*, the many *languages of the patriarchy*',[6] Woolf's concern to write a 'good' essay on Stephen suggests that her attempts to resist the languages of patriarchy were complicated by a desire to find a language which might facilitate intimacy with her father.

---

[5] *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.49.

In her descriptions of Mrs Hilbery's creativity, Woolf searches for ways in which women's writing might be validated, despite being found flawed by patriarchal standards. Woolf articulates a patriarchal appraisal of Anne Thackeray Ritchie's work in her depiction of Mrs Hilbery as a failure, for, as Woolf notes in the *TLS* obituary, Leslie Stephen had criticized Ritchie's writing for its lack of organization. She quotes his comment that if Ritchie had 'any share of Miss Austen's gift for clearness, proportion, and neatness, her books would have been much better' (*E*, III. 17).[7] However, both the essay and the novel validate Ritchie's writing in other, more covert, ways. In the obituary, Woolf notes that, despite its apparent lack of structure, Ritchie's writing has integrity and completeness of its own: 'every sentence is formed; they cohere together; and invariably at the end of a chapter or paragraph there is a sense that the melody has found its way through one variation and another to its natural close' (*E*, III. 15). The language used in this passage suggests that Ritchie's work needs to be interpreted by musical rather than linguistic criteria and Woolf defends it against standards which would find it flawed. Woolf recuperates Ritchie in *Night and Day* by drawing on musical metaphors for Mrs

---

[6] *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 8.

[7] The quotation comes from *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book*, p.14 (a then unpublished memoir).

Hilbery's successful artistry in areas other than writing. Mrs Hilbery is shown to be creative as a host, and (like Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*) generates harmony among her visitors. For example, her attempt to integrate a latecomer into the tea-party which opens the novel is described in musical terms: 'Mrs Hilbery was immediately sensitive to any silence in the drawing-room, as of a *dumb note* in a sonorous scale' (*ND,* 8, emphasis added).

This affirmation of Mrs Hilbery's creativity is a powerful recuperation of Ritchie, for Woolf's analogy between social interaction and singing in harmony echoes one which Ritchie often made herself. In *The Village on the Cliff,* Ritchie describes how a governess, Catherine George, feels excluded from the family which employs her: she is like 'a *dumb note* in the music. A sort of longing had come over her to be alive, to make music too.' [8] As well as writing about Ritchie, Woolf writes with or alongside her, for she gives Mrs Hilbery a sort of completeness as an artist through engaging with images of creativity in Ritchie's work. A similar process of identification and affirmation can be seen in the novel as a whole. Although Woolf's picture of Mrs Hilbery ignores the fact that Ritchie was a prolific and successful author (she completed some eight novels, including *The Story of Elizabeth* (1863), *The Village on the Cliff* (1867), and *Old Kensington* (1875); a biography of Mme de Sévigné; and many essays and memoirs), this is not a Bloomian suppression of the precursor's achievements. As Zuckerman points out, Mrs Hilbery is 'virtually permitted to take over and write the end of the plot' (p.37), by orchestrating the union of the two couples to create a denouement which is characteristic of happy endings in Ritchie's own novels. Woolf thus writes about Ritchie in a book whose structure — atypical for her — resembles one of Ritchie's novels.

The musical imagery Woolf uses to seek an intimacy with Ritchie as a writer which she had not achieved in life is a more powerful and complex metaphor for constructing tradition than it appears at first. Ritchie herself had used ideas of harmony as a metaphor for the intimacy between writer and reader, and between writers in a tradition. In a famous essay on Jane

---

[8] *The Village on the Cliff* (London: Smith & Elder, 1867), p. 70, emphasis added. Hereafter *VC.*

Austen, Ritchie digresses on her own fondness for, and identification with, characters such as Anne Elliot in *Persuasion:*

> Man seems a strange and ill-kept record of many and bewildering experiences. Looking at oneself — not as oneself, but as an abstract human being — one is lost in wonder at the vast complexities which have been brought to bear upon it; lost in wonder, and in disappointment perhaps, at the discordant result of so great a harmony. Only we know that the whole diapason is beyond our grasp: one man cannot hear the note of the grasshoppers, another is deaf when the cannon sounds. ... [W]e seize a note or two of the great symphony, and try to sing; and because these notes happen to jar, we think all is discordant hopelessness. Then come pressing onward in the crowd of life, voices with some of the notes that are wanting to our own part — voices tuned to the same key as our own, or to an accordant one; making harmony for us as they pass us by. [9]

This passage suggests a view of self and other which encourages intimacy. The individual is seen not as a discrete unit but in relational terms, as part of the wider reality of humanity — 'not as oneself but as an abstract human being', as part of a whole and not as an individual. While writing about Austen, Ritchie also evokes a wider tradition, for the digression draws on the ideas of the Romantic poets: for example, Wordsworth uses a musical metaphor in his speculation that there is an 'immortal spirit ... Like harmony in music', a creative force that 'reconciles | Discordant elements, makes them cling together | In one society'; Coleridge invokes a similar idea when he suggests that poets and writers are important to society, for 'there would be no harmony without them'. [10] In writing about a female precursor, Ritchie draws upon male writers to validate different approaches within a literary tradition, to suggest how the alternative values and voices of women writers might also find a place in a wider literary culture. Thus, Ritchie's writing can be seen to engage closely with, and seek connections between, both male and female precursors: hers was the kind of mind which Woolf celebrated in *A Room of One's Own,* which could 'think back through its fathers or through its mothers' (p.93). The rest of this chapter will demonstrate how Woolf used the figure of Mrs Hilbery to signal and negotiate her relationships with her female and male precursors.

---

[9] *A Book of Sibyls: Miss Barbauld, Miss Edgeworth, Mrs Opie, Miss Austen* (London: Smith & Elder, 1883), pp.212–13. The piece originally appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* as a review of J.E. Austen-Leigh's memoir of Jane Austen, and was 'by far the most influential of all the popularising accounts of Jane Austen' in the nineteenth century (*Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* p.164).

[10] *Wordsworth: Poetical Works.* With intro. and notes. Ed. by Thomas Hutchinson; new edn. rev. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), *Prelude* I. 340–44 (hereafter *Poetical Works*). *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* 16 vols. General Editor: Kathleen Coburn (London and Princeton, NJ: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Bollingen Series LXXV, Princeton University Press, 1969–), XIV i. 285 (hereafter *Works*).

Woolf looks back to her female literary precursors in the plot of *Night and Day*, which follows a heroine's progress through courtship to engagement; its conclusion with the prospect of two marriages, between Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham, and between Katharine's cousin, Cassandra Otway and William Rodney, returns to an earlier narrative pattern in which marriage or engagement are made goals or rewards for the protagonists. The centrality of romance in *Night and Day* suggests an acceptance of Victorian conventional restrictions on how women should write and what subjects they should write about.[11] My analysis of *The Voyage Out* (Chapter 2, above) suggested that Woolf initially followed the pattern of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* by tentatively bringing her protagonists together into four couples, and presenting marriage as a possible outcome; but then rejected the structure by denying marriage to all but one minor couple. The tensions which precipitated that swerve revealed Woolf's doubts about the acceptability of a plot which posited marriage as desirable. By contrast, *Night and Day* could be read as a reversion to type; Woolf does not problematize the issue by looking at life beyond engagement, as she did in *The Voyage Out,* and so the ending appears to endorse marriage as a favourable outcome. *Night and Day* is more true to the spirit of Austen's work, as the characters do what Gilbert and Gubar describe as 'an Austenian courtship dance throughout the work' (*No Man's Land,* III. 19): finding the 'right' partner through the instructive experience of making false choices. At the start of the novel, Katharine faces the prospect of a 'perfectly loveless marriage' to William Rodney, before she manages to free herself by encouraging William's attraction to Cassandra. Similarly, Ralph Denham has a deep friendship with Mary Datchet, which he feels tempted to develop into marriage (he makes a half-hearted proposal), although he is more strongly attracted to Katharine. This parallels the pattern of many of Austen's novels: for example, Elizabeth Bennet is attracted to George Wickham; Anne Elliot is nearly persuaded to marry Mr Elliot; and Fanny Price is put under pressure to accept Henry Crawford. Although the contrast between *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* suggests that Woolf shifted from rebelling against Jane Austen to writing a novel which was more closely allied to the spirit of her precursor's work, her return to the courtship drama was not a capitulation to a pattern because rebellion had proved too difficult. *Night and Day* makes a negotiated return to an earlier style in that it consciously adopts its precursors.

---

[11] As Valerie Sanders notes, a preoccupation with love interest was castigated and marginalized in the nineteenth century as a characteristic of female writers (*Eve's Renegades*, p.48). *Night and Day* is more conservative than the novels of Woolf's immediate female precursors who, as Lyn Pykett has pointed out, were the 'New Woman' writers such as Mona Caird and George Egerton, who were preoccupied with what happened to women *after* marriage, and often described the protagonist's escape from an unhappy marriage, usually raising issues about married women's rights, the sexual double standard, and divorce laws (*Engendering Fictions,* pp.57–58).

The figure of Mrs Hilbery is instrumental in Woolf's conscious negotiation of this literary heritage. Woolf distances herself from the courtship narrative by using Mrs Hilbery as a focal point for the marriage plot: it is she who engineers the romance between Ralph and Katharine from an early stage in the novel, by sending them off together and watching them secretly 'with a smile of expectancy on her face, as if a scene from the drama of the younger generation were being played for her benefit' (*ND,* 15). Since Ralph and Katharine had actually been bickering before Mrs Hilbery's arrival, her delight in the scene seems ironic, but she is vindicated later when Katharine and Ralph get engaged, suggesting that she knows them better than they know themselves. Mrs Hilbery goes to find Ralph after he has given up hope of a relationship with Katharine and it is she who extracts from him the assurance that 'I would marry her in St Paul's Cathedral' (*ND,* 514). As Joanne Zuckerman notes, 'there is a kind of shock' in Mrs Hilbery taking over and writing the end of the plot, but the shock element is important since it gives the happy ending an air of artificiality. Mrs Hilbery's sentimental reaction to Ralph's declaration is treated mockingly (especially since she seems to be thinking of Westminster Abbey rather than St Paul's): 'the noble cadences, the stately periods, the ancient eloquence of the marriage service would resound over the heads of a distinguished congregation gathered together near the very spot where her father lay quiescent with the other poets of England' (*ND,* 515). The reference to Alardyce and other writers buried in Poet's Corner suggests that marriage is endorsed by literary tradition as well as by social convention.

In providing a character-sketch of Anne Thackeray Ritchie as Mrs Hibery, Woolf invokes a precursor who had already begun to deal with the legacy of the earlier generation of women writers; a precursor who had, in her essay on Austen, partly helped to *define* that legacy.

Ritchie, as Mrs Hilbery, becomes a target for Woolf's satirical ambivalence towards her inheritance from her female precursors and the patriarchal context in which they worked. Ritchie provided Woolf with a model for reworking the narratives of her female precursors, particularly those of Jane Austen and George Eliot. Ritchie's novel *The Village on the Cliff* is a courtship drama focusing on how protagonists sort themselves into couples; as we shall see, it invokes both *Mansfield Park* and *Middlemarch.* [12] The plot of *The Village on the Cliff* closely parallels that of *Mansfield Park.* Ritchie's main protagonist, 'poor little Catherine George', is a governess; she is a poor outsider in a wealthy home, like Fanny Price who is taken away from her impoverished parents to be brought up by her uncle Sir Thomas Bertram. Like Fanny, Catherine is attracted to the most powerful member of the younger generation of the family: Fanny strikes up a close friendship with Sir Thomas's favourite son, Edmund, while Catherine falls in love with Richard Butler, her employers' nephew and heir to the family estate. Fanny's role as an outsider in the family is confirmed by her refusal to take part in their theatricals, but that refusal also gives her moral superiority (especially when she senses that the play is being used as a cover for flirtation) and earns her Edmund's approval. Ritchie similarly depicts Catherine George's exclusion from family musical soirées: she describes Catherine watching flirtations taking place under the cover of the entertainment and notes that Richard is drawn to Catherine by sensing her exclusion and disapproval: 'You don't think it quite right, do you, Miss George?' (*VC,* 70). Both Catherine and Fanny watch helplessly as the men they admire become involved with rivals: Richard is in love with Reine Chrétien and Edmund is pursued by Mary Crawford. Both would meet with disapproval if their hopes were known, and both face pressure to marry someone else. Fanny's uncle demands that she accept Henry Crawford, and sends her back to her parents to teach her to appreciate the wealth and status Crawford can offer her. Catherine, similarly, is sent to another post to keep her away from Richard, and is cajoled into marrying an elderly widower, M. Fontaine.

---

[12] It also nods towards *Wuthering Heights*, for two central characters are called Catherine (and are introduced in a chapter entitled 'The Two Catherines').

Ritchie also provided Woolf with a model for rewriting the courtship narrative to allow room for positive outcomes in addition to, or as alternatives, to marriage. The ending of *The Village on the Cliff* swerves from the pattern of *Mansfield Park.* Fontaine dies and Richard, who has begun to lose hope of marrying Reine, looks set to marry Catherine; matching *Mansfield Park,* where Mary Crawford capriciously leaves Edmund, leaving him free to marry Fanny. In the last pages of the novel, Ritchie twists the plot so that Richard marries Reine after all, and Catherine is granted a happy ending with the security of her late husband's money and the love of her young sisters. This change exposes the falsity of the ending of *Mansfield Park,* in which the match between Edmund and Fanny is made within 1,500 words of the end of the book and indeed within a single sentence. We are told that Edmund 'scarcely had ... done regretting Mary Crawford' when he begins to wonder

> whether Fanny herself were not growing as dear, as important to him in all her smiles, and all her ways, as Mary Crawford had ever been; and whether it might not be a possible, an hopeful undertaking to persuade her that her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love. [13]

The ending of *Mansfield Park* is ambiguous as to whether it ultimately validates sibling love (Fanny's 'warm and sisterly regard' for Edmund) or marriage. Although sibling-love in one way reinforces the status quo, for it suggests that the ideal marriage is one which replicates the birth family, the ending also has subversive potential. As Rachel Brownstein notes, Fanny has 'a brother who adores her, and a lover who feels toward her as a brother'; and Austen uses this to revise romance, by invoking 'men's brotherhood with women to claim that the sexes are equal, which is to say well matched'. [14] In *The Village on the Cliff,* Ritchie opens up the subversive potential of this ending by granting marriage to Reine, her secondary heroine, but giving her main protagonist, Catherine, the reward of the familial love of doting and trusting children. Reine and Catherine enact the potential and the actual endings of Fanny's story: the outcome which looks likely until the closing pages of *Mansfield Park,* in which she would give up hope of marrying Edmund and continue to live as her aunt's helper and companion; and the actual ending of the novel where she marries Edmund after all.

---

[13] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park,* ed. by Tony Tanner (1814; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.454.

[14] *Becoming a Heroine,* pp.110, 111.

The outcome Ritchie grants to Catherine engages another female precursor, by introducing an element of George Eliot's writings to complete Jane Austen's narrative. Catherine's story partly echoes that of Dorothea Brooke from *Middlemarch.* Like Dorothea, Catherine is widowed and her husband's will dictates that she should lose her inheritance if ever she marries again. Unlike Dorothea, who sacrifices financial security by submitting to a 'hopeless love' and marrying Will Ladislaw, Catherine achieves a compromise by keeping her money and her freedom by not remarrying. In Catherine, Ritchie develops some subversive possibilities of Dorothea's life-history which Eliot plays down by ending *Middlemarch* with a marriage. Catherine George is a widow, a position which Dorothea gives up to marry Ladislaw; and takes on the role of adoptive mother, echoing Dorothea who does not have children of her own but is a loving aunt to her sister's children. These two roles have subversive potential, for they are respected positions in the patriarchal structure, but do not carry as strong an implication of the sexual and social domination by men as the role of wife may do.

In *Night and Day,* Woolf follows the pattern of Ritchie's reworking of *Mansfield Park* to negotiate her links with her female precursors. As in *The Village on the Cliff,* Woolf explores two potential outcomes which Austen fused into one in *Mansfield Park:* she grants marriage to Ralph Denham and Katharine Hilbery, and she follows Ritchie's example by exploring alternatives to marriage in the story of Mary Datchet. Woolf's rewriting of *Mansfield Park* is more complex than Ritchie's, because the Fanny/Catherine role is assigned to a male character, Ralph Denham. Ralph comes from a poor family with several siblings, and is introduced to the wealthy Hilbery family in a semi-professional capacity, by writing for Mr Hilbery's 'Critical Review'. Woolf allies Ralph with Catherine (and Fanny) by using music to confirm his status as an outsider in the Hilbery home: he is a 'dumb note in a sonorous scale' (*ND,* 8), matching Catherine's position as a 'dumb note in the music' (*VC,* 70) (and Fanny's refusal to take part in the theatricals). Like Fanny and Catherine, Ralph is attracted to the most important member of the younger generation (Katharine has a special place in her extended family as the only granddaughter of Richard Alardyce), and like them, he is powerless to prevent her marrying a more socially acceptable rival, William Rodney. Ralph's story also involves a 'false' relationship: his friendship with Mary Datchet parallels Henry Crawford's courting of Fanny and Catherine George's marriage to M. Fontaine. Although Ralph is not under pressure to marry Mary, the scandal of his relationship with Katharine leads Mr Hilbery to contemplate banishing him from the Hilbery home (*ND,* 501). Like Fanny, Ralph is finally reinstated into the family and recognized as Katharine's suitor. By assigning the role to a male character, Woolf transposes the motif of the economically disadvantaged outsider and thus evades the issue prevalent in many courtship dramas where a woman needs to gain economic security and social status through marriage. Katharine Hilbery has something different to gain: by marrying outside her social class she has the chance of escaping the limiting conventions in which she was brought up. Where William Rodney is 'naturally alive to the conventions of society' and 'strictly conventional where women were concerned' (*ND,* 256), Katharine's relationship with Ralph offers her means of escape from her family home and the ghostly domination of her grandfather.

Woolf follows Ritchie in the second strand of her re-reading of *Mansfield Park,* by exploring alternatives to marriage in the figure of Mary Datchet. Mary's role echoes that of Catherine George: she loves in vain and gives up the man she loves to a rival, while also seeking alternatives to romantic or married love. Although this part of *Night and Day* views *Mansfield Park* through the lens of *The Village on the Cliff,* it also contains more verbal echoes of Austen. For example, the Datchet family is described with a satirical detachment characteristic of Austen's writings. Mary's father Rev. Datchet is credited by his children 'with far more learning than he actually possessed' and has 'more strength of purpose and power of self-sacrifice than of intellect or originality' (*ND,* 184–85). Mary's sister Elizabeth resembles Elizabeth Elliot in *Persuasion* (who also has a sister called Mary), in that both women live with a widowed father whom they take after: Elizabeth Datchet 'already much resembled him in dry sincerity and methodical habit of mind' (*ND,* 185), while Elizabeth Elliot gets on well with her father, because she is 'very like himself'. [15] Each has an inheritance from her mother: Austen writes that 'Elizabeth had succeeded, at sixteen, to all that was possible, of her mother's rights and consequence' (ibid.). Woolf echoes but distorts this, for her Elizabeth inherits only domestic responsibility: the 'late Mrs Datchet had left an excellent cupboard of linen, to which Elizabeth had succeeded at the age of nineteen, when her mother died, and the charge of the family rested upon the shoulders of the eldest daughter' (*ND,* 185). These echoes suggest that Woolf sought to associate Austen more closely with, and thus claim her authority for, a narrative which presented spinsterhood as a positive outcome, rather than with a narrative which ended in marriage, although this was quite the opposite from the view Austen presented in her novels.

Woolf also draws on Austen's approach to her characters' inner landscapes to accord Mary some volition in absenting herself from the courtship pattern of the novel. Mary, like Fanny Price (and also Anne Elliot) has a deliberative rather than an active role in the novel. Throughout *Night and Day,* her thoughts are concerned with her relationship with Ralph: initially she hopes that their friendship might develop into something deeper; then she realizes that Ralph cares more for Katharine than he does for her; and, finally, she attempts to adjust her feelings towards him and to channel her energies in new directions. Jane Austen frequently describes such reflective moments in her heroines as attempts to 'compose' themselves. Although the term describes the heroines' efforts to control emotion (as Mary does), it also suggests their attempt to take control over their future — in other words, to write their own narratives. Major changes of plot are conceived by Austen's heroines long before the events take place. For example, villains are often suspected by the heroine before their actions bring them public exposure: Anne Elliot mistrusts Mr Elliot; Fanny Price suspects that Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford will have an affair. Mary Datchet occupies a similar position: she suspects that something is wrong between Katharine and William and when she sits down to 'piece together her impressions of them as a whole', she hits upon the idea that Katharine may be a more suitable match for Ralph, for Katharine has 'something that carried her on smoothly, out of reach — something, yet, but what? — something that reminded Mary of Ralph' (*ND,* 182). As in Austen's novels, this meditation alerts the reader to a possible relationship between Ralph and Katharine and demonstrates Mary's perceptiveness. Mary's understanding gives her a degree of control over her own future, for it prevents her from accepting Ralph's offer of marriage.

---

[15] Jane Austen, *Persuasion,* ed. and intro. by D.W. Harding (1818; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.37.

Where Woolf follows Ritchie in developing the subversive potential of an Austen narrative, she also parallels *The Village on the Cliff* by drawing on *Middlemarch* to present alternatives to marriage. The echoes of *Middlemarch* are particularly strong in Woolf's description of a reverie in which Mary renounces personal happiness and the prospect of marrying Ralph. Walking among crowds on Charing Cross Road, she shifts from 'an acute consciousness of herself as an individual ... to a conception of the scheme of things in which, as a human being, she must have her share' (*ND,* 271). This echoes the passage in *Middlemarch* in which Dorothea Brooke learns to ignore her own problems and concern herself with the sufferings of humankind: the dawning of a consciousness of 'the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance' and the realization that she was 'part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining'.[16] In both passages, the protagonist is offered a chance to escape from a previously confined existence, by taking a role in the community. However, whereas Dorothea's marriage is an indirect consequence of her involvement in society (she helps Rosamond, and in doing so learns that Ladislaw loves her), Mary's decision leads her to reject marriage entirely. This is confirmed in a later reverie when she realizes that she no longer loves Ralph and that she has gained 'independence of the tyranny of love' (*ND,* 472–73). Mary absents herself from the love plot to discover that 'there are different ways of loving', replacing romance with a more altruistic way of caring, as 'another love burned in place of the old one' (*ND,* 471). However, Woolf does not treat Mary's commitment to social causes as positively as might be expected. In the last scene of the novel, Mary is enclosed in her room, behind blinds which appear

---

[16] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. and intro. by W. J. Harvey (1871–72; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.846.

'impersonal and serene in the spirit of the woman within, working out her plans far into the night — her plans for the good of a world that none of them were ever to know' (*ND,* 533). Whereas Katharine's marriage can be viewed as a 'reward', offering her an escape from conventionality and from the confines of her family, Mary's choice of altruism over romance seems to lead to back to confinement and rob her of personality, with little prospect of success in her ventures. It also carries overtones of the Victorian ideal of a woman sacrificing self-interest for the greater good of society.

Makiko Minow-Pinkney has suggested that Woolf's modernist experiments with form and her rejection of social conventions were parallel feminist challenges to patriarchy: her fiction is 'a feminist subversion of the deepest formal principles — of the very definitions of narrative, writing, the subject — of a patriarchal social order' (p.x). [17] Such a rejection is not fully realized in *Night and Day* because it consciously invokes traditional narrative structures. Woolf's difficulty in presenting Mary's fate as a positive one suggests that even the deliberate negotiation with past narratives she conducted in *Night and Day* could not fully subvert the limited definitions of women's role which were inherent in the courtship narrative, for the courtship plot which structures *Night and Day* is too powerful to allow Mary to be presented as anything other than a loser. Woolf's frustration with these conventions contributed to her realization while writing *Night and Day* that 'as the current answers don't do, one has to grope for a new one' (*D,* I. 259), and fuelled her ideas for reforming the novel which made their way into 'Modern Novels'.

Although Woolf does not manage to overthrow narrative in *Night and Day,* she undermines its importance by emphasizing the workings of the imagination. Woolf punctuates the narrative with descriptions of characters' dreams and visions, which are separate from the realities of their daily existence; in doing so, she challenges the inevitabilities of the conventional courtship narrative and the whole question of rewards or outcomes it entails. As in the delirium scenes in *The Voyage Out,* Woolf can be seen to turn away from the narratives she associated with earlier women writers and to look towards male precursors in this aspect of the novel, for Woolf's exploration of the imagination draws on Romantic ideas. Anne Thackeray Ritchie also plays a mediating role in this process: as Joanne Zuckerman has suggested, Woolf found in Ritchie 'an important predecessor, confronting the same problem of reconciling the recording of experience, as it actually passes through the mind, with the demands of the conventionally structured novel' (p.38). Ritchie provided Woolf with a model for using a Romantic interest in the life of the mind to undermine the importance of plot in her novels. In the preface to *The Village on the Cliff,* Ritchie disclaims responsibility for the narrative of her novel by claiming that the story is based on one she heard in the village of Petitport in Normandy. She writes that she is interested in resurrecting her memories of Petitport, in an exploration of 'sights, sounds and peculiarities which we thought we had scarcely noticed, which remain in the mind like magic lantern slides, and come suddenly out of the darkness, starting into life when the lamp is lighted by some chance association' (*VC,* 1). As M.H. Abrams has argued, the lamp is a Romantic analogue for the workings of the mind, [18] and Woolf follows Ritchie in using this metaphor in Katharine and Ralph's dreamlike journey around London after their engagement — 'he appeared to her a fire burning through its smoke ... to hold his arm ... was only to touch the opaque substance surrounding the flame that roared upwards' (*ND,* 530). This conclusion works to affirm the importance of dreams over marriage as a social arrangement: whereas Woolf undermined the courtship narrative by questioning whether women and men can ever know one another in *The Voyage Out*, in *Night and Day* she suggests that this predicament actually makes marriage possible. Katharine and Ralph distrust one another's feelings because those feelings are based on dreams rather than experience, and Mrs Hilbery advises them not to challenge romance, but to learn to believe in it; to exchange dreams rather than try to get to know one another better. She offers an 'ancient fairy tale' about going out to sea with Mr Hilbery in a boat during their courting days: 'It was life, it was death. The great sea was round us. It was the voyage for ever and ever.' (*ND,* 508) When Katharine complains that she and Ralph could never experience this, because they keep finding their feelings and one another illusory, Mrs Hilbery pronounces the moral of the story: 'We have to have faith in our vision' (*ND,* 510).[19] This profoundly Romantic idea is affirmed in the dream-like conclusion to the novel.

---

[17] Pykett (p.92) similarly suggests that Woolf criticized a 'masculine tradition', and that her work in remaking or renovating language and fiction was a feminist project, for the 'life' she sought in 'Modern Fiction' was 'feminine'.

---

[18] *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; repr. 1971), pp.57–69.

Woolf also uses Romantic ideas about the imagination in Mary Datchet's reveries to support Mary's rejection of romance. The reveries are examples of the process described by Nancy Miller in which feminist writers use a dream-world as a space in which to rewrite narratives and (in contrast to the scenes with Katharine and Ralph) to refuse romance.[20] In her first reverie, on Charing Cross Road, Mary seeks to escape the limitations of her daily life and personality, and to 'climb the crest of existence and see it all laid out once and for ever ... her suffering as an individual was left behind her' (*ND,* 271). She looks for a solution in the realm of the imagination, as she seeks 'this essential thing' which she lacks and other people seem to have:

> And this essential thing? In the eyes of every single person she detected a flame; as if a spark in the brain ignited spontaneously at contact with the things they met and drove them on. (*ND,* 270)

Mary temporarily forgets her unrequited love for Ralph, but Woolf's attempt to subvert narrative by exploring Mary's imaginative life is not sustained, for the meditation on Charing Cross Road ends with an awkward break as Mary turns from her conception of life to consider her narrative, her relationship with Ralph: 'Where was he to be placed in the new scale of life?' (*ND,* 272). This question takes her away from her unified vision in which she can empathize with others, even Ralph — 'she was identified with him and rethought his thoughts with complete self-surrender' — to one in which she opposes others, as, 'with a sudden cleavage of spirit, she turned upon him and denounced him for his cruelty' (*ND,* 272). The juxtaposition suggests that although Romantic moments of self-forgetfulness may offer an escape from the conventions of patriarchal society, they can only be achieved at the expense of self-interest, which may be a capitulation to patriarchy in itself. Woolf attempts to balance these issues in Mary's later reverie, which pays attention to the activities of the mind, while pursuing the narrative by revealing that Mary no longer loves Ralph:

---

[19] Mrs Hilbery's intervention fulfils the sort of function which Carol Hanbery MacKay identifies in Ritchie's novels, in which the 'whimsical mode of her domestic fairytales dipels the hateful but familiar conventions perpetuated by literary expectations and unconsciously adopted by society' ('Hate and Humor as Empathetic Whimsy in Anne Thackeray Ritchie', *Women's Studies,* special issue on women and comedy, ed. by Regina Barreca, 15:1–3 (1988), 117–133 (p.118)).

[20] *Subject to Change,* pp.31-32.

> She looked back dazed into the room, and her eyes rested upon the table with its lamp-lit papers. The steady radiance seemed for a second to have its counterpart within her; she shut her eyes; she opened them and looked at the lamp again; another love burnt in the place of the old one, or so, in a momentary glance of amazement, she guessed before the revelation was over and the old surroundings asserted themselves. (*ND,* 471)

The careful construction of the relationship between subject and object made here — in which 'the lamplight seemed for a second to have its counterpart within her' — is attuned to Romantic debates about how poetry is formed. As Wordsworth puts it in *The Prelude:* 'An auxiliar light I Came from my mind, which on the setting sun I Bestow'd new splendour' (II. 368). In this meditation, Mary's mind does not simply create the scene she views, but distorts it to reflect its own state: the lamp becomes a flame for her, and she makes this a symbol of her new love which 'burnt in the place of the old one'. In this reverie, Woolf's exploration of the workings of the mind creates a break or a space within the narrative, in which the inexorable progress of events may be subverted and Mary's marriage plot abandoned.

These reveries are important for Woolf's development of her feminist and modernist project: they inform Woolf's argument in 'Modern Novels', for the verbal echoes between the essay and Mary's reverie on Charing Cross Road in particular suggest that the two works were part of the same project. The ideas Woolf presented in 'Modern Novels' did not emerge simply as an expression of Woolf's frustration with *Night and Day*, as James Hafley has suggested, but they were actually rehearsed in Woolf's description of the workings of the mind in the novel. Mary's desire to be free of personality and her predicament with Ralph prefigures Woolf's argument for reaching beyond plot, personality, and emotion which she attacked in 'Modern Novels' and which were shown to be confining in *Night and Day.* In Mary's reverie, as in 'Modern Novels', Woolf finds an escape from the imperatives of narrative in paying close attention to the workings of the 'mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life', and tracing the 'pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness' (*E,* III. 33–34). Mary's search for 'this essential thing' (ND, 270) prefigures

Woolf's argument in 'Modern Novels' that literature should convey 'this, the essential thing' (*E*, III. 32); in both pieces, she uses the symbol of the flame to suggest the working of the mind and something intangible or spiritual (as opposed to a tangible plot). Furthermore, although Woolf refers to James Joyce in the essay as an example of a modern novelist — she praises him for being 'spiritual; concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its myriad messages through the brain' (*E*, III. 34) — the language used in the essay seeks to appropriate the critical ideas of the Romantic poets for her literary project. Woolf had made a systematic study of the critical writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley while writing *Night and Day*, but the way in which she adopts Romantic theory for the feminist project of challenging narrative suggests a direct link with Anne Thackeray Ritchie's subversive techniques, specifically to her statement about the importance of the imagination over plot in the preface to *The Village on the Cliff.* [21]

Thus, Woolf can be seen to develop her modernist and feminist literary project in *Night and Day* by looking back to Ritchie and, through her, to the Romantic poets whom she claims for a feminist and subversive tradition. Furthermore, *Night and Day* can be seen to bear the seeds of Woolf's later and more progressive ideas, for Woolf's references to Shakespeare in the novel claim him for a female literary tradition in the novel in ways which foreshadow the figure of Shakespeare's sister in *A Room of One's Own.* Once more, Anne Thackeray Ritchie is a link in the chain by which Woolf constructs her place in this imaginative tradition. Woolf presents Mrs Hilbery as a channel for Shakespeare's work: she encourages people to read Shakespeare, she goes to Stratford to visit his grave, and she enacts scenes from his plays: her sudden appearance from behind a curtain on several occasions echoes Polonius who hides behind an arras in *Hamlet*; her return from Stratford hidden by foliage from Shakespeare's grave echoes the army which descends on Macbeth, bearing branches like a moving forest. [22] Woolf reveals the connections more pointedly when Mrs Hilbery claims Shakespeare for a 'female' literary tradition, by frivolously evolving 'a theory that Anne Hathaway had a way, among other things, of writing Shakespeare's sonnets'; she then had 'come half to believe in her joke, which was, she said, at least as good as other people's facts' (*ND*, 320). The incident alludes to an anecdote about Ritchie making a similar comment to Samuel Butler, as a riposte to Butler's suggestion that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman. [23] The joke unsettles the authority of 'fact', and imaginatively points to the possibility of female authorship for Shakespeare's texts and so threatens to displace Shakespeare as a male literary icon and claim him as a great precursor for women writers. Shakespeare has often been assumed to fulfil a paternal role for Woolf, [24] but her attempts to forge connections between Shakespeare and Anne Thackeray Ritchie through Mrs Hilbery suggest that she wanted to claim Shakespeare for a female literary tradition. As Beth Schwartz points out, Woolf 'reimagines Shakespeare as the cornerstone of the incipient tradition of women writers'. Although Schwartz argues that Shakespeare's 'mothering influence' is most evident in *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando,* I would argue that the origins of this process can be seen in *Night and Day.* [25]

---

[21] Woolf made notes on Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and Shelley's 'Preface' to *Alastor*: see *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks*, ed. by Brenda Silver, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), Notebook XXX. She probably read Keats's *Letters* (*D*, I. 113), and reviewed a new edition of Coleridge's *Table Talk* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 February 1918 (*E*, II. 221–25).

Her interest in the imagination suggests a more radical departure from reality than Wordsworth's argument, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, for art which represents ordinary experience, Wordsworth's concern to describe 'incidents and situations from common life' — albeit with 'a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect' (*Poetical Works*, p.734) — suggest that he attached more importance to narrative here than Woolf did in 'Modern Novels'.

Woolf follows Ritchie in appropriating Shakespeare for a feminist project of exposing the ambivalent relationship between reality and illusion, thus further undermining the social imperatives of the courtship narrative. Ritchie invokes Shakespeare in her exploration of the subversive potential of the imagination to provide an escape from present-day realities, or to present an ironical view of reality. For example, she alludes to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *The Village on the Cliff*, and the novel shares that play's theme of the difficulty in distinguishing between dream and reality: 'Are you sure I That we are awake? It seems to me I That yet we sleep, we dream' (IV. 1. 192). Catherine George's isolated existence is made bearable by her lively imagination, to the extent that her dreams seem more real than the everyday lives of those around her, and Ritchie describes Catherine's wish to be part of the Butler family as a desire 'to be acting a part ever so small in this midsummer night's dream' (*VC*, 70). Later, when Catherine senses that she has fallen out of favour with her employers, she asks: 'Had some malicious Puck squeezed some of the juice of Oberon's purple flower ... to set them all wandering at cross purposes all through this midsummer's day?' (*VC*, 96). Woolf echoes this theme in *Night and Day* when she describes Katharine Hilbery's sense of alienation from her parents' circle, and finds her own imaginative world more real: 'voices reached her from the room in which she was standing. She heard them 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 ... The dream nature of our life had never been more apparent to her.' (*ND*, 371) By playing with the difficulty in distinguishing between reality and unreality, Woolf and Ritchie subversively question the authority of a 'standard' way of perceiving the world and seek to validate alternative views.

---

[22] Margaret Comstock, '"The Current Answers Don't Do": The Comic Form of *Night and Day',* *Women's Studies*, Virginia Woolf Special Issue, ed. by Madeline Moore, 4 (1977), 153–171 (p.157).

[23] Zuckerman, p.34.

[24] For example, J.J. Wilson suggests that Woolf sees Shakespeare as the 'one true father' in 'Why is *Orlando* Difficult?', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Jane Marcus (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981) pp.170–84 (p.178).

[25] Beth C. Schwartz, 'Thinking Back Through our Mothers: Virginia Woolf Reads Shakespeare', *English Literary History,* 58:3 (1991), 721–46 (p.722). Christine Froula suggests that Woolf's attempt to claim Shakespeare for women writers began with *To the Lighthouse,* in 'Virginia Woolf as Shakespeare's Sister: Chapters in a Woman Writer's Autobiography', in *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare: On the Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot, and Others,* ed. by Marianne Novy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp.123–42.

Woolf builds a series of allusions to *As You Like It* into the courtship narrative of *Night and Day*. The references suggest that courtship narratives (supposedly the province of women novelists) may be linked with Shakespearean comedy; but, rather than drawing on Shakespeare to validate courtship and marriage, Woolf uses these allusions to undermine the imperative of narratives, particularly narratives of gender. As Margaret Comstock (pp.160–62) has shown, Woolf allies Katharine Hilbery with the figure of Rosalind: indirectly by alluding to Rosalind's male disguise in describing Katharine's mannerisms as 'masculine' (*ND*, 139, 298), and explicitly, when other characters refer to her as Rosalind. These references point to Katharine's ambiguous status as the heroine of a courtship drama. Katharine is identified with Rosalind for the first time when William mocks her for pretending not to take an interest in art and literature: 'it's one of Katharine's poses ... She pretends that she's never read Shakespeare. And why should she read Shakespeare, since she is Shakespeare — Rosalind, you know' (*ND,* 180). Rosalind in *As You Like It* also poses: firstly in dressing as a boy in order to flee to the Forest of Arden to escape her uncle's wrath, and then in pretending to play herself, in order to mock and test Orlando. The irony of William's comment is that he does not understand that Katharine's appearance as his fiancée is itself only a pose. Mary Datchet has guessed as much. She notices how Katharine takes charge of pouring tea, and wonders whether there is 'something maternal in this assumption of control'. Then she realizes that, rather than being an expression of some 'innate' tendency, Katharine's actions are a façade: 'it struck Mary that Katharine ... in the obscurity of her character, was, perhaps, smiling to herself, not altogether in the maternal spirit' (*ND,* 179). Like Rosalind, who could mock and test Orlando in her disguise as Ganymede by pretending to be herself, Katharine silently mocks William under the cover of their engagement and keeps her self in reserve from him.

This scene suggests a complex relationship between roles and selves. Judith Butler has argued that there is no 'subject who might be said to preexist the deed', for the 'subject' — even the subject's gender — is itself 'performatively constituted' by acts. [26] *As You Like It* questions the process by which the subject is constituted in performance, for on the one hand it explores how gender identities are constructed through action (partly, of course, as a result of the fact that women's roles were played by boys), and on the other, it questions how far those and all identities are false. Thus, Oliver's advice to Rosalind to 'counterfeit to be a man' (IV. 3. 173) has a double meaning: it implies that he has detected that Rosalind is a woman; and it suggests that a youth attains manhood by assuming and maintaining a façade of bravery. *As You Like It* suggests a solution which Marvin Carlson has proposed as a reply to Butler: that although the subject is constructed in performance, performers can introduce 'a subversive and parodic self-consciousness' into the playing of a role which may question and subvert that role. [27]

---

[26] *Gender Trouble*, p.25.

[27] *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.171, 175.

In *Night and Day,* Katharine escapes from Rodney by parodying her role as his fiancée: she continues the engagement in order for him to remain in the family circle and carry out his courtship with her cousin Cassandra. Katharine is compared with Rosalind a second time as she is about to post a letter to Cassandra inviting her to stay with the Hilberys to be near William. Mrs Hilbery muses about setting up a playhouse in which members of her circle would take parts in Shakespearean plays, and decides that Katharine would be 'Rosalind — but you've a dash of the old nurse in you' (*ND,* 321). The comparison draws attention to Katharine's role as a match-maker, for the Nurse is the go-between for the lovers in *Romeo and Juliet,* and Rosalind is a match-maker in *As You Like It,* not only by preparing Orlando to marry her, but by reconciling the shepherding couple, Silvius and Phebe. Phebe had refused to take Silvius because she was in love with Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede. Rosalind reunites Phebe and Silvius by stepping out of her disguise; Katharine frees William to marry Cassandra and frees herself to develop her relationship with Ralph by lifting her disguise as William's fiancée.

The ending of the novel invokes the conventions of festive comedy — a play whose major plot involves courtship and ends with the prospect of marriage for a heroine. [28] Mrs Hilbery's role in uniting the two couples both enacts one of Anne Thackeray Ritchie's characteristic 'happy endings' and echoes Hymen who presides over the nuptials at the end of *As You Like It.* As Penny Gay points out, festive comedy is traditionally thought to be profoundly conservative, allowing 'the topsy-turveydom of carnival', before the idea of community is asserted at the end, symbolized by a marriage and the expulsion of disruptive elements. [29] At the dinner-party which follows the announcement of the engagements in *Night and Day,* Woolf notes that 'civilization had triumphed, and Mr Hilbery presided over a feast which came to wear more and more surely an aspect, cheerful, dignified, promising well for the future' (*ND,* 528). Mary Datchet, who is excluded from this celebration, becomes the scapegoat. [30] However, *As You*

---

[28] Critics have identified patterns of festive comedy in other novels by Woolf. See, for example, Judy Little, 'Festive Comedy in Woolf's *Between the Acts', Women and Literature* 5:1 (1977), 26–37 and Melba Cuddy-Keane, 'The Politics of Comic Modes in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts', PMLA,* 105: 2 (1990), 273–85.

[29] Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.2.

[30] Comstock (p.467) compares Mary with Jacques in *As You Like It* who absents himself from the celebration which ends the play.

Like It does not quite end with nuptials; neither does *Night and Day* end with this celebratory meal. As Phyllis Rackin points out, the play's epilogue includes ambiguities which 'involve not only gender but sex itself, and not only the character Rosalind but also the boy actor who played her part ... that ambivalent figure refuses to choose between actor and character or between male and female but instead insists on the ambiguities' by identifiying *her*self as 'the lady' and *him*self as a boy ('if I were a woman' (V. 4. 198, 214)). [31] In *Night and Day,* Katharine and Ralph go out into the London night, making a dream-like journey around the town. They accept theatricality rather than abandoning it, as they recall the people who have played a part in their story, and visualize them as 'little figures' which 'came by in procession' (*ND,* 533), suggesting the finale to a play. They also affirm their dreams rather than entering reality, as they go together into 'the enchanted region' (*ND,* 534). In its parallels with *As You Like It, Night and Day* resists narrative closure and the imperatives it carries.

The process by which Woolf claims Shakespeare, not as an authoritative father figure, but as a forebear in an imaginary and subversive 'female' literary tradition, was founded on the version of Romantic theory she derived from Ritchie. The justification for her intimacy with Shakespeare comes from Ritchie's comment in her essay on Austen, that a reader can gain intimacy with the text she reads in her imagination. The process by which Woolf adopts Shakespeare in *Night and Day* anticipates her more explicit comments in *A Room of One's Own,* when she claims Shakespeare for a female tradition by describing his mind as 'the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly mind' (*Room,* 94). Woolf derived the concept of androgyny from Coleridge's idea that 'a great mind must be androgynous'. [32] She glosses Coleridge, suggesting that he 'meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided' (*Room,* 94). Woolf's interpretation suggests a fluid relationship between self and other: the androgynous mind is 'resonant' and can echo others, it is 'porous' and can admit the words of others; it is 'undivided', not only because it ignores gender difference, but because it evades the binary division of self and other. Woolf's later definition of androgyny bears a similarity to her description of Ritchie. As 'the transparent medium through which we behold the dead', Ritchie is incandescent; and she is androgynous because her existence was so effortlessly bound up with that of her father, 'she lived in him' and has become 'merged in the greater light of his memory' (*E,* III. 18). Such intimacy was central to the imaginative literary tradition Woolf sought to construct in her novels and critical writings.

---

[31] 'Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage', *PMLA*, 102: 1 (1987), 29–41 (p.36).

[32] 'I have known *strong* minds, with imposing, undoubting, Cobbett-like manners, but I have never met a *great* mind of this sort. And of the former, they are at least as often wrong as right. The truth is, a great mind must be androgynous.' (*Works,* XIV, ii. 190–91).

The connections between *Night and Day* and *A Room of One's Own* suggest that, far from being an aberration in Woolf's career, the novel anticipated ideas which became central to her mature aesthetic. Mary's reveries in particular anticipate key elements of what Woolf came to describe as her 'method': the (sometimes problematic) dispersal of personality in *Jacob's Room* and the process of 'tunnelling' into Clarissa's memories (the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique) in *Mrs Dalloway* or into Mrs Ramsay's 'wedge-shaped core of darkness' in *To the Lighthouse.* However, *Night and Day* demonstrates that Woolf's route towards innovation involved exploring her literary past and seeking intimacy with the literary tradition; the novel can be seen as a stage in her process of revolutionizing the novel by drawing on the literature of the past. The connections between the two works also suggest that, although Woolf clearly found the conventional structure of *Night and Day* deeply frustrating, her theory of fiction was not as greatly divergent from her writing practice as might appear.

'Modern Fiction' also gives theoretical justification to Woolf's attempt to construct a literary tradition and negotiate her own place in it, in *Night and Day.* In the essay, Woolf denies a linear development of literary history (whether it is seen as progress or as deterioration) for 'we do not come to write better'; instead she suggests that literary history is circular, although the circular motion is made up of more erratic movements, 'moving, now a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle' (*E*, III. 31). The essay attacks the previous generation of novelists — chiefly H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy — who were all popular in Woolf's day, and compares them unfavourably with *their* predecessors, Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad (*E,* III. 31). This rejection of an immediate past, coupled with Woolf's theory of a circular pattern for literary history, suggests that she undermines a view of tradition as the passing down of literature from one generation to the next, and replaces it with the possibility of cross-generational identification which did not rely upon a chain of inheritance.

The tradition Woolf envisages is built on empathy, for she identifies an English tradition within her, 'an ancient civilisation which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand' (*E*, III. 36). *Night and Day* is not simply 'a novel in the tradition of the English novel' as Mansfield suggested, but, with its links to Shakespeare and the Romantics, it aspires to be a novel in the tradition of English literature more generally. In this case, *Night and Day* can be read not as a failure to reform the past, but as an attempt to express identification with the past, to claim earlier writers as functions of what Woolf saw as 'instincts' and 'natural' sentiments of her own.

Chapter 4

Culture and Survival: *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*

In *Night and Day*, Woolf foreshadows the innovative techniques of her later novels by consciously invoking past literature rather than by rejecting it. She gives this process theoretical justification in 'Modern Novels', where she suggests that the path towards innovation in literature is found by looking to the past and exploring the tradition of English literature. Woolf regards this tradition as vibrant and, on the whole, comic: it is 'an ancient civilisation which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand', and takes a 'natural delight in humour and comedy, in the beauty of earth, in the activities of the intellect, and in the splendour of the body' (*E,* III. 36). Woolf's view of English tradition as comic is confirmed in the allusions to Shakespearean comedy (particularly *As You Like It*) which permeate *Night and Day.* Woolf continued to reach back to a vibrant tradition in her more experimental novels, *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway:* both novels draw heavily on Shakespeare, but they also look further back to claim classical Greek literature as a kind of prehistory to the English tradition Woolf embraced. As this chapter will argue, Woolf's construction of tradition is a feminist technique, for while she continues to claim great male writers as precursors to women writers (as well as for women readers), the terms she uses suggest that women engage with tradition in a comic and lively way, while men seek to control literature by turning it into moribund convention.

As in *Night and Day,* Woolf looks back with a mixture of nostalgia and ambivalence to a relatively recent past in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway. Jacob's Room* is set in the years leading up to the First World War, *Mrs Dalloway* is set in June 1923 and gives a picture of post-war euphoria in London, and in both novels Woolf seeks to breach a cultural gulf the war has created. Jacob Flanders in *Jacob's Room* is one of the lost generation of war dead, and the narrator's quest to tell his life-story is also an attempt to recall the pre-War world of his upbringing, education, and early adulthood at the beginning of the century. *Mrs Dalloway* can be read as a continuation of the narrative begun in *Jacob's Room:* although set in 1923, the present day is interspersed with Clarissa Dalloway's memories of her youth in the nineteenth century, and shows pre-war society reasserting itself after the disruption caused by the war. However, Woolf is critical of English society in the pre- and post-war worlds. *Jacob's Room* suggests that the seeds of war were found in society itself, and that Jacob (whose surname is synonymous with trench warfare in France) has been led inexorably towards his death in the war by his education and experience. In *Mrs Dalloway,* there is an element of satire in Woolf's picture of the post-war world seen through the eyes of Clarissa Dalloway, the wife of an MP, who welcomes the restoration of the old order: 'The War was over ... The King and Queen were at the Palace' (*MD,* 5). She is uneasy about the cavalier way in which English society has reasserted itself despite the 'thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten' (*MD,* 150): the presence of the shell-shocked ex-soldier Septimus Warren Smith, with his hallucinations of birds singing in Greek, suggests a troubling past which English society ignores in order to rebuild itself.

In both novels, Woolf examines and criticizes the ways in which English patriarchal society has sought to construct culture and literary tradition and control who has access to it; she suggests that such attempts to control culture have created the conditions that led to war. For example, she examines the social structures which had effectively excluded women from reading in *Jacob's Room* by pointing to the unequal educational opportunities available to young men and women. Following Jacob at a distance through school and university at Cambridge, Woolf shows young men attaining 'culture' almost as a birthright. Jacob and his contemporaries are privileged with special access to literature, for they 'have at hand as sovereign specifics for all disorders of the soul Adonais and the plays of Shakespeare' (*JR,* 105); Fanny Elmer, by contrast, wistfully longs for an education and feels excluded from the experience of reading: 'there is something, Fanny thought, about books which if I had been educated I could have liked' (*JR,* 168). Woolf suggests that Jacob and his friends believe that their educational privilege puts them in a position of power, and that it has instilled in them an urge to subdue and appropriate other nations which is tantamount to imperialism. As Jacob discusses ancient Greece with his friend Timmy Durrant, the narrator comments that, 'Civilizations stood round them like flowers ready for picking. Ages lapped at their feet like waves fit for sailing.' (*JR,*

101) However, Woolf questions the validity of Jacob's apparent privilege, for there is a degree of irony in her comments about his reading interests. She shows that Jacob does not really engage with the literature that seems to be on offer to him. The narrator views a pile of books in Jacob's empty college room and concludes that you cannot tell a person from the books they read. For example, Jane Austen is there, 'in deference, perhaps, to someone else's standard. Carlyle was a prize.' (*JR,* 49) Woolf indicates that Jacob owns books simply because he feels he should, rather than because they mean anything special to him.

Woolf's critique suggests that Jacob's education has not brought him any personal experience of the literary tradition; in fact, she suggests, the educational system may actually have instilled in him and his generation a fatalism which prepared them for their role as cannon-fodder. The connection between education and death in war is underlined in Woolf's description of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, an all-male bastion where the wives of academics are barely tolerated. Woolf's description aligns academia and religion with militarism:

> Look, as they pass into service, how airily the gowns blow out, as though nothing dense and corporeal were within. What sculptured faces, what certainty, authority controlled by piety, although great boots march under the gowns. (*JR,* 38)

Woolf's pun on service conflates military service with religious observance and suggests that established religion and education are forms of conscription, in which young men are marshalled both physically and mentally. This idea is reinforced by the image of 'great boots' marching into chapel. There is an inevitability about the procession, for the boots seem to march independently of the volition of the men who wear them. These young men are insubstantial; their gowns appear empty, reinforcing the anonymity and insignificance of the thousands who died in battle. The empty gowns seem to presage their deaths, as do their 'sculptured faces' which already seem like monuments to the dead.

Woolf suggests that students are trained to think in a linear way which leads them inexorably towards war and death. She describes the erudition of one of the dons, Huxtable, as militaristic and deathly: his thoughts are 'orderly, quick-stepping, and reinforced, as the march goes on, by fresh runnels' (*JR,* 50). Huxtable thinks in a linear way, his arguments running to inevitable (and presumably conventional) conclusions, just as the students are marched inexorably towards death in the trenches. Continuing the military metaphor, Woolf adds that 'Such a muster takes place in no other brain' (*JR,* 50). Seeing Huxtable asleep, the narrator imagines that 'you might fancy that on a pillow of stone he lay triumphant' (*JR,* 51), implying that, like a dead warrior, the reward for his labours will be commemoration in (and reduction to) a stone monument. In suggesting that the ways of reading advocated by the male-dominated education system are profoundly morbid, Woolf seeks to reverse the dynamic of *The Voyage Out,* where the female resistant reader was aligned with mortality.

In *Mrs Dalloway,* Woolf is more explicit about the ways in which the educational system has appropriated literature to legitimize war and nationalism, by showing how Septimus Warren Smith (though from a very different social class from Jacob) is led into battle by his education. Septimus studies Shakespeare at an adult education college, and falls in love with the lecturer Isabel Pole. Septimus volunteered to fight to 'save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square.' (*MD,* 112) Woolf here shows how Shakespeare may be co-opted as a synecdoche for nationalism and the heterosexual economy of patriarchy, which exhorted women to encourage their husbands to volunteer and challenged men to prove themselves by joining up. [1] Shakespeare is also invoked by the militaristic Lady Bruton, the epitome of the English ruling classes. She 'never spoke of England, but this isle of men, this dear, dear land, was in her blood (without reading Shakespeare), and if ever a woman could have worn the helmet and shot the arrow, could have led troops to attack, ruled with indomitable justice barbarian hordes and lain under a shield noseless in a church ... that woman was Millicent Bruton' (*MD,* 236). Though Lady Bruton invokes Shakespeare, she is not a reader, and her nationalistic sentiment is expressed in a misquotation from John of Gaunt's eulogy to England in *Richard II:* 'This happy breed of men, this little world' (II. 1. 45). [2] Like Huxtable in *Jacob's Room,* Lady Bruton's idea of triumph is to be commemorated in a lifeless (and mutilated) piece of statuary. Although a woman, Bruton stands for the political establishment which, like the university system satirized in *Jacob's Room,* has ignored the vitality of writing but appropriated the idea of literature for the purposes of militaristic rhetoric.

---

[1] These pressures are illustrated in two famous wartime posters: one simply stating, 'The Women of Britain say "Go!"', the other depicting the embarrassment of a father who had not fought when asked by his children, 'What did you do in the war, Daddy?'.

[2] Fox, *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance,* p.130; Schlack, p.57.

Woolf picks up on a social and cultural phenomenon of the time by examining the ways in which patriarchal constructions of literary tradition, in other words the construction of a canon, are implicated in militarism. As Paul Fussell has argued, the Great War took place against the background of two 'liberal' cultural forces: 'the belief in the educative powers of classical and English literature' and 'the appeal of popular education and "self-improvement"'.[3] If *Jacob's Room* is an expression of the first cultural force, Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* represents the second. Fussell also indicates the importance of the literary canon at this time, by pointing out that two anthologies — Sir Arthur Quiller Couch's edition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* and *The Greek Anthology* (pp.159, 180–81) — were particularly popular among soldiers. Although these books were taken to the front because they were easy to carry, their format represents the selection — which is tantamount to the prescription or canonization — of approved texts. Fussell suggests that literature was a comfort; that writers such as Wilfred Owen and Herbert Reed used literary allusion to express experiences which were 'unspeakable'. However, when he suggests that the feeling of national sentiment generated by English literature was 'one of the reasons why there was no serious mutiny in the British army, even under the most appalling conditions' (p.158), he hints at but does not critique the power of the cultural encoding of literature (found in the very process of canonization) to regiment and oppress individuals. Woolf's description of Jacob's Cambridge and Septimus's experience of working-class education makes a critique of these conditions. Woolf's political satire in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* foreshadows her argument in *Three Guineas* that the current educational system (which had always discriminated against women) had failed to protect 'culture and intellectual liberty', and that such a failure might be an indirect cause of war (pp.98–100).

Woolf's critique of the appropriation of literature by patriarchal culture in *Jacob's Room* is implicated in a more personal drama which is acted out in the novel. The figure of Jacob represents Woolf's brother Thoby who died of typhoid fever in 1906 (QB, I. 112); in her satirical treatment of Jacob's education, Woolf articulates (and thus continues) their long-standing sibling rivalry over literature. Like Fanny Elmer who covets Jacob's education, Woolf was jealous of Thoby and other men of his generation who went to school and university, while she was educated at home. Woolf later enviously described Thoby's knowledge of Shakespeare:

---

[3] *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.157.

> He had consumed Shakespeare, somehow or other, by himself. He had possessed himself of it, in his large clumsy way, and our first arguments — about books, that is — were heated; because out he would come with his sweeping assertion that everything was in Shakespeare: somehow I felt he had it all in his grasp; at which I revolted. (MB, 138–39)

The language used in this passage — the images of Thoby having 'consumed' Shakespeare, 'possessed himself of it' and having it 'all in his grasp' — implies that Woolf saw her brother greedily absorbing an experience which was denied her, and jealously guarding it against any attempt by her to obtain it. Woolf's response is defensive, for she argues and 'revolts' against her brother. The passage suggests that Woolf saw Thoby as inheriting the male custodianship of literature: he had 'possessed himself' of Shakespeare as Leslie Stephen had 'acquired' the great English poems (Maitland, p.475). However (as with Woolf's response to Leslie Stephen's tutelage in *The Voyage Out*), Woolf's attitude towards her brother is tempered by a sense of loss. As Quentin Bell suggests, Woolf's longing for Thoby after his death was complicated by a sense that he had been a mystery to her when he was alive: she sought to know more about him, partly as consolation for his death and 'partly for a more complex reason — an amused yet resentful curiosity about the privileged masculine society of Cambridge' (I. 112). Sara Ruddick has suggested that Woolf's pursuit of her elusive subject in *Jacob's Room* is a function of her quest not only for the lost 'private' brother who had shared her home, but for the 'public' aspects of his life from which she was excluded.[4] Thus, while Woolf sought to wrest literature from her brother's control, she also used literature in an elegiac way: to compensate for what she could not know about him.

The strategies which Woolf used to seize possession of literature from Thoby are revealed in a letter she wrote to him in 1901, while he was a student at Cambridge. Woolf wrote to tell him of what was perhaps her first serious encounter with Marlowe and Shakespeare, or at least her first attempt to examine their claims to greatness:

> Speaking of a certain great English writer — the greatest: I have been reading Marlow[e], and I was so much more impressed by him than I thought I should be, that I read Cymbeline just to see if there

---

[4] 'Private Brother, Public World', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp.185–215 (p.190).

> mightnt be more in the great William than I supposed. And I was quite upset! Really and truly I am now let in to [the] company of worshippers — though I still feel a little oppressed by his — greatness I suppose. I shall want a lecture when I see you; to clear up some points about the Plays. I mean about the characters. Why aren't they more human? Imogen and Posthumous and Cymbeline — I find them beyond me — Is this my feminine weakness in the upper region? But really they might have been cut out with a pair of scissors — as far as mere humanity goes — Of course they talk divinely. (*L*, I. 45)

Woolf describes approaching their work with a scepticism towards the traditional conception of greatness, but nonetheless admits to being overawed, 'oppressed', by Shakespeare. She turns to Thoby as a mediator, asking him to 'lecture' her — that is, to pass on to her some of the knowledge he is acquiring at Cambridge — while she excuses her own criticism as an aspect of 'feminine weakness'. However, Woolf's deference to Thoby's knowledge, and her claims of intellectual 'weakness' (which plays up to the idea of women's 'native incapacity' expressed by St John Hirst in *The Voyage Out*) is a façade, for she goes on to make her own critique of *Cymbeline*. She argues that the characters lack humanity and that Shakespeare's greatest strength lies in writing good lines: she picks out 'the best lines in the play — almost in any play I should think —' and quotes them: 'Think that you are upon a rock and now throw me again! ... Hang there like fruit my soul, till the tree die' (*L*, I. 45–46; *Cymbeline*, V. 5. 262). Having reduced Shakespeare to isolated lines she can admire him, for she adds, 'Now if that doesn't send a shiver down your spine ... you are no true Shakespearian!' (*L*, I. 46). Where Woolf saw Thoby as having literature 'all in his grasp', her approach is more tentative, for she extracts lines from Shakespeare's plays, treating them like fetish objects to claim parts of a whole which has been denied her. [5] The quoted lines are also a way of taming and controlling Shakespeare's 'greatness': Woolf does not accept him as a great author because he has been canonized by patriarchal society, but because his words bring out a strong emotional reaction in herself. Having appropriated Shakespeare in this way, she can use his greatness to challenge Thoby's educational privilege, for she dares him to match her emotional appreciation of the words. Woolf confirms her sense that her approach to literature is superior in a late memoir when she writes that Thoby 'was not, as I was, a breaker off of single words or sentences ... he was much more casual and rough and ready and comprehensive' (*MB*, 139). This later opinion suggests that although Thoby had a more complete grasp of Shakespeare, his approach was more coarse ('rough and ready') than her own careful attention to words and sentences.

---

[5] Freud defines the fetish object as 'some part of the body ... or some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces' (*Standard Edition*, VII. 153). Woolf's use of quotation as a way of damaging Shakespeare's texts, as well as trying to possess them, is analoguous to the ambivalent attitude towards the fetish which Freud describes in 'Fetishism' (XXI. 149–57): 'To point out that [the fetishist] reveres his fetish is not the whole story; in many cases he treats it in a way which is obviously equivalent to a representation of castration' (p.157).

Woolf's attempt to use literature as a substitute for knowledge of Thoby is revealed in 'Old Bloomsbury', a memoir written at the same time as *Jacob's Room* (*MB,* 181; QB I. 124–25n.). There, she describes how Thoby would regale her with stories of his friends at Cambridge: 'I thought about Pilkington or Sidney Irwin or the Woolly Bear whom I never saw in the flesh as if they were characters in Shakespeare.' (*MB,* 190) Here, Woolf uses Shakespearean characters as a substitute for people she has not met, and so Shakespeare becomes a cypher for the aspects of her brother's life which she finds mysterious and inaccessible. Woolf cannot claim him, or seek intimacy with him, through these figures: they are essentially a projection of her own ideas, for Woolf adds that after listening to Thoby she would go on to make up stories about his friends herself.

These two aspects of Woolf's negotiations with Thoby are projected onto her treatment of literature in *Jacob's Room.* Woolf's treatment of Jacob displays an ambivalence and a desire both to wrest Shakespeare from the control of educated men by belittling their claims to him, and also a quest to identify herself with Jacob and share his experience. On one hand, as we have seen, Woolf tries to unsettle Jacob's privileged status. As Woolf tried to challenge Thoby to defend his presumed status as a 'true Shakespearian', she tries to play down the importance of Jacob's reading and education. In her critique of Jacob and his friends, and in seeking to make a distinction between the books he owned and his reading interests, Woolf begins to challenge the kind of patriarchal economy around literature which she criticized in *The Voyage Out:* here, it is not enough to possess books just to make the right impression. On the other hand, Woolf makes Jacob in some ways like herself: Shakespeare and Marlowe, whom Woolf admits to 'worshipping' in the 1901 letter, are among Jacob's favourites, and he shares her own distaste at the contemporary Edwardian novelists: 'there is Mr Masefield, there is Mr Bennett. Stuff them into the flame of Marlowe and burn them to cinders' (*JR,* 145). Jacob and his friends, in a drunken quest for the 'three greatest things that were ever written in the whole of literature', quote Woolf's favourite lines from *Cymbeline*, along with *Macbeth*: 'The devil damn you black, you cream-faced loon' (*JR,* 172-73). [6] In showing Jacob treating individual lines with relish and ignoring the wider structure of Shakespeare's plays, Woolf uses his words ironically to undermine established ideas of greatness. The canon is reduced from a set of texts prescribed by the establishment to three lines which give personal pleasure.

Woolf's strategies for identifying and validating a sister's access to literature in the face of brotherly appropriation are brought to bear on her wider social and political concern to challenge the patriarchal annexation of literature in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway.* Indeed, Woolf was still using the struggle between brother and sister as a metaphor for feminist resistance of patriarchy in 1938, when she argued in *Three Guineas* that women could play a role in protecting culture and liberty, and thereby help to prevent war, 'not by advising their brothers how they shall protect culture and intellectual liberty, but simply by reading and writing their own tongue in such a way as to protect those rather abstract goddesses themselves' (*3G,* 103). In her description of the British Museum in *Jacob's Room,* Woolf seizes brief quotations as a way of undermining the claims of Jacob, or any young man of his class, to appropriate Shakespeare and the classics. The Museum is in itself a symbol of British nationalism and also of the appropriation of culture, for prominent among its collection are the Elgin Marbles, taken from the Parthenon in Greece. Woolf suggests that the fruits of human knowledge and literature are not so easily appropriated:

> There is in the British Museum an enormous mind. Consider that Plato is there cheek by jowl with Aristotle; and Shakespeare with Marlowe. This great mind is hoarded beyond the power of any single mind to possess it. (*JR,* 147–48)

The great works of philosophy and literature are the products of human endeavour: there are more great works than any one person can read in a lifetime, and more great works than any one writer or thinker can produce. However, this passage also sutures the words of Shakespeare, for it links the names of Plato and Aristotle with the words 'cheek by jowl', a phrase from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (III. 2. 338). The phrase also subtly resists concepts of canonization, for it emphasizes equality (in the original quotation, Demetrius says that he will not follow Lysander but go with him 'cheek by jowl'). By setting Shakespeare and Marlowe side by side, Woolf refuses (as in her 1901 letter to Thoby) to accept that Shakespeare is greater than Marlowe, thus resisting pre-ordained ideas of greatness. The juxtaposition of Plato and Aristotle, Shakespeare and Marlowe also denies a correlation between chronology and progress, and resists both the element of ranking which is central to the construction of the canon and the linear chronology implied by the construction of tradition.

---

[6] *Macbeth,* V. 3. 11: 'The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon!'

Woolf also voices her ambivalence towards the canon by setting up implicit contrasts between the continued vitality of great works of literature and the inanimity of stone memorials which — like the young men with their sculptured faces or Huxtable on his pillow of stone — are merely *mementi mori.* Thus, although Woolf notes that all the names carved around the dome of the British Library are men's, she is not entirely in sympathy with the feminist Julia Hedge's comment, '"Oh damn ... why didn't they leave room for an Eliot or a Brontë?"' (*JR,* 145). Woolf's description of Hedge as bitter and unfortunate, with 'Death and gall and bitter dust ... on her pen-tip', seems an inappropriate response to what might be read as a valid feminist point, but taken in the context of Woolf's attack on the monolithic and the statuesque as the province of the patriarchal system, Hedge's desire to see the great women writers commemorated in stone becomes synonymous with a wish to ossify their work.

In the British Museum sequence, Woolf also suggests how enduring works of literature might be used for elegiac purposes: not to reclaim individuals who have died (as Woolf could not gain intimacy with Thoby through Shakespeare's words and characters), but to testify to a kind of cultural survival which was greater than the individual. Woolf contrasts the enduring power of the ideas of Plato and Shakespeare (symbolized by their books in the British Museum) with the mortality of the individual:

> Stone lies solid over the British Museum, as bone lies cool over the visions and heat of the brain. Only here the brain is Plato's brain and Shakespeare's; the brain has made pots and statues, great bulls and little jewels, and crossed the river of death this way and that incessantly, seeking some landing; now wrapping the body well for its long sleep ... Meanwhile, Plato continues his dialogue ... And Hamlet utters his soliloquy. (*JR,* 149)

Individual mortality, represented by the wrapped bodies of the mummies at the British Museum, is contrasted with the continually renewed effort of the human race in making artefacts which survive; and of great writers whose works continue to be read, and thus continue to live. By contrast, the pots, statues, bulls, and jewels suggest individual mortality because they are all funerary artefacts, and may have been ceremonially dispatched across sacred rivers. The 'river of death' referred to in this passage is also a reference to the river of Ocean in Greek mythology, over which the heroes were allowed to pass to the Isles of the Blest or Elysium. By asserting the immortality of heroes, or great authors like Shakespeare and Plato against the mortality of individuals, Woolf suggests that individuals like Jacob and his contemporaries cannot possess the great civilizations, as their education might have led them to believe;[7] instead she seeks elegiac consolation in the idea that culture continues to thrive and survive without them.

In *Jacob's Room,* Woolf suggests how a woman's reading might enable cultural regeneration by endorsing a relationship with literature which is more fluid and suggestive than the monumental regime represented by the likes of Huxtable or even Julia Hedge. This relationship picks up on Woolf's attempt to access Shakespeare through isolated lines, and is suggested in the thoughts of a woman, Jacob's mother Betty, as she remembers her dead husband:

> Seabrook lay six foot beneath, dead these many years; enclosed in three shells; the crevices sealed with lead, so that, had earth and wood been glass, doubtless his very face lay visible beneath, the face of a young man whiskered, shapely ... (*JR,* 15)

Although Seabrook is buried in a churchyard, his maritime name, his burial in shells (inner coffins), and Betty's fantasy about seeing his face through glass, all evoke a submarine world. These images hint at the presence behind Woolf's text of Ariel's song from *The Tempest:*

> Full fadom five thy father lies;
>   Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:
>   Nothing of him that doth fade,
> But doth suffer a sea-change
>   Into something rich and strange.
> Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell...
> Hark! now I hear them, — Ding-dong, bell. (I. 2. 399)

As in the song, Betty imagines that her husband has not faded but has somehow been preserved underground. The echo from *The Tempest* continues as Betty Flanders hears a church bell: 'when ... she heard the bell for service or funeral, that was Seabrook's voice — the voice of the dead.' She hears her son, Archer, calling, and 'Sounding at the same moment as the bell, her son's voice mixed life and death inextricably, exhilaratingly.' (*JR*, 16) The echoes of Shakespeare not only give Ariel's song new vitality by working it into a new context, but the echoes themselves are used to suggest an alternative to death, destruction, and decay. The synchronicity of the voices of the living and the dead suggest a more creative and pliable form of quotation, in which Woolf seeks intimacy between herself and Shakespeare. Through the voice of Betty Flanders, Woolf explores a more vibrant tradition in which to seek inheritance from Shakespeare, developing the conception of Shakespeare as a key figure in a female literary tradition which she had begun in *Night and Day*. This explicitly feminine reading of literature suggests an alternative to the monolithic, militaristic thinking of Huxtable, which is associated with war and death; and reaffirms Woolf's reversing of her characterization of female reading as morbid in *The Voyage Out*.

---

[7] Woolf's image of the 'enormous mind' in the British Museum echoes T.S. Eliot's argument in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that a poet must be aware of 'the mind of Europe — the mind of his own country — a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind' (*Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; repr. 1986), p.16). However, where Eliot argues that the later writer must both absorb culture and become a 'catalyst' for change (p.18), Woolf denies that any single individual can inherit and change tradition.

Woolf continues the process of using quotation as a way of bringing the voices of past writers — Shakespeare and the classical Greek writers — to bear on the present moment in *Mrs Dalloway*. A diary note made while writing *Mrs Dalloway* suggests that Woolf saw the reappearance of the past in the present as central to her innovative technique in the novel. Woolf wrote that she had made a 'discovery', which she described as: 'I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment.' (*D*, II. 263) These 'beautiful caves' chiefly consist of the characters' memories and they form part of what would later be labelled her 'stream-of-consciousness' technique; but prominent among the memories and thoughts of these characters are phrases and images which had emerged from Woolf's own reading of Elizabethan drama and Greek literature at that time. [8] The idea of the 'beautiful caves' is itself a classical echo, for it is reminiscent of Plato's cave. [9]

Themes from Greek literature emerge in the hallucinations of Septimus Warren Smith. Septimus hears a sparrow singing

---

[8] Woolf read Elizabethan drama and Greek literature including Homer, Plato, Euripides, and Aeschylus in preparation for *The Common Reader*. This was not a commissioned project and so it is a fairly reliable guide to her interests. Indeed, Woolf's diary note on her reading list for the essay, 'On Not Knowing Greek', suggests that she planned to read Greek literature primarily for personal enjoyment: 'Sounds very learned; but really might amuse me. & if it doesn't, no need to go on.' (*D*, II. 196)

[9] The Platonic influences on Woolf have been identified and explored by Brenda Lyons, in 'Textual Voyages: Platonic Allusions in Virginia Woolf's Fiction' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1995).

> freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death. (*MD*, 31)

Woolf had recently written about a similar hallucination she experienced during her own mental illness of 1904, in 'Old Bloomsbury' (*MB,* 186). The conjunction does not simply suggest that Septimus's delusions had an autobiographical source, but it implies that the image Woolf used to describe her illness was itself informed by her recent reading in Greek literature. The location of the sparrows, in the 'meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk', resembles Elysium, the place beyond the stream of Ocean, to which human heroes were allowed to pass to enjoy an afterlife. [10] The sparrow's message that 'there is no death', thus echoes the Greek trope of the immortality of heroes. By drawing, consciously or unconsciously, on that literature, Woolf found a way of describing Septimus's hallucinations, and of framing her own experience of mental illness in a way that enabled her to overcome the trauma of writing what she called 'the mad part' of the novel which 'tries me so much, makes my mind squint so badly that I can hardly face spending the next weeks at it' (*D,* II. 248). Thus the project of recalling a personal past becomes elided with that of exploring literary heritage.

The exploration or recovery of the past has an elegiac purpose, for Woolf brings the classical theme of the immortality of heroes directly to bear on the issue of facilitating regeneration after the Great War. Her use of classical allusion can be seen as an attempt to reach back beyond the recent past towards an ancient culture which still had a relevance in the present day. Woolf's choice of classical references over contemporary ones is a deliberate one, for in 'On Not Knowing Greek' (written at the same time as *Mrs Dalloway*), Woolf remarked upon the superiority of the war poetry of classical Greece over that of her contemporaries, such as Owen or Sassoon:

> In the vast catastrophe of the European war our emotions had to be broken up for us, and put at an angle from us, before we could allow ourselves to feel them in poetry or fiction. The only poets who spoke to the purpose spoke in the sidelong, satiric manner of Wilfr[e]d Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. It was not possible for them to be direct without being clumsy; or to speak simply of emotion without being sentimental. But the Greeks could say, as if for the first time, 'Yet being dead they have not died.' (*CE,* I. 10)

---

[10] *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature,* ed. by M.C. Howatson, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp.15 and 210.

Woolf's comparison of the two literatures emphasizes their emotional content over their treatment of war: she characterizes contemporary poets by their tendency to evade emotions and treat war satirically. For instance in the opening lines of Wilfred Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' — 'What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? | — Only the monstrous anger of the guns' — the sanctity of human life is set in ironic contrast to the brutality and inhumanity of death in war. [11] On the other hand, the line from Simonides which Woolf selects for praise — 'Yet being dead they have not died' — does not address the subject of war at all, and even attempts to evade the subject of death. By pitting Classical against contemporary in this way, Woolf ignores the classical references and allusions which pervaded writing on the First World War, [12] for example, Owen used classical references in his work, such as in his satirical allusion to Horace's saying, 'Dulce et Decorum Est', in his poem of that name. In her comment that Simonides expresses 'as if for the first time' the sentiment 'being dead they have not died', Woolf also takes an ambiguous stance towards Robert Graves's ode 'Not Dead', which elegizes David Jones and begins: 'Walking through trees to cool my heat and pain, | I know that David's with me here again'. [13] By ignoring the classical allusions in First World War poetry, Woolf attempts to deny that these writers had access to the classical tradition, as she had teased Thoby that he was not a 'true Shakespearian'.

In the figure of Septimus, Woolf dramatizes what she characterizes as a split in sensibility between Classical and contemporary literature; she suggests that the contemporary mentality is ultimately too fragile to bear the enduring power of classical literature. Septimus's mental illness dramatizes the contemporary resistance to emotion — a sort of shell-shock experienced by an entire generation [14] — for the war has left him unable to feel emotion, even for the death in battle of his close friend Evans. He is tortured by sparrows singing that there is no death — the song of the Greek poets — and by the ghostly appearances of Evans as a dramatization of that song. Septimus imagines that he sees Evans, or hears him talking or singing behind a screen. In the hallucination, Evans sings that the dead are in Thessaly — the mythical land of magicians and heroes, the land of Lapiths and Centaurs, and the place from where the Argonauts set sail. [15] These images not only link Evans with the heroes of Greek legend, but they also confer on him a sinister form of immortality, for he haunts Septimus's visions, driving him to suicide. This suggests that for Septimus and the modern generation, the classical can only impinge on the modern world as nightmare or psychosis.

---

[11] Wilfred Owen, *The Complete Poems and Fragments,* 2 vols., ed. by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus with Hogarth Press and Oxford University Press, 1983), I.1.

[12] See Fussell, chapter V, esp. pp.155–69.

[13] Robert Graves, *Poems (1914–1926)* (London: Heinemann, 1927), p.53.

[14] Max Saunders suggested that the condition of shell-shock characterized the Modernist era in 'War, History, and Madness in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End',* a paper given at 'The Cultural and Intellectual Contexts of Modernism' conference, Centre for English Studies, University of London, 31 May – 1 June 1996. Trudi Tate similarly argues for the incidence of a civilian form of shell-shock, 'civilian war neuroses', analogous to the modern notion of 'post-traumatic stress disorder' ('HD's War Neurotics', in *Women's Fiction and the Great War,* ed. by Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp.241–62 (esp. pp.241–44)).

However, Woolf shows how the sensibilities of the past might have a place in the present in the figure of Clarissa, Septimus's double, who survives where he perishes. The theme of haunting — the survival of the past into the present and the need to come to terms with the past — is central to her story, as it is to Septimus's. Where Greek literature emerges in Septimus's mind in the form of a nightmare which he tries to suppress, classical ideas are central to Clarissa's imaginative and creative life, and she allows personal and literary pasts to inform her thinking, for the 'beautiful caves' of her memories have Platonic parallels. Clarissa's memories impinge upon the present day and Peter Walsh, the suitor she rejected in her youth, returns from India to visit her (a hint at the courtship narrative Woolf rejected after *Night and Day*). Clarissa's party has a classical parallel, for Peter's return echoes Odysseus' return to Penelope at the end of the *Odyssey*: Peter has to wait for her to finish entertaining politicians (like Penelope's suitors) before he can be alone with her. The party also brings together a number of people she has not seen for several years, as though they are returning from the dead — for example, Peter Walsh is shocked to see Clarissa's aunt Helena Parry, because he had been convinced that she was dead — as Odysseus was assumed to be dead until he returned from his travels. [16]

---

[15] Howatson, p.568.

[16] These echoes from the *Odyssey* suggest parallels between *Mrs Dalloway* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (which Woolf read in manuscript in 1918 and in print in 1922). There are also structural echoes in that both novels are set in one city over the course of a day and interweave two unrelated strands of narrative (Harvena Richter, 'The *Ulysses* Connection: Clarissa Dalloway's Bloomsday', *Studies in the Novel*, 21 (1989), 305–19; and Maria di Battista, 'Joyce, Woolf and the Modern Mind' in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, ed. Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision Press, 1983), pp.96–114). However, Woolf's response to Homer is quite different from Joyce's. Whereas the chapter titles of *Ulysses* link the structure of Joyce's narrative directly with that of the *Odyssey*, Woolf's text absorbs images from the *Odyssey* more subtly. Woolf's imaginative response to the *Odyssey* is a riposte to the conscious erudition of Joyce, whom she had described as 'a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples' (*D*, II. 188–89), and so it matches her attitude to the university education of Thoby Stephen and Jacob Flanders.

The resolution of *Mrs Dalloway* may be read in terms of the sibling rivalry over literature outlined earlier: Clarissa is able to allow the literary past to inform her thoughts in a vivid way, and survives; Septimus (a brother-figure) is led into war by a narrow view of literature fed to him by his education, and is driven to his death when ideas from a life-affirming classical tradition impinge on his thoughts like the return of the repressed. However, the equation is not as simple as this, for Woolf resists the suggestion that Clarissa herself is an inheritor of literature, for Woolf frequently undermines egotism and the attempt to appropriate literature (both of which she saw as evils of patriarchy). Her reading of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in the novel is central to this idea. Two lines from the play — 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun I Nor the furious winter's rages' (IV. 2. 258) — are repeated throughout the novel as a refrain, and are used by both Clarissa and Septimus. By extracting lines from the play, Woolf dislocates the quotation from the political setting of *Cymbeline* — the skirmishes between Roman-occupied Britain and the Roman army — thus refusing to give war any narrative importance. The quotation also resists war by speaking of renewal. The lines are taken from a funeral song for Cymbeline's daughter, Imogen, who is thought to have taken a deadly poison. She has actually taken a strong sleeping draught and eventually wakes up to be reunited with her family. Imogen's recovery, which speaks of renewal and survival, is congruent with Simonides' epitaph, 'Yet being dead they have not died'. Woolf's invocation of Shakespeare suggests that the hope for renewal does not lie with individuals but with society at large, for she persistently invokes the quotation in connection with the mortality of individuals. The refrain from *Cymbeline* first appears when Clarissa thinks about her own mortality while shopping on Bond Street and asks, 'did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her ... ?'. The closest she can get to envisaging immortality is to imagine that her existence is bound up with that of others, that 'somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other ... ' (*MD,* 11). The words from *Cymbeline* suggest Clarissa's resigned acceptance of mortality, for to die is to 'fear no more'. It also illustrates the idea of living 'in each other', for her thoughts are informed by Shakespeare's words, suggesting that Clarissa's sense of self is fluid rather than fixed. The theme of merging thoughts and identities is found the next time the lines from *Cymbeline* are used. Clarissa finds that her husband has been invited to lunch without her, and again she is reminded that death will one day separate them for ever (*MD,* 38). The thought leaves her with a feeling of 'exquisite suspense', as though she is about to dive, plunging in the sea to undergo a sea-change as the waves 'gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl' (*MD,* 39). Here, the lines from *Cymbeline* are associated with echoes from Ariel's Song in *The Tempest.* Woolf allows this image from *The Tempest* to inform the next allusion to *Cymbeline*: 'Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea' (*MD,* 51). As the refrain becomes associated with both the beating of the heart and the sound of the waves, the combined allusions balance the end of individual life against the continued existence of the natural order.

The process by which Woolf allows Shakespeare's text to merge with her own thus sits in parallel with Clarissa's sense of self in relation to others. This is affirmed when Woolf uses Shakespeare's words as a link between Clarissa and Septimus, as she had thought of Shakespearean characters as a link between herself and Thoby, in 'Old Bloomsbury'. Shortly before his suicide, Septimus thinks he hears Shakespeare's words being whispered by Nature: 'Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more' (*MD,* 182). Although ironically, as Fox has pointed out (p.118), Septimus thinks that Shakespeare's message is intended for him alone, the echo suggests that Shakespeare is a shared inheritance, which cannot be possessed or appropriated by any one individual. When Clarissa hears from a guest at her party that a young man (Septimus) has killed himself, she uses Shakespeare to connect her experience with that of the dead young man she has never known. At first she is horrified at bad news being relayed at her party; but gradually comes to reflect that by committing suicide, Septimus had preserved himself from corruption. She remembers empathizing with Othello's words in her youth — 'If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy' (*MD,* 242; *Othello,* II. 1. 189) — and she recites them now to align her own experience with that of Septimus (Fox, pp.116–17). While the quotations from Shakespeare function as a point of commonality between Septimus and Clarissa, they also serve as a vanishing-point for both characters as individuals, in that each finds expression in the words of another. The echo from Shakespeare thus suggests, as Woolf implied in her description of the British Museum in *Jacob's Room,* that individuals die, but that Shakespeare's words will continue. In her final repetition of the words from *Cymbeline,* Clarissa allays her own fears while laying Septimus to rest: 'the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun' (*MD,* 244). The phrase signals the resolution of her crisis and her decision to return to her party: they suggest an awakening like Imogen's when the sleeping draught has worn off. Shakespeare, whose work and reputation had functioned as a battle-call, is here reclaimed to signal recovery and the return of peace.

Woolfs treatment of Shakespeare and the ancient Greeks in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* suggests a subversive attempt to liberate the great writers from the grasp of educated men and from the values of patriarchy, nationalism, and egotism. The ease with which she allowed echoes from past literature to inform and influence her texts suggests that she did not seek to appropriate that literature for herself but rather to absorb it into her own voice, and to give up that voice into a communal one. Woolfs response differs from the appropriation of literature by James Joyce, whose works she accused of being ruined by the 'damned egotistical self' (*D,* II. 14); or even by T.S. Eliot, who wanted to establish a place for his own poetry by inserting 'the new (the really new) work of art' into a great tradition of 'existing monuments' (p.15). Eliot emphasizes the 'necessity to conform'; Woolf, by contrast, seeks her own route into literature as an outsider. Instead of envying or even emulating the education which patriarchy grants to its sons, Woolf practises the more subversive strategy of absorbing literature by covert means.

In *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway,* Woolf defends a vibrant and specifically feminine way of reading against a patriarchal culture which is shown to have appropriated literature and emptied it of its vitality. By presenting patriarchal culture as moribund and a feminine approach as vibrant, Woolf suggests that women readers and writers might become the custodians of literary culture, for they have the power to foster survival and renewal. Unlike the Bloomian account of influence in which a poet fights for the posterity of his own work, [17] Woolf seeks reassurance of the survival of others: the survival of the 'great minds' of literature in spite of war; and the survival of the individual in other people after death. The two processes are deeply interconnected. In these novels, Woolfs incipient pantheism seeks for some form of personal survival after death, in contrast to the organized religion symbolized by King's College Chapel, which purports to offer eternal life but is ironically shown to lead young men to their deaths.

---

[17] *The Anxiety of Influence,* p.71.

Literature becomes a space in which the living might both identify with and distance themselves from the dead, as Clarissa elegizes Septimus, and Woolf remembers Thoby in the words of Shakespeare. As the next chapter will show, the process of using literature as elegy continued and intensified in *To the Lighthouse.*

Part II

Elegies

Chapter 5

To the Lighthouse and the Ghost of Leslie Stephen

> Father's birthday. He would have been ... 96, yes, today; & could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; — inconceivable. I used to think of him & mother 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. I must read him some day. I wonder if I can feel again, I hear his voice, I know this by heart? (*D,* III. 208)

Woolf wrote these words in her diary entry for 28 November 1928, almost two years after *To the Lighthouse* was completed. She records that, retrospectively, she regarded the novel as a turning-point in her relationships with both her parents: by writing this heavily autobiographical novel and by translating her parents into the fictional characters of Mr and Mrs Ramsay, Woolf readjusted her relationship with the past. As Phyllis Rose has argued, the process of writing *To the Lighthouse* enabled Woolf to begin to compose her own life story and to take control of her past (p.154). It is tempting to use such a biographical reading of the novel and diary entries like this one, to read *To the Lighthouse,* as Fogel does, in Bloomian terms as a process by which Woolf overcame parental influences and took control over her own writing (p.61). However, this passage suggests a different dynamic: rather than repressing the past, Woolf addresses it directly by writing about her parents, confronting her obsession with them and laying their ghosts. It also articulates a process of loss and recovery: although Leslie Stephen's death had left Woolf free to write, her sense of freedom was compromised by a longing for him (the unhealthy obsession she describes in this diary entry). The process of writing *To the Lighthouse* helped Woolf address this loss by enabling her to know her father (though not her mother) in a new way.

As earlier chapters have demonstrated, Woolf closely identified with Leslie Stephen as a reader, for he had introduced her to literature, by educating her and lending her books from his library. He also influenced her practice as a writer. His views on women writers inform *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day,* where Woolf seeks to emulate the domestic environments and courtship narratives of Jane Austen's novels, which Stephen had praised, while his disparagement of Austen's 'limited' subject-matter contributes to Woolf's ambivalence towards her female role-models. Although Woolf invokes and tackles patriarchal ideas in all her early novels, she does not address Stephen directly in them: for example, in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway,* she invokes her brother Thoby (and men of his generation) to negotiate the patriarchal appropriation of literature. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf finally tackles Leslie Stephen's ghost directly, not only by bringing him to life in the character of Mr Ramsay but by exploring his writings in a series of allusions throughout the novel. [1] This chapter will argue that Woolf came to know her father through his works, to make a shift from a familial relationship (which is all a Bloomian reading can imagine) towards the more intimate relationship that exists between reader and writer. [2] In quoting and alluding to Stephen, Woolf appropriated his works for her own time and her own purposes: as she notes in her diary, she came to see him as a 'contemporary' whose works were relevant to her own time, rather than to the late Victorian world he inhabited.

Three works in particular structure Woolf's attempt to recall her father and lay his ghost in *To the Lighthouse: The Mausoleum Book, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,* and *An Agnostic's Apology.* [3] Woolf's starting-point for recalling her father is his *Mausoleum Book*, which is a straightforward autobiographical work, partly a memoir and partly a diary (it was not written for publication, although an edition is now available). Woolf draws on and negotiates her father's account of her childhood years, particularly of her mother, Julia, in the opening section of the novel; she examines *how* he represented the past and questions how far it is possible to recall past events and people who have died. The novel is concerned with the nature of elegy and the problem of presence and absence, and Woolf draws on the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* to explore these issues. Central to Woolf's meditation is the question of whether anything exists outside of our perceptions of it, a theme which Stephen discusses in connection with the English empiricist philosophers, particularly Hume, and which Woolf alludes to in *To the Lighthouse* as Mr Ramsay's research on 'subject and object and the nature of reality' (*TL*, 33).

---

[1] Woolf's comment in the diary entry that she must read her father's works does not mean that she had not read them already: as Gillian Beer suggests, she is not planning to read him for the first time, but to read him thoroughly, 'that act of intimacy, homage and appraisal in which we subject ourselves to a writer's complete work' ('Hume, Stephen, and Elegy in *To the Lighthouse*', *Essays in Criticism,* 34:1 (1984), 33–55 (p.54)).

[2] The distinction between the writer father and actual father is also suggested by Jane Elizabeth Fisher in 'The Seduction of the Father: Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen', *Women's Studies,* 18:1 (1990), 31–48, and by Virginia R. Hyman in 'Reflections in the Looking-Glass: Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf', *Journal of Modern Literature,* 10 (1983), 197-215.

[3] *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book.* With an intro. by Alan Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) (hereafter *MBk*). *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,* 2 vols. (London: Smith & Elder, 1876) (hereafter *History*). *An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays* (London: Smith & Elder, 1893) (hereafter *Apology*).

The *History* and *An Agnostic's Apology* articulate Stephen's attempt to grapple with past ideas. For Stephen, the negotiation centred on religious issues. As a young man, he was a don at Cambridge, and, according to the conventions of the time, had been ordained as a clergyman in the Church of England. Over the years, he became convinced that the views which the church propagated as sacred truths were false. After a painful crisis of faith, he gave up his post as don and resigned from Holy Orders in the late 1870s with Thomas Hardy as a witness. Stephen used empiricist philosophy to defend of his rejection of God intellectually, firstly in the *History* and then at greater length in *An Agnostic's Apology;* but he still retained an emotional attachment to religious imagery and a Romantic spirituality. As I will argue in this chapter, Woolf found resonances in Stephen's departure from the religious and educational establishment for her own attempts to negotiate patriarchy.

I

The relationship between *The Mausoleum Book* and *To the Lighthouse* is extremely complex. We cannot look at it as a source for the novel, because we cannot tell for certain whether events recorded in both books are simply two accounts of the same incidents remembered by both writers, whether Stephen's account of them in *The Mausoleum Book* helped to shape Woolf's recollection of certain events, or indeed, whether his book enabled her to picture scenes she had not witnessed first-hand. Alan Bell discounts the importance of parallels between the two books:

> It is less the indirect quotation of Stephen's text which is important, more the 'transcription' of gestures of body and attitudes of mind. The loosely-quoted anecdotes as well as the portrayal of

> intellectual feeling owe most to an inevitable store of family memories so strong that a direct reference to the documents would have been superfluous. (*MBk,* xxix)

However, although both Woolf and Stephen drew on their common family memories in their writings, Stephen wrote about them first. By committing events to writing before Woolf did, he had begun the process of describing and ordering them, and placing them in a literary idiom. The book was not wholly spontaneous, for Stephen paid close attention to the presentation of material: he wrote it in manuscript before making a fair copy, for which he made 'a good many alterations' including 'correcting slovenly phrases and repetitions' (*MBk,* 97). Woolf continued the process of turning family memories into literature and responded to Stephen's version of events in *To the Lighthouse*. So, while Stephen's memoir was not the sole source of descriptions, characters, and events which also find their way into Woolf's novel, her account nonetheless engages with and challenges his record of events. As we have seen, Woolf looked back to the pre-war years in three of her previous novels, and attested to the power of patriarchy in shaping and recording that world. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf addresses not simply a generically patriarchal view of those years, but her own father's account.

Woolf replicates Stephen's methods of arranging and recounting certain incidents in 'The Window'. The setting — the Ramsay's holiday home on a Scottish island — is based on the Stephens' holiday cottage, Talland House at St Ives, which Stephen makes the backdrop for his descriptions of Julia, his children, and some family friends. He uses three things in particular to set the scene: cricket on the lawn, the garden, and Julia's visits to the sick. The first section of *To the Lighthouse* is set mainly in the garden, with cricket being played in the background, and the main excursion away from the house is Mrs Ramsay's visit to a sick person. One of the anecdotes Stephen tells in this setting is Julia Stephen's success in promoting Kitty Lushington's engagement to Leo Maxse in 1890. 'My Julia was of course,' he concedes 'though with all due reserve, a bit of a matchmaker' (*MBk*, 75). Woolf echoes this assessment by making Mrs Ramsay instrumental in bringing together Paul Rayley and Minta Doyle. Since Woolf would have been only eight years old when the Maxses were engaged, the importance she attaches to Mrs Ramsay's role in it is possibly based on other people's views of her mother rather than on her own observations. Also, since she had already portrayed the character of

Kitty Maxse as Mrs Dalloway (QB, II. 87), the picture here of Kitty as a young woman is a shift which suggests that Woolf took the story from somewhere else.

Woolf echoes Stephen's opinions about several friends and family members in *To the Lighthouse*. For example, Stephen describes a brilliant mathematician, Worstenholme, 'whose Bohemian tastes and heterodox opinions had made a Cambridge career unadvisable': Woolf gives Carmichael a similar biography in *To the Lighthouse*. Remembering that Woolf was a child when she knew Worstenholme, it is unlikely that she would have known about the problems which had stunted his career. It is even less likely that she would have been allowed to know the details of Worstenholme's marriage. Stephen described Worstenholme as practically a hermit, married to an 'uncongenial and rather vulgar Swiss girl'; he was 'despondent and dissatisfied and consoled himself with mathematics and opium'. Julia 'took him under her protection, encouraged him and petted him' and invited him every year to St Ives, where 'he could at least be without his wife' (*MBk*, 79). Woolf uses this verdict as a basis for her description of Carmichael, who also takes opium, and is the object of Mrs Ramsay's pity, for 'what was obvious to her was that the poor man was unhappy, came to them every year as an escape', and that this unhappiness was 'his wife's doing' (*TL*, 56).

Woolf may have turned to *The Mausoleum Book* not simply for the history it recalled, but because it was concerned, as she was, with loss and how to overcome it. Stephen composed his memoir as a way of mourning Woolf's mother, Julia, who died on 5 May 1895. He describes how they met and were married, recounts incidents from their time together, and expresses his desolation over her death. Stephen wrote the main part of the memoir in the two months after Julia's death, but continued to use the book as a journal chiefly for recording the deaths of friends, acquaintances, and family members, including Virginia's half-sister Stella. *To the Lighthouse* is similarly concerned with remembering the dead. While writing *To the Lighthouse* Woolf suggested that mourning deaths and giving expression to loss were important aspects of her own writing: '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; 27 June 1925). [4] In the first section, 'The Window', Woolf recaptures her childhood and memories of her parents and siblings; the priority it gives to reminiscence makes it the section which most closely resembles *The Mausoleum Book*. In the second section, 'Time Passes', Woolf alludes to the deaths of her mother, Stella, and her brother Thoby, in the characters of Mrs Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew, as Leslie Stephen used his journal to record the deaths of friends and relatives. The last section, 'The Lighthouse', is concerned with enacting memorials: Lily Briscoe completes her painting of Mrs Ramsay; while Mr Ramsay, James, and Cam make a trip to the lighthouse to take the provisions which Mrs Ramsay had always wanted to send to the lighthouse-keepers.

The Mausoleum Book and *To the Lighthouse* have an important common focus in the figure of the lost mother — Julia Stephen or Mrs Ramsay — and the void created by her death. While some similarities between the works can be explained simply by the fact that they use the same person for their model, it is evident that Stephen's portrait of Julia was in Woolf's mind as she wrote her novel. In her presentation of Mrs Ramsay, Woolf does not simply record her own impressions, but attempts to negotiate Leslie Stephen's image of Julia. She carries out this negotiation in her treatment of two important and inter-related themes: woman as the object of reverence and woman as the object of art. *The Mausoleum Book* is largely a hagiography: Stephen writes that 'my love was blended with reverence. She is still my saint.' (*MBk*, 54) Woolf explores the issue of reverence by showing the kind of adoration which Mrs Ramsay inspires in others. Lily Briscoe notices how Mr Bankes looks lovingly at Mrs Ramsay, and realises that her womanhood is the reason for this veneration: Lily feels 'the reverence which covered all women; she felt herself praised' (*TL*, 66). More importantly, Mrs Ramsay is held in honour for being a mother, and is frequently seen in the first part of the novel with her youngest, and favourite, son James. As Mr Bankes observes, mother and child are 'objects of universal veneration' (*TL*, 72). This echoes Stephen's sentiments in *The Mausoleum Book*:

---

[4] Hermione Lee notes that *To the Lighthouse* has strong affinities with the Victorian pastoral elegy (introduction to *To the Lighthouse* ed. by Stella McNichol (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)). Stevie Davies demonstrates how the novel may be classified as an elegy in *Virginia Woolf: To the Lighthouse*, Penguin Critical Studies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).

> The love of a mother for her children is the most beautiful thing in the world; it is sometimes the redeeming quality in characters not otherwise attractive. [Julia] was a perfect mother, a very ideal type of mother; and in her the maternal instincts were, as it seemed, but the refined essence of the love which showed its strength in every other relation of life. (*MBk*, 83)

Ironically, what is missing from this description is Julia herself: we are told that she epitomizes motherhood, one of the most beautiful states of human existence, but this makes her more mysterious, since it only tells us what she was, not who she was. Stephen's sense of mystery is portrayed in Woolf's account of Mr Ramsay worshipping his wife and son. Seeing them from a distance he finds them 'lovely and unfamiliar' — symbolic of the mother–child bond. Woolf's narrative draws attention to the almost religious impulse behind this feeling: 'who will blame him if he does homage to the beauty of the world?' (*TL*, 51). In the close connection between veneration and admiration of physical beauty in this scene, the theme of woman as the object of reverence intersects with that of woman as the object of art.

The theme of woman as the object of reverence and art emerges in both *The Mausoleum Book* and *To the Lighthouse* in the image of the Madonna, which links physical beauty with the mystery of motherhood. Leslie Stephen invokes it to describe his first impression of Julia when they met at a picnic in 1866: 'I do not remember that I spoke to her. I saw and remembered her, as I might have seen and remembered the Sistine Madonna or any other presentation of superlative beauty.' (*MBk*, 31) The image is significant, for, as Stephen records, Julia was used by Edward Burne-Jones as a model for the Madonna in his painting 'The Annunciation'. This picture was painted in 1879: after Leslie and Julia Stephen were married and, appropriately, while Julia was pregnant with Vanessa, the first child of the marriage. [5] Thus Stephen recovers his first memory of Julia through this later image. Suggestions of religious painting also hover around Mrs Ramsay. Woolf's description of Mrs Ramsay knitting juxtaposes her against a Renaissance religious painting: 'with her head outlined absurdly by the gilt frame, the green shawl which she had tossed over the edge of the frame, and the authenticated masterpiece by Michael Angelo' (*TL*, 42). Although Woolf draws attention to this absurdity to question whether Mrs Ramsay should be worshipped as a religious icon, she nonetheless shows that other characters revere her as a Madonna. Chief amongst these is Mr Bankes, who has visited the 'Sistine Chapel; Michael Angelo; and Padua, with its Giottos' (*TL,* 98). His views on art are shared by Lily Briscoe: although she tries to paint Mrs Ramsay in an abstract and post-impressionist style, with colourful, geometrical shapes, she respects traditional ideas about art. Her painting is closely associated with Renaissance depictions of the Madonna and Child, for Lily twice defends herself for representing Mrs Ramsay and James as a purple shadow, because mother and child, 'objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty — might be reduced ... to a purple shadow *without irreverence*' (*TL,* 72; emphasis added). Later, she argues that 'she did not intend to disparage a subject which ... Raphael had treated divinely' (*TL,* 136). Lily never dispels her sense of reverence for Mrs Ramsay. When she later has a vision of Mrs Ramsay sitting on the step, she treats it as a holy visitation: 'Mrs Ramsay — it was part of her perfect goodness to Lily — sat there quite simply, in the chair' (*TL,* 272). [6]

---

[5] *Julia Duckworth Stephen: Stories for Children, Essays for Adults*, ed. by Diane F. Gillespie and Elizabeth Steele (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p.xv.

Although Lily tries to see Mrs Ramsay differently, Woolf shows the power of these traditional images, for Lily's vision confirms that Mrs Ramsay is beautiful, possesses 'perfect goodness', and commands respect. Like Julia Stephen in *The Mausoleum Book,* Mrs Ramsay remains mysterious. As beautiful women, Mrs Ramsay and Julia Stephen are in danger of becoming objects which other people can contemplate and consume: their capacity to think or feel is ignored in favour of their capacity to give pleasure to the viewer. Leslie Stephen's image of Julia as an artist's Madonna compromises her ability to communicate: he does not remember her speaking at their first meeting, but is struck with her physical attractiveness. Stephen is unable to break the silence with which he surrounds Julia, for even when he praises her mind, he contradicts himself by turning her into a statue:

> It was just the perfect balance, the harmony of mind and body which made me feel when I looked at her the kind of pleasure which I suppose a keen artistic sense to derive from a masterpiece of Greek sculpture. (*MBk,* 32)

---

[6] I discuss Woolf's allusions to the Madonna and Her representation in Renaissance and Pre-Raphaelite painting in greater detail in a forthcoming article, 'Behind the Purple Triangle: Art and Iconography in *To the Lighthouse*', *Woolf Studies Annual* (New York: Pace University Press, 1999).

Woolf draws attention to this problem in her account of Mr Ramsay gazing at Mrs Ramsay reading. He finds her 'astonishingly beautiful', he 'exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all.' (*TL*, 163) Woolf does not deny that Mrs Ramsay is ignorant, simple, or beautiful. She only indicates that Mr Ramsay likes to exaggerate these qualities. Thus Woolf's picture of Mrs Ramsay only tentatively challenges Leslie Stephen's presentation of Julia as beautiful, virtuous, and ignorant. Yet, we now know that Julia Stephen herself was not ignorant or badly educated. Although she was not a professional writer, she had one book published during her lifetime, a guide for nurses and carers called *Notes from Sick Rooms* (1883) and an article, the entry on her aunt Julia Margaret Cameron in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. She also wrote a number of unpublished essays on contemporary questions — 'Agnostic Women', 'The Servant Question', and 'Domestic Arrangements of the Ordinary English Home' — and some children's stories.[7] Yet this aspect of her creativity is only sketchily reflected in Mrs Ramsay. Although her notes on the health and welfare of poor people could be a recognition of Julia Stephen's researches for *Notes from Sick Rooms*, she is generally shown to be uninterested in taking part in topical discussions with her guests. And although Mrs Ramsay invents a magic mountain to comfort her daughter, she reads her children a bedtime story by the Brothers Grimm rather than making up one of her own.

As Phyllis Rose (p.158) has suggested, Woolf's portrait of Mrs Ramsay bears many of the hallmarks of the Victorian ideal of womanhood she satirized in her 1931 lecture, 'Professions for Women'. Woolf named the stereotypical woman the 'Angel in the House' after a poem by Coventry Patmore, and described her as 'intensely sympathetic', 'immensely charming', and so unselfish that 'she sacrificed herself daily ... in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others' (*CE*, II. 285). Woolf claimed that she had rejected this image by 1931, for 'had I not killed her she would have killed me' (p.286). This claim may be set in parallel with her comment that, had her father lived, 'his life would have entirely ended mine', that there would have been 'no writing, no books' (D, III. 208), for the idea of the Angel in the House was endorsed by Stephen. Though Woolf could claim to have killed the angel by 1931, her portrait of Mrs Ramsay in 'The Window' suggests that in the late 1920s she had not entirely rejected this ideal. Woolf picked an easy target for satire in Coventry Patmore's sentimental poem: in *To the Lighthouse,* however, she was tackling much stronger and more personal images of women.

---

[7] These were published in 1987, ed. by Gillespie and Steele.

Religious iconography was problematic both for Stephen and Woolf. They were seduced by the poetry of language to the extent that they were prepared to let images like the Madonna and Child intrude upon their respective concerns for empirical truth and women's equality. Where Stephen wrote as an agnostic in a language which was heavily inscribed by Christianity, Woolf wrote as a woman in a language which had been inscribed by patriarchy. Although Leslie Stephen was agnostic, the language he uses to describe Julia is religious: she is his 'saint' and he holds her in reverence. As someone who had lost his faith, religious language was a tricky issue for Stephen. On one hand, he was aware of the difficulty of expressing truth when all the available terminology was tinctured with old beliefs, with the result that 'old conceptions are preserved to us in the very structure of language' (*History*, I. 5). On the other, he was reluctant to dispense with the language of fantasy and imagination, because he felt that the decline in religious beliefs meant that 'we have lost a mode of expressing our emotions. The old symbols have ceased to be interesting, and we have not gained a new set of symbols.' (*History*, I. 15)

The process by which Leslie Stephen dispensed with old conventions had implications for Woolf's challenge to patriarchy. Stephen was reluctant to dismiss the moral dimensions of Christianity and was determined 'to live and die like a gentleman'. [8] He did not see himself as clinging to Christian morals out of sentiment, but because the morality was valid without the support of a religious infrastructure. The figure of the mother was central to his moral outlook: he saw a mother's love for her children as 'the most beautiful thing in the world' and suggested that motherhood could 'redeem' characters who were 'not otherwise attractive' (*MBk,* 83). By making motherhood the ideal state for women, Stephen confined them to the domestic sphere and to the traditional family unit. The moral and the poetic vestiges of religion can be seen to work together in *The Mausoleum Book:* the image of the Madonna and Child as a poetic, emotive expression of the beauty of motherhood, is underpinned by a moral and social ideology.

---

[8] Quoted in Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (New York: Random House, 1984), p.2.

Virginia Hyman has pointed out that Auguste Comte was a key figure behind Stephen's thinking on the family. [9] Comte's work also played an important part in leading Stephen to reject much of the Bible because it could not be proved to be true: Stephen wrote that he read Comte and became convinced 'among other things that Noah's flood was a fiction (or rather convinced that I had never believed in it) and that it was wrong for me to read the story as if it were a sacred truth' (*MBk*, 6). As T.R. Wright points out, Comte's views were inconsistent because they espoused both Enlightenment ideas on empirical verification and Romantic ideas leading to highly subjective plans to reform society and religion. [10] Thus, Stephen would have found in Comte a philosophy which embraced two competing tendencies in his own thinking: a commitment to the rigorous pursuit of truth, and more idealistic schemes for improving the quality of life. Comte's social theory of Positivism emphasized the mother and the traditional family as vehicles of social progress. Comte sought to counter the destructive potential of individualism by creating a sense of community modelled on that of primitive Catholicism. Positivism preserved traditional structures by translating Christianity into the 'Religion of Humanity': Comte replaced a transcendent God with 'le Grand Être' or the soul of humanity, which was intrinsically female. Comte's ideas shed light on the veneration of women and the Victorian ideals of womanhood, for he transmuted Catholic veneration of the Madonna into reverence for womankind in general. As Noel Annan ironically glosses it:

> Womanhood was the source of love; Positivist saints might be worshipped provided they were women; and in order to develop compassionate propensities to the full, priests were to be compelled to marry and imbibe ... rich draughts of female affection. (p.271)

These venerated women are only seen in relation to others, particularly men. A woman's value is located in what she does for others or means to them, or in what she can inspire others to be. Such selfless giving is central to the Comtean ideology. The power of a woman's love to bring others closer to an ideal state of being is reflected in Leslie Stephen's summary of Julia Stephen's life:

---

[9] Virginia R. Hyman, 'The Metamorphosis of Leslie Stephen', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly*, 2:1–2, (Winter/Spring 1975–76), 48–65.

[10] T.R. Wright, 'George Eliot and Positivism: A Reassessment', *Modern Language Review*, 76 (1981), 257–72 (p.260).

> its value was the outpouring of a most noble and loving nature, knitting together our little circle, spreading its influence to others, making one little fragment of the race happier and better and aware of a nobler ideal. (*MBk,* 96)

Julia is depicted as fulfilling the positivist ideal of bringing about social improvement through loving others, but her power is limited to the space accorded to her by traditional patriarchal society, for her influence only affects her 'little circle' which constitutes 'a little fragment of the race'.

The contours of Leslie Stephen's ideology of the family can be seen in Woolf's portrait of Mrs Ramsay. Although she does not engage with Comte directly, Woolf reflects the Comtean background to Stephen's thinking in her description of female altruism in Mrs Ramsay's ability to give to others — such as when she lets Mr Ramsay 'protect her', giving 'of her own free will what she knew he would never ask' (*TL,* 89). Though Lily Briscoe later draws attention to the problems of such altruism — 'Mrs Ramsay had given. Giving, giving, giving, she had died' (*TL,* 203) — the earlier part of the book suggests that, like the 'noble and loving' Julia Stephen, Mrs Ramsay inspires a love capable of improving the quality of life. Woolf uses Lily to explore these ideas. For example, Lily watches Mr Bankes gazing at Mrs Ramsay and thinks that it was:

> love ... distilled and filtered; love that never attempted to clutch its object; but, like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain. (*TL,* 65–66)

This scene could be read as a gloss on the description of Julia Stephen in *The Mausoleum Book.* Rather than denying the spiritual power Leslie Stephen attributes to Julia, Woolf exaggerates it in Mrs Ramsay. Where Stephen limits Julia's achievement to making her own family happy, Woolf suggests that the love Mrs Ramsay inspires might be 'spread over the world'. Here, Woolf harnesses a positive side of the Comtean ideal of womanhood, by suggesting that even if women cannot take public roles, they can make an impact on society by influencing others to act. This exaggeration makes Mrs Ramsay seem more powerful by granting her a wider sphere of influence but it also makes her more mysterious.

Like Stephen's adoption of Comtean ideas, the passing allusions to Positivism in *To the Lighthouse* engender contradictions. Where Stephen's use of Comte is a function of his inability completely to reject traditional ideas and conceptions, Woolf's (perhaps unwitting) acceptance of the spiritual side of Positivism prevents her from overturning traditional ideas about the family. Woolf makes it clear that Mrs Ramsay's secret power works to preserve the status quo, for Mrs Ramsay influences others to obey the 'universal law' that 'they all must marry' (*TL*, 69, 68). The description of marriage as a precept of 'universal law' makes it a divine institution rather than simply a form of social organization. Lily reveres Mr and Mrs Ramsay as 'symbols of marriage, husband and wife' (*TL*, 99). In the draft version of the novel, she sees their relationship in more powerfully Christian terms, as they take on 'gigantic ~~meaning~~ stature — Crucified & transcendent, ~~blessing the world~~ or ~~with gestures of blessing a~~ with symbolic meaning'. [11] This use of Christian images to sanctify marriage suggests that Woolf made an equation between Christianity and the patriarchal family.

Woolf's description of Mrs Ramsay's dinner-party further links religious ideas with the status quo. Mrs Ramsay's success in bringing her disparate guests into union suggests that she single-handedly manages to preserve civilization as it was known, particularly when she attempts to promote marriages among her guests. She hopes to persuade Lily to marry Mr Bankes and instigates the engagement of Paul and Minta, which is announced at this meal. As Lily notes, there is something terrifying about Mrs Ramsay's match-making, for she 'led her victims ... to the altar' (*TL*, 137). The phrase has strong ritualistic significance: the altar is the traditional location for a wedding, but it is also the site for ritual feasts and sacrifices. [12] When Mrs Ramsay learns of Paul and Minta's engagement, she thinks of her party as 'celebrating a festival'; but she recognizes that the meal is also a sacrifice, because 'the love of man for woman' they are celebrating also bears 'in its bosom the seeds of death' (*TL,* 135). The comment presages later events in the novel, for Paul and Minta sacrifice their happiness by marrying, and Prue Ramsay is sacrificed ('*given* in marriage') and literally gives up her life for motherhood when she dies from 'some illness connected with childbirth' (*TL,* 179, 180; emphasis added). Mrs Ramsay's role as match-maker literally has life-and-death significance and the sense of power and mystery which surrounds her is enhanced rather than exploded. Positioned at the centre of this festival and 'presiding over destinies which she did not understand', she becomes the focus of anxieties about the future, about life and death, and the survival of civilization.

---

[11] *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*, transcribed and ed. by Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1983), p.120 (hereafter *OHD*).

[12] For example, Jane Lilienfeld has noted that the meal evokes ritual festivals of the Great and Terrible Mother in '"The Deceptiveness of Beauty": Mother Love and Mother Hate in *To the Lighthouse*', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 23:3 (1977), 345–76.

These deep-seated anxieties about Mrs Ramsay's power over life and death are reinforced by another influence on *The Mausoleum Book,* and ultimately on *To the Lighthouse:* the Romantic tradition, and Wordsworth in particular. Where, in *Night and Day,* Woolf had sought to appropriate the Romantic poets for a 'female' tradition, in *To the Lighthouse* she investigates the patriarchal interpretations which had accrued to their poetry. In the memoir, Leslie Stephen uses two quotations from Wordsworth to express his thoughts about Julia. One comes from 'Tintern Abbey':

> that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
> Of kindness and of love (l.33; *MBk,* 82)

It is ironic that a book of remembrance should use this quotation, which talks about acts which are 'unremembered' — forgotten or ignored. At the same time it suggests that a person should be remembered chiefly for what she or he did for others. While trying to preserve Julia's legacy, Stephen is effectively denying it. These problems are even more evident in his other quotation from Wordsworth, from 'Poems of the Imagination':

> She was a Phantom of delight...
> A perfect woman, nobly planned,
> To warn, to comfort, and command;
> And yet a Spirit still, and bright
> With something of angelic light. (VIII. 1, 27; *MBk,* 33)

This quotation, which is specifically about a woman, firmly locates her importance in what she does for others: warning, comforting, and commanding are all done to other people. At the same time, Wordsworth casts the woman as an angel (or the 'Angel in the House'), stressing her negligibility. A line which Stephen does not quote takes this idea further by emphasizing woman's mortality: she is 'a Traveller between life and death' (VIII. 24). In this poem, woman is a Wordsworthian 'border' figure — a person who is not important in herself, but because, in her apparent position on the borders between life and death, she inspires the poet to higher thoughts.

In negotiating Stephen's appropriation of Wordsworth, Woolf had to deal with the problem that in poems such as these, the woman is the object of the male poet's reverence and desires, and is marginalized because she is so closely linked to mortality. As a female reader, Woolf had to negotiate this objectification. This problem was intensified because Woolf had first encountered Wordsworth through listening to Stephen reciting his poems from memory:

> His recitation, or whatever it may be called, gained immensely from this fact, for as he lay back in his chair and spoke the beautiful words with closed eyes, we felt that he was speaking not merely the words of Tennyson or Wordsworth but what he himself felt and knew. Thus many of the great English poems now seem to me inseparable from my father; I hear in them not only his voice, but in some sort his teaching and belief. (Maitland, p.476)

Stephen and Wordsworth were bound together as a common site of authority by this childhood memory. Stephen validated Wordsworth's sentiments and knowledge by expressing them as his own; and he validated his own feelings and knowledge through reference to Wordsworth. This mutual validation consolidated father and poet into a powerful figure — one which was authorized to know and feel and one which had its knowledge and feelings authorized. As the speaker, Stephen took upon him the subjectivity of the poet; as the listener, Woolf could only act as witness to that subjectivity. And as a female listener, she must negotiate the border position which the text assigned to her. Thus, although Woolf mocked Patmore, she found it difficult to attack Wordsworth: not only because of his status a great writer, but because his greatness was sanctioned by her father.

Woolf's allusions to Wordsworth in *To the Lighthouse* grapple with the problem of how to establish female characters within discourses which cast them as border figures. This can be seen in Mrs Ramsay's Wordsworthian reverie as she contemplates the lighthouse across the bay.

Once the children have gone to bed, Mrs Ramsay feels that she can 'be herself, by herself' (*TL*, 85). The process of discovering an inner self after being freed from the identity conferred on her by her roles as hostess, mother, and wife echoes Wordsworth's praise of solitude in *The Prelude:*

> When from our better selves we have too long
> Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,
> Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired,
> How gracious, how benign, is Solitude. (IV. 354)

In solitary communion with nature, Wordsworth confirms a sense of self which emerges once he has escaped from the 'unnatural self', or the identity which the busy life of college and city impinge upon him. However, while Mrs Ramsay's meditation appears to affirm her sense of self in a way which echoes Wordsworth, Woolf develops the Wordsworthian allusions in ways which render that self elusive and unstable. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth uses a person at prayer and a lighthouse-keeper as images of solitude:

> Votary (in vast cathedral, where no foot
> Is treading, where no other face is seen)
> Kneeling at prayers; or watchman on the top
> Of lighthouse, beaten by Atlantic waves;
> Or as the soul of that great Power is met
> Sometimes embodied on a public road,
> When, for the night deserted, it assumes
> A character of quiet more profound
> Than pathless wastes. (IV. 362)

Images from this passage are echoed in Woolf's description of Mrs Ramsay: the votary in a cathedral appears in the picture of Mrs Ramsay's 'self', freed from her body 'pushing aside a thick leather curtain of a church in Rome'; while the lighthouse-keeper mutates into a lighthouse beam. Wordsworth uses the worshipper and the lighthouse/lighthouse-keeper as symbols of solitude: the lonely nature of their tasks illustrates the solitary condition. Neither of them stands as a cipher for the poet's self, but their solitariness describes his state; and, as 'human centres' of solitude (IV. 359), their humanity is important to him. By contrast, Woolf uses the visitor at a cathedral, the lighthouse beam, and — more radically — the core of darkness as symbols to stand for what Mrs Ramsay becomes once she is released from roles which impose identity. Unlike Wordsworth's simile, Woolf's symbol fuses subject and object — Mrs Ramsay is not like the light, she *is* that light: 'inanimate things ... expressed one; ...

became one; ... knew one, in a sense were one' (*TL*, 87).

Thus, while Woolf sets out on the Romantic project of finding Mrs Ramsay's true or inner self she finds an absence, an empty symbol. This emptiness confirms Mrs Ramsay's status as the angel or ghost: although she is alive in this section of the novel, there is a suggestion that she has no existence of her own when she is not the object of someone else's thoughts or vision. Reduced to a symbol, she is absent. As Makiko Minow-Pinkney argues from French feminist theory, 'language, the symbolic order, representation itself' is 'made possible by the repression of "woman"'. Presence and absence are 'organised around the phallus as the Signifier (what Cixous terms "hierarchised oppositions"): full presence-masculine-active-positive-coherent (superior), absence-feminine-passive-negative-incoherent (inferior)'. Femininity is the 'term which has been repressed into marginality and silence by the order of representation, this constituting the very condition for the functioning of the symbolic order' (pp.16–17).[13] By representing Mrs Ramsay's 'self' as a core of darkness, Woolf does not realize that self, but permanently defers it, rendering it unknowable. The problem of Mrs Ramsay's loss of subjectivity goes deeper than the question of the non-representation of women in patriarchal discourses. The question of whether a person exists when no-one else can see them is connected both with the work of the empiricists and with the elegiac theme of remembering the dead, with its attendant question of whether there is such a thing as personal survival after death. Mrs Ramsay's reverie has elegiac overtones: for example, there is an allusion to the Lady of the Lake from *Morte D'Arthur* in Mrs Ramsay's feeling of a ghostly stirring inside herself: 'there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover' (*TL*, 87).

Woolf draws on themes from Leslie Stephen's philosophical work, *The History of English*

---

[13] Margaret Homans similarly argues that a symbol implies the absence of the female, for the symbolic order 'depends on the identification of the woman with the literal, and then on the denial that the literal has any connection with masculine configurations' (*Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 10).

Thought in the Eighteenth Century, to develop these elegiac questions in *To the Lighthouse.* As Gillian Beer has pointed out, there are 'congruities' between the *History* and *To the Lighthouse* which suggest that 'Woolf's writing is meditating on problems raised in the father's text' (pp.39, 42). One of the most important of these problems is that of 'presence and absence'. The empiricist philosophers Stephen discusses in *History* argued that nothing could exist apart from our perceptions of it: when something was not being perceived, it could be said not to exist. Beer points to their common use of the figure of the table as a link between Woolf, Stephen, and the empiricists (pp.43–45). The question of whether a table can be said to exist independently of a viewer is a popular example used by empiricists, such as Hume: 'That table, which just now appears to me, is only a perception, and all its qualities are qualities of a perception'. [14] Leslie Stephen, while debating Hume, remarks that 'it is a plain fact of consciousness that we think of a table or a house as somehow existing independently of our perception of it' (*History,* I. 46). And in *To the Lighthouse,* Andrew Ramsay explains his father's research topic to Lily Briscoe by telling her to 'think of a kitchen table ... when you're not there' (*TL,* 33).

As Beer's article makes clear, the problem of presence and absence is not only a philosophical exercise, but it lies at the heart of elegy and any form of writing. Elegy is a way of writing about a person when they are no longer there, but, since language is made up of symbols for things which are absent, then all writing is concerned with absence and loss. If elegy is an attempt to re-capture a dead person in writing, it is doomed to failure because language can only preserve absence. And, if the symbolic order of language inscribes the absence of women, then elegies for women are doubly problematic. In responding to *The Mausoleum Book,* Woolf had to negotiate her father's elegy: *his* attempt to perpetuate Julia's memory in *his* language. This problem was seen in Woolf's attempt to get beyond the symbolic and reclaim her mother's subjectivity and inner self in Mrs Ramsay's reverie, where she confirmed rather than challenged her mother's absence.

---

[14] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* 2 vols., 1736, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, (London: Longmans and Green, 1874), I. 523.

For Woolf, as for Stephen, the elegiac question of how to make sense of a person's non-existence was made more urgent by the absence of Christian consolations. Woolf invokes agnostic questions specifically in Mrs Ramsay's reverie. Mrs Ramsay finds herself thinking, 'We are in the hands of the Lord' but then feels annoyed for thinking it, for the 'insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her' (*TL*, 87). Mrs Ramsay's dismissing of God as an 'insincerity' among 'truths' alludes to Leslie Stephen's concern that he could only accept as truth what could be proven; and that the existence of God could not be proven. Mrs Ramsay's meditation echoes a specific problem raised by Leslie Stephen in his chapter on Hume in the *History*. She asks: 'How could any Lord have made this world?', when 'there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit' (*TL*, 87). This an argument which Stephen made from Hume that the existence of the universe is no proof that there is a God: an imperfect world cannot prove a perfect maker; a heterogeneous world cannot prove a unified maker (*History*, I. 324–26); and it is impossible to prove the existence of a supreme moral ruler when all the universe suggests to us is (he quotes from Hume): 'blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children' (*History*, I. 328). Woolf makes a specific allusion to Hume in this passage, when Mr Ramsay walks past, laughing to himself over an anecdote about Hume, as a fat old man, being stuck in a bog and rescued by an old lady on condition that he says the Lord's Prayer (*TL*, 88). Of all the philosophers Stephen considers in the *History*, he holds Hume in the highest esteem, because he makes an 'unanswerable' case against eighteenth-century theology (*History*, I. 341). It is perplexing that Woolf should make Hume an object of ridicule, and deride him as a hypocrite for praying even though his scholarly work constituted a radical attack on religion. The joke is in part a buried allusion to the *History*: Stephen himself remarked that Hume's quarrel with religion was academic, and that Hume admitted that his doubts disappeared once he left his study (*History*, I. 44). However, it also points to a central tension in Stephen's thinking. On one hand, he endorsed the ideal of the Angel in the House, with all its spiritual and religious ramifications, and maintained a Romantic belief in the saving powers of love and altruism; on the other, he applauded Hume's attempts to undermine religion and endorsed his pessimistic vision of 'blind nature' meaninglessly producing 'maimed and abortive children'.

Woolf's ambivalence in her treatment of Mrs Ramsay's reverie suggests that she too, had difficulty in resolving this tension. Her exploration of the 'inner self' makes her engagement with the empiricists problematic, because the concept was alien to Hume's ideas. It also illustrates her uncertain relations with Romanticism, because, although her concern with the inner self is Romantic, her difficulty in supporting that concept owes something to the empiricists. Hume argued that human beings were no more than their faculties of perception: that without the capacity to see or to be seen, a person would no longer exist. The ultimate instance of the removal of perceptions is death: 'were all my perceptions remov'd by death, and cou'd I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate ... what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity?' (Hume, I. 534). Woolf thus enters into two very different discourses in her exploration of selfhood and existence: a sceptical–empiricist one which casts doubt on personal existence and survival after death and a Romantic one which foregrounds the subjective and spiritual. We need to add to Gillian Beer's account of Woolf's engagement with empiricist ideas an appreciation of how she also responded to Romantic ones.

II

Woolf plays out the tensions between Romanticism and empiricism in 'Time Passes', where she engages closely with Stephen's ideas and with the ideas of his major influences, to explore the theme of absence. On one hand, Woolf rehearses empiricist ideas about whether something only exists when it can be seen, by writing about the Ramsay's holiday cottage when the characters who were introduced in 'The Window' are not there, and raising questions about whether the house still exists when it is not seen or inhabited; and whether people are still present in the house when they are away from it. The section begins with darkness falling, and the substantiality of even the most solid of household objects is questioned, as lamps are put out and the house is plunged into darkness: 'Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness' which 'swallowed up ... the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers' (*TL*, 171–72). As the characters who peopled 'The Window' go to sleep, Woolf rehearses the argument that the act of sleeping, which off cuts the senses from the stimuli of the outside world, might also disintegrate identity — 'there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say "This is he" or "This is she"' (*TL*, 172) — thus invoking an extension of the empiricist argument that the self is only a collection of perceptions. On the other hand, Woolf invokes more Romantic ideas to suggest that, although the Ramsay family and their guests are absent, there are presences in the cottage to perceive it. Anthropomorphic images are found throughout the section: for example, the draughts which blow around the house are endowed with the capacities to think and to see, for they 'entered the drawing-room, questioning and wondering' (*TL*, 172). These airs are endowed with human characteristics but also seem to be ghosts: they move around 'ghostlily', as they 'all sighed together; all together gave off an aimless gust of lamentation to which some door in the kitchen replied; swung wide; admitted nothing; and slammed to' (*TL*, 173). The existence of ghosts, the manifestation of human spirits, implies the possibility of an inner being or soul (something which was anathema to the empiricists) and the possibility of existence after death or at least *in absentia*. However, the tension continues, for the ghost-story element does not release the section from the shadow of the empiricists: if 'Time Passes' was an attempt to prove that the *cottage* continues to exist when it is not seen, then it has not succeeded. While it implies that things continue to exist when identifiable individuals are not looking, it cannot eliminate the perceiving human subject altogether, for it is impossible to imagine an empty house, other than as the object of someone's gaze. Rather than refuting empiricism, this sequence endorses it by demonstrating the main issues of the empiricist argument in graphic terms. In turning these tensions about, Woolf allows her fictional and imaginative narrative to interplay with rational and philosophical ideas.

In the third section of 'Time Passes', Woolf plays with sceptical and Romantic ideas to test the idea of the existence of a deity. The anthropomorphic spirit which inhabits the island has now assumed a godlike form and Woolf suggests that there may be a deity which allows human beings a transcendent vision, for 'divine goodness had parted the curtain' — though that deity can also withhold such visions, as 'divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain' (*TL*, 174). The anthropomorphic form represents what Stephen saw as the charms of the 'old order' of religion; and he associated ideas such as pagan gods with Wordsworth, who, he says, 'expresses the familiar sentiment when he wishes that he could be "a pagan suckled in some creed outworn". The sight of Proteus and Triton might restore to the world the long-vanished charm.' (*History,* I. 14). On the other hand, Woolf brings this divine figure to bear on the empiricist argument which greatly interested Leslie Stephen — the question of whether God could be said to exist, if He cannot be seen. The presence of 'divine goodness' presents Berkeley's hypothesis — discussed by Stephen in the *History* — that things continue to exist when we do not see them because they still exist in the mind of God. Yet by making this divinity anthropomorphic, Woolf reflects the more sceptical arguments of Hume which oppose Berkeley. According to Hume, the tendency to endow God with human characteristics called His existence into question because it jeopardized the idea of a *super*-human supreme being. The image of 'divine goodness' in the homely act of drawing curtains seems to call into question the conception of such a super-human being. As Stephen argues from Hume in the *History,* human attempts to imagine God do not prove His existence, for they only lead to an anthropomorphic god. The human mind cannot conceive of anything beyond its own experience: if it cannot conceive of something, then it cannot prove that thing's existence (I. 324; 336–37). Thus, Woolf's conception of a divine being as a fictitious figure both invokes and calls into question the existence of a divinity.

Woolf continues to pit a sense of mystery against agnostic doubt in a second group of human subjects introduced in 'Time Passes': the unnamed people who keep watch on the beach. Variously described as the mystic, the visionary, and the hopeful (*TL,* 178–79), the watchers' interests are spiritual. There is a strong correspondence between these figures and the group of believers Stephen casts as his theological opponents in *An Agnostic's Apology*, whom he names Gnostics. Stephen introduces the Gnostics by attesting to the power of the temptation to seek answers:

> A complete solution, as everyone admits, is beyond our power. But some answer may be given to the doubts which harass and perplex us when we try to frame any adequate conception of the vast order of which we form an insignificant portion. We cannot say why this or that arrangement is what it is; we can say, though obscurely, that some answer exists, and would be satisfactory, if we could only find it. Overpowered, as every honest and serious thinker is at times overpowered, by the sight of pain, folly, and helplessness, by the jarring discords which run through the vast harmony of the universe, we are yet enabled to hear at times a whisper that all is well, to trust to it as coming from the most authentic source, and to know that only the temporary bars of sense prevent us from recognising with certainty that the harmony beneath the discords is a reality and not a dream. This knowledge is embodied in the central dogma of theology. God is the name of the harmony; and God is knowable. Who would not be happy in accepting this belief, if he could accept it honestly? (*Apology*, 2–3)

This passage articulates a quandary between giving in to the attractions of faith and accepting the logical and moral impossibility of defending faith. The passage builds up to a crescendo of hope about what might be achieved if only one could believe, before crashing down into the recognition that it is not possible to hold these beliefs honestly. A similar tension also runs through Woolf's portrayal of the watchers. Like Leslie Stephen's Gnostics, Woolf's watchers believe in the existence of answers and of an invisible order underlying the visible universe. They have the sense of assurance that 'all is well', which Stephen supposed the Gnostics to enjoy, in their perception of a 'strange intimation ... that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules' (*TL*, 180). Like the Gnostics, who believe in the reality of a God despite the fact that it cannot be perceived in any way, hidden as it is by 'the temporary bars of sense', Woolf's searchers find an answer to their questions, but are not able to communicate it to others: 'suddenly an answer was vouchsafed them (what it was they could not say)' (*TL*, 179). Echoing Stephen's attack on the Gnostics, Woolf demonstrates that the watcher's beliefs could neither be proven nor communicated. Woolf further calls into question the watchers' sense of assurance by setting them against a climate of loss, for she juxtaposes their first appearance with the announcement of Mrs Ramsay's death and Mr Ramsay's desolation: 'stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out ... They remained empty' (*TL*, 175). Woolf suggests the limited usefulness and effectiveness of the watchers' contemplation of nature and sense of prayers answered in the face of the pain of human bereavement.

Stephen's Gnostics and Woolf's visionaries can be seen as parallel, sceptical responses to Romanticism. In their responsiveness to nature and their sense of an indefinite and expansive quest, Woolf's watchers are closely identified with the figure of the solitary wanderers in Wordsworth's poetry, who contemplate nature and seek answers for deep spiritual questions. Similarly, although Stephen lambasts his opponents, in the passage quoted above, for adhering to the 'central dogma of theology', the vocabulary and imagery in which he characterizes the Gnostics' beliefs — the prevalence of images of nature in the passage, the musical imagery, the idea of an underlying harmony — suggest Romantic ideals rather than orthodox Christian imagery. When Stephen writes of the attractions of believing that 'the harmony beneath the discords is a reality and not a dream', he is not describing the appeal of organized religious doctrines but the power of a Romantic ideal, such as Wordsworth's idea that 'the immortal spirit grows | Like harmony in music' and 'reconciles | Discordant elements' (*Prelude,* I. 340–44). In 'Time Passes', Woolf, like Stephen, invokes harmony as an ideal, and, like him, suggests that such an ideal is difficult to maintain. The watchers on the beach see warships which are 'out of harmony' with 'the usual tokens of divine bounty' (*TL,* 182). Where, in 'The Window' Woolf saw Wordsworth and her father as a common site of authority, who sought to marginalize female experience, she now aligns herself with Stephen by taking up his sceptical position towards Romantic ideas.

Woolf's sense of the inadequacy of Romantic ideas when dealing with death and loss comes into focus most clearly in her representation of the relationship between the human subject and nature. This relationship is celebrated by Wordsworth, who describes his growth as a poet as a process of being nurtured by nature — the 'common face of Nature spake to me | Rememberable things' (*Prelude,* I. 587) — and of entering into a communion, a 'spirit of religious love' with nature (II. 357). 'Time Passes', by contrast, voices doubts about the possibility of a communion between the human subject and nature. The divorce between the viewer and nature is emphasized in Section 6, when Spring is said to be 'entirely careless of what was done or thought by the beholders' (*TL,* 179). Nature is not a benign force but a cruel one. This cruelty is reinforced by Prue's death in childbirth, for a process which may be considered a celebration of humankind's relationship with nature is shown to have made Prue nature's victim. To be close to nature is also to be close to mortality. Though Wordsworth recognized mortality as integral to the natural world, he believed that death was part of the working-out of a higher purpose: for example, he describes a dead child as being 'checked | By special privilege of Nature's love' (*Prelude,* VII. 374). By contrast, Woolf views nature as a morally neutral, uncaring force, denying that death is the working of a higher purpose, and denying the sanctity of the dead (including the 'phantom of delight' or the 'angelic woman' celebrated by Wordsworth in 'Poems of the Imagination', and associated with the Angel in the House). Yet, here Woolf also draws on Stephen's interests, for her view of nature draws on Hume's argument (which Stephen endorsed) that nature is a 'blind' force which generates ugly creatures 'without discernment or parental care' (*History*, I. 328). She thus brings the two sides of Stephen's thought into direct conflict, by using sceptical ideas to undercut the Victorian ideals of womanhood he endorsed.

Woolf also challenges Wordsworth's aesthetic that poetry is formed from a process of opening the mind up to nature while allowing the imagination to augment what it sees, for her account of the watcher's struggle pours doubt on the capacity of the human mind to receive inspiration. Woolf sees the mind as 'a murky pool' and 'a cracked mirror', which is therefore an imperfect means of reflecting what it sees, while nature is an uncaring force which does not offer good:

> That dream, then, of sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? ... contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (*TL*, 182–83)

The divide between humankind and nature is reinforced by the wartime setting of 'Time Passes'. The 'tokens of divine bounty — the sunset on the sea, the pallor of dawn, the moon rising, fishing-boats against the moon, and children pelting each other with handfuls of grass' cannot be appreciated when grey warships on the bay make it difficult 'to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within' (*TL*, 182). The watchers on the beach discover that it is almost impossible to sustain a belief in the healing powers of nature in the shadow of war. Woolf dismissively lists natural features — along with the Romantic assumption that they can offer the viewer intimations of something more spiritual — as being of little worth in a time of war. She dismisses the characteristically Romantic responsiveness to the natural environment and the concept of 'divine bounty'; implying that belief in the power of nature is even less feasible in times of war than in peacetime.

Woolf further rebuffs Wordsworth by implying that the love of nature is inappropriate in wartime; for Wordsworth, writing against a background of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, suggested that a belief in nature was essential for humanity to survive the conflict. Like Woolf's observation about the warship in the bay, Wordsworth describes the shocking contrast between natural beauty and the evidence of war, for example, in his encounter with a soldier in the Lake District who appeared 'ghastly in the moonlight' (*Prelude,* IV. 396); whereas the warships in 'Time Passes' intrude upon the viewer's attempt to appreciate nature, war in *The Prelude* renders a love of nature even more important to the individual. Wordsworth wrote that while war disrupts humankind's capacity to commune with nature, peace can be restored if only people would listen to nature again: 'If new strength be not given nor old restored, I The blame is ours, not Nature's' (*Prelude,* X. 469). He described the end of the Reign of Terror in France (*Prelude,* XI. 31–34), as a chance for nature to help humankind to rebuild, as the political system had collapsed and 'left an interregnum's open space I For *her* [Nature] to move about in, uncontrolled'. Woolf, by contrast, finds the triumph of nature as deeply sinister, something to be feared because it threatens to exterminate humanity. Nature's fecundity (like Prue's pregnancy) carries the threat of extinction as much as the promise of new life: 'What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?' (*TL,* 187). Eric Warner and Margaret Beede have noted that Woolf's Romanticism was essentially social, but neither does justice to the strength of Woolf's desire to preserve the human and the social from the ravages of nature.[15]

In Woolf's final anti-Romantic statement in 'Time Passes', she rejects the Romantic image of the ruin (celebrated in poems such as Wordsworth's 'The Ruined Cottage'), by playing it off against empiricist arguments about presence and absence. Woolf describes the ruination of the Ramsay's cottage not as a fruitful return to nature but as a fear that the lives the family had led will be obliterated:

> In the ruined room, picnickers would have lit their kettles; lovers sought shelter there, lying on the bare boards; and the shepherd stored his dinner on the bricks; and the tramp slept with his coat round him to ward off the cold ... some trespasser, losing his way, could have told only by a red-hot poker among the nettles, or a scrap of china in the hemlock, that here once someone had lived; there had been a house. (*TL,* 188–89)

Gillian Beer reads the ruination of the cottage as an attempt to sever the building from its associations with domesticity by portraying the 'decaying humanism of the concept "house" — an object constructed for human use and so now, without function, present only as lexical play' (p.49). This process might be seen as a challenge to Hume, by suggesting that it is possible to get beyond the human-centred view which he thought was essential to all perception. In fact, the opposite happens, for human existence is cherished against all odds. Even at its most deserted, the cottage is not uninhabited: the lovers, tramps, and picnickers will occupy the site and find tokens of the lives the Ramsays and their friends had led there. This passage suggests that it is impossible to imagine a world without humans; and, while it is possible to imagine a world without oneself, it is difficult emotionally to contemplate a world from which even the *memory* of oneself has been expunged. Rather than challenging Hume to show that it *is* possible to think beyond the human, Woolf agrees with him, for her picture of the empty house demonstrates the emotional impossibility of giving up the human viewpoint.

---

[15] Eric Warner, 'Some Aspects of Romanticism in the Work of Virginia Woolf' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1980), p.54; Margaret Beede, 'Virginia Woolf — Romantic', *North Dakota Quarterly,* 27:1 (1959), 21-29 (p.22).

The dynamic of 'Time Passes', even as it contemplates loss and ruination, is towards the social, the human, and the everyday, and away from the other-worldly, the spiritual, and Romantic ideas about Nature. This means a rejection of the Angel in the House in favour of a more solid and practical definition of the female role. The resolution of 'Time Passes' lies in a restoration of the house by an old charwoman, Mrs McNab, in preparation for the return of some members of the Ramsay party; but Woolf also appropriates the Romantic figure of the borderer in Mrs McNab. Although Mrs McNab is treated with the full force of Woolf's class prejudices — she is described as toothless and witless, lurching and leering — and although she is oblivious to the watchers and continues to 'drink and gossip as before' (*TL*, 179), she is not simply a pitiable, comic, antithesis to them. A clue to her role is found in the earlier versions of the novel, where she is given a mystic or visionary dimension of her own:

> as if her message ... were somehow transmitted — rather by the lurch of the body & the leer of her smile ... & in them were the broken syllables of a revelation more ... confused, but more profound, than any accorded to solitary watchers, pacers on the beach at midnight. (*OHD*, 216)

The picture of Mrs McNab as a lower-class figure capable of inspiring the viewer to deeper thoughts concords very strongly with figures like Wordsworth's 'Old Cumberland Beggar' or his leech-gatherer in 'Resolution and Independence'. Like the Old Cumberland Beggar who can 'prompt the unlettered villagers | To tender offices and pensive thoughts' (l.169), and the leech-gatherer who is 'like a man from some far region sent, | To give me human strength, by apt admonishment' (l.111), Mrs McNab seems to transmit a profound message to those who see her. [16]

However, Woolf also revises the Wordsworthian figure of the borderer who inspires living people with thoughts of other worlds: Mrs McNab is an agent for restoring the domestic and the ordinary. She is responsible for reclaiming the home of the Ramsay family, not simply from disuse but from oblivion. Where darkness had earlier caused a chest of drawers to cease to exist, Mrs McNab 'rescued from the pool of Time ... now a basin, now a cupboard' (*TL*, 189). So, Mrs McNab represents both a revision of the borderer and an adjustment of empiricist views: she proves the solidity of objects against the suggestion that they are mere perceptions. Her handling of domestic artefacts is perhaps equivalent to the famous anecdote in which Samuel Johnson retorted to the empiricist idea that nothing exists outside of perception by kicking a stone and saying 'I refute it thus'.

The adjustments Woolf makes in her relationship to the two traditions which form her inheritance lead her towards new ways of memorializing the dead, beyond the stereotypical images of Wordsworth's 'phantom of delight' or Patmore's 'Angel in the House'. One way is to assert the importance of literary posterity — and the role played by the living in preserving the currency of the work of dead authors. In the process of restoring the cottage, Mrs McNab 'fetched up from oblivion all the Waverley novels' (*TL*, 189). This is an allusion to an incident at the end of 'The Window', when Mr Ramsay reads one of Sir Walter Scott's novels and Mrs Ramsay recalls a conversation in which Charles Tansley had said that 'people don't read Scott any more. Then her husband thought, "That's what they'll say of me"' (*TL*, 159). Sir Walter Scott was one of Leslie Stephen's favourite authors: Woolf recalled 'the thirty-two volumes of the Waverley novels, which provided reading for many years of evenings' (Maitland, p.474). The full significance of Scott for Leslie Stephen is seen in his essay, 'Some Words about Sir Walter Scott', in which he reflects on the short life-span of literary fame. Writing less than fifty years after Scott's death, Stephen remarks that fewer people are reading him and that many consider his works to be dull. Stephen uses physical decay as a metaphor for fading literary fame — Scott's novels 'are rapidly converting themselves into mere debris of plaster of Paris' and asks, 'will they all sink into the dust together, and the outlines of what once charmed the world be traced only by Dryasdust and historians of literature?'. Although Stephen points out weaknesses in Scott's writing — some of his characters lacked depth, his history was not scholarly — he finds Scott's fall from popularity a *memento mori* for other writers, for, 'If Scott is to be called dull, what reputation is to be pronounced safe?'.[17] Stephen was troubled by doubts about the durability of his work: he knew that, for a writer, immortality is the state of being read and appreciated by future generations. At the end of *The Mausoleum Book*, he expressed doubts that he would ever be remembered, that his name would 'only be mentioned in small type and footnotes' in a history of English thought in the nineteenth century. He speculates that 'had my energies been wisely directed, I might have had the honour of a paragraph in full sized type or even a section in a chapter all to myself' (*MBk*, 93). Mrs McNab rescues Sir Walter Scott for posterity by making his novels fit to read again: like the Fates whom she resembles as 'she unwound her ball of memories' (*TL*, 191), Mrs McNab has the power to grant life and death. By making Mrs McNab save Sir Walter Scott, Woolf implies that the reputation of Mr Ramsay — and Leslie Stephen whom he represents — might also survive to a future generation. This suggests, too, that Woolf now has the power to perpetuate Leslie Stephen's memory.

---

[16] Mrs McNab 'turning over scraps in her drawers' (*TL*, 178), echoes the Old Cumberland Beggar who 'from a bag ... drew his scraps and fragments, one by one' (ll.8, 10).

Woolf also uses Mrs McNab to address the more difficult question of how to preserve the memory of someone, like Mrs Ramsay, who did not write. Mrs McNab is the only human figure to be identified in 'Time Passes' outside square brackets, except for the opening section in which the Ramsays and their guests fall asleep, and the closing section, in which they wake up. Her conversation about the Ramsay family with her helper Mrs Bast is the point at which the family re-enters the narrative. Although Mrs McNab's verbal memories are inexact — 'Some said he was dead; some said she was dead. Which was it?' (*TL*, 190) — her visual memories are powerful. She has the ability to see the past, as if through a telescope:

---

[17] *Hours in a Library*, 3 vols. (London: Smith & Elder, 1874–79), I. 222, 220.

> She could see her [Mrs Ramsay] now, stooping over her flowers; (and 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, up the dressing-table, across the washstand ...) (*TL,* 186)

A telescope enables a person to see something which exists in the distance, rather than something which existed in the past; it suggests that the past still exists — but in a different place. The image elides the difference between something which is absent and something which does not exist: it suggests an objection to the empiricists' argument by implying that we cannot disprove the existence of something which is absent.

The flickering image of Mrs Ramsay which 'went wandering over the bedroom wall', and the moving picture of Mr Ramsay 'in a ring of light ... wagging his head' (*TL,* 190), seen through an artificial lens and in a yellow beam, also suggest cinema projection. While writing 'Time Passes', Woolf analysed her early impressions of seeing a film reel in her essay 'The Cinema'. As Suzanne Raitt has pointed out, the echoes between the two pieces suggest that they were part of the same project. [18] 'The Cinema' deals with the sort of philosophical concerns raised in 'Time Passes'. Woolf saw the cinematic form as a way of preserving the past and making it exist in the present: past events can be recorded and brought to life again when the film is shown. She writes that the images on film are seen 'as they are when we are not there':

> We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the pettiness of actual existence ... we have time to open our minds wide to beauty and register on top of it the queer sensation — this beauty will continue, and this beauty will flourish whether we behold it or not. Further, all this happened ten years ago, we are told. We are beholding a world which has gone beneath the waves. (*CE,* II. 269)

This passage shares imagery with 'Time Passes': the events which Woolf sees on screen have now 'gone beneath the waves', just as the 'pool of Time' closed over the contents of the cottage (*TL,* 189); and Woolf was perhaps thinking of the ten-year time-span of 'Time Passes' when she remarked that the events captured on film took place ten years earlier. The passage also alludes to the central problem of the empiricists. Woolf is interested in how the concept of film contributes to the discussion about what exists 'when we are not there': film gives the impression that things do exist when they are not viewed, by offering viewers a lifelike record of a world they have not seen in the flesh.

---

[18] *Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse,* Critical Studies of Key Texts (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.61.

Although Woolf presented the cinema as an answer to the empiricists' problem in the essay, it does not provide a suitable answer in *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf sees the cinema camera as confirming a viewer's lack of involvement in what is seen: 'this beauty will flourish whether we behold it or not'. The camera cuts off the human subject's direct response to the natural world, like the force of nature in 'Time Passes' which takes no heed of human feelings or wishes, or like the cracked mirror which confirms the divorce between the human subject and nature. Human responses and perceptions become important again with the entry of Mrs McNab: it is her imagination which makes the Ramsays live on. Her agency is what finally distinguishes her from a Wordsworthian borderer: she is not simply an object for other people's contemplation, but she has the power to think and remember and to re-create other people in her own imagination. Instead of the artificial lens of the cinema projector, this sequence suggests the creative eye of human imagination, and its power to project its own reality on the world. In other words, Mrs McNab's power to project her memories is closely related to Wordsworth's metaphor for his imagination: 'An auxiliar light I Came from my mind, which on the setting sun I Bestowed new splendour' (*Prelude,* II. 368). Mrs McNab's imagination, stirred by her surroundings, creates a vision of Mr and Mrs Ramsay. As with her role in granting Mr Ramsay posterity, this passage suggests that the past is in the control of the thinking subject (that is, the woman writer) in the present. Mrs McNab's vision, in which scenes and images thrown up by the memory have a power which renders them believable and real, echoes Stephen's challenge to Hume, using a logical proposition on the concept of 'fiction'. In the *History,* Stephen states Hume's case as: 'The belief that anything exists outside our mind, when not actually perceived, is a "fiction". The belief in a continuous subject which perceives the feelings is another fiction.' (*History,* I. 44) He points to a logical flaw in this formulation, to argue that: 'If all reason is fiction, fiction is reason.' (I. 49) In other words, fiction can have its own internal consistency which gives it plausibility.

Over the course of 'Time Passes', Woolf can be seen to be coming to terms with two traditions which form important parts of the literary and intellectual background to her writing. She provides an answer to the question of whether someone continues to exist when they are no longer there, by making Mrs McNab's mind the site of Mr and Mrs Ramsay's continued existence. This solution is reached through two complementary processes: firstly, Woolf counters the empiricists' idea that nothing exists outside human perception, to suggest that something can still exist if it is perceived by the imagination; and secondly, she uses the empiricist idea that nothing exists outside of perception to modify the romantic paradigm of the mind being open to inspiration from nature, by defending a space for the mind to create its own reality. In negotiating a position for herself within the two traditions that informed Stephen's work, she follows the same path as he took. As we have seen, Stephen tempered his Romantic sympathies by drawing on empiricist arguments, but he was also reluctant to follow Hume to the sceptical conclusion that nothing exists outside our perceptions of it. By the close of 'Time Passes', therefore, Woolf has achieved a balance between two important influences, but she has done so through engaging with her father's texts and has reached remarkably similar conclusions to his. Both Woolf and Stephen defend the freedom of the individual mind and conscience, by questioning assumptions about an external, transcendent reality and implying that the individual must seek and defend her/his own definition of truth.

However, an important contradiction has not been fully resolved. Although Leslie Stephen defended the freedom of the individual conscience, we have seen earlier that his treatment of Julia Stephen in *The Mausoleum Book* suggests a reluctance to recognize the subjectivity or agency of women. How does Woolf deal with the presence of texts underlying her novel which threaten her subjectivity? In other words, how does Woolf challenge the ideal of the Angel in the House when Leslie Stephen's texts continue to inform *To the Lighthouse*? 'Time Passes' goes part-way towards a solution: there is a challenge to authority implicit in the conception of nature worked out in the section. The impulse in 'Time Passes' towards the everyday and the domestic, culminating in the very practical restoration of the cottage, emphasizes the importance of solidity and practicality, over ideas about Nature and spirituality which underlie the concept of the Angel in the House. More importantly, by working out a series of objections to Romantic ideals by drawing on Stephen's work, Woolf begins to divide the double father/authority figure of Wordsworth and Stephen against itself. However, Woolf develops these issues more explicitly in 'The Lighthouse', where she brings Stephen's ideas to bear on the issue of representing women in art and literature.

III

Woolf continues to work out her reaction against the concept of the Angel in the House, or idealized versions of womanhood, in her description of Lily Briscoe's attempt to finish her painting of Mrs Ramsay in 'The Lighthouse'. [19] She articulates the inhibiting influences on Lily to point to the marginal position of women artists (or writers), which she had found frustrating, but did not fully voice, while writing *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day.* Lily is discouraged by her awareness of the cynical attitude of her companions towards her work, especially Charles Tansley's notion that 'Women can't paint, women can't write' (*TL,* 67); Mrs Ramsay's patronizing attitude that painting is only a hobby, and can conflict with a woman's duty to be a wife and mother; and Mr Ramsay's demands for sympathy which impinge upon her consciousness as she tries to paint. In Lily's reaction towards Mrs Ramsay's attitude, Woolf interrogates and dismantles the courtship narrative which she had battled with in her first two novels, for Lily sets her artistic creativity in direct opposition to social pressures to get married. This conflict originally surfaces in 'The Window', when Lily simultaneously makes a personal resolution to resist marriage and an aesthetic decision to change the position of a tree in her painting. Resisting pressure from Mrs Ramsay to pity William Bankes, 'in a flash she saw her picture and thought, Yes, I shall put the tree further in the middle; then I shall avoid that awkward space' (*TL,* 115). Later in the dinner-party, Lily's decision not to pity Mr Bankes becomes strengthened into a resolution to resist Mrs Ramsay's plans that she should marry him, and the decision to move the tree becomes a symbol (for her) of her resolution: 'at any rate, she said to herself, catching sight of the salt cellar on the pattern, she need not marry' (*TL,* 138).

---

[19] Lilienfeld, p.347; Rose, p.158.

While the decision to move the tree carries personal meanings for Lily, the problem of space takes on a wider significance within the novel itself, for it becomes a way of dealing with women's marginalization within patriarchal discourses. Lily feels that her resolution not to marry, like her decision to avoid an awkward space in her picture, saves her from 'dilution' (*TL*, 138). For Lily, marriage — and the wider manmade culture it sustains and represents — threaten her with a loss of self, for to get married would be to accept a role which would confer an alien identity on her. As Lily tackles the problem of space she also addresses the problem of women's marginalization.

In 'The Lighthouse' Woolf tackles the marginalization of women artists (or, presumably, writers) on two levels: she investigates how women can practise art in opposition to social pressures to fulfil other roles; and the problem (raised in 'The Window' in relation to Renaissance painting) that art might be overdetermined by patriarchal conventions which do not allow women to be represented honestly. The first of these issues is evaded rather than overcome. Lily is unable to paint until Mr Ramsay has left, when she is alone except for Mr Carmichael who, 'rubicund, drowsy, entirely contented' (*TL*, 206) does not interfere with her work. When Lily exchanges the 'fluidity of life for the concentration of painting', she feels a sense of release from the role she is expected to play, as she subdues 'the impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people' (*TL*, 214, 213). Yet, while this leaves her free to concentrate on her art, the price is loss of personality. The implication is that Lily cannot be a woman and a painter: she can only paint by denying her womanhood: 'myself, thought Lily, girding at herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid presumably' (*TL*, 205). Her denial suggests that the meaning of the very word 'woman' has been colonized by society: by renouncing the role of the angel, Lily has to cope with a more derogatory identity. Almost immediately after remembering her decision to move the tree and resist marriage, Lily is confronted by Mr Ramsay who makes it impossible for her to work, by demanding from her sympathy she cannot give. Her decision not to take on the role of a wife has not exempted her from the expectations that she should reassure men; nor has it affected her feeling that Mrs Ramsay is to blame for creating a climate in which women must minister to men: 'it was all Mrs Ramsay's fault' (*TL*, 203). Although the novel ends with Lily having 'her vision' and succeeding in completing her painting despite all odds, albeit after a hiatus of ten years, the end of the novel is ambiguous about what she has really achieved. Lily is pessimistic that anything will become of her picture once it is finished: she is convinced that it will be 'hung in attics' or destroyed (*TL*, 281). There is no indication that completing the painting has changed her life: her seemingly triumphant declaration, 'I have had my vision' (*TL*, 281), in the past tense, suggests that Lily has only gained something fleeting, which she has now lost. The painting of the final brush-stroke only continues the pattern of Lily's creative process as a whole: the experience of achieving temporary resolutions which quickly subside into new difficulties.

The second problem is worked out more thoroughly in 'The Lighthouse', for Woolf brings her meditation on questions of elegy and absence to bear on the question of the representation of women in art. Writing and painting carry conventions of representation, and, as we have seen, the images clustering around the Angel in the House informed popular ways of representing women in art. The issue Woolf addresses in 'The Lighthouse' is only partly to do with her personal battle against Victorian ideals of womanhood. The problem faced both by Lily painting Mrs Ramsay and Woolf writing about her mother as Mrs Ramsay, lies in dealing with the image of the Angel, a fictitious figure which was difficult to subvert because it is 'far harder to kill a phantom than a reality' (*CE*, II. 286). Woolf's frustration with the Angel is not that it represents, but that it *fails* to represent, her mother: the angel is a symbol which underlines the fact that her mother is lost. Similarly, Lily's attempt to finish her painting of Mrs Ramsay is in part an attempt to grapple with symbols such as the Angel and the Madonna, which fail to represent Mrs Ramsay and have obscured the truth about her. Lily attempts to look beyond the symbols and recover feelings for and memories of Mrs Ramsay which she has lost.

Woolf draws on Leslie Stephen's writings and the philosophical traditions she invoked earlier in the novel to describe how Lily sets about dealing with these feelings, for the problems of how we can lay claim to any knowledge of the world or of other people and how we can convey that knowledge to others are central to Lily's attempt to finish her painting of Mrs Ramsay. Lily is preoccupied with questions of meaning, truth, and reality. She asks herself, 'What does it mean?'; she wants to get at 'the truth of things'; and she seeks antidotes to her prevailing impressions of the cottage as 'aimless', 'chaotic', and 'unreal' (*TL*, 197–99). Her search for reality and truth is frustrated by the problem of change over time: Woolf stresses that Lily has returned to the island 'after all these years', with 'Mrs Ramsay dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too' (*TL*, 198). If the dominant question at the start of 'Time Passes' was whether things continue to exist when there is no-one to see them, 'The Lighthouse' takes up a related concern: whether there is a continuing reality which underlies apparent changes. These themes pick up on a concern expressed by Leslie Stephen in the *History:*

> All things, as the old sceptics said, are in ceaseless flux ... To find reality is to find the permanent thing which remains when all qualities of a perceived object are changed. To find truth must be to find a proposition which remains in spite of all changes in the perceiving subject. (I. 27, 28)

Lily's quest for reality and truth amid change reflects Stephen's concern that 'reality' is the permanent thing which remains despite changes in the perceived object; and truth is what remains once the perceiving subject has changed. Lily seeks reality, as something permanent which remains now that Mrs Ramsay — the perceived object — has gone; and she seeks truth, something which remains despite changes in herself over the ten-year interval. When she starts applying paint to her canvas, she finds the 'space' left between the brush-strokes most 'formidable'. Lily's technical difficulty in dealing with the spaces on her canvas is a function of these issues of absence and change: the space represents her struggle to depict someone who is now absent and to express reality which neither words nor paint can convey. Lily's 'formidable ancient enemy' is 'this other thing, this truth, this reality' which 'emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention' (*TL*, 214).

In her description of how Lily sets about discovering and describing the 'truth' about Mrs Ramsay, Woolf develops a compromise between sceptical and Romantic points of view which accommodates Leslie Stephen's views. Woolf initially seems to support Lily's search for transcendent reality, a desire to go beyond 'appearances' which is comparable with the Romantic aim of overcoming the 'tyranny of the eye'. Lily attributes to Mrs Ramsay a seemingly mystical power to create permanence, order, and stability: she remembers sitting on a beach with Charles Tansley when Mrs Ramsay seemed to make time stand still, 'making of the moment something permanent'. This had the 'nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this external passing and flowing ... was stuck into stability' (*TL*, 218). However, Mrs Ramsay's power to create stability is actually an imaginative demonstration of Stephen's (sceptical) proposition that to find truth we must find something permanent amid the flux. Woolf even tempers Lily's sense of revelation with scepticism, for she is not sure that transcendence has been achieved: 'The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.' (*TL*, 218) Lily's pessimistic approach to the idea of revelation accommodates Leslie Stephen's view. The concepts of miracle and revelation were particularly anathema to him: in *An Agnostic's Apology* he argued against theologians' belief that truths could be encountered through revelation or that God's existence could be proved by miracles. He argued that theologians could not both claim to know all about God and defend revelation as a source of knowledge, because the need for revelation would demonstrate that humankind could not know the truth. Revelation would suggest that 'it is all a mystery; and what is mystery but the theological phrase for Agnosticism?' (*Apology,* 35). Lily's 'little daily miracles' amount to the gradual stumbling towards truth which Stephen saw as part of the process of enlightenment:

> We are a company of ignorant beings, feeling our way through mists and darkness, learning only by incessantly-repeated blunders, obtaining a glimmering of truth by falling into every conceivable error, dimly discerning light enough for our daily needs, but hopelessly differing whenever we attempt to describe the ultimate origin or end of our paths. (*Apology*, 39–40)

Lily's belief in truth, reality, and permanence, which she identifies with Mrs Ramsay, thus becomes tempered by a sceptical recognition of the limitations of the human mind. The truth she aspires towards can at best be known only in part, but can never be declaimed with any authority.

In this manoeuvre, Woolf does not reject Stephen's views, but justifies her own work by making it consonant with his, for she uses this compromise to return to the problem of representing women in art. Woolf shows that Lily's attempt to capture the essence of Mrs Ramsay in paint is frustrated by the fact that art deals in symbols which have no connection with reality. Although

Lily is a painter, Woolf explores this problem in an analogy with language. Lily overhears Mr Ramsay reciting Cowper's 'The Castaway': the quotation ends with the line, 'We perished each alone', and the words 'perished' and 'alone' impinge upon her thoughts. She finds that these words have become detached from meaning and that they take on a visual form and implant themselves on empty space: 'the words became symbols, wrote themselves all over the grey-green walls'. Lily feels that the words could lead her towards reality: if she could put them into a sentence, 'then she would have got at the truth of things' (*TL*, 199). Lily's wish to find truth through language resembles Leslie Stephen's exploration of the problem of how to find truth in a changing world. In the *History*, he suggests that the 'difficulty of reconciling change and permanence' is 'roughly' solved by the 'assumption that the name corresponds to some persistent entity'. Language could provide a framework for finding what is constant, because things continue to be known by the same name even if they change. But almost as soon as he raises this possibility, he dismisses it. Although we need to assume, in order to speak at all, that language has an ability to represent truth, this carries with it 'some, however infinitesimal, inaccuracy. If language is taken to be more than an approximation, we have at once a source of error' (I. 27). Similarly for Lily, the words do not lead to truth, but take on a kind of materiality as they become visual symbols detached from meaning: she finds that '*Words* fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low', and asks 'how could one express in *words* these emotions of the body?' (*TL*, 240, 241; emphasis added). Woolf shows that no symbol (whether a visual image or verbal metaphor) can make an authoritative representation, but only gesture towards something which cannot be expressed directly.

Woolf brings these (agnostic) questions to bear on the problem of the pseudo-religious image of the Angel in the House. By playing with the disjuncture between symbols and reality, Woolf undermines any authority which may be claimed for language as a form of representation. Although Lily seems to aim for a representative form of painting — by responding to something outside herself, following 'some rhythm which was dictated to her ... by what she saw' (*TL*, 215) — the activity of her mind becomes more important than what she sees. She begins to 'lose consciousness of outer things', with her mind working 'like a fountain', throwing up ideas, schemes, memories, phrases, and names (*TL*, 215–16). The image of the fountain recalls Wordsworth's 'Intimations Ode':

> ... those first affections,
> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain-light of all our day (l.152)

Lily's memories, like Wordsworth's 'shadowy recollections' become a source of inspiration, into which she 'dipped' in order to create her picture. Echoing Wordsworth's image of the intimations as a 'fountain light', Lily finds that her memories of Mrs Ramsay are 'like a drop of silver in which one dipped and illuminated the darkness of the past ... as she dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there' (*TL*, 232). The reference to paint changes Wordsworth's image significantly. The fountain is not, as Wordsworth uses it, a symbol for immortality, part of that 'immortal sea l Which brought us hither' (l.167), but a literal substance — paint — which becomes the medium for Mrs Ramsay's continued existence. Like Mrs McNab's telescopic eye, Lily's memories and her painting provide the medium and conditions for Mrs Ramsay's existence in the present.

Lily revives Mrs Ramsay through fiction: as she paints, she makes up stories about the people she had met at the cottage. Lily remarks that 'this making up scenes about them, is what we call "knowing" people, "thinking" of them, "being fond" of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same' (*TL*, 234). Lily cannot use fiction to reach transcendent truth, but to express what is true for her. The implication is that, while no-one has access to absolute, authoritative truth, all people have experiences which are true for themselves and which they assume others can share. The idea that there is some truth — but no absolute truth — in everyone's perceptions again ties in with an idea of Leslie Stephen's:

> What remains after Hume's scepticism has been allowed full play is the objective fact of the regularity of the external world, and the subjective faculty which corresponds to it, in virtue of which we assert, not that this or that truth, revealed by experience, is universally true, but that every experience implicitly contains a universal truth. (*History*, 53–54)

In 'The Lighthouse', Woolf plays with distance and perspective in order to explore the kind of truths which emerge from different experiences. The account of Lily completing her painting is presented in counterpoint to the story of the voyage to the lighthouse made by Mr Ramsay, Cam, and James. Woolf uses the contrast between the two narratives to show how definitions of reality change with angles of vision. Cam, viewing the island from the boat, thinks that it appears 'unreal' and the lives they had lived there 'were gone: were rubbed out; were past; were unreal, and now this was real; the boat and the sail with its patch' (*TL*, 225). Lily, on the other hand, looks across the bay and thinks that Mr Ramsay, Cam, and James have been 'swallowed up' in the distance 'they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things' (*TL*, 253–54). Woolf uses the opposing viewpoints of Cam and Lily to suggest that the concepts of reality and unreality can be relative: what is perceived as real depends on point of view. Her description of James's first sight of the lighthouse at close range examines this further. He asks whether the lighthouse is the tall, white-washed tower, or whether it is the distant shape he had seen from the island: 'No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too. It was sometimes hardly to be seen across the bay.' (*TL*, 251) The lighthouse does not simply appear to be one thing or another — it *is* both, it exists both as a distant light and as a close-up tower. The conclusion that 'nothing was simply one thing' leaves room to accommodate differing perspectives.

This compromise helps Lily recapture Mrs Ramsay from the images which have surrounded her: she finally succeeds in finishing her painting by accommodating both an empirical view of Mrs Ramsay and a mystical, Romantic one. She feels the need 'to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply, that's a chair, that's a table' — the table, of course, making an allusion to Mr Ramsay's research, and thus to Leslie Stephen and the empiricists — 'and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy'. Lily is enabled to see Mrs Ramsay as an ordinary woman: 'Mrs Ramsay ... sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking', though, at the same time, she preserves her feeling that Mrs Ramsay has mysterious powers, for her ghost-like re-appearance is 'part of her perfect goodness to Lily' (*TL*, 272). Although Leslie Stephen appears in the novel as Mr Ramsay, his views are more effectively represented by Mrs as well as Mr Ramsay, and by Romantic as well as empiricist ideas. The balance Woolf negotiates between these pairs by the end of the novel suggests a reconciliation of the two tendencies in Stephen's thinking; it enables Woolf to put her memories of her father in proportion.

To the Lighthouse was a pivotal stage in Woolf's negotiation of her literary past: she confronted Leslie Stephen's influence on her in a direct way, but she also drew on his ideas, using them for her own purposes. If she re-made her father as a 'contemporary', she also re-made herself as a writer in the process. This process of negotiation can be broken down into three stages, corresponding to the three parts of the novel. 'The Window' draws on and interrogates Leslie Stephen's account of Woolf's childhood years in *The Mausoleum Book.* The similarities between *To the Lighthouse* and *The Mausoleum Book* in terms of location, people, and events, as well as vocabulary and images, suggest that Stephen's writing influenced Woolf's perceptions of the past. The strength of Stephen's influence, and of the wider cultural ideas which informed his writing, meant that Woolf was only partially successful in challenging his views. Although she voiced some objections to his view of women — by questioning Stephen's idealistic picture of Julia through Lily's doubts about Mrs Ramsay — she was unable to present any real alternative to it.

In 'Time Passes' and 'The Lighthouse' Woolf interrogates Stephen's writings more closely, by examining his ideas, and those of *his* influences, and entering into a dialogue with him through the fiction. In doing so, Woolf does not oppose her father's ideas, but reaches very similar conclusions to his. This is particularly true of 'Time Passes', where Woolf takes up the question of whether something exists when no-one can see it. Like Stephen, she tends towards the sceptical conclusion that appearances are the only reliable source of truth; and, like him, she resists thorough-going scepticism by emphasizing the importance of the human mind over arguments which claim that people are nothing other than a collection of perceptions. Woolf's dialogue with her father becomes a three-way conversation, between the two of them and some of his influences, notably Hume and Wordsworth, who represent the empiricist and Romantic traditions respectively. This wider conversation shows Woolf finding her own place within those traditions: though the ground she occupies within them is essentially that which was occupied by her father. In other words, Woolf claims her inheritance as Stephen's literary (and not just as his familial) daughter.

Woolf's conversation with Stephen moves on in 'The Lighthouse', where she uses his texts less explicitly and brings them to bear on preoccupations of her own: the woman artist going through her creative process and the problem of representing women in art. She applies Leslie Stephen's agnostic questions about how we can know God or the world directly to the question of how we can know other people, particularly women. Woolf came to think of her father as a contemporary by imbibing his ideas, exploring them for herself, and then applying them to concerns of her own. Or rather, having taken on board his questions and his questioning, she applied them to new situations: where Leslie Stephen questioned the tenets of religion, Woolf questioned the values and 'certainties' of the Victorian patriarchal world. In doing so, she detached his legacy from its underlying patriarchal implications, and reconstructed Leslie Stephen the agnostic outsider as a model for herself as a feminist outsider.

Chapter 6

Reclaiming the Past: *Orlando* and V. Sackville-West

In the process of writing *To the Lighthouse,* Woolf readjusted her relationship with Leslie Stephen and negotiated for herself a position as the outsider daughter of an outsider, using her father's ideas about freethinking and non-conformity to justify her resistance of patriarchal values. In *Orlando,* Woolf uses this doubly marginalized position to negotiate her relationship with literary tradition; and considers how it could help her address the problem of the patriarchal appropriation of literature. As this chapter will show, Woolf adopts two strategies to tackle this problem in *Orlando.* On the one hand, her attitude towards the past is a desiring one: she seeks to appropriate the literary past as she invokes it, in a highly conscious way. By naming and alluding to the work of earlier writers and using archaic language and pastiche to reflect the changing styles of English literature over three and a half centuries, she seeks to absorb past writings into her text. On the other hand, she uses her marginal position to gain freedom from the weight of a literary past: it enables her to take an ironic position towards the idea of a literary tradition. This is exemplified by the acknowledgements she makes in the joke Preface: 'no one can read or write without being perpetually in the debt of Defoe, Sir Thomas Browne, Sterne, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Macaulay, Emily Brontë, De Quincey, and Walter Pater' (*O,* 5). The disclaimer at once recognizes and makes light of the incidence of influence: Woolf acknowledges her debt to past writers, but only by pointing out that she is no more indebted to them than anyone else is. One of these forebears, Defoe, was cited by Woolf in her earliest sketch for the novel (then called 'The Jessamy Brides'), when she envisaged writing 'a Defoe narrative for fun' (*D,* III. 131). These comments suggest that Woolf could now treat influence in a more ironic, self-satirizing way.

While Leslie Stephen is implicated in this process of negotiation, Woolf's attitude towards her father and towards the whole question of inheritance underwent a further change through the stimulus of her friend, Vita Sackville-West. This can be seen in a letter Woolf wrote to

Sackville-West shortly after sketching 'The Jessamy Brides'. She implies that her new novel will be original *because* it will draw on the past:

> I've thought of an entirely new book: it may be two: Each more entirely new than the other. So my fortune gilds the future for me — if my father didn't leave me pearls, this was by way of a makeshift. (L, III. 344)

Sackville-West was a wealthy aristocrat (and had inherited several sets of pearls), and Woolf's reference to her own 'fortune' is in some ways a riposte, a way of boasting of an inheritance which might rival Vita's. Woolf claims a personal connection with literary history by suggesting that Leslie Stephen, had, in a sense, bequeathed to her the whole of literature by educating her and giving her access to his library. In the allusive and parodic layers of *Orlando,* Woolf displays and celebrates her inheritance from the writers of the past and from her own father.

As this chapter will show, Woolf's parody of the English past is bound up with her fantastic presentation of the life and family history of Vita Sackville-West, in the figure of Orlando. It will argue that Woolf's parodies of Sackville-West's life and work and of English literature in general, are acts of imitation shaped by the desire for intimacy. As Suzanne Raitt has pointed out, the representation of intimate relationships between women have sometimes been characterized by strategies of 'identification and images of doubling', exemplified by one partner's tendency to imitate the other. [1] Woolf's parody of past literature in *Orlando* could be read as a strategy of desiring that past: it can also be modelled on the lines of relationships between same-sex lovers in a way which ultimately undercuts the familial relationships implied by notions of inheritance. This strategy of desiring was intensified because Sackville-West was directly connected with the English history Woolf celebrated in *Orlando;* Woolf sought to reclaim the past and to reclaim Sackville-West, whose absence was an important factor in the composition of the novel. Woolf first sketched her ideas for the novel in her diary in March 1927, at a time when she was feeling neglected by her friend: 'Although annoyed that I have not heard from Vita by this post nor yet last week ... still I must record the conception last night between 12 & one of a new book.' (*D,* III. 130–31) By the time Woolf began to write *Orlando* in October, she was feeling jealous and neglected after Sackville-West had begun a relationship with Mary Campbell. [2] Thus, like Woolf's other novels, *Orlando* could be read as an 'elegy': an act of mourning Sackville-West, with the figure of Orlando being created as a substitute for a lost lover.

---

[1] *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.40.

The desire for intimacy with the past and with Sackville-West can be seen in the diary entry in which Woolf describes visiting Knole, the home of Sackville-West's aristocratic family, and conceiving one of the central historical ideas of the novel. Woolf recalls seeing a cart bringing wood to be chopped and Sackville-West saying that 'she saw it as something that had gone on for hundreds of years'. Woolf goes on to fantasize about Knole's history:

> All the centuries seemed lit up, the past expressive, articulate; not dumb & forgotten; but a crowd of people stood behind, not dead at all; not remarkable; fair faced, long limbed; affable; & so we reach the days of Elizabeth quite easily. (*D*, III. 125; 23 January 1927)

Here, inspired by Knole, Woolf makes the past exist in the present — she gives history a voice and revives long-dead people in her imagination — creating a link between herself and the Elizabethan age. In *Orlando*, Woolf gives expression to this sense of the past, and Sackville-West's role in its continuation, when she uses Sackville-West and Knole, in the guise of Orlando and his estate, as symbols of the continuity over time she had sensed during the visit. Woolf was particularly fascinated by Sackville-West's connections with literary history. One of her ancestors, Thomas Sackville, was an Elizabethan author, and another, Charles Sackville, was a literary patron commemorated in the literature of the Augustan age. [3] In the diary entry, Woolf describes Sackville-West finding a letter and lock of hair from a seventeenth-century Lord Dorset. Woolf remarks that 'One had a sense of links fished up into the light which are usually submerged.' (*D*, III. 125) The fishing image suggests a particular intimacy with the past, for just four months earlier (shortly after finishing *To the Lighthouse* and while making an early sketch of *The Waves*), Woolf used the metaphor of 'a fin passing far out' in an attempt to explain her own state of mind (*D*, III. 113). Woolf saw her creative process as an attempt to net that fin, so the 'links fished up into the light' might be seen not simply as the recovery of historical details, but as an expression of Woolf's sense that past literature was an integral part of her psychic experience.

---

[2] Nigel Nicolson, 'Vita and Orlando', *Spectator* (20 March 1993), 48. Raitt, p.34.

[3] The works of Thomas Sackville, First Earl of Dorset (1536–1608) include *Gorboduc*, the *Complaint of Henry Duke of Buckingham*, and *The Induction to Mirror for Magistrates*. Charles Sackville, the Sixth Earl (1638–1706) appears in the writings of Pepys and Johnson, his obituary was written by Dryden, and Pope wrote the epitaph for his monument.

Woolf's visit to Knole and her friendship with Sackville-West gave her a sense of a personal contact with history. Sackville-West later wrote of Woolf that 'Such things as old families and great houses held a sort of Proustian fascination for her ... they satisfied her acute sense of the continuity of history, English history in particular.'[4] Knole satisfied a slightly snobbish taste on Woolf's part for English aristocracy and the supremacy of English literature; and the Proustian fascination mentioned by Sackville-West suggests that Woolf liked to imagine herself as an inheritor of and partaker in such a tradition. Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (which both Woolf and Sackville-West read in the 1920s) is concerned with recovering and expressing personal memory. In her visit to Knole, Woolf imaginatively recovered a personal connection with history by engaging with Vita Sackville-West, her fantasies and her family history. By writing *Orlando*, Woolf forged and strengthened such links by parodying English literature and by taking a close look at the work and life-history of her friend.

In *Orlando*, Woolf's identity merges with that of her friend *and* with the voices of past writers. Her first sketch for *Orlando* in her diary illustrates this process: Woolf saw Sackville-West as 'violently Sapphic' (*L*, III. 155), and this was to be expressed in 'The Jessamy Brides' where 'sapphism is to be suggested' between two women protagonists.[5] These ideas were to be woven into the 'Defoe narrative for fun'. Woolf's choice of Defoe as a model is an example of her bringing her influences into the open, for his novels had fired her imagination earlier in her life. While reading *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders* in 1919, Woolf had noted in her diary that she 'saw London ... through the eyes of Defoe. ... Yes, a great writer surely to be thus imposing himself upon me after 200 years.' (*D*, I. 263) If Woolf had thought of Defoe as a formidable writer 'imposing himself' on her eight years earlier, then in 'The Jessamy Brides' she planned to harness his strengths to write a novel. Woolf's memory of Defoe was refreshed in 1927 as she began to write about him for 'Phases of Fiction' — a piece 'about how to read all fiction as if it were one book one had written oneself' — in which she depicted herself choosing and rejecting reading matter, explaining why she found a particular writer or genre congenial at a particular time (*L,* III. 325; *CE,* II. 56). Woolf found Defoe congenial when writing *Orlando* because she liked the way he depicted strong women characters and expressed ideas on women's rights which were well in advance of his time (*CR,* I. 91–2). She admired the way he elicited sympathy for notorious women and for those on the margins of society — such as the thief and pickpocket Moll Flanders — and so perhaps his manner would provide a way of voicing sapphism in a sympathetic and uncontroversial way.

---

[4] 'Virginia Woolf and "Orlando"', *Listener* (27 January 1955), 157–58 (p.157).

[5] *D*, III. 131. The original plan also included the 'ladies of Llangollen', eighteenth-century lesbians Sarah Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor Butler. See Danell Jones, 'The Chase of the Wild Goose: The Ladies of Llangollen and *Orlando*', in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations*, ed. by Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993), pp.181–89.

By drawing on Defoe, Woolf explored her own literary inheritance from the writer she regarded as 'the founder and master' of a particularly English school of writing; his works were a sort of endowment, for *Robinson Crusoe* was 'read aloud to us as children' (*CR,* I. 94, 86). As Susan Squier notes, Leslie Stephen played a part in transmitting this heritage to her, because he had claimed Defoe for his own 'patrilineal tradition of English literature' in *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century;* and because Stephen and Defoe, in their separate works, shared an interest in searching out and verifying facts.[6] However, since Woolf adopted Defoe consciously and ironically (she set out to imitate his style 'for fun' (D, III. 131)), she could subvert the notions of truth and veracity he championed. Defoe claimed his fictions as truth: he described *Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders,* and *Roxana* in his prefaces as 'true histories' not 'stories'; *Robinson Crusoe* was, of course, an appropriation of the story of the shipwrecked sailor Alexander Selkirk. *Orlando,* like *Crusoe,* is based on an actual person, for it presents Sackville-West's character in the figure of Orlando, and many of the incidents in the novel are fictionalized representations of events in her life and those of her family. However, although the preface to *Orlando* presents it as a work of research rather than fiction (the narrator claims to have sought to collect and ascertain facts), this claim is subverted by the fantastic nature of the novel itself, for Sackville-West appears as the eponymous hero/heroine who lives for over 350 years, changing sexes part-way through.

While Woolf drew on, and subverted, her own literary heritage, she also manipulated Sackville-West's life-story as she worked it into a Defoe narrative. As Squier has suggested, certain details of *Orlando* echo *Moll Flanders*: both characters describe themselves as men, consort with gipsies and prostitutes, are experienced travellers, become mothers, and explore different strata of London life (p.168). While these parallels with Defoe are evident in *Orlando*, the connection is made even more explosive by the way in which many of these factors are also evident in Sackville-West's life. Sackville-West often took on a male persona in her writings, and sometimes wore men's clothes; she was a seasoned traveller and travel writer; and she became a mother. Although she did not actually consort with gipsies, Sackville-West was fascinated by their life-style and she frequently described her lover, Violet Trefusis, as a gipsy. [7] In Woolfs novel, Orlando's attempt to elope with the Russian Princess Sasha represents Sackville-West's scandalous departure for Monte Carlo with Trefusis in 1920. Sasha's nationality is a coded reference to the real-life couple's Russian pet-names for one another: Vita called Violet Lushka, whilst Violet called her Mitya. The parallels between *Moll Flanders* and *Orlando* suggest that Woolf was re-shaping Sackville-West's story along the lines of a Defoe novel, and calling upon her own, imaginative inheritance from Defoe and Leslie Stephen, in order to take over the telling of Sackville-West's life and family history. The Defoe connection means that, as well as illustrating Sackville-West's connections with history, Woolf drew on a literary history she considered her own, and appropriated Sackville-West's story into that.

---

[6] 'Tradition and Revision in Woolf's *Orlando:* Defoe and "The Jessamy Brides"', *Women's Studies,* 12:12 (1986), 167–77 (p.168).

There is an element of cruelty and aggression in Woolfs appropriation of Sackville-West's personal and family history as subjects for the novel. Jean Love notes that *Orlando* is hostile because it turns Sackville-West's life into a joke; [8] Suzanne Raitt points out that 'beneath the desire to compliment and to flatter, so evident in *Orlando,* lay a more sinister impulse to punish and to hurt' (p.18). Although Sackville-West, on hearing Woolfs plans to write a novel about her, thought that the book would be a shared pleasure — 'What fun for you, what fun for me!' (*L*, III. 429n.) — Woolf made sure that her subject's involvement in the composition of the novel was limited. For all Woolfs professed reliance upon Sackville-West during the research process for the book, she was more interested in re-inventing than in representing Sackville-West:

---

[7] See, for example, Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p.138.

[8] '*Orlando* and Its Genesis: Venturing and Experimenting in Art, Love, and Sex', in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity,* ed. by Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp.189–218.

> Tomorrow I begin the chapter which describes Violet and you meeting on the ice. The whole thing has to be gone into thoroughly. I am swarming with ideas. Do give me some inkling what sort of quarrels you had. Also, for what particular quality did she first choose you? Look here: I must come down and see you, if only to choose some pictures. I want one of a young Sackville (male) temp. James 1st: another of a young Sackville (female) temp. George 3rd. Please lend yourself to my schemes ... (I think of nothing but you all day long, in different guises, and Violet and the ice and Elizabeth and George the 3rd)' (*L*, III. 430)

Woolf asks for specific documents and information, thus setting strict limits around Sackville-West's contribution and closing the door on any possibility of a collaborative role for her. Her intention to write in detail about Vita's earlier lover suggests an intrusive desire for intimacy, but her thoughts about Vita 'in different guises' imply that Woolf was developing fantasy images of her lover. In these musings, and in the novel itself, Woolf retains control over the way in which Sackville-West is represented.

However, Sackville-West was not only the passive subject of the novel, and Woolf was not simply plundering her life for 'copy' (as Vita accused her).[9] Woolf's sense of their relationship — of self and other in relation — remained an important stimulus. Her comment that, 'I think of nothing but you all day long', displays a love for Vita and a curiosity about her as a subject in her own right, although the same love and curiosity also result in the figure of Orlando, a fantasy version of Vita. As Elizabeth Meese has pointed out, when Woolf told Sackville-West that 'I try to invent you for myself', both 'I' and 'you' are necessary and important — they will not make sense if subsumed into 'I'.[10] There was a narcissistic dimension to their relationship which meant that the other was necessary in order to provide a foil for, or a reflection of, the self. Woolf and Sackville-West's friendship grew through an exchange of fantasies about one another, and their letters were an important part of this process. Early in their relationship, Sackville-West wrote to Woolf praising her accomplishments. Woolf enjoyed these compliments, although she saw them as illusions: she wrote back, 'to beg for more illusions. I can assure you, if you'll make me up, I'll make you.' (*L*, III. 214) Sackville-West sent more praise: she wrote admiring the 'orderly' way in which Woolf worked and organized her time, but Woolf replied, 'Do we then know nobody? — only our own versions of them, which, as likely as not, are emanations from ourselves.' (*L*, III. 245) This comment is a reflection on the nature of human knowledge, but it is also indicative of the way in which Woolf dealt with Sackville-West in her fiction: it suggests that what Woolf engages with in *Orlando* is her own version of Sackville-West and her work.

---

[9] See *Listener*, p.157, where Sackville-West describes Woolf's desire to see her as 'the author's form of cupboard love — in other words, I had become "copy"'.

[10] Elizabeth Meese, 'When Virginia Looked at Vita, What Did She See?; or, Lesbian: Feminist: Woman — What's the Differ(e/a)nce?', *Feminist Studies* 18:1 (1992), 99–117 (p.108).

Woolfs reaction to Sackville-West and her work is complicated by the fact that Woolf was also an influence on her. By Sackville-West's own admission, Woolf 'had more influence on me intellectually than anyone, and for this alone I love you'. [11] Here, again, are shades of narcissism: Sackville-West's love for Woolf seems to rest solely on the extent to which Woolf can help her fulfil her potential. Woolf helped to shape Sackville-West's writing by offering criticism and advice on her manuscripts; while her role as commissioning editor at the Hogarth Press partly dictated what Sackville-West wrote. [12] On the other hand, part of the pleasure Woolf took in Sackville-West's writing was in seeing something of herself in her friend's work. For example, she commented on Sackville-West's novel *Seducers in Ecuador:* 'I saw my own face in it, its true' (*D,* II. 313), and she wrote to Sackville-West that the book was 'full of a particular kind of interest which I daresay has something to do with its being the sort of thing I should like to write myself' (*L,* III. 131). Woolf engages with Sackville-West's talent through a self-reflexive and self-protective sense of her own abilities.

However, Woolf goes on to suggest a way in which Sackville-West might have influenced her writing: 'I felt rather spirited up by your story, and wrote a lot — 300 words — perhaps, this morning' (*L,* III. 132). The comment may, of course, be flattery, but it is probably sincere because the term 'spirited up' implies a sense of rivalry along with encouragement; and a week before she received *Seducers in Ecuador* in September 1927, Woolf had complained in her diary, 'It is a disgrace that I write nothing, or if I write, write sloppily, using nothing but present participles.' (*D,* II. 312) Although both friends accepted that Woolf was the better writer, she admired Sackville-West's ability to write quickly. After reading *Seducers in Ecuador,* Woolf wrote in her diary: 'my brain would never let me milk it to the tune of 20,000 words in a fortnight, & so I must lack some central vigour I imagine' (*D,* II. 313). Woolf wrote *Orlando* with great speed and enthusiasm, which might in part be an attempt to emulate Sackville-West's vigour as a writer.

---

[11] Letter to Virginia Woolf, 29 January 1927, quoted by Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p.172.

[12] Louise A. De Salvo has suggested that Woolfs influence in this respect was inhibitive, noting that the years of their closest friendship saw a hiatus in Sackville-West's novel-writing from *Seducers in Ecuador* (1924) to *The Edwardians* (1930) ('Lighting the Cave: The Relationship Between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf', *Signs* 8:2 (1982), 195–214, (p.205)). The suggestion is also borne out by Victoria Glendinning's observation that Sackville-West began to pin her reputation on her poetry (after winning the Hawthornden Prize in 1927), urging people not to read her novels (p.177).

Another reason for the speed with which Woolf wrote *Orlando* is that she looked on it as a letter to Sackville-West. Nigel Nicolson has described *Orlando* as 'the longest and most charming love-letter in literature', [13] and Woolf thought of it as a letter from the start. In her sketch for the earliest version of the novel, she notes that 'it is to be written as I write letters at the top of my speed' (*D,* III. 131). A love-letter is an intimate space, in which the sender and recipient engage with one another in privately-exchanged words; but it is also a token of absence, because a love-letter is usually written and read when the beloved is not there. Woolf and Sackville-West were often kept apart, due to Woolf's sometimes lengthy illnesses and Sackville-West's travels, and their close friendship grew in their exchange of letters. The letters seem to excite, but rarely satisfy, desire: when thanking Sackville-West for a series of four letters sent from a journey to Persia in March 1926, Woolf added, 'I have spelt them out every word, four times, I daresay. They do yield more on suction; they are very curious in that way.' (*L,* III. 247) While Woolf's intensive reading partly draws out material from Sackville-West's text, she also elaborates on the letters in an attempt to make them 'yield more'.

In previous chapters, I have suggested that Woolf's use of literary allusion is a way of claiming part of a text by an absent and desired other. Woolf appropriates parts of Sackville-West's letters for *Orlando* in this way. Echoes of her Persian letters are found in Woolf's description of Orlando's visit to Turkey. [14] Orlando's period as ambassador is marked by a combination of stateliness and farce — seen, for example, in the fictional report from a Lieutenant Brigge who remarks that the sight of the ceremony in which Orlando is given the order of the Garter is 'one of indescribable magnificence', and then falls out of a tree (*O,* 123). The juxtaposition echoes the disrespectful fascination with Embassy life found in Sackville-West's letters, for example, in her risqué vignette about a state occasion which pictures 'Harold in uniform, and gold lace, little sword getting between his legs'. [15] *Orlando* also takes up the rhythm of Sackville-West's prose. Sackville-West often wrote in long cadences, building up extensive lists in many sub-clauses. For example, she sends Woolf an hour-by-hour breakdown of her daily routine at the Legation, which Woolf mimics in a room-by-room account of the ceremonies which make up Orlando's official duties (ibid.; *O,* 118–19). Woolf thus takes Sackville-West's stories about herself and the rhythms of her prose, and reflects them back to her in the figure of Orlando. But in the process, she manipulates her own voice and describes Vita by becoming like her, making her own voice resemble Vita's.

---

[13] *Portrait of a Marriage,* p.186.

[14] Orlando's appointment as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople is a reference to Harold Nicolson's role as Secretary in the British Embassy at Constantinople, from 1911–14; but as Nigel Nicolson noted (in a marked-up copy of *Orlando* made available to Rachel Bowlby, editor of the World's Classics edition), details are also drawn from Vita's Persian trip (see *O,* 325, n.117).

Woolf did not only echo Sackville-West's letters in *Orlando:* her fantasy biography of Sackville-West can also be read as an attempt to mimic or appropriate her fiction, which was often autobiographical. This is exemplified in Woolf's description of Orlando's sex-change, which draws on Sackville-West's novel, *Challenge,* where she presented a fictionalized version of her affair with Violet Trefusis. Sackville-West addressed the subject of sapphism obliquely by using a heterosexual couple to represent herself and her lover. An Englishman, Julian Davenant (based on Sackville-West herself) becomes the figurehead for an uprising in which the Greek island of Aphros claims independence from mainland Herakleion. The uprising provides Julian with the opportunity to flee to Aphros with his cousin Eve; resembling Sackville-West's flight to Monte Carlo with Trefusis. (The island itself is a coded reference to sapphism, for Sappho lived on one of the Greek islands, and Sackville-West's fictional name Aphros is a near-anagram of Sappho's name.) At Aphros, Julian enjoys a relationship which is subversive because it is potentially incestuous, with his gipsy-like cousin Eve; as Sackville-West was able briefly to enjoy a sapphic relationship with Trefusis, whom she saw as a gipsy. Woolf echoes *Challenge* in the sex-change sequence, when she introduces it with a breakdown in order, in the form of a rebellion in Turkey; and follows it with Orlando's escape from the embassy to live with gipsies, echoing Julian's flight with the gipsy-like Eve.

While Woolf reflects the fantasies which Sackville-West had entertained in *Challenge*, she also mimics Sackville-West's use of allusion in telling her life-story in a high, literary style. *Challenge* has an air of pastoral comedy, for the island is a place in which order is temporarily overthrown; Julian sees it as an 'island of enchantment', and he 'knew fantastically that they were alone upon an island in which he was all but king'. [16] Aphros is described as a magical place, like the island in *The Tempest:* Sackville-West alludes to Shakespeare's play when she describes the love of Julian and Eve as 'the tempest of an inexorable law of nature' (p.236). In the denouement of her novel, Sackville-West gives her novel epic overtones, for Eve, like her Miltonic namesake, falls prey to temptation and is persuaded to betray Julian, thus foiling the rebellion. Woolf parodies Sackville-West's attempt to tell her own life in a high, literary style, and draws on her own stock of literary allusions to mock Sackville-West. For example, the narrative voice introduces the sex-change scene in exaggerated, mock-heroic tones:

---

[15] *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf* ed. by Louise A. De Salvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Virago, 1992), p.128.

> And now again obscurity descends, and would indeed that it were deeper! Would ... that it were so deep that we could see nothing whatever through its opacity! Would that we might here take the pen and write Finis to our work! (*O,* 128–29)

Although the statement appears to be an epic pronouncement (like Milton's 'warning voice' at the opening of Book IV of *Paradise Lost*), Woolf's narrative does not go on to bear out its warning; for the sex-change scene tends far more towards obscurity than revelation. Sherron E. Knopp has suggested that Woolf is concerned with the 'truth about Orlando's identity and about Sapphism'; and that the novel is liberating because it celebrates 'such a personality as Vita's and its attendant "connections"', resisting the pressures of 'society and psychiatry', pressures which included the contemporary furore over Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness,* which was banned shortly before *Orlando* was published. [17] However, Woolf's novel is deeply ambivalent in its treatment of sexuality, and Woolf's use of allusion serves to obscure Sackville-West's sexual identity and preferences rather than to celebrate them.

In the sex-change scene, Woolf's allusions serve as word-play to obscure details, while professing to reveal them. Orlando falls into a trance, and the biographer remarks that he wishes the story could end there, but that he is forced to disclose 'The Truth and nothing but the Truth!' (*O,* 129). Disclosure is momentarily evaded, for the sequence slips into fantasy as a masque scene ensues and the personified virtues of Truth, Candour, and Honesty enter and urge the biographer to tell the truth. The masque form is historically appropriate, since it evokes the seventeenth century (the historical setting for Orlando's sex change), but its effect is to disguise the sexual import of the passage, because the masque was often used as an *indirect* medium for dealing with sexual themes, such as marriage and seduction, on stage. Woolf picks up on the Shakespearean allusions in *Challenge* to increase the sexual confusion rather than celebrate liberation. Woolf's masque features three figures described as 'Horrid Sisters', echoing the three witches or 'Weird Sisters' from *Macbeth*, whose sex is ambiguous, as Banquo comments: 'you should be women, I And yet your beards forbid me to interpret I That you are so' (I. 3. 45). The masque continues as Chastity, Purity, and Modesty (all enemies to sexuality) enter Orlando's bedroom and try to cover up what is about to happen. Each in turn departs, to reveal 'Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess — he was a woman.' (*O,* 132). However, rather than revealing the 'truth', Woolf evades the issue of Sackville-West's ambiguous sexual identity with the fiction of imagining that two different people can be the same. She suggests that both masculine and feminine traits can be found in the same person, for 'his form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace'; and compares two illustrations in the book — plate 4, which depicts a Sackville ancestor and plate 5, which is a photograph of Sackville-West posing as Orlando — and shows that 'their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same' (*O,* 132–33). The scene ends with an announcement that the danger of revelation is over, for the narrator dismisses the subject, 'let other pens treat of sex and sexuality' (*O,* 134). (This phrase is itself an (anachronistic) literary allusion for it paraphrases Jane Austen's opening sentence in the last chapter of *Mansfield Park* — 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery.' — as well as playing on the title of *Sense and Sensibility*.) The whole sequence is a kind of strip-tease, which purports to reveal a 'truth' without ever being clear about what is being revealed. [18]

---

[16] V. Sackville-West, *Challenge,* first UK edition (London: Collins, 1974), pp.229, 211.

[17] '"If I saw you would you kiss me?": Sapphism and the subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing,* ed. by Joseph Bristow (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.111–27 (pp.117, 121).

The process by which Woolf reworks *Challenge* into the sex-change scene suggests that she did not simply mimic Sackville-West, but attempted to create a substitute for her and her work: a new version which was more acceptable to Woolf and more consonant with her interests. This process was facilitated by Woolf's sense of Sackville-West's inferiority as a writer: although 'she gratifies my eternal curiosity ... I have no enormous opinion of her poetry' (QB, II. 119).

---

[18] Judy Little argues that the entire book is a wild goose chase, in which truth constantly collapses, in '(En)gendering Laughter: Woolf's *Orlando* as Contraband in the Age of Joyce', *Women's Studies,* 15:2 (1988), 179–91.

Woolf was intensely interested in what Sackville-West had to say, but she was not impressed by her writings overall. For example, Woolf wrote to Sackville-West, commenting on the draft of *The Land:*

> I read a bit of your poem the other night — it must be good, I think: one can break off crumbs and suck them. ... Like a rich cake, I can break crumbs off your poem. I imagine it wants a little central transparency: Some sudden intensity: I'm not sure. Send me something you've written. (*L*, III. 244–45)

Although Woolf feels that the poem lacks integrity, she derives pleasure from taking little pieces from it. [19] Her image of the poem as a 'rich cake' suggests gratification (especially with the sexual connotations of Woolf's image of 'sucking' the crumbs) which is followed by hunger, for she ends by asking Sackville-West to send her something else she has written. The image of sucking crumbs suggests hunger and desire, but also a form of vampirism, as though Woolf wants to consume the poem, emptying it of such vitality as it has. Diana Fuss has suggested that the desire to create a duplicate of another is part of the process of identification, 'an embarrassingly ordinary process, a routine, habitual compensation for the everyday loss of our love-objects.' Identification 'invokes phantoms. By incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly departed love-object, the subject vampiristically comes to life.' [20] The character of Orlando can thus be read as a vampire-figure, in which Woolf elegizes her dying relationship, creating a version of Vita which she can control and possess.

Woolf's desire to break up, consume, and create a duplicate of Sackville-West's writing impacts upon the novel, where *The Land* appears as Orlando's poem 'The Oak Tree'. (When looking for an Elizabethan name for her central character, Woolf may have chosen 'Orlando' because it incorporates the title of Sackville-West's poem.) Although Woolf is often scornful about 'The Oak Tree' in general — ridiculing Orlando for his difficulties in writing it, and even suggesting that as a nobleman he is born to be a patron and not a writer — she also worked quotations (or 'crumbs') from *The Land* into her novel. The manuscript reveals that Woolf played with and abandoned various quotations, before she chose the following extract for the final version of the novel:

---

[19] Sackville-West was hurt by this comment, but she also agreed that Woolf's criticism was justified: see *Portrait of a Marriage*, p.193.

[20] Diana Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p.1.

> And then I came to a field where the springing grass
> Was dulled by the hanging cups of fritillaries,
> Sullen and foreign-looking, the snaky flower,
> Scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls — (*O*, 252)

The quotation is given as a brief example of what Orlando (at this point a woman in the late nineteenth century) is writing, and, as it stands it lacks integrity, for it begins part-way through an action, starting 'And then...', while the last line ends with a dash, so its sense is left incomplete. The quotation does not serve as an illustration of what the poem is about, but instead it is offered as a meaningless fragment, a taster or crumb. However, 'The Oak Tree' is central to *Orlando*, for its composition runs in parallel with the novel: Orlando begins the poem as a boy in the sixteenth century and continues to work on it throughout the novel, until she finishes it as a woman in the twentieth century. (The poem is published and wins a prize, as Sackville-West won the Hawthornden prize for *The Land* in 1927.)

The parallel progress of Orlando's 'The Oak Tree' (representing *The Land)*, with the development of *Orlando* suggests that Woolf identified herself with Orlando as a writer, in the same way as she identified herself with Lily Briscoe whose attempt to paint Mrs Ramsay runs concurrently with *To the Lighthouse* or with Miss La Trobe whose play runs through *Between the Acts*. However, Woolfs identification with Orlando is more complex than these, because Orlando also represents Sackville-West. Thus, the figure of Orlando becomes a space in which Woolf imaginatively shares with Sackville-West the experience of being a writer. The complex connection between Woolf, Sackville-West, and Orlando can be seen in her critical gloss on the extract from *The Land,* where she imagines that Orlando is being intimidated by a ghostly figure who censures what she writes:

> Grass, the power seemed to say, going back with a ruler such as governesses use to the beginning, is all right; the hanging cups of fritillaries — admirable; the snaky flower — a thought, strong from a lady's pen, perhaps, but Wordsworth, no doubt, sanctions it; but — girls? Are girls necessary? You have a husband ... you say? Ah, well, that'll do.' (*O*, 253)

In this highly ironic passage Woolf parodies the role of critics and satirizes the pressure on women writers to conform to socially accepted standards of 'feminine' behaviour. Woolf herself had often felt this pressure: the figure, though dubbed the 'spirit of the age' in *Orlando,* testifies to the social constraints on women writers which Woolf herself acknowledged in the figure of 'the Angel in the House' who dictates how women should write (*CE,* II. 285).

By glossing the quotation, Woolf offers to expand upon the ideas in the extract, and again threatens to expose a sapphic element in Sackville-West's poetry. The lines following this passage in *The Land* (and not quoted in *Orlando*) continue with the sensual image of the fritillaries wrapping themselves around other plants, as a gipsy girl might 'sidle up' and ensnare a passer-by, 'Holding her captive close with her bare brown arms, | Close to her little breast beneath the silk'.[21] Woolf's commentary draws attention to the presence of exotic, Egyptian girls in the text and suggests that they may be considered indecent. The anonymous censor allows the reference to the girls to remain only because Orlando is a married woman, and so, according to superficial social standards, she can be considered heterosexual. In this passage Woolf threatens to expose the lesbian element of Sackville-West's writings, and only neutralizes the threat by drawing attention to Sackville-West's own subterfuge — the protective front of her marriage. Since Woolf has identified herself with Orlando/Sackville-West and she would also implicate herself in any aspersions made about them, the conclusion to the passage also obscures Woolf's associations with sapphism because she too had a husband and so could claim to conform to society's norms.[22]

Woolf's gloss on this extract from *The Land* reveals that, besides wanting to take Sackville-West's writing apart (break it into crumbs) Woolf wants to expand and improve upon what she had written, seeking intimacy by interpolating her own writing into Sackville-West's texts. Woolf offers an image for this in her response to a letter in which Sackville-West described a visit to her mother:

> Its perfectly enchanting and has lasted me two whole days — your picture: the chauffeur, the secretary your mother the night. There are at least 3 novels in it. Send me some more: If only all novels were that — balls of string for one to pull out endlessly at leisure. (*L*, III. 221)

Woolf seems to have found the description interesting not because Sackville-West has told the story of the visit in its entirety, but because her description suggests that more remains to be told. Sackville-West's writing is a toy for Woolf to play with, like 'balls of string for one to pull out endlessly at leisure'. The process by which Woolf appropriated her friend's life can be seen as expanding and improving upon threads pulled from many of Sackville-West's own writings.

---

[21] V. Sackville-West, *The Land* (London: William Heinemann, 1926), p.49.

[22] Hermione Lee notes that Woolf censored her own manuscript by reducing the references to sapphism in the published version, possibly to avoid a situation like the Radclyffe Hall trial ('Orlando and her Biographer', *TLS* (18 March 1994), 5–6 (p.5)). E.B. Rosenman notes that a similar process of self-censorship took place between the draft and published version of *A Room of One's Own* ('Sexual Identity and *A Room of One's Own:* "Secret Economics" in Virginia Woolf's Feminist Discourse', *Signs,* 14:3 (1989), 634–50).

By writing a biography and family history of Vita Sackville-West in *Orlando,* Woolf attempted to take over Sackville-West and her work. If Woolf's treatment of Sackville-West's sexual history was ambivalent (reflecting a reluctance on her own part to claim a sapphic identity), she approaches Sackville-West's family history in a direct and more covetous way. Woolf was reading *Knole and the Sackvilles,* Sackville-West's most extensive account of her family history, as she started to write *Orlando.* She wrote to Sackville-West, 'I am reading Knole and The Sackvilles. Dear me; you know a lot: you have a rich dusky attic of a mind.' (*L,* III. 429) Woolf saw Sackville-West as a repository of details and pictures from her family history, and as such she found her inseparable from that history. Woolf appropriated the structure of *Knole and the Sackvilles* for *Orlando* in order to depict Sackville-West within that history, and also to claim history for herself. Both books effectively begin in the sixteenth century. Sackville-West chose to begin the history of *Knole and the Sackvilles* in the sixteenth century: although the Sackville family history can be traced back to the Norman conquest, she wrote that none of her ancestors 'has the slightest interest until Richard Sackville, temp. Henry VIII – Elizabeth' (*KS,* 30). In *Orlando,* Woolf begins her pageant of England and its literature in the late sixteenth century, even though she was interested in English literature as far back as Chaucer. Both place their greatest emphasis on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, roughly half of each being set in this period.[23] Sackville-West treats the eighteenth century at greater length than Woolf (mainly because of her fascination with Charles Sackville, the literary patron) while Woolf spends more time covering the nineteenth century (reflecting her own interests in nineteenth-century literature). However, both books end in the present, giving a sense of how the past has culminated in the present day. *Knole and the Sackvilles* ends with Sackville-West's personal memories of her grandfather, to present herself as the summation of the history she has traced. In the last chapter of *Orlando,* Woolf imposes Orlando's memories of past eras onto her present-day shopping trip in London, showing the present as a culmination and cumulation of the past.

---

[23] Four of the seven historical chapters in *Knole and the Sackvilles* and three of the six chapters in *Orlando.* In the manuscript version of *Orlando,* two and a half of four chapters were set in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See '*Orlando:* An Edition of the Manuscript', ed. and intro. by Madeline Moore, *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 25th Anniversary Number, Virginia Woolf Issue, 25:3 (Fall/Winter 1979), 303–46 (p.305).

Critics have pointed out that many details of Orlando's estate and events in his political career are taken from *Knole and the Sackvilles,*[24] but Woolf did not read the book for purposes of historical research. In *Orlando* she plays with the details she finds, putting them through the filter of her imagination, often flagrantly distorting the chronology in the process. For example, the painting used to depict Orlando as a boy (plate 1) is *half* of a plate taken from *Knole and the Sackvilles,* a portrait by Cornelius Nuie of the two sons of Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset. The painting was made in the 1630s, but Woolf uses it to illustrate Orlando's boyhood when 'the sixteenth century had still some years of its course to run' (*O,* 16). She describes him dressing in a costume like the one represented in the painting when he goes to see Queen Elizabeth, with a 'lace collar, waistcoat of taffeta, and shoes with rosettes on them as big as double dahlias' (*O,* 20). Clearly she chose the picture for its appeal to her imagination rather than for its historical accuracy. The picture from *Knole and the Sackvilles* is taken out of context, like the crumbs which Woolf broke off *The Land.* Woolf's appropriation of the painting, like her appropriation of the story of the Sackvilles, represents her attempt to arrogate a small piece of the English, aristocratic history she began to covet as she explored Knole.

Woolf also approaches the history of the Sackvilles through the filter of Sackville-West's fantasy of seeing herself as the cumulation not only of family traits and history but of English history as a whole. Woolf takes Sackville-West's ideas from *Knole and the Sackvilles,* mimicking them and painting them on a grander, more fantastic scale. For example, Orlando's longevity picks up on Sackville-West's account of one of her ancestors, Catherine Fitzgerald, Countess of Desmond, who was said to have lived for 140 years. Sackville-West is fascinated by the sweep of English history contained in this one life:

> Tradition says of her that she was born in the reign of Edward the Fourth and died in the reign of Charles the First ... that is to say, she was a girl when Henry the Seventh came to the throne, and watched the pageant of all the Tudors and the accession of the Stuarts — the whole of English history enclosed between the Wars of the Roses and the Civil War.[25]

---

[24] Frank Baldanza, '*Orlando* and the Sackvilles', *PMLA,* 70:1 (1955), 274–79; David Bonnell Green, '*Orlando* and the Sackvilles: Addendum', *PMLA,* 71:1 (1956), 268–69; Charles G. Hoffmann, 'Fact and Fantasy in *Orlando:* Virginia Woolf's Narrative Revisions', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 10:3 (1968), 435–44.

[25] V. Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles* (London: Heinemann, 1922), p.14. (Hereafter *KS*).

In *Orlando,* Woolf expands and improves upon the idea of one life encompassing the history of the Tudor and Stuart eras, by increasing the Countess' 140 years to Orlando's lifetime of 350 years from the Elizabethan age to Woolf's own time; by depicting Sackville-West as the long-lived Orlando, Woolf enables her to live out this fantasy of inclusivity. The relationship between the lives of people and the wider events and ideas of their time is an important theme in both *Knole and the Sackvilles* and *Orlando.* Sackville-West's description of her ancestors suggests that something in her needed them to represent and symbolize the progress of English history. The value of the Sackvilles for her was that they represented their respective eras so well: 'From generation to generation they might stand, fully equipped, as portraits from English history.' (*KS,* 28) She sees Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset as 'the embodiment of cavalier romance' (*KS,* 82) and Charles Sackville, sixth Earl as 'the prototype of [his] age' (*KS,* 115). If her ancestors symbolized their historical times so well, then Vita, as their descendent, could see herself as a cumulation of this history. Woolf reflects this fantasy by exploring the changes within one consciousness over time, and by making Orlando exist through three and a half centuries, changing with the ages. She offers a way of separating a person from the era in which they live, by speculating that 'the human spirit has its place in time assigned to it; some are born of this age, some of that', and that a person will only fit in with 'the spirit of the age', if she or he finds the fashions and ideas of that age congenial (*O,* 233). By opening up the possibility of identification across time, Woolf suggests a way of accessing the past, and reclaiming what has been lost in time.

The epitome of Woolf's chronological free-play is a compression of the family history into the life of one figure, based on the character of Vita. As Frederick Kellermann points out, history is manipulated to present Vita as the summation of the Sackville family.[26] However, the device is not entirely Woolf's invention, for Vita Sackville-West presents herself as a central figure in, and a summation of, her family history in *Knole and the Sackvilles.* She frequently positions herself within the narrative as a descendent and a spectator, looking at paintings and imagining the characters of the people depicted, or handling historical artefacts and empathizing with their former owners. Woolf uses the fantasy of Orlando's longevity to reflect Sackville-West's sense of being an active participant in family history.

---

[26] 'A New Key to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando', English Studies,* 59 (1978), 138-50.

Alongside its celebration of Sackville-West's abilities to cross boundaries, *Orlando* also explores the extent to which a person is limited by gender. In *Knole and the Sackvilles,* Vita shows great empathy with a female ancestor whose attitude and spirit were at odds with her time: her pipe-smoking ancestor, Lady Anne Clifford. Sackville-West applauds Lady Anne's success in overcoming contemporary criticisms for 'lack of finery and absence of proper vanity', and approves her androgynous costume, by which 'she dressed always in rough black serge, she shaved her head' (*KS,* 77). Woolf's portrait of Orlando shortly after her sex-change, feeling entrapped by the 'coil of skirts about her legs' and becoming aware of 'the penalties and the privileges of her position' (*O,* 147) owes something to this portrait in *Knole and the Sackvilles.* Lady Anne Clifford spent much of her life fighting to keep her rights to her inherited property, and eventually outlived the males of her generation to inherit an estate in Westmoreland, leaving her 'free to turn tyrant herself over her own undisputed realm ... she ruled autocratically over her servants, her tenants, her neighbours and the generations and ramifications of her family' (*KS,* 73). Like Lady Anne Clifford, Orlando finds her inheritance is jeopardized once she becomes a woman. Sackville-West dreamed of emulating Lady Anne by becoming the mistress of an estate, but she knew that as a woman, she was legally barred from inheriting Knole. Shortly before *Orlando* was completed, Vita Sackville-West's father died, and the property passed to her uncle.

In searching for consolation for her disinherited position, Sackville-West presented alternatives to the legal process of inheritance by forging connections with her family history and property. By writing lovingly about Knole and displaying empathy with her ancestors — often by noting her own character traits in portraits of Sackville ancestors — Sackville-West tried to set up a system of inheritance which relied upon empathy rather than the law. This fantasy is worked out most fully in her novel *The Heir: A Love Story.*[27] Peregrine Chase, an insurance clerk from Wolverhampton, inherits from his aunt an estate very similar to Knole. The estate is heavily in debt and Chase's solicitors persuade him to put it up for auction, but, as plans for the auction go ahead, Chase falls in love with the house and the land. Sackville-West makes it clear that his emotional ties to the estate are much more important than the legal rights which have been conferred on him. In the closing pages of the book, Chase attends the auction and buys the house for himself, thus effectively bypassing and rejecting the legal process by which he would have inherited it. In *Orlando*, Woolf goes further to set up economies of love and empathy, as opposed to economies of the market and property law. She gives Sackville-West a fulfilment of her wishes by writing a book which, as Nigel Nicolson wrote, 'identified her with Knole for ever. Virginia by her genius had provided Vita with a unique consolation for having been born a girl, for her exclusion from her inheritance, for her father's death earlier that year.' [28] Woolf thus demonstrates that imagination and empathy are more powerful ways of staking a claim to the past than the legal system of inheritance can offer.

---

[27] V. Sackville West, *The Heir: A Love Story* (printed for private circulation, 1922).

However, Woolf also used *Orlando* to compensate for her *own* sense of loss: as Louise De Salvo has argued, Woolf tried to 'possess Vita utterly' in *Orlando*, by creating a fictional version of Sackville-West she could own completely, as opposed to the 'real' person, whom she had to share with Mary Campbell. The idea could be expanded: Woolf imaginatively took possession of Sackville-West by appropriating her texts — taking over Sackville-West's stories and wishes and reflecting them back to her. In reflecting Sackville-West's history, self-images, and fantasies, Woolf creates a mirror-image of her. Sackville-West seems to have been aware of the mirroring process, for after reading *Orlando* (on the day it was published, 11 October 1928), she wrote to Woolf: 'you have invented a new form of Narcissism, — I confess, — I am in love with Orlando — this is a complication I had not foreseen'. [29] As Narcissus saw his own reflection in a pool and fell in love with it, so Sackville-West saw a reflection of herself in the work of her friend and fell in love with that. Her pleasure in reading *Orlando* echoes Woolf's enjoyment of seeing 'my own face' in *Seducers in Ecuador* (*D*, II. 313). Woolf and Sackville-West each saw herself reflected in the work of the other and each, to an extent, found herself affirmed by this process. Sackville-West fell in love with the image of herself she saw in *Orlando*, while Woolf felt assured of her position as the better writer when she saw Sackville-West trying to copy her in *Seducers in Ecuador.*

---

[28] *Portrait of a Marriage*, p.190.

[29] *Letters to Virginia Woolf*, p.289.

The process of creating a mirror-image of Sackville-West in *Orlando* had an impact on Woolf's writing and on her construction of her own relationship with history. Her writing changed on a superficial level, in that the broad historical scope of *Orlando* — as well as its comedy and fantasy — are not found to the same degree in any of Woolf's previous novels, yet they are present in several of her later works. She returned to an exploration of social history in *The Years* and literary history in the pageant sequences of *Between the Acts*. However, this change should not be overestimated because *Night and Day,* written before Woolf met Sackville-West, was concerned with family history and drew on comic forms. If there was a change in Woolf's writing after *Orlando,* it was not a shift in direction but the intensification of interest in themes which had already been present in her work. The influence which Sackville-West had on Woolf thus resulted from identification: she was attracted to Sackville-West and her writing because she embodied qualities and ambivalences which she saw in herself. As Joanne Trautmann has suggested, *Orlando* is as much a projection of Woolf's wishes as her view of Sackville-West.[30] Thus Sackville-West offered Woolf a mirror in which she could view and interrogate her own identity as a writer, rather than making her discontented with her own writing and uncertain of her writerly identity. Elizabeth Meese offers an useful insight into this process. She draws on Linda Kauffman's hypothesis that 'since every letter to the beloved is also a self address, ... the heroine's project ... also involves self-creation, self-invention'[31] to argue that in Woolf's letters to Sackville-West, she 'invents herself as she writes the other'.[32] In *Orlando* (which is itself a letter), Woolf wrote *to* Sackville-West but she also *wrote* Sackville-West, that is, she brought her into being in writing. In doing so, according to Meese, she 'becomes (most like) Vita' (111). In order to see how Woolf might have invented *herself,* we need to take a look at the some of the effects of her identification with Sackville-West.

Writing about Sackville-West and her history in *Orlando* inspired Woolf to re-think her own relationship with history. Woolf's understanding of her intellectual inheritance changed in response to Sackville-West's construction of her family history. As we saw, Woolf replicated the structure of *Knole and the Sackvilles* in *Orlando,* by beginning the novel in the Elizabethan age in response to Vita Sackville-West's decision to begin her family history with the sixteenth century. The era becomes a focal-point to which Woolf refers throughout the novel. The age survives in Orlando's Shakespearean name, in the Elizabethan architecture of the estate, and in the figure of Shakespeare, whose visit to the estate remains Orlando's 'earliest, most persistent memory' (*O,* 157). However, Woolf internalized this history, for in a diary entry written after *Orlando* was published, she traced her own intellectual inheritance from the Elizabethan age:

---

[30] *The Jessamy Brides: The Friendship of Virginia Woolf and V. Sackville-West,* Pennsylvania State University Studies, 36 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1973).

[31] Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.25.

[32] Meese, p.109.

> It was the Elizabethan prose writers I loved first & most wildly, stirred by Hakluyt, which father lugged home for me — I think of it with some sentiment — father tramping over the Library with his little girl sitting at HPG in mind. He must have been 65; I 15 or 16, then; & why I dont know, but I became enraptured, though not exactly interested, but the sight of the large yellow page entranced me. I used to read it & dream of those obscure adventurers, & no doubt practised their style in my copy books. I was then writing a long picturesque essay upon the Christian religion, I think ... & I also wrote a history of Women; & a history of my own family — all very longwinded & El[izabe]than in style. (*D,* III. 271)

Woolf had always had a passionate interest in Elizabethan literature (for example, two of the essays in the first *Common Reader* are 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room' and 'Notes on an Elizabethan Play'), [33] but this diary entry gives the era special emphasis in that she locates her origins as reader and writer in the Elizabethan age. She cites her encounter with Elizabethan prose as a formative reading experience and remembers her earliest attempts at writing as imitations of the work of Hakluyt and his contemporaries. We can see how Woolf's account of her own history has shifted in emphasis if we compare this piece with another diary entry made in 1924, when Woolf described her youthful preference for prose. There, she listed Hakluyt, along with Merimée, Carlyle, and Gibbon, as a favourite *prose writer* rather than as an Elizabethan (*D,* II. 310). The personal emphasis in this diary entry thus attempts to establish a more intimate contact with the Elizabethan age than her attempt to claim Shakespeare as a forebear in a tradition of women's writing in *Night and Day*; or even her quest to reclaim him from educated men in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway.*

By tracing her own intellectual origins to the Elizabethan age, Woolf modelled her history on that of Sackville-West. This re-working of her history is a result of the process identified by Raitt, whereby 'Woolf and Sackville-West continually rewrote their life stories, trying out new "explanations", modifying their stories in response to those offered by each other and by other women' (p.62). Woolf offers the example of her history of her family to match Sackville-West's own family history, including *Knole and the Sackvilles.* This juvenile work has been lost (*D,* III. 271n3), so we cannot know what Woolf wrote, but her reference to it here suggests that she wanted to stress that her own family, like the Sackvilles, had a history which was worth writing. Woolf's (now affectionate) memory of her father bringing her volumes of Hakluyt strengthens her claim to an inheritance, for the story shows him bestowing Elizabethan literature on her. It expands upon Woolf's image of literature as a rich bequest — 'my fortune gilds the future for me — if my father didn't leave me pearls, this was by way of a makeshift' (*L,* III. 344) — which formed part of the impulse behind *Orlando.* Her access to Elizabethan literature as a reader and her upbringing in a house full of books are her substitutes for Vita Sackville-West's ancient name and her upbringing in an Elizabethan mansion.

---

[33] Alice Fox detects Elizabethan references throughout Woolf career, in *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance;* Juliet Dusinberre demonstrates that Woolf found the Renaissance a powerful metaphor in *Virginia Woolfs Renaissance.*

Woolf attempted to forge her own connections with history and establish an intellectual pedigree by seeking to engage closely with the literary past in *Orlando.* Where Sackville-West presents history in *Knole and the Sackvilles* through the lives and activities of her own ancestors, Woolf constructs a history of the same period through reference to writers and themes in English literary history: *her* literary heritage. Woolf's use of pastiche forms part of the process of seeking intimacy with Vita Sackville-West (who represented for Woolf a large sweep of English history and whose own writing voice shifted to encompass a number of different styles) but also with history itself. In *Orlando,* Woolf uses pastiche as a way of engaging with and embodying the literary history through which the narrative passes. She wilfully conjures up the past by mimicking the language and literary styles of the episodes of Orlando's story in different periods. Woolf presents the Elizabethan age as the formative and most persistent literary period in Orlando's narrative. Besides evoking Elizabethan English (in archaisms such as "twas', 'sennight' or 'trolling their ditties') Woolf suggests resonances between Orlando's life and the literature of the period. As Orlando waits for Sasha at the time set for their elopement, he recites lines from *Othello:* 'Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse | Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe | Should yawn —' (*O,* 55; *Othello,* V. 2. 100). The lines — in which Othello is struck by the full impact of the consequences of his murder of Desdemona and his loss of a lover — are prophetic for Orlando who is about to discover that Sasha has deserted him and departed for Russia. Orlando is shown to have the melancholy which Woolf saw as characteristic of the age: he is drawn to the writing of Sir Thomas Browne, and, in another Shakespearean allusion (a parody of the grave-digging scene from *Hamlet*) he visits the crypt where his ancestors are buried and asks, 'Whose hand was it? ... The right or the left? The hand of man or woman, of age or youth?' (*O,* 69). And, as we saw, Shakespearean allusions also persist into Orlando's sex-change, which is described in terms of the contemporary genre of the masque.

As the story progresses, the events in Orlando's life, and, correspondingly, the style of the narration, shift to represent the literatures of the time. In the chapter on the eighteenth century, Orlando sets up a literary salon, and meets Pope, Addison, and Swift. The narrator uses the literature of the period as a means of empathizing with Orlando: 'So, now that we have read a page or two of the *Rape of the Lock,* we know exactly why Orlando was so much amused and so much frightened and so very bright-cheeked and bright-eyed that afternoon.' (*O,* 200) Woolf does not quote Pope's poem in the text: instead, she suggests that Orlando can somehow be found within the literature of her time. The biographer's voice later mimics the manner of the eighteenth-century, when it copies the thesis–antithesis form of the eighteenth-century essay in a digression on the subject of Orlando's gender identity. (The narrator proposes that clothes construct a person's gender, then counters that with the view that clothes are an expression of inner reality.) The nineteenth century is characterized by descriptions of weather taken from the literature of the period: the cloud over Britain during the Victorian age is reminiscent of the 'storm-cloud' or 'plague-cloud' which John Ruskin argued was 'peculiar to our own times' in *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century.*[34] It also echoes the fog over London in *Bleak House,* and in a Dickensian exaggeration, the narrator offers a whimsical theory that all aspects of society, from clothes to literature, have been shaped by the damp weather. Orlando experiences nature in the same way as the Romantic poets did: Woolf notes that 'the air blew upon her spirit' (*O,* 236), echoing Wordsworth's image in *The Prelude* of the 'correspondent breeze' which blew in his soul as the wind blew against his body (I. 35). The picture of Orlando running wild on the moors as 'nature's bride' (*O,* 237), echoes the rugged country and love of nature evident in

---

[34] John Ruskin, *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century: Two Lectures Delivered at the London Institution, February 4th and 11th, 1884* (Orpington: George Allen, 1884), p.1.

Wuthering Heights, in which Emily Brontë could, according to Woolf, 'by speaking of the moor make the wind blow and the thunder roar' (*CE*, I. 190).

By consciously invoking her precursors and employing them for the purposes of her narrative, Woolf draws on her literary past, but is not inhibited by it. The allusions become a way of laying claim to the past. They become a way of anchoring Woolf/Orlando into literary history, as Sackville-West wanted to trace her descent from ancestors who 'stand, fully equipped, as portraits from English history' (*KS*, 28). As we have seen, Woolf's allusions are occasionally anachronistic: she alludes to Jane Austen amid a pastiche of Shakespeare and the masque; and characteristics of Defoe pervade the novel as a whole. Such anachronisms suggest that Woolf sought to encompass a vast range of literary history within her texts: her writings thus appear as the cumulative effect of a vast sweep of history. We have seen that Woolf read *Knole and the Sackvilles* and remarked that Sackville-West had 'rich dusky attic of a mind' (*L*, III. 429), that is, she was inseparable from the family history she narrated. By re-telling the story of the Sackville family and by appropriating Sackville-West's protean voice and penchant for imitating literary styles, Woolf attempted to embody Sackville-West in prose. But in mimicking Sackville-West, Woolf begins to invent a prose voice for herself which seeks a similar intimacy with literary history.

By evoking transitions in English language and literature over three and a half centuries, Woolf also identifies herself with Orlando, whose 'Oak Tree' runs parallel with the novel. In this respect her writing resembles that of Orlando who, like Sackville-West, shifted styles over time. As Woolf draws towards the conclusion of the novel, she looks for continuity amid Orlando's many changes, asking how Orlando's many selves might be gathered into one 'captain' self. Looking over the drafts of 'The Oak Tree', Orlando observes that, 'She had been a gloomy boy, in love with death, as boys are; and then she had been amorous and florid; and then she had been sprightly and satirical; and sometimes she had tried prose and sometimes she had tried drama. Yet through all these changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same.' (*O*, 226) The problem of how something might remain 'the same' although changed is central to Woolf's presentation of Sackville-West as a summation of the lives and characters of her ancestors. However, the survival of the past into the present, and the gathering of many echoes into one voice, is also central to Woolf's articulation of a literary history — and her construction of her own voice — in *Orlando.* The intimacy with the past Woolf negotiates in *Orlando* enacts her vision of 'the past expressive, articulate; not dumb & forgotten' (*D,* III. 125): her use of quotations and pastiche enables the literary past to be articulated within her own text.

This construction of literary history in *Orlando* thoroughly disrupts the patriarchal constructions of history and literary tradition which marginalize women and which, as we have seen, Woolf wrestles with in all her early novels. Woolf parodies Leslie Stephen's scholarly critical writings and biographies in her joke preface, index, and footnotes, and in her narrator's stated intention of trying to 'plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth' (*O,* 63). By slipping from the scholarly voice into mimicry of the literary past and into close identification with Orlando, Woolf mocks the narrator's pretence of writing a factual, objective account of biography or literary history. This disruption of the narrative voice demonstrates that the language and form of the traditional biography are inadequate for dealing with a life like Vita Sackville-West's, for 'the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place — culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man' (*O,* 297–98). Woolf further disrupts traditional, academic approaches to chronology through the conceit of making the past present in one figure (Orlando) and articulate in one voice (the narrator's). She makes a direct retort to her father by arguing that the 'true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute' (*O,* 291), for Stephen edited that *Dictionary* for many years, and contended in all his scholarly writings that truth was that which could be ascertained by proof. By framing *Orlando* as a biography and literary history, Woolf pretended to take up a position similar to that occupied by her own father (as a child may follow a father into a trade) but she questions this inheritance by distorting its conventions. The irony with which Woolf treats the figure of the narrator suggests that she does not want to inherit her father's position or take methods and approaches handed down by him: instead, she seeks to change the usual emphases of biography, to disrupt its chronologies, and to negotiate a different, more intimate and imaginative, relationship with the subjects of biography and history.

Woolf's approach to questions of tradition and inheritance are thus shot through with concerns about what a woman's heritage might be. These concerns arose as she wrote about and identified herself with Vita Sackville-West, a member of a noble and historic family who loved her family estate but, as a woman, could never own it. Sackville-West dealt with her disinherited state by negotiating different, stronger bonds of empathy with the past. Woolf took up these strategies in *Orlando* when she began to re-think her own inheritance. She demonstrated an intimacy with writers of the past by the strength of her empathy and identity with them, as a reader, which was more important to her than the structures and approaches granted to her by literary tradition. Woolf expressed the attitude towards history she developed in *Orlando* more formally in *A Room of One's Own* (pp. 72–73), in the idea of 'thinking back', which emphasizes the need to explore imaginative links with the past, constructed 'through our mothers', the disinherited female line as opposed to the linear chains suggested by the patrilineal system of legal inheritance. Woolf's subversions of 'traditional' biography and literary history crystallized into her more sober injunction to 'rewrite history' to include the neglected work and experience of women.

Both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* see women as the *disinherited* heirs of literary history, and turn this into a means of liberation from any potentially inhibitive powers of the past. The concept of 'thinking back' implies that Woolf saw the past as lost; and in need of rescuing by later generations. Her imaginative reclamation of the past in *Orlando,* like her construction of literary history in *Room,* are structured by a desire to recover something that is lost. This impulse is deeply implicated with Woolf's need to compensate for losing Sackville-West (and her connections with history) to Mary Campbell. Woolf's means of compensation was to make herself like her desired object. She achieved what Diana Fuss (p.1) has called identification: 'incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly departed love-object' (through allusion and parody) so that the subject 'comes to life' in the composite body of Orlando: the character and the novel. Woolf expressed a very similar sentiment at the end of *A Room of One's Own,* when she speculated that 'great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh' (p.108). This process leads to a measure of control over the literary past, for the later writer has to create an opportunity for the work of earlier writers to survive. Thus, while *Orlando* (like many of Woolf's previous novels) was driven by a longing for the past, it also enabled Woolf to negotiate her relationship with that past and to develop a writerly identity which was both new and deeply engaged with the voices of other writers.

Part III

Identification

Chapter 7

The Waves as Woolf's *Prelude*

A month after *The Waves* was published, Woolf speculated on the direction her novel-writing was taking: 'I shall write out some very singular books, if I live. I mean I think I am about to embody, at last, the exact shapes my brain holds. What a long toil to reach this beginning — if The Waves is my first work in my own style!' (*D,* IV. 53). This comment might be read in terms of the fantasy of overcoming the 'anxiety of influence': Woolf imagines herself capable of producing 'singular' books unlike those of any other writer, books which are unique to her, for they could 'embody' the 'shapes' of her brain. She suggests that *The Waves* could be the beginning of this process, for it is her 'first work' in her 'own style'. However, this claim is misleading, for Woolf had much earlier described *Jacob's Room* as the first work written using her own method and voice (*D,* II. 186). This suggests that she did not reach a fixed identity as an author, but that her conception of her 'own' style or voice shifted over time. In *The Waves,* Woolf's sense of having achieved her 'own style' also goes alongside an awareness of her receptivity to influence, for past writers are deeply implicated in the dense network of allusions, echoes, and quotations which is worked into the novel. An engagement with other writers and their work had thus become integral to what Woolf saw as her 'own' style.

Woolf's diary entries during the composition of *The Waves* mark out her deepening involvement with other writers. When she sketched out the initial idea for the novel, in September 1926, she added: 'I want to watch & see how the idea at first occurs. I want to trace my own process' (*D,* III. 113). Three years later, while grappling with the first draft, she wrote: 'Really these premonitions of a book — states of soul in creating — are very queer & little apprehended' (*D,* III. 253). Between these two diary entries, Woolf had written *Orlando,* in which she had developed a protean voice which mimicked and absorbed a vast range of other styles. Where the pre-*Orlando* diary entry implies that Woolf is in control of her 'own process', the later diary entry suggests that the novel is being inspired, as though from without: Woolf merely experiences 'premonitions' of what is going to happen rather than initiating it. In the entry where she records the completion of the novel in February 1931, she seems to have relinquished control over her writing: 'I wrote the words O Death fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity & intoxication that I seemed only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad)' (*D,* IV. 10). Rather than watching her own process, she now seems to picture herself almost as the amanuensis for some other 'speaker'. Woolf became increasingly conscious of opening herself up to outside influences, which manifest themselves as inner voices: 'external' influences have been appropriated or transformed so that they become her own voice.

Alongside her appropriation of other voices, Woolf also increasingly developed a view of herself as an author in relation with other writers. In her review of her career on completing *The Waves*, Woolf identifies herself with Wordsworth's quest to establish his identity as a poet in *The Prelude.* Her view of her career up to *The Waves* as a 'toil to reach this beginning', from which singular works might follow, is comparable with Wordsworth's view of *The Prelude* as the beginning of greater work to come, a forerunner to a proposed work, *The Recluse,* which was to be 'a literary work that might live' and achieve posterity. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth aimed to prepare himself for greater works by making 'a review of his own mind'. The poem is subtitled 'The Growth of a Poet's Mind: An Autobiography', and in it Wordsworth undertook to 'examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him' to write a great work, and 'to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them' (*Poetical Works,* p.494). Woolf's stated intentions to 'trace my own process' and to apprehend the 'states of soul in creating' suggest that, like Wordsworth, she wanted to trace her own development as a writer, by scrutinizing her creative process closely. Her interest in finding a form of writing which might 'embody ... the exact shapes my brain holds' suggests that, like him, she wanted to explore in writing the workings of her own mind. The parallels reveal that at this point in her career, Woolf began to use Wordsworth as a model for developing her view of herself as a writer.

Woolf's interest in exploring states of mind is found in her first hint at the germ of the novel, in a diary entry written at Rodmell on 30 September 1926, shortly after completing *To the Lighthouse.* Woolf writes that she is thinking about 'the mystical side of this solitude; how it is not oneself but something in the universe that one's left with'. A month later, this has evolved into an idea about a woman thinking:

> At intervals, I begin to think (I note this, as I am going to watch for the advent of a book) of a solitary woman musing [?] a book of ideas about life. This has intruded only once or twice, & very vaguely: it is a dramatisation of my mood at Rodmell. (*D*, III. 114; brackets in published edition)

The solitary woman musing, who is apparently planned as Woolf's proxy within the novel, emerges in the drafts of *The Waves.* [1] The draft novel begins with a seemingly empty room, which is shortly shown to contain 'the lonely mind person, — man or woman, young or aged'. The thinker's identity and gender remain ambiguous: it is next described as 'the lonely mind, mans or womans, it does not matter which'. This suggests that though Woolf was interested in exploring her own mind, she sought a kind of impersonality in writing: two of the early working titles were 'the life of anybody' and 'life in general'. [2] This impersonality seems to contrast with *The Prelude,* for the 'Poet's Mind' mentioned in the subtitle refers specifically to Wordsworth's own mind, and the poem is written in the first person and traces a personal development throughout.

The impersonal narrative voice of the drafts is preserved in the published version of *The Waves* in a series of italicized interludes which describe the natural world, including the movement of the waves and the progress of a day from dawn to sunset. Woolf also refracts Wordsworth's project of a literary autobiography into the life-stories of six figures, narrated as a set of first-person monologues in the nine episodes of the novel. The three male figures are writers in a conventional sense — Bernard is a novelist and Neville and Louis are poets. Of the women, Jinny is preoccupied with body language and physical expression and Susan is creative in practical ways. If, as Leonard Woolf suggested, the six protagonists represent different aspects of Virginia's personality, [3] then Woolf responds to Wordsworth's openly autobiographical project by displacing her own life-story (and autobiography in general) into fiction and splitting it into six parts.

---

[1] The passage also suggests a close connection with *To the Lighthouse,* for Woolf had already begun to explore the 'mystical side of solitude' in conjunction with 'a solitary woman musing' in her account of Mrs Ramsay's reverie in that novel (*TL*, 85–88) — a passage which also includes echoes of *The Prelude.* See chapter 5. I, above.

[2] *Virginia Woolf: The Waves: The two holograph drafts* transcribed and ed. by John W. Graham (London: Hogarth, 1976), draft I, p.1. (hereafter *HD.*)

[3] 'Virginia Woolf and *The Waves*', *Radio Times* (23 June 1957), 25.

These differences between *The Prelude* and *The Waves* could be read in Bloomian terms as strategies for repressing the precursor (such as *kenosis* in which the poet 'empties out' his precursor). Jane Marcus detects an aggressive dimension to the Romantic allusions in *The Waves,* arguing that Woolf attacks a 'still-living English Romantic quest for a self and definition of the (white male) self against the racial or sexual other', and that 'she disposes of the notion of individual literary genius by an overdetermined intertextuality with Romantic poetry'. [4] However, Woolf's technique was neither evasive or aggressive: instead, she consciously entertained an identification with Wordsworth while writing *The Waves.* Shortly after beginning the novel Woolf copied into her diary 'some lines I want to remember' (not suppress) from *The Prelude*:

> The matter that detains us now may seem,
> To many, neither dignified enough
> Nor arduous, yet will not be scorned by them,
> Who, looking inward, have observed the ties
> That bind the perishable hours of life
> Each to the other, & the curious props
> By which the world of memory & thought
> Exists & is sustained. (*D,* III. 247; *Prelude,* VII. 458)

Woolf identifies her own purpose with Wordsworth's by using his words to express her feelings about her own work. [5] The quotation contains a number of themes which become important in *The Waves.* Here, as elsewhere in *The Prelude,* Wordsworth justifies using the ordinary events of his life as subjects for literature. The passage follows a description of the theatre, and in these lines, he justifies theatre as a suitable subject for poetry because it acts as a stimulus to the imagination. A similar idea is at work in the diary entry which contains this quotation, for Woolf describes the mundane activities of an ordinary day, from eating breakfast in the morning to reading the papers at night. Following the quotation, she attempts to capture the experience of her day: 'But my skeleton day needs reviving with all sorts of different colours. Today it was grey & windy on the walk; yesterday generous & open; a yellow sun on the corn; & heat in the valley.' The word 'reviving' is significant because it suggests the importance of rescuing something lasting from the ephemeral. The minutiae of the day have ceased to be important, but what can be 'revived' are the impressions they made. Rather than 'emptying out' Wordsworth or seeking to eliminate him as a precursor, Woolf involves him in a project which seeks to affirm existence and subjectivity.

---

[4] 'Britannia Rules *The Waves*', in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century 'British' Literary Canons,* ed. by Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp.136–62 (pp.137, 145).

[5] Woolf had copied the same lines into her reading notebook while writing *Mrs Dalloway,* adding 'good quotation for one of my books' (Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks,* p.228).

The lines from *The Prelude* are emblematic of Woolf's concern to establish permanence within the ephemeral: to express the 'ties | That bind the perishable hours of life | Each to the other'. In particular, they reflect her belief in the importance of 'the world of memory and thought' in giving significance and thus permanence to events which would otherwise simply vanish. Like Wordsworth, Woolf searched for ways of preserving experience against the forces which threatened to dissolve life and memory. Woolf articulated this crisis in her concept of 'Moments of Being' — another proposed title for *The Waves* — which is reminiscent of a phrase from Wordsworth's Ode, 'Intimations of Immortality': 'Our noisy years seem moments in the being | Of the eternal Silence' (l.158). Like the impetus behind Woolf's 'moments of being', this phrase suggests dissolution by the passage of time and death itself which threaten language (the noisy years) and lived experience with extinction. Writing *The Waves* was an important stage in Woolf's development of the concept of 'moments of being', for the 'world of memory and thought' is explored at length in the novel, through her description of interactions between the mind (and memory) and the outside world. This is in itself a characteristically Romantic concern; [6] and Woolf draws on her own experience *and* identifies Wordsworth's ideas with her own, in her description of moments of being. As some critics have pointed out, there are close parallels between her 'moments of being' and Wordsworth's 'spots of time'. [7]

The 'moments of being', like Wordsworth's 'spots of time' are reactions to death. Neville's childhood moment of being comes after hearing about a suicide or murder:

> 'I will use this hour of solitude, this reprieve from conversation, to coast round the purlieus of the house and recover, if I can, by standing on the same stair half-way up the landing, what I felt when I heard about the dead man through the swing-door last night when cook was shoving in and out the dampers. He was found with his throat cut. The apple-tree leaves became fixed in the sky; the moon

---

[6] Frank D. McConnell, '"Death Among the Apple Trees": *The Waves* and the World of Things', in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Claire Sprague (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp.117–29. Hermione Lee points to Woolf's affinities with Romanticism in 'A Burning Glass: Reflection in Virginia Woolf', in *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective*, ed. by Eric Warner (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.12–27.

[7] Stella McNichol, introduction to *Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); Kate Flint, introduction to *The Waves* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992); Davida Beth Pines, 'William Wordsworth and Virginia Woolf: Assertion and Dissolution of Self' (unpublished M.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1993).

> glared; I was unable to lift my foot up the stair. He was found in the gutter. His blood gurgled down the gutter. His jowl was white as a dead codfish. I shall call this stricture, this rigidity, "death among the apple trees" for ever. There were the floating, pale-grey clouds; and the immitigable tree; the implacable tree with its greaved silver bark. The ripple of my life was unavailing. I was unable to pass by. There was an obstacle. "I cannot surmount this unintelligible obstacle," I said. And the others passed on. But we are doomed, all of us, by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass.' (*W*, 17–18)

Neville's experience is a conscious effort to revive an incident which has passed, in a period of solitude and silence (a 'reprieve from conversation'). His imaginative act has three stages: he consciously recreates or tries to 'recover' his initial reaction to hearing about the dead man; he pictures for himself the sight of the man with a face 'as white as a dead codfish' and the sound of his blood 'gurgling' in the gutter; and then he associates the death (and human mortality in general) with an apple-tree he seems to have been looking at when he overheard the news. Woolf herself had a similar experience — recounted in her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past' — when she overheard that a Mr Valpy, who had recently visited her family at St Ives, had killed himself:

> The next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark — it was a moonlit night — in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralysed. (*MB*, 82–83)

The similarities between these passages suggest that Woolf was using her account of Neville's moment of being in *The Waves* as a way of formulating an event she had experienced. Like Neville, Woolf connects a horrific death with the vision of an apple-tree lit by moonlight so that its bark appears grey or silver, and like him, she is thrown into a trance-like, paralysed state.

This sequence in *The Waves* forms part of the process by which Woolf developed the analysis of her own creativity she presented in 'A Sketch of the Past': the novel thus becomes a provisional text, a *prelude* to a later autobiographical account. This incident in 'A Sketch of the Past' is commonly thought to demonstrate that the scene in the novel had an autobiographical source. While the *memory* described in 'Sketch' is a source for the incident in *The Waves,* Woolf wrote the memoir in 1939 — ten years after *The Waves* — and so she had already rehearsed her account of the incident in fictional form in the novel before presenting it as a memoir. 'A Sketch of the Past' thus becomes less important as a document for interpreting *The Waves*;

rather, the novel can be seen an important stage for Woolf in working out the analysis of her own creative process which later appeared in the memoir.

Woolf drew on Wordsworth's concept of 'spots of time' to provide a structure for describing and exploring these childhood experiences. In her account of Neville's vision, the centre of interest is the power of the imagination to create associations. This is a key theme in *The Prelude,* where Wordsworth argues that poetry results from the active engagement of the mind with its surroundings, from 'observation of affinities | In objects where no brotherhood exists | To passive minds' (II. 384). Like Woolf's 'moments of being', these associations take place in specific moments — 'spots of time' (*Prelude,* XII. 208–335) — which are 'scattered everywhere' throughout life, but significantly date from 'our first childhood'. These moments help to preserve a moment by making it memorable, they become a focal point for future memories: they have 'a renovating virtue, whence ... our minds | Are nourished and invisibly repaired'. They are formed during moments when the mind is most active in imposing structure on experience: moments which 'give | Profoundest knowledge to what point and how | The mind is lord and master — outward sense | The obedient servant of her will.' These are all features of Neville's vision.

Like Neville's moment of being, Wordsworth's spots of time are formed in response to death. The two anecdotes from his childhood which Wordsworth cites in *The Prelude* as examples of spots of time both involve death. In the first, he is lost on the moor as a young child and passes the spot where a gibbet had hung. Eventually, when he comes to a pool where a girl is filling a pitcher of water, he does not feel hopeful, but finds the sight melancholy and filled with 'visionary dreariness' (XII. 256). Yet, while the mind had altered the perception of the scene in one way, memory gives it a different colouring, for the event has invested the place with 'radiance more sublime' (XII. 267). In the second anecdote, memory changes a scene to make it bleak in retrospect. Wordsworth remembers looking out across a moor while waiting for the carriage which would take him home from school at Christmas. His father died during the holiday, and the sight of the moor, with its sheep, 'one blasted tree', 'the bleak music' of a stone wall and the mist over the road become imprinted with this memory: 'All these were kindred spectacles and sounds | To which I oft repaired, and thence would drink, | As at a fountain.'

(XII. 319–26) Events are stored up in memory and become attached to perception, to be revived at a later date.

'Spots of time' and 'moments of being' are reactions to death, but they also serve as ways of preserving moments and thus constitute attempts to fend off death and dissolution. Neville's vision of 'death among the apple-trees' becomes a recurring image in his speeches in the novel. When the six characters re-unite for a dinner-party and share what is on their minds, Neville contributes a concise re-capitulation of the earlier moment of being. It functions as an emblem of his personality, which he uses as protection against the threat of being subsumed by the group. Later, he uses the incident for protection as he tries to come to terms with the death of his friend Percival: 'I will stand for one moment beneath the immitigable tree, alone with the man whose throat is cut' (*W,* 125). Such repetition is an important part of the structure of *The Waves,* and is central to Woolf's exploration of the role of memory, for Neville's mind plays an important part in reconstructing — 'recovering' — his childhood memory by preserving it in words.

Woolf also engages with Wordsworth in her exploration of the limited powers of language to preserve or affirm lived experience. James Naremore has argued that Woolf's moments of being are attempts to assert the self in language, in face of the dissolution of self threatened by moments of being or by group identities; [8] but another moment of being, which Woolf recounts in Rhoda, suggests that language is not the only way to prevent dissolution, for physical contact with solid objects can also be used to regain a sense of self:

> 'I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather, I was wafted down tunnels. Then very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle.' (*W,* 50)

As with Neville's moment of being, this account also formed part of Woolf's examination of her own creativity in 'A Sketch of the Past', where she describes encountering a puddle in her way: 'everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something ... the whole world became unreal' (*MB*, 90; ellipsis in original). Although the puddle incident is based on a memory which Woolf mentions in her diary when planning the novel (D, III. 113), she draws on Wordsworth to structure the accounts of the event in *The Waves* and 'Sketch'. As Pines (pp.33–35) has suggested, the sequence is comparable to Wordsworth's description of a similar experience, in a note to his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood':

---

[8] *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p.180.

> Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being ... With a feeling congenial to this I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall of tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. [9]

The fear of the loss of personal identity (being subsumed into other people and things), and the need to draw back from this experience by establishing contact with a solid object are all characteristics of Rhoda's moment of being and Woolf's later autobiographical account. [10] It is often assumed that Romantic poetry is concerned with the solitary genius, but passages such as this suggest that Wordsworth, too, was prone to crises about his existence and identity as an individual; the echoes of Wordsworth in *The Waves* and 'A Sketch of the Past' suggest that Woolf identified with his experience, and sought to draw on his work to seek a solution. Wordsworth's note also suggests that he recognized that language was not the only way to assert identity, but that physical contact (a semiotic experience) could intervene when language failed.

Woolf explores the importance of physical experience and questions the possibility of preserving it in language, in Bernard's moment of being. Bernard's experience is precipitated when a nursemaid squeezes a sponge over him:

> 'Water pours down the runnel of my spine. Bright arrows of sensation shoot on either side. I am covered with warm flesh ... Now hot towels envelop me, and their roughness, as I rub my back, makes my blood purr. Rich and heavy sensations form on the roof of my mind; down showers the day — the woods; and Elvedon; Susan and the pigeon.' (*W*, 19)

---

[9] *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p.428. This note was dictated by Wordsworth to Isabella Fenwick in 1843; Woolf would have known the Fenwick Notes, which appeared in editions of Wordsworth's poems from the 1890s onwards (James V. Logan, *Wordsworthian Criticism: A Guide and Bibliography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1961), pp.75, 78).

[10] As I argue in the next chapter, Woolf's account of the moment of being when she saw a flower and thought 'That is the whole' (*MB*, 82), is drawn from Coleridge and is presented in fictional form in *Between the Acts*.

On the surface, this is different from Neville's experience and from the Wordsworthian spots of time, because it has its origin in pure sensation — the feeling of warm water on his skin. However, Bernard's moment is also an imaginative act, for his physical sensation becomes the nexus at which a number of different memories of this day are gathered. Bernard recalls this experience at several points during the novel, and it becomes the centre for a cluster of memories, not about a particular day, but about his childhood in general. The squeezing of the sponge, along with the garden at Elvedon, are Bernard's contribution to the chorus of memories at the dinner-party, and like Neville, he returns to his moment of being when mourning Percival's death: he visits the National Gallery and finds that 'arrows of sensation strike from my spine, but without order' (*W,* 129). Later, in his summing-up, Bernard again describes the squeezing of the sponge, citing it as the dawning of physical and emotional response to the environment, for 'as long as we draw breath ... we are pierced with arrows of sensation' (*W,* 200).

Woolf identifies with Wordsworth through Bernard's early moment of being, for, like him, she suggests that responsiveness to the environment is the first stage in becoming creative. In the lines immediately preceding the 'spots of time' sequence, Wordsworth describes how his imaginative power has made him 'a sensitive being, a *creative* soul' (XII. 207; italics in original). Woolf developed the idea that sensitivity is a prerequisite to writing more explicitly in 'A Sketch of the Past', when she speculated that 'the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer' (*MB,* 83). As she filtered her memories of Valpy's suicide and the puddle incident through Wordsworth's ideas in the figures of Neville and Rhoda, so she uses the figure of Bernard here as a focus for developing Wordsworthian ideas about writing which she later applied specifically to her own creativity.

Woolf also identifies with Wordsworth when she uses Bernard to explore the problems faced by a writer when confronting the disparity between experience and language. Bernard's moment of being is a physical sensation preserved in a body-memory of 'arrows of sensation' which is re-enacted at several points during his life, but the experience does not guarantee his success as a writer. Throughout his life, Bernard 'makes phrases', but these do not necessarily express experience. They often seem superficial: for example, when he enters his 'methodically lettered' phrases into a notebook he carries with him, and although he has a reputation as a story-teller, his stories often lack endings, for, as Neville says, the 'appalling moment' comes 'when Bernard's power fails him and there is no longer any sequence' (*W,* 29). Bernard is unable to achieve the kind of closure or coherence in his own writing which he found in the fusion of experiences in his moment of being.

Bernard's capacities for feeling and imagination which will make him, however unsuccessfully, a writer are established in his moment of being, but he also becomes split between the symbolic order of language and the semiotic order of the body. As Minow-Pinkney has demonstrated, *The Waves* may be viewed in Kristevan terms as celebrating the persistence of the semiotic order after language has been acquired. Bernard often treats language semiotically, for he is aware that writing has its own materiality: in his speech on leaving home for boarding school, he talks of making phrases to 'interpose something hard between myself and the stare of housemaids, the stare of clocks, staring faces, indifferent faces, or I shall cry' (*W,* 22). His 'phrases' do not convey or symbolize experience or reality but are a means of fending off reality. When he tries to build these phrases into stories, they always lapse into silence, thus acknowledging what Kristeva has since described as the semiotic rupturing symbolic language. While his moment of being gave him a sense of integration, the process of putting the experience into language initiates division, so that his stories lack completeness.

Woolf's awareness of the disparity between language and experience is also a point of identification with Wordsworth, who suggested in *The Prelude* that:

> Thou also, man! hast wrought,
> For commerce of thy nature with herself,
> Things that aspire to unconquerable life;
> And yet we feel — we cannot choose but feel —
> That they must perish (V. 18)

These lines explore the question of a 'living' work of art both in the sense of conveying lived experience — by providing a medium through which 'human nature' can commune with itself — and by aspiring to posterity, or 'unconquerable life'. However, as Wordsworth admits, books cannot last, and anything of life captured in language will also perish. A few lines later he wonders whether writing as a form is inimical to the human mind, and ponders whether there is a more direct means of preserving experience: 'Oh! why hath not the Mind | Some element to stamp her image on | In nature somewhat nearer to her own?' (V. 45).

In an attempt to solve this problem, Wordsworth considered ways in which poetic language might be adapted to bring it closer to everyday experience. He suggests, for example, that simple language is most appropriate for lovers, because love does not need 'language purified | By manners studied and elaborate' (XIII. 190). Woolf echoes this suggestion in Bernard's longing for a simpler, more elemental means of expression: 'I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing' (*W,* 246). Wordsworth famously defended homely language in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* where he emphasized the importance of narrating 'incidents and situations from common life ... as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men' (*Poetical Works,* p.734). However, as Coleridge pointed out in *Biographia Literaria,* Wordsworth does not carry out his intention to use the language of ordinary people (*Works,* VII. ii. 42–43; 55–56). Like Wordsworth, Woolf does not practise the simple language Bernard aspires towards, for even when the characters are children, they do not use baby-talk or words of one syllable only. Instead, she points to the extreme result of Wordsworth's theory in Bernard's suggestion towards the end of the novel that pre-linguistic sounds — 'a howl; a cry'; 'a bark, a groan' — are needed for true expression (though, of course, this is an impossible paradox since such sounds do not communicate the complexity of ideas like Bernard's).

Louis' moment of being provides a further perspective on the relationship between language and experience. Louis actively tries to fuse different elements:

> 'Let me try,' said Louis, 'before we rise, before we go to tea, to fix the moment in one effort of supreme endeavour. This shall endure ... my shattered mind is pieced together by some sudden perception. I take the trees, the clouds, to be witnesses of my complete integration. ...' (*W,* 29–30)

This experience demonstrates the power of the mind to create associations — what Wordsworth described as 'observation of affinities | In objects where no brotherhood exists | To passive minds' (*Prelude,* II. 384) — in order to preserve a fleeting moment for posterity. Louis's assertion of unity against the threat of fragmentation also feeds into Woolf's analysis of her own creativity in 'A Sketch of the Past', where she notes that one of her aims in writing was to join fragments. She reasons that while her capacity to receive 'shocks' — Bernard's 'arrows of sensation' — make her a writer, her use of words enables her to make the experience 'whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me ... a great delight to put the severed parts together' (*MB,* 84). Woolf sees writing as a process of suturing or joining severed parts into a system, thus mitigating and mediating the pain and immediacy of experience.

Although Louis, like Bernard, finds that words have a materiality and so function as a defence, he subscribes to the symbolic order as a way of signalling his individuality, as when he signs his name: 'I, and again I, and again I. Clear, firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name. Clear-cut and unequivocal am I too.' (*W,* 138) While his assertion of the personal pronoun is an attempt to separate self from other, this is undermined by his contradictory perception that he does not exist as an individual but only as a point on a continuum of human existence, for 'a vast inheritance of experience is packed in me. I have lived thousands of years.' (*W,* 138) Louis can only see himself as a discrete individual by divorcing himself from the wide, historical continuum which makes up his existence. This dramatizes another problem of language exposed by Wordsworth: his suggestion in *The Prelude* that books emphasize division and neglect the universal, for, 'while they most ambitiously set forth I Extrinsic differences, the outward marks I Whereby society has parted man I From man, neglect the universal heart' (XIII. 217). In Louis, Woolf questions whether the self which she (like Wordsworth) attempts to preserve from dissolution is individual or collective. [11]

Woolf plays with ambiguities about what constitutes the self in her presentation of the six figures in *The Waves*: while each speaker is named and has her or his own life-story, they also have a group identity. [12] Their relationship is analogous to the two polarities indicated by object-relations theory: consciousness of self where the speakers assert their individuality, as when Neville uses his moment of being to distinguish himself from his friends; and a sense of the self as part of other people, which is found at times when they join together as a group, and also in the themes which their individual moments of being have in common. Yet the relationship between the speakers can also be mapped onto Woolf's engagement with Wordsworth. Woolf identifies herself with Wordsworth in the various projections of herself and her interests in *The Waves*, as his ideas surface in the speeches of her characters. In the moments of unity among her six figures, Woolf suggests a construction of a subject in which the ego does not defend the illusion of its own autonomy (as posited by Freud's Oedipal theory), but recognizes the importance of self-in-relation (as outlined in object-relations theory). This reconfiguration of the self to include the other informed Woolf's description of the authorial Mind in the drafts, as one who is 'not concerned with the single life, but with lives together' (*HD,* I. 9); it also facilitates Woolf's intimacy with Wordsworth by enabling her to appropriate and transform his ideas into her own.

---

[11] Louis is partly based on T.S. Eliot, and some critics have identified echoes of Eliot's work in *The Waves.* See Allen McLaurin, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp.133–34, and Josephine O'Brien Schaefer, *The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1965), p.141. Woolf is, however, less in sympathy with Eliot than with Wordsworth on the question of poetic identity: for example, Woolf's uncertainty about whether Louis's identity is collective or individual suggests a scepticism towards Eliot's idea of tradition and the *individual* talent, whereby one great and 'really new' work of art can change the nature of a tradition (*Selected Essays,* p.15).

[12] Susan Gorsky, '"The Central Shadow": Characterization in *The Waves*', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 18:3 (1972), 449–66.

Woolf's concern with 'lives together' is demonstrated in collective moments of being, such as the moment of unity the characters experience at the party for Percival. The characters achieve a transitory unity by looking at the same thing — the flower, or Percival himself — from different angles. Their monologues describe their unity as a structural formation: Susan notes that 'a circle has been cast on the waters; a chain is imposed', and Louis says, 'see us fixed, see us displayed, see us held in a vice' (*W,* 116). The six friends leave the party believing that the seven-sided flower they have created will endure, and 'join the innumerable congregations of past time' (*W,* 119–20). The party is followed by news of Percival's death, and the hope for unity takes on the elegiac potential of compensating for loss: as Gillian Beer has pointed out, the seven-sided flower echoes Wordsworth's poem 'We Are Seven', in which a child insists that she is one of seven siblings, despite the fact that two of them have died (*W,* 252, n.104). Although this consolation proves to be transient because the six friends see themselves as a 'six-sided flower' the next time they meet, *The Waves* nonetheless raises questions about how images might endure: in other words, it questions the possibility of a literary work which 'might live' as Wordsworth hoped.

Woolf's description of the moment of unity in spiritual terms as a 'communion', and the characters' hope that they have created something eternal and universal invokes a Wordsworthian vision of the sublime:

> The soul when smitten thus
> By a sublime *idea,* whencesoe'er
> Vouchsafed for union or communion, feeds
> On the pure bliss, and takes her rest with God. (VIII. 672)

However, although Woolf's characters experience communion, it is not centred on God, for her mysticism reaches after something unknown, rather than a single, named deity. Woolf's depiction of communion between her characters seems to undermine the connections with the divine — the claims of access to origins — which Wordsworth asserts in his poem.

In order to understand how Woolf dealt with the mystic element of the novel, it is necessary to take a closer look at the kinds of systems of belief she invokes. Woolf's description of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley in 'The Pastons and Chaucer' suggests that she shared their sense of mystery:

> . . . among writers there are two kinds: there are the priests who take you by the hand and lead you straight up to the mystery; there are the laymen who imbed their doctrines in flesh and blood and make a complete model of the world without excluding the bad or laying stress upon the good. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley are among the priests; they give us text after text to be hung upon the wall, saying after saying to be laid upon the heart like an amulet against disaster —
>
> 'Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone'
>
> 'He prayeth best that loveth best I All things both great and small'
>
> — such lines of exhortation and command spring to memory instantly. (*CR* I, 17–18) [13]

Woolf conceived of *The Waves* as 'an endeavour at something mystic, spiritual' (*D,* III. 114), but since she saw Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley as being able to 'lead' readers to 'the mystery', her attempt to deal with the subject might be seen as secondary to their achievement. [14] Using Harold Bloom's analogy of the precursor standing between the later poet and the

---

[13] The quotations are from Wordsworth, 'Elegiac Stanzas: Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by George Beaumont' (l.53); and Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner* (l.614), *Poems* (London: Everyman, 1963, repr. 1983).

[14] Woolf's other 'priests', Shelley and Coleridge, were also influential. Coleridge's influence is discussed in Chapter 8, below. Woolf twice quoted Shelley in her diary while composing *The Waves* (*D,*

Muse, it could be said that if Wordsworth can write about the mystery with authority (and so is truly an author) and has access to the origins of mystery (and so has originality), then Woolf as a later writer might be expected to exhibit anxiety about her own authorship and originality.

However, Woolf's description of the Romantic poet's words as 'amulets against disaster' suggests that a Bloomian reading is not appropriate, for an amulet protects one against bad luck, rather than depriving one of good. Woolf also used the words of Wordsworth, to express ideas which she felt she shared with them, for example, when she quoted *The Prelude* in her diary as a statement of her own interests. Sharing a writer's words becomes a means of achieving intimacy and of identifying with them, rather than setting up defences against them. Woolf's perception of Wordsworth as a poet who has access to 'the mystery' impacts upon *The Waves* in a diffuse and complex way, for she engages with and responds at length to the spirituality expressed in his poetry. Woolf explores Wordsworth's ideas in the earliest draft of the novel in a series of buried allusions to his 'Immortality Ode'. The draft begins as the protagonists are literally born out of the sea:

> waves succeeding waves; endlessly sinking & falling; ... waves that were ~~the forms~~ ... of many mothers, & again of many mothers, & behind them many more, endlessly sinking & falling, & lying prostrate, & each holding up ... as the wave pass its crest ... a child.
>
> For every wave, ... sank ... cast a child from it; before it sank into the obscure body of the sea. (*HD*, I. 9, 10. Ellipses replace deletions in the original.)

Woolf's description of the children arriving out of the sea echoes Wordsworth's vision of 'that immortal sea | Which brought us hither', a place to which one can travel in imagination and 'see the Children sport upon the shore, | And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore' (ll.167–71). Where the sea in Wordsworth's poem is a metaphor for the traffic of the soul between heaven and earth, the image of the mothers in Woolf's draft suggests a female presence and female creativity, and physical birth. The passage could be read as a celebration of childbirth, where the children are carried on the amniotic waters out of the body of the sea while their mothers lie prostrate.

III. 113, 153), using his words, like her quotation from *The Prelude* in the diary note discussed above, to express her attitude towards her own creative process. Woolf's identification with Shelley surfaces in the novel in the figure of Rhoda, who takes up words from his poem, 'The Question', and uses them as 'amulets against disaster' (*W*, 33). For further discussion of Woolf's allusions to Shelley in *The Waves*, see Gillian Beer, introduction to *The Waves*, pp.xv and n., and xxix ff.; and J. Holt McGavran, Jr., 'Shelley, Woolf, and *The Waves:* A Balcony of One's Own', *South Atlantic Review*, 48:4 (1983), 58–73.

Through this allusion, Woolf portrays birth as a spiritual and physical event. Far from celebrating physical birth, Wordsworth describes the body as a 'prison house' in which the immortal soul, which has come from heaven, resides during life. Wordsworth suggests that immortality is proved by the recollections or 'intimations' of past existence experienced by small children. Woolf hints at a similar phenomenon in the first draft of *The Waves,* where the children have visions of life beyond the here and now, for 'moments of clairvoyance seize specially the young mind, which is not yet attached by fibres' to the mundane and ordinary. However, childhood for Woolf is not the blessed state which Wordsworth believes it to be, but an unhappy time, partly because of a child's openness to intimations, which are among the horrors of childhood: 'the terrible revelations; the faces that look out from behind leaves; ~~the surprises; the intimations; the beckonings; the sudden~~ shadows on the ceilings'. Two of the children are especially open to this sort of experience: Susie, who is described as 'one of those ~~ancient prophetesses~~ ... to whom the Lord spoke', echoing Wordsworth's eulogy of the child as 'Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!' (l.114) and Louis, who in the earliest drafts, feels a calling to the Christian ministry (*HD,* I. 20).

The Christian overtones in Louis' calling and Susie's status as a Prophet disappear after the earliest drafts; Woolf reworks ideas from the 'Immortality Ode' to question Wordsworth's access to mystery by undermining the religious assumptions within his poem. Though Wordsworth's beliefs were not entirely orthodox, [15] the 'Ode' does presuppose the existence of God as a transcendent being and creator: 'trailing clouds of glory do we come | From God, who is our home: | Heaven lies about us in our infancy!' (l.64). Woolf's draft challenges this assumption through the figure of Louis: Woolf paraphrases Wordsworth's image of life after birth as 'but a sleep and a forgetting', [16] so that Louis thinks of life as 'a dream', but also as a 'stage of being; some long meditation', implying that life is not just a 'forgetting' but a conscious experience. Louis' visions are not of a past existence in heaven, but of life in other cultures at other times. His life is:

---

[15] Stephen Gill describes Wordsworth as 'a profoundly religious poet' whose poetry 'eschews doctrine and dogma and is not Christ-centred' (*Wordsworth: The Prelude,* Landmarks of World Literature series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.39–40).

[16] l.58. Wordsworth's image is possibly derived, in its turn, from Shakespeare, as an inversion of Shakespeare's idea of the pre-birth and post-death states as sleep: for example, 'Our little life | Is rounded with a sleep' (*The Tempest,* IV. 1. 157) or 'To die, to sleep' (*Hamlet,* III. 1. 60).

> some long meditation, begun when the pyramids were still building in Egyptian sands ... For he had ... existed endlessly; & now; on this ... particular day was forced to state the result of those dreams, those ~~pre-natal meditations, charactered upon the walls of his mind~~ (*HD,* I. 11)

Instead of suggesting personal existence in Heaven before birth and after death, this passage comes closer to evoking the Jungian collective unconscious. Woolf offers a psychological rather than spiritual explanation for the phenomenon Wordsworth describes, thus questioning his thesis that immortality is assured by children's memories of Heaven. In this way, she casts doubt upon Wordsworth's access to arcane knowledge and questions his 'authority'. In place of God, who is central to transcendence in *The Prelude,* Woolf posits the fragmentary echoes from human history which linger in the mind. The gathering of echoes is part of the structure of the drafts, for the lonely mind is a 'power that centralises, what is otherwise ... lost ~~gathering together~~ in its mind, not ~~by any means,~~ all that was said ... but ~~some~~ fragments ~~& then, setting to work to make them coherent; for the world would now begin.~~' (*HD,* I. 6). As a narrator figure, its role is to collect these echoes and put them into an intelligible order — thus prefiguring the efforts of Louis in the published novel, and Woolf herself in 'A Sketch of the Past', to create wholeness from broken pieces.

Woolf subverts the central concept of Wordsworth's 'Ode', to posit a different sort of immortality, in the form of a continuity within human existence, linking Ancient Egypt (a period in the early history of civilization) with the present day. She suggests that though the individual is not immortal, the human race has continued for centuries, and something of that history remains in the individual. Louis's perception of himself as part of a wider, collective existence shifts the focus away from individual life and towards human life in general: Woolf's picture of the children being born out of the 'endlessly sinking & falling' waves presents human life as an endless process. In her account of Louis' 'pre-natal meditations', Woolf stresses the idea of a self which is not unitary but is formed through the influence of past lives. In doing so, she questions the concept of original thought. The individual consciousness cannot trace itself back to the unitary origin of 'God, who is our home', as it does in Wordsworth's poem, but it is formed and informed by the weight of the whole history of consciousness.

Woolf reworks Wordsworth's image of the wave to underline this process in the published novel. Louis echoes Wordsworth's Ode when he has an intimation of the sea from which he emerged: 'I dash and sprinkle myself with the bright waters of childhood' (*W,* 53). The sea here is not a symbol of the glory experienced in childhood, but it warns that individual identity may be subsumed by a collective existence, as waves gather and break and become part of the body of the sea. As Louis says when the friends meet at Hampton Court, 'our separate drops are dissolved; we are extinct' (*W,* 188) for each group member has lost individuality. The episode re-capitulates the birth-scene from the earliest drafts, for, seeing his friends from a distance, Louis finds that they appear not as people but as fish:

> 'The net is raised higher and higher. It comes to the top of the water. The water is broken by silver, by quivering little fish. Now leaping, now lashing, they are laid on shore. Life tumbles its catch upon the grass. There are figures coming towards us. Are they men or are they women? They still wear the ambiguous draperies of the flowing tide in which they have been immersed.' (*W,* 193)

Seen from a distance, his companions lose their humanity and their individuality, and become an amorphous catch of fish. This scene invokes but subverts Wordsworth's description of a vision of shepherds in the distance, a 'border experience', in which they appear to be giants, so that humankind is ennobled and the poet inspired with 'love and reverence | Of human nature' (*Prelude,* VIII. 278). Woolf presents a border experience in which the human form is not ennobled but primitivized: the Christian overtones of Wordsworth's poem are overwritten with Darwinian implications that no form of life is exalted, because all species ultimately evolved from sea creatures and had a common origin in the sea. [17] At the close of the Hampton Court episode, Neville suggests that human life might return to the water, for 'we are scarcely to be distinguished from the river' (*W,* 194).

Woolf rewrites Wordsworth's image of the persistence of individual existence before birth and after death, to suggest that the individual may have a part in a wider collective existence that continues beyond the life-span of one person; and that individuals may have broken away from one common source. This is suggested in Woolf's presentation of the six figures as a group, for as Schaefer (p.140) points out, the novel charts their separation and their re-joining. In childhood, they are relatively undifferentiated and growing up involves a process of painful separation from one another: 'We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies' (*W,* 202). Their lives begin to take very different courses until they experience a moment of unity at the party; they resume their separate lives, until the meeting at Hampton Court, when they appear to lose individuality and be drawn back together: 'we only wish to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been severed' (*W,* 194). Finally, the narratives of all six characters are taken over and re-told by one person, Bernard, who carries on the task of bringing fragments into a coherent whole, practised by the narrator in the drafts and by Louis in his moment of being.

---

[17] Woolf's engagement with Darwinian ideas has been explored at length by Gillian Beer, for example in 'Virginia Woolf and Pre-History', in *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective,* ed. by Eric Warner (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.99–123.

Bernard recapitulates and conflates the life-stories of himself and his friends, by using images associated with the other characters, such as Neville's apple tree, and describes scenes which originally appeared as the dreams and imaginings of others. Bernard takes on a composite identity in which the physical attributes and experiences of the others are centred in his one body: 'Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt.' (*W,* 241) The other characters are lost in, but also in some sense continue as part of, the figure of Bernard. Woolf's presentation of the common life of the six characters suggests that although individual lives are mutable, collective existence may be more durable.

Woolf's subversion of Wordsworth's spirituality in the 'Ode' also has an impact on her treatment of the question of literary posterity. Woolf explores the question of what might be permanent early on in the summing-up, when Bernard says that: 'On the outskirts of every agony sits some observant fellow who points; who whispers'. Although the phrases he hears only sketch out a scene from his childhood, Bernard suggests that the shadowy figure is important for indicating something beyond the personal perspective: 'he directed me to that which is beyond and outside our own predicament; to that which is symbolic, and thus perhaps permanent, if there is any permanence in our sleeping, eating, breathing, so animal, so spiritual and tumultuous lives' (*W,* 208). Bernard's vision offers glimpses of a writer outside himself, whose whispers and fragmentary phrases hint towards, but can only barely offer assurance of, something permanent.

Bernard's sense of something symbolic and permanent beyond the self is reminiscent of Wordsworth's account of crossing the Alps in *The Prelude.* Wordsworth describes the 'immeasurable height | Of woods decaying, never to be decayed, | The stationary blasts of waterfalls' (VI. 624), suggesting that there may be permanence in repetition, for constant change produces constant stasis. The passage goes on to argue that the features of the mountains:

> Were all like workings of one mind, the features
> Of the same face, blossom upon one tree;
> Characters of the great Apocalypse,
> The types and symbols of Eternity,
> Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (VI. 636)

The monumental Alps are emblems of their creator and thus are symbols of an Eternity beyond the confines of self. But, as Mary Jacobus has argued, this perception threatens the individual consciousness with extinction. The ideas of the end of the world and of Eternity itself make Wordsworth aware of his mortality both as a person and as a writer, and so, as Jacobus suggests, 'unless both face and writing can be redefined as transcendental, inscription undoes the autobiographer's imagined presence in the text to leave only dead letters'. In order to evade the idea of his own death, Wordsworth tries to substitute divine writing — that is, the mark of the creator on the mountains — for his own. [18]

Wordsworth suggests that behind the individual author is the powerful figure of the Author-God. This concept was articulated in more detail by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria,* a work which, like *The Prelude*, began as a literary autobiography. Coleridge argues that the *will* of the poet is more important in poetry than his receptivity to outward impressions and his passive acts of memory. He defines the will in terms of spirit or self-consciousness, the 'SUM/I AM', in which the will of the creator-poet is at one with the will of the Creator-God: 'We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in God.' Poetic imagination thus becomes 'a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM' (*Works,* 7, i. 283, 304). In *The Waves,* Woolf challenges Wordsworth and Coleridge's attempts to conceive of a kind of writing which is authoritative and can gain posterity because it has access to the figure of the Creator-God.

---

[18] Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on* The Prelude (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.7.

This challenge is made most strongly in Woolf's account of Bernard's confrontation with death. Here she subjects to a rigorous test any ideas about the possibility of permanence, and of the lasting power of literature. The sequence revolves around two closely related ideas: the loss of self and the loss of language. It begins when Bernard describes losing his sense of self, which was 'like a death'. He pictures the experience as an eclipse, where not only self but the whole world disappears: 'The woods had vanished; the earth was a waste of shadow. No sound broke the silence of the wintry landscape. No cock crowed; no smoke rose; no train moved. A man without a self' (*W*, 238). Bernard's loss of self enables him to take a new perspective. In his account of the sunlight returning after the eclipse he takes on the perspective of the opening interlude of the novel, which described a sunrise. He sees a 'vapour as if earth were breathing in and out, once, twice, for the first time', echoing the waves in the opening interlude which were 'sighing like a sleeper'; the description of the glimmer of daylight as if 'someone walks with a green light' echoes the image of sunrise at the opening of the novel as a 'lamp' held over the sea by a woman. Bernard's vision of the earth breathing 'for the first time' suggests the creation of the world: the idea of a second creation is stronger in the drafts, where Bernard says, 'Look at the world being reborn without me' (*HD*, I. 390). Coming at this stage in the novel, the idea of a second creation conjures up images of the Apocalypse, as it is described by the narrator of the Book of Revelation (21. 1): 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.' This allusion to the last book in the Bible balances the echoes of Genesis, which Kate Flint has detected in the opening chapter of the novel.[19] (In light of this, Neville's experience of death among the apple-trees takes on suggestions of Eden and the Fall.) As the opening of *The Waves* conflated the birth of individuals with the creation of the world, so the ending of the novel conflates the death of an individual with the end of the world. The Apocalyptic allusions continue in the picture of Bernard riding against death on horseback, for the book of Revelation depicts a battle in which kings and warriors and the 'beast' are destroyed by a shadowy god-like figure on horseback.[20]

---

[19] *The Waves*, ed. by Flint, p.229n1.

[20] Revelation 19. 19–20: 'And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him ... These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.'

These allusions to Biblical accounts of the beginning and end of the world suggest that the novel takes on epic proportions, to encompass the whole of human life. Woolf does not accord these Biblical ideas any authority, for Bernard points at a truth which lies beyond expression in language. Although he feels as though someone is showing him the truth — 'The old nurse who turns the pages of the picture-book had stopped and said, "Look. This is the truth"' (*W,* 240) — nothing is revealed to the reader. Instead, Bernard deals with echoes: he quotes the nurse, who is pointing to something which the reader cannot see; he is not narrating the story in her picture-book, but merely adding 'a comment in the margin' (*W,* 200). The sense of mystery in *The Waves* is conveyed in echoes: Woolf implies that while one can hear echoes of voices which hint at the mysterious, no-one has the power or authority to describe it directly.

Woolf's denial of authority in writing is reinforced when Bernard's loss of self is followed by a loss of language. Speaking from a place beyond himself, he says that 'he is dead, the man I called "Bernard", the man who kept a book in his pocket in which he made notes — phrases for the moon, notes of features' (*W,* 242–43). The ephemeral nature of language is emphasized when Bernard drops the book containing the phrases he had been collecting all his life, suggesting that there is now no difference between his notebook and the rubbish which will be 'swept up by the charwoman when she comes wearily at dawn looking for scraps of paper, old tram tickets, and here and there a note screwed into a ball and left with the litter to be swept up' (*W,* 246). Although these reflections on the ephemeral nature of writing echo Wordsworth's concerns in *The Prelude* that though books 'aspire to unconquerable life ... they must perish' (V. 20, 22), Woolf goes further to suggest that true expression is outside the range of language. Thus she undercuts the power of her 'priests' to 'lead you straight up to the mystery'.

Woolf further questions the possibility for a writer to transcend language and engage with mystery at the end of the summing-up, where Bernard says that he prefers silence to phrases: 'How much better is silence.' (*W,* 246) Woolf shows that, having spent all his life dealing with language, silence is both his enemy and his death as a writer. Silence and death are linked explicitly in the first holograph draft, which ends with the statement: 'Silence has sheathed me in her dark wings. Sealed & shrouded I stand now at the door.' (*HD,* I. 398) Bernard's encounter with Silence alludes to but subverts Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode'. In the Ode, silence is an image used to build up a reassuring notion of Eternity: 'Our noisy years seem moments in the being I Of the eternal Silence' (I.158). Woolf, by contrast, challenges Wordsworth's idea of immortality, by suggesting that silence means death for a writer, who can have no existence outside words.

Although Woolf ultimately denies that writing can create anything permanent out of the ephemeral, the final paragraphs reinforce the necessity, even the compulsion, to continue the effort of capturing life and truth in art. As Bernard walks out of the restaurant, he sees a new day dawning and becomes aware of the pattern of 'the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again', suggesting that life will continue without him. Bernard's narration closes as he charges to face Death, his enemy — but the novel still has one narrating voice left, for it ends with an interlude: *'The waves broke on the shore'.* This functions as a reminder of the rhythm of the waves, which are part of this eternal renewal. It suggests that literature is the result of a collective process and not of individual effort alone; that no work of art is a permanent, monumental achievement, but that future generations are needed to sustain the process of renewal.

By exploding the unitary self presupposed by *The Prelude* and by challenging the idea of a great work of literature that 'would live', Woolf sought to unpick Wordsworth's legacy and achieve intimacy with him. By undermining the ideas of authority and originality which Wordsworth sought to defend, Woolf suggested that no author had access to an absolute source. Instead, she defined the author's role as gathering echoes and fragments and weaving them into a coherent whole which might mimic a hypothetical source. Instead of placing value on priority, *The Waves* places greater emphasis on the later writer's role of gathering together what has gone before. By absorbing Wordsworth into her writerly identity, Woolf reconfigured his posterity so that she could carry on his work in her own. This strategy informs her attempt to manage multiple influences in *The Waves.*

Whereas Woolf uses Louis to represent the collective unconscious and to configure the individual as the product of history, she uses Bernard to explore the relationship between the individual writer and a wider literary tradition. Bernard's identity (as a character and a writer) is forged by mimicking his favourite authors: as Neville scornfully remarks, 'Once you were Tolstoy's young man; now you are Byron's young man; perhaps you will be Meredith's young man; then you will visit Paris in the Easter vacation and come back wearing a black tie, some detestable Frenchman whom nobody has ever heard of.' (*W,* 70) For much of the novel, Bernard's receptivity to the ideas of others is treated with ridicule: he dresses in a cloak to mimic Byron, but his attempts to be a romantic hero are foiled by his clumsy behaviour and sloppy appearance. Bernard's attempt to write in the style of his hero is ridiculous. He tries to emulate Byron in 'the speed, the hot, molten effect, the laval flow of sentence into sentence that I need' (*W,* 63), alludes to the volcanoes which appear with some frequency in Byron's poetry; but Byron himself had ridiculed the volcano as a 'common-place ... a tired metaphor'.[21] Although Bernard remarks that 'My true self breaks off from my assumed' (*W,* 64), this does not imply that he has established a firm identity, merely that he has recognized the shedding of a false one.

Woolf uses the ambiguity surrounding Bernard's 'true self' to question Wordsworth's accounts of an unadulterated, unitary self which emerges in solitude: 'Gently did my soul | Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood. | Naked, as in the presence of her God' (*Prelude,* IV. 150). Bernard does not find that solitude reaffirms his sense of who he is, but it makes him more aware that the places and people he has experienced are integral parts of his being: 'when I have left a room, and people talking, and the stone flags ring out with my solitary footsteps, and I behold the moon rising, sublimely, indifferently, over the ancient chapel — then it becomes clear that I am not one and simple, but complex and many' (*W,* 61).

In spite of Woolf's gentle mockery of Bernard for his apparent lack of originality and his receptivity to the words and ideas of others, he is vindicated for his awareness of a wide range of human experience. Bernard comes into his own in the final section of the novel when he becomes the sole narrator. Although, as Elizabeth Heine has remarked, Bernard reaches an understanding which 'is to a great extent a repetition of a belief that has been obvious throughout', [22] such repetition is not a flaw but a central feature of the section. Where the first eight episodes are made up of the quoted speeches of the six figures, Bernard's summing-up takes this process to a new dimension because he is reiterating what was already reported speech. [23] Far from telling an original story, Bernard is repeating a number of stories whose origins are lost among many layers of reportage and mediation. Woolf had echoed other writers in previous sections of the novel, but in the final episode of the novel she creates a large-scale echo of her entire book — with all its inherent layers of quotation.

---

[21] *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron,* ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1905). *Don Juan,* XIII, st. 36.

Bernard's summing-up is a palimpsest: he tells a communal narrative, composed of fragments of the lives of all the six friends. In effect, he performs the function of the Lonely Mind of the drafts, which sought to write a narrative which is 'not concerned with the single life, but with lives together' (*HD*, I. 9). The parallel is made clear in Bernard's stated intention 'to seek among phrases and fragments something unbroken' (*W*, 222), to use words to suture these fragments, 'shattering and piecing together ... I netted under them with a sudden phrase. I retrieved them from formlessness with words' (*W*, 225). [24] A similar process takes place with the fragments of text which comprise the summing-up — echoes of the words of the other characters and quotations from a wide range of literature. Some of these echoes take the form of quotes within quotes, adding to the palimpsest effect — for example, he echoes Susan's refrain, 'I love; I hate' (possibly taken from Dostoevsky's novel, *The Possessed),* later repeating it as 'love and hate the heat of the sun', thus blending it with the lines from *Cymbeline* 'fear no more the heat of the sun' (*W*, 207, 222). [25] The layering of quotation is an expression of Bernard's composite identity as a speaker, which is composed through the absorption of many other voices. The chain of echoes in Bernard's speech suggests a kind of elegiac consolation because it implies that dead authors (and his absent friends) achieve posterity through him. However, posterity does not perpetuate the authority of the original author. This is illustrated in the clustering of quotations that takes place in the final soliloquy: Bernard says that 'one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time — "Hark, hark, the dogs do bark," "Come away, come away, death," "Let me not to the marriage of true minds",[26] and so on. "He attained some success in his profession....He inherited a small sum of money from an uncle"' (*W,* 217; ellipses in original). Yet two of the phrases he labels with the others as nonsense come from Shakespeare.

---

[22] 'The Evolution of the Interludes in *The Waves*', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly* 1:1, (Fall 1972), 60–80 (p.77).

[23] J.W. Graham analyses the layers of reportage in 'Point of View in *The Waves:* Some Services of the Style', in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Criticism*, ed. by Thomas S.W. Lewis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), pp.94–112.

[24] Bernard's narration also resembles the Lonely Mind of the drafts in that it takes place at a dinner table. Where the Mind looked at a tablecloth and imagined the children being born out of the sea, Bernard 'dips' with his spoon to retrieve his friends from 'the pool', like the fish from the early drafts (*W*, 204).

[25] Woolf makes a note of the phrase 'love, hate' in her reading notes for *The Possessed:* Berg, Holograph Reading Notes, vol. 14. The quote from *Cymbeline* had formed a refrain in *Mrs Dalloway* (see Chapter 4, above). Its appearance here suggests the reflexivity between Woolf's novels.

Stephen M. Ross has suggested that in the 'polyphonic' novel, 'the author is subjugated (subjugates himself?) to "his" voice — and thus "he" vanishes, leaving the novel originless'.[27] In *The Waves,* 'Woolf's voice' does not vanish but she takes up other voices as part of her own. Rather than rendering the novel 'originless', the use of quotation marks suggests that the speeches and the material quoted in them have sources. *The Waves* thus becomes a novel with multiple sources rather than no origins at all. This perception brings us closer to understanding Woolf's experience in the closing stages of the novel as seeming 'only to stumble after my own voice, or almost, after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad)'. The comment suggests that Woolf's experience of writing the novel was a process of hearing and repeating echoes from those other voices.

Woolf's engagement with Wordsworth's ideas led her to a series of reflections on authorship which went further than the fascination with the creative process found in her diary notes. In appropriating and re-working *The Prelude,* Woolf deconstructs the values of authority, permanence, and originality which Wordsworth sought to justify in his poem. She takes apart the concept of the author as a single, creative genius by emphasizing the fluidity and multiplicity of identity (which is latent, but not made explicit in Wordsworth's ideas): in the relationship between the six figures, who are both separate entities and form one common identity; and in the many different layers of quotation within the novel which suggest that literature is a process of the repetition and renewal of phrases. *The Waves* implies that a text cannot be driven simply by one named, embodied individual but that the authorial 'voice' comprises a collection of observations by other voices, many of which are anonymous. In this way, she develops a conception of authorship in which the influence of others is central to the creative process and not detrimental to it. The 'anxiety of influence' is irrelevant to this conception of influence: authorial identity is not a single ego defending itself from others but is fluid and forges multiple connections with others.

---

[26] The last two quotations are from *Twelfth Night* II. 4. 51; and Sonnet 116 respectively.

[27] Stephen M. Ross, '"Voice" in Narrative Texts: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*', *PMLA* 94:2 (1979), 300–10 (p.305).

Woolf builds on this conception of authorship and influence to posit a revised notion of permanence in literature. Wordsworth wrote *The Prelude* to explore his own creativity — or establish his own poetic identity — as preparation for writing a literary work that would last. In face of the difficulties which might prevent the individual author from attaining posterity, Wordsworth transcends the individual perspective to assert a more profound conception of authorship in the form of a divine creator. Wordsworth suggests that his work is centred in something eternal when he writes of his inspiration coming from God, and, as in his account of crossing the Alps, when he accepts his own mortality and the transience of his work by imagining a greater author who has stamped his image on the mountains. Woolf subverts Wordsworth's conception of posterity by fragmenting the notion of a single, immutable origin of writing. Although she hints that it might be possible to transcend the self and commune with nature (though not with God), Woolf's account of Bernard's death suggests that we have no way of knowing what lies beyond society and the self. She questions the possibility of immortality, either for an individual or for a literary work. Instead, she points to the possibilities for cultural continuity and survival through change. Through interiorizing Wordsworth's words and ideas, Woolf made him one of many continuing presences within her writing and aesthetic. Her narrative perspective further suggests how literary continuity could come about. Her text is full of narrators who lurk outside the speeches of her six main figures, for the structure of quotations within quotations suggests that someone is telling a story to someone else. The echoes from the many speakers cannot lead to truth — which is silence and stasis — but their reverberations offer hope for the continual making and renewing of fictional worlds.

Chapter 8

Talking with Coleridge in *Between the Acts*

In the peroration to *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf hints that the mounting political crisis of the late 1930s was having a profound effect on her attitude to literature. Having discussed various strategies for preventing war, Woolf remarks to her fictional correspondent that 'even here, even now' she is tempted

> to listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets, answering each other, assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only; to discuss with you the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity. But that would be to dream ... the dream of peace, the dream of freedom. But, with the sound of the guns in your ears you have not asked us to dream. (*3G,* 163)

The passage suggests a deep desire for intimacy with other writers, through the pleasures of reading: such closeness might, she suggests, reassure her of the possibility of unity. The experience of hearing poets 'answering each other' is part of the dialogue or conversation which goes on between reader and writer, and is bound up with the imaginary conversations with and between other writers which Woolf constructed in her novels. However, the passage also suggests that it may be impossible to enjoy poetry at this time, for the dissonance of the guns and the gramophone (Woolf's shorthand for the establishment and its war machine), [1] impinge upon the harmonious sounds of poetry and interrupt the voices of the poets. Woolf implies that literature could even be irrelevant and politically unhelpful at such a critical time. The tension between these two positions had an effect on Woolf's relationship with her literary past towards the end of her life, and it informs her engagement with her precursors in her last novel, *Between the Acts*. As this chapter will demonstrate, Woolf turned to the poetry and philosophy of Coleridge in her attempts to deal with these issues; his work was deeply implicated in her final success in accommodating the literary past.

Woolf's growing fascination with Coleridge in the late 1930s was a major part of the impetus behind her desire to read poetry at this time of crisis. Woolf was reading 'masses' of letters by Coleridge and Wordsworth while writing the early draft of *Between the Acts* (*D,* V. 289), and she turned to Coleridge for relief from current affairs. In a diary entry in August 1940 she notes that she 'cd. expand & soar — into P[oyntz]H[all]. into Coleridge', if it were not for interruptions such as 'men driving stakes digging fresh gun emplacements' (*D,* V. 310). [2] Woolf invokes Coleridge in support of her pacifist argument in the last footnote to *Three Guineas,* and, as Hermione Lee suggests, 'Coleridge's voice, from *Three Guineas* onwards through the war, provided her with a life-line, an alternative to the "besieging voices" of radio and loudspeaker and manifestos'. [3] Coleridge espouses the values of unity and harmony which Woolf pits against the forces of destruction, for example in his vision of nature united by 'one intellectual Breeze, I At once the Soul of each, and God of all' in *The Eolian Harp* (l.47). Woolf implicitly uses Coleridge's philosophy to justify her temptation to turn to poetry as a respite from war, for her wish to make 'unity out of multiplicity' reflects his attempt, as he described it in *Table Talk,* 'to reduce all knowledges into harmony' (*Works,* XIV, i. 248).

---

[1] See *Three Guineas*: 'society, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is grinding out with intolerable unanimity "Three hundred millions spent upon arms"' (p.121).

Woolf also identified with Coleridge in her desire to hear poets answering one another, for he saw reading as an activity in which 'you revisit so many venerable friends with whom you can converse' (*Works,* 7, i. 225). Like her, Coleridge saw writing as a kind of dialogue, for several of his works were 'conversation poems'. He also offered Woolf a model for working with influences, for his work was deeply connected with that of others. As Woolf describes him in 'How it Strikes a Contemporary', his critical writings emerge out of profound engagement with the work of others: she imagines him 'brewing in his head the whole of poetry and letting issue now and then one of those profound general statements which are caught up by the mind when hot with the friction of reading as if they were of the soul of the book itself' (*CE,* II. 155). Coleridge wrote his major poems during the period 1797–98, when his friendship with William and Dorothy Wordsworth was at its height: he testified to his friend's influence in 'To William Wordsworth', where he hails him as one of the 'truly great' who 'Have all one age, and from one visible space I Shed influence!' (ll.50–52). The presence of other writers in Coleridge's work suggests that he might not simply be *one* of the poetic voices Woolf wants to hear, but that his voice may in itself constitute 'the voices of poets answering one another'.

---

[2] Woolf was also writing an article on Coleridge at this time and this reference could apply to the article as well as the poet himself. The ambiguity suggests the close relationship between Woolf's practice as reader and writer.

[3] *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), p.737.

Woolf regarded Coleridge as part of her literary inheritance and recognized him as a channel for influence. While working on an early draft of *Between the Acts,* she described him in 'The Man at the Gate':

> ... it is vain to put the single word Coleridge at the head of a page — Coleridge the innumerable, the mutable, the atmospheric; Coleridge who is part of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley; of his age and of our own; Coleridge whose written words fill hundreds of pages and overflow innumerable margins; whose spoken words still reverberate, so that as we enter his radius he seems not a man, but a swarm, a cloud, a buzz of words, darting this way and that, clustering, quivering, and hanging suspended. (*CE,* III. 217)

Woolf pays tribute to Coleridge's influence. Coleridge supplied Wordsworth with part of 'We are Seven'; with Wordsworth, he had a profound effect upon the next generation of Romantic writers, Keats and Shelley; and, as Woolf suggests, his influence continued to her own era. However, despite recognizing his power, Woolf does not see him as a monolithic, oppressive father-figure. She recognizes the multiplicity of Coleridge's poetic identity, implying, perhaps, that his ability to receive and to dispense influence are connected. The vocabulary used to describe Coleridge in the passage — he is 'atmospheric', his work overflows, reverberates, swarms — suggests the transgression and breakdown of boundaries between individuals.

Woolf takes up Coleridge's 'multiple' voice in *Between the Acts.* This process is illustrated in the draft in a graphic way. Woolf 's comment that Coleridge's words 'overflow innumerable margins' refers to the copious notes he made in the margins of books. His marginalia — where his hand-written comments are wrapped around the borders of printed pages and incised between lines of printed text — form a visual illustration of the way in which he interlaced his own words with those of others. [4] Woolf similarly interlaces her text with Coleridge's work in a particularly graphic way in a draft of *Between the Acts,* where she inserts a description of Coleridge in the form of an early draft of 'The Man at the Gate'. The article reviews *Coleridge the Talker,* a collection of memoirs edited by Richard Armor and Raymond Howes. [5] The fragment contains this sketch of Coleridge as a talker:

> Two pious American editors have collected a large volume .... of the comments of those who heard Coleridge talk in the flesh. It is the only way of getting at the truth — to have it broken into splinters

---

[4] For a visual example, see the frontispiece to *Works,* 12, i. The editor, George Whalley, estimates that 'some 8000 notes have been recovered from about 450 titles (nearly 700 volumes) written by some 325 authors' (12, i. xiii).

[5] *Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments,* with a critical introduction by Richard W. Armor and Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1940).

> by many mirrors. The truth about Coleridge the talker seems to have been that he rapt some to the seventh heaven; bored others to extinction, and made one girl giggle irrepressibly. In the same way his eyes were brown to some, grey to others and again a very bright blue.[6]

The passage suggests that Coleridge's multiplicity cannot be appreciated by drawing the parts into unity, but by seeing those parts in isolation. Instead of summing up the picture presented by Armor and Howes's volume, Woolf fractures that picture by drawing attention to the book's inconsistencies. She welcomes the attempt to tell the 'truth' about Coleridge, but notes that the book can only reach after that truth by presenting *fragments* of incompatible wholes; we cannot know what is true, but only how things 'seem' from one point of view or another.

It is not uncommon to find passages from a review in the midst of the manuscript of a novel in this way, for Woolf often made notes for her essays in the book that she was using for her fiction. However, this passage is remarkable because it fits into the flow of Woolf's narrative in *Between the Acts.* The insertion comes shortly after her description of the last scene of Miss La Trobe's pageant, where the cast hold up shiny objects to form a broken mirror in which the crowd sees a distorted picture of itself. The reflection of the crowd in those objects is as disjointed as the picture of Coleridge in Woolf's sketch. In the page immediately preceding this insertion, the words of the crowd are broken up, as snatches of a song, 'Dispersed are we', are heard coming from the gramophone, interspersed with scraps of conversation from the villagers. We overhear only snatches of their talk, as we see only glimpses of Coleridge in the extract from Woolf's review which follows. The fragment of the essay ends with a description of Coleridge's mannerisms — 'He acted as he talked, now, if he felt the interest flag, pointing to a pic[t]ure, caressing a chi[l]d, and' — ending mid-sentence. The part-sentence leads in to the end of a sentence on the next page of the draft of *Between the Acts* ... 'feeling for his tobacco pouch. I like a man to be natural — not always on a perch'. The page continues with scraps of conversation which slip from subject to subject, as the locals debate academic questions — 'Were the oracles, if I'm not being irreverent, a foretaste of our own religion?' — or allude to contemporary scientific debates — 'It's odd that science, so they tell me, is making things (so to speak) more spiritual ... The very latest notion, so I'm told is, nothing's solid...' (*BA,* 178–79; ellipsis in original). This conversation is a microcosm of Coleridge's *Table Talk:* a collection of informal speeches, transcribed by his son-in-law Henry Nelson Coleridge, in which he strikes at the heart of complex subjects, briefly, before moving on. Thus *Between the Acts* mimics Coleridge's voice in an exaggerated version of the disjointed structure of *Table Talk*.

---

[6] Berg Collection, holograph reading notes, vol. 24 (1939–40), p.167b, verso.

In this way, Woolf incorporates Coleridge into her draft and makes her own work mirror his: but in both cases, she is responding to her own view of him as multiple and fragmented. While modelling her work on his, she also remakes him in her own image: in other words, she has ingested and mastered his influence. Woolf's essay on Coleridge's daughter, Sara (written in the same month as 'The Man at the Gate') indicates how she saw her own relationship with Coleridge. Sara Coleridge spent many years making a memorial to her father, annotating and editing his works, with her husband Henry. Yet unlike Woolf's portrait of Mrs Hilbery in *Night and Day*, who lives her life in the shadow of her dead father's fame, she argues that Sara Coleridge was not overpowered by the past, but that she drew on it in order to find and develop her self:

> Much of it was not self-sacrifice, but self-realization. She found her father, in those blurred pages, as she had not found him in the flesh; and she found that he was herself. She did not copy him, she insisted; she was him. (*CE*, III. 225)

Again, Woolf sets Coleridge at a distance: his writing is not complete, final or even lasting, but a set of 'blurred pages'. This puts Sara Coleridge in a position of strength as the one who deciphers this work and transmits it to the world. Her activity is liberating, for it leads to self-realization through identification with another: Woolf's own identification with Coleridge could be seen as a means of self-realization.

Woolf's description of Sara Coleridge suggests a process which is very similar to the one I outlined in my analysis of Woolf's response to Leslie Stephen in *To the Lighthouse*. Part of the process by which Woolf reconciled herself to her father was to take on board his ideas on freethinking and his position as a dissenting 'outsider', but to apply them to her own ideas about women's outsider status. Like Sara, who found her father in his 'pages, as she had not found him in the flesh', Woolf began to encounter Leslie Stephen through his work, so that he comes back 'differently ... more as a contemporary' (*D*, III. 208). In 'Sara Coleridge', Woolf identifies herself with Sara as *a* daughter, but, by implication, as *Coleridge's* daughter. And as in *Orlando*, where Woolf develops ideas about inheritance which do not rely upon traditional, legal structures, but upon empathy with — and even love for — the past, Woolf here tries to unseat the importance of blood relationships and supplant them with intellectual sympathies. She writes that Sara Coleridge is 'not of his flesh indeed, for she was minute, aetherial, but of his mind, his temperament' (*CE,* III. 222). If Woolf saw herself as being of Coleridge's 'mind, his temperament', then she too could call herself his daughter.

Woolf's attempt to find herself in Coleridge and to construct herself as his daughter can be seen in the similarities between 'The Man at the Gate' and her accounts of her own development as a writer. In 'The Man at the Gate', Woolf draws on an account by De Quincey to describe Coleridge as 'paralysed', 'incapable of action', 'a passive target for innumerable arrows, all of them sharp, many of them poisoned' (*CE,* III. 217). In 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf describes her own experience of a similar state of passivity in 'exceptional moments' which 'brought with them a peculiar horror and a physical collapse; they seemed dominant; myself passive' (*MB,* 83). [7] This suggests that her picture of Coleridge is drawn through the filter of her own imagination and sensibilities; that she wilfully called him up as an extension or mirror image of herself. In 'The Man at the Gate' and 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf suggests that both she and Coleridge are writers by virtue of their sensibility and their ability to convert such experiences into words. She imagines Coleridge using words as a comfort: 'To confess, to analyse, to describe was the only alleviation of his appalling torture ... he uses words most often to express the crepitations of his apprehensive susceptibility. They serve as a smoke-screen between him and the menace of the real world.' (*CE,* III. 217, 219) She describes her own need to use words as protection in similar terms — words provided a way of making a moment 'whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me' (*MB,* 84).

Where Woolf saw Coleridge using words to hide from the 'real world', she presents herself as using words to make reality clearer, and to see reality 'whole'. Her emphasis on her own pursuit of wholeness contrasts with her caricature of Coleridge as a fragmented, disparate presence. In the same way as Sara Coleridge discovered herself while transmitting Coleridge's 'blurred pages' to the world, Woolf suggests that she found her own writerly identity by making complete what Coleridge only achieved in part. However, the situation is more complex than this, for Woolf shared one of her central images for the ideal of wholeness with Coleridge himself. This can be seen in the last of the three 'moments of being' described in 'A Sketch of the Past'. Here she draws on Coleridge to frame a childhood experience which, she suggests, was one of the things which led to her becoming a writer:

---

[7] The description resembles both Rhoda's agonies and Bernard's creativity in *The Waves.*

> I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; 'That is the whole', I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later. (*MB,* 82)

Although Woolf is describing an incident from early childhood, she reclaims and frames that memory in language and imagery she had acquired later. [8] In this account of her creative response to the plant, Woolf appropriates a model of poetic creativity from Coleridge. As M.H. Abrams has pointed out, Coleridge's 'concept of poetic creativity ... — that self-organizing process, assimilating disparate materials by an inherent lawfulness into an integral whole — borrows many of its characteristic features from the conceptual model of organic growth'. [9] Coleridge used the analogy of the plant growing from a seed to emphasize the importance in poetry of fusing elements into unity:

> In the World we see every where evidences of a Unity, which the component parts are so far from explaining, that they necessarily pre-suppose it as the cause and condition of their existing *as* those parts: or even of their existing at all ... That the root, stem, leaves, petals, &c., [of this crocus] cohere to one plant, is owing to an antecedent Power or Principle in the Seed, which existed before a single particle of the matters that constitute the *size* and visibility of the Crocus, had been attracted from the surrounding Soil, Air, and Moisture. (*Works,* IX. 75–76)

The growth of the plant — where the elements of root, stem, leaves, and petals together comprise a complete plant, and can all be traced back to one origin in the same seed — here becomes an analogy for a metaphysical and mysterious unity underlying the world. Coleridge goes on to say that while the rational inference of his argument is that there is 'One universal Presence' behind the world, the phenomenon can also be experienced spiritually, by means of revelation. [10] Woolf also attaches importance to revelation when she argues that, following the 'shock' of a 'moment of being' there comes 'a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words' (*MB,* 84). Though

---

[8] That 'Sketch of the Past' represents Woolf's mature account of her childhood can be seen in comparison with 'Reminiscences' (*MB,* 32–69), written in 1907–08, in which she recounts her childhood, but makes no mention of the 'moments of being'.

[9] *The Mirror and the Lamp,* p.124.

[10] 'A *positive* Insight belongs to a more advanced stage: for spiritual truths can only spiritually be discerned. This we know from Revelation, and (the existence of spiritual truths being granted) Philosophy is compelled to draw the same conclusion.' (*Works,* IX. 77)

Coleridge couches his argument in the Unitarian terminology of the 'One universal Presence' behind the world, and Woolf uses a more provisional expression, 'some real thing behind appearances', the process described by both is remarkably similar.

While Woolf shared Coleridge's desire to generate unity or wholeness through writing, she feared that the possibility of wholeness was under constant threat from outside forces which generated conflict and fragmentation. This is at the heart of her suspicion that the temptation to listen to 'poets answering one another' was only a useless 'dream' at a time of crisis. Woolf takes these ideas further in *Between the Acts* by interrogating and deconstructing the concept of wholeness she shared with Coleridge. She retells the moment of being described in 'A Sketch of the Past' from the perspective of a small boy, George, looking at a flower as he plays in the grass:

> The flower blazed between the angles of the roots. Membrane after membrane was torn. It blazed a soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light. All that inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling of yellow light. And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his knees grubbing he held the flower complete. (*BA*, 10)

In George's perception of the integrity of the single flower and the connections between the grass, tree, and flower Woolf draws on Coleridge's notion of organic unity in nature (which informed her account of her own moment of being). In his vision George becomes part of what he sees: his mind, 'the caverns behind the eyes', is filled with light from the flower and with its smell. The distinction between inner and outer space has been elided, and he seems to become one with the flower. The passage explores the process by which the human mind becomes part of nature, a theme found in 'The Eolian Harp' where Coleridge speculates that nature inspires thought and poetry:

> ... what if all of animated nature
> Be but organic Harps diversly fram'd,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,
> At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (I.44)

Here, as in the sequence in *Between the Acts,* inner and outer worlds are elided, for all of nature — including humankind — is compared to the harp, and all are said to share one soul, which derives from God. Woolf is critical of Coleridge's theological perspective in *Between the Acts.* Her narration of the scene from a child's perspective suggests that the belief in unity with nature might be a naïve one: the moment of being is interrupted by the intrusion of the adult world, when George's grandfather frightens him by using a rolled-up newspaper as a mask. Since *Between the Acts* is set in the summer of 1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, the newspaper would be carrying news of the mounting crisis, thus representing forces which frustrate any hope for unity.

Woolf further criticizes Coleridge when she revisits the theme of his poem 'Fears in Solitude' (written in Somerset while England was threatened with invasion by France in April 1798) in her description of Giles Oliver's thoughts on the threat to the English countryside posed by a German invasion:

> At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens and blast the Folly. He, too, loved the view and blamed Aunt Lucy, looking at views, instead of — doing what? (*BA*, 49)

Here, Woolf enlarges upon the suggestion that it is impossible to commune with nature in the face of war. Contemplating the landscape, as Giles's aunt Lucy Swithin does, is a Romantic response: but, though Giles blames Lucy, he is in an impasse because he, too, loves the view and cannot think of an alternative. Like Giles, Coleridge contrasts the current peace and beauty of the landscape with future destruction, as he imagines 'What uproar and what strife may now be stirring I This way or that way o'er these silent hills', and fears 'Carnage and groans beneath this blessed sun!' (ll.33, 39). However, Coleridge, like Lucy Swithin, concludes that 'solitary musings' and 'nature's quietness' will allay his fears and renew his sense of charity towards his fellow human beings. Woolf exposes the inadequacy of Coleridge's solution in Giles, who does not feel charitable towards his companions: he is contemptuous towards members of his family and their visitors and has a strained relationship with his wife, Isa. The Olivers' marital tension acts as a veiled attack on the hypocrisy of Coleridge's professions of charitable feelings, since his own married life was turbulent. Interpersonal tensions, like the threat of international hostilities, produce conflicting voices which frustrate attempts at wholeness and unity.

Woolf's engagement with Romantic ideas about humankind's relationship with nature is partly conditioned by changes in warfare between the 1790s and 1930s. In 'The Leaning Tower', written in 1940, Woolf noted that the war was close for her, because she could hear gunfire over the channel and Hitler's voice on the radio, in contrast to the time of the Napoleonic Wars when Coleridge and Wordsworth were writing, when news travelled slowly and the conflict was distant (*CE,* II. 164). However, Woolf's response to Romanticism was more profoundly conditioned by the changed conception of nature between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coleridge's conception of unity with nature was essentially a spiritual one, based on the assumption that nature was provided for human contemplation and use. His concept of 'animated nature' (found, for example, in the 'The Eolian Harp', quoted above), was essentially restricted to humankind: sentient beings which could 'tremble into thought', possessing a concept of spirituality and so capable of receiving the 'one intellectual Breeze' which became 'the Soul of each, and God of all'. Woolf questions this anthropocentric assumption in Giles's prediction that 'guns would rake that land into furrows', which suggests that agricultural cultivation and destruction caused by warfare are much the same and that any attempt by people to intervene in the natural world can be damaging.

Woolf further examines the implications of humans using the natural world for their own purposes in her examination of the relationship between the artist and nature in the attempts of a playwright and director, Miss La Trobe, to stage a village pageant in the grounds of Pointz Hall. La Trobe is caught between imposing meaning on the natural environment and subordinating her own will to nature. For example, as she surveys the performance space she thinks that the trees

> were not too regular; but regular enough to suggest columns in a church; in a church without a roof; in an open-air cathedral, a place where swallows darting seemed, by the regularity of the trees, to make a pattern, dancing, like the Russians, only not to music, but to the unheard rhythm of their own wild hearts. (*BA,* 59–60)

This passage traces a progression from Miss La Trobe's attempt at artifice — her idea of using the trees to represent a church — to a celebration of the energies of nature itself, where the activity of the swallows supplants her intended scenario as the focus of interest. (The passage also suggests a transition away from organized religion, symbolized by the church or cathedral, which has an anthropomorphic deity, to pantheism, suggested in the wild activities of nature.) La Trobe's quandary echoes the Romantic preference for art drawn directly from the natural world, rather than based on artistic convention: it can be seen as an extension of Coleridge's suggestion in *Biographia Literaria* that the greatest poetry 'while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature' (*Works,* 7, ii. 17). Woolf takes

Coleridge's suggestion to its logical conclusion by suggesting that art breaks down when it encounters the natural world.

The nature which impinges upon La Trobe's play is not simply the sentient, spiritual force to which Coleridge responded, but a post-Darwinian nature which recognizes the chain of being which links humankind with the animal and vegetable worlds. [11] This can be seen at two key points in La Trobe's play when the narrative breaks down and nature intervenes. In both cases, an implicit connection is made between the failure of art, the fall of great civilizations, and a resulting resurgence of the natural world. The first time this happens, the actors have been singing about the fall of the great civilizations of Babylon, Ninevah, Troy, and Rome. The words of their song, '*Where the plover nests was the arch ... through which the Romans trod*' (*BA*, 125; ellipsis and italics in original), suggest that nature takes over as birds build their nests in the crumbling architecture of a once-great civilization. Just as La Trobe feels that her illusion has failed, the gap is filled by the noise of a herd of cows:

> It was the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment ... The cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion. (*BA*, 126)

The sound of the cows is 'primeval': it undoes the effects of civilization, and suggests a return to the primal swamp which Darwin identified as the origin of all life.

However, Woolf also retains a Romantic view of the spiritual in nature, for their sorrowful sound articulates the sense of loss which La Trobe is trying to convey. Nature similarly inscribes a sense of cultural loss the second time it intervenes in the play, when Miss La Trobe tries to present a scene entitled, 'The present time. Ourselves.' She wants the audience to see present-time reality, with no action depicted on-stage. However, the audience sits waiting for the traditional ending to an Empire Day pageant, 'a Grand Ensemble. Army; Navy; Union Jack', and cannot make sense of the play without it. Once again, La Trobe feels that she has failed; but then the rain falls: 'Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping'. This intervention of nature generates an emotion — not one of triumph, as a jingoistic parade would have done, but one of sorrow — and La Trobe feels that 'Nature once more had taken her part' (*BA*,

---

[11] For Woolf's response to Darwinism in *Between the Acts*, see Gillian Beer, 'Virginia Woolf and Pre-History' (Warner, pp.99–123); and Elizabeth Lambert, 'Evolution and Imagination in *Pointz Hall* and *Between the Acts*', in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations*, ed. by Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993), pp.83–89.

160–62). Untamed nature fills a gap left after art (or 'culture') has broken down, but continues its sentiment.

Although these transitions indicate the breakdown of culture, they also rehearse in an extreme form the Romantic values of expression over form, and rugged nature over structured landscaping. The intervention of nature after the failure of art, and after the song about the fall of great civilizations, is reminiscent of Wordsworth's comment on the end of the Reign of Terror:

> To Nature, then,
> Power had reverted: habit, custom, law,
> Had left an interregnum's open space
> For *her* to move about in, uncontrolled. (*Prelude*, XI. 31)

Wordsworth had advocated a return to human nature — common-sense and intuition — for guidance; Woolf, however, invokes a surrender to the animal and vegetable elements of nature, over the human or 'spiritual'.

Woolf's underlying attraction to Romantic values informs her vision of how art might be rebuilt after the breakdown of civilization. When the pageant is over and La Trobe stands alone thinking that her play has been ephemeral, a flock of starlings attacks a nearby tree: 'The whole tree hummed with the whizz they made, as if each bird plucked a wire' (*BA,* 188). The image of birds plucking wires is suggestive of Coleridge's equation of natural sounds with harp music in 'The Eolian Harp', or of the birds in 'The Nightingale' which 'all burst forth in choral minstrelsy, I As if some sudden gale had swept at once I A hundred airy harps!' (1.80). Standing there, Miss La Trobe discovers the germ of her next piece, for 'something rose to the surface', and she imagines a curtain rising to reveal two figures on the stage. Shortly afterwards she hears the first words of the new play:

> Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning — wonderful words. (*BA,* 191)

The passage compares Miss La Trobe's creative process to the sowing of seeds, for the words sink into the mud like seeds, they germinate there as the mud becomes 'fertile', and they grow, or rise up, out of the mud. Woolf's organic image for writing resembles Coleridge's model for poetic creativity, discussed earlier, but her emphasis on mud takes the image further to suggest a return to the primeval swamp. This botanical image for the imaginative process posits the possibility of the regeneration of artistic creativity after the kind of interregnum envisaged by Wordsworth, but Woolf does not give details of what form such creativity might take. We do not know what the 'wonderful words' are; and we do not know what the people on stage are saying. The picture of a curtain rising to reveal two figures on the stage prefigures the last words of *Between the Acts* — 'Then the curtain rose. They spoke.' — which also leaves us in ignorance of what happens next. La Trobe's vision of a new play only hints towards a new kind of writing which might emerge through conflict and social upheaval. In order to look forward, Woolf looks back to Coleridge and Wordsworth, whose work had also spanned a period of war and cultural revolution; but she supplements the Romantic view of the importance of human engagement with the 'spiritual' in nature, with a post-Darwinian recognition that humankind might not have any special status, for it had its origins, along with other species, in the primal swamp. This re-reading of Romanticism suggests a conception of nature which was more inclusive and heterogeneous than that of Wordsworth or Coleridge.

Woolf illustrates the problems of inclusivity and heterogeneity in the commentary on the play by the vicar, Rev. Streatfield:

> 'I thought I perceived that nature takes her part. Dare we, I asked myself, limit life to ourselves? May we not hold that there is a spirit that inspires, pervades ....' (the swallows were sweeping round him. They seemed cognizant of his meaning ...) (*BA*, 173)

Streatfield acts as a voice for Romanticism, for his notion of the inspirational power of nature is very close to Coleridge's sentiments in 'The Eolian Harp'. While Streatfield's suggestion is partially endorsed, for the appearance of the swallows seems to lend credence to what he says, his analysis is also compromised when his speech is interrupted by intimations of war, as 'Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead.' (*BA*, 174) The audience goes home disputing Streatfield's words: although they repeat his adage that 'Nature takes part', they also comment that 'if one spirit animates the whole, what about the aeroplanes?' (*BA*, 178). The intrusion of the planes raises questions about whether one spirit animates the whole: for either the planes are antithetical to the natural world, and cannot be subsumed into one spirit; or, resembling *wild* ducks, they represent a possibly malign and certainly uncaring force of nature which cannot be controlled and is indifferent to human suffering.

Woolf thus deconstructs assumptions about wholeness or unity by suggesting that any attempt to see all things as part of one being must also account for discord and heterogeneity. This problem is explored on a social and political level. As Streatfield suggests, part of the reason for the pageant is to bring the villagers together as a community and he interprets the play as an appeal for social unity: 'To me at least it was indicated that we are members one of another. Each is part of the whole' (*BA,* 172). [12] The creation of unity and order out of anarchy and chaos, particularly through art, derives from Coleridge and, further back, from Rousseau. In the last footnote to *Three Guineas,* Woolf quotes Coleridge's argument that the ideal political constitution would be one which all people would obey voluntarily, not by coercion, but by reference to their own reason. Coleridge supported his statement by translating an adage from Rousseau (also quoted by Woolf): 'To find a form of society according to which each one uniting with the whole shall yet obey himself only and remain as free as before.' (*Works,* IV, i. 192; *3G,* 206) However, Woolf noted that this position was complicated by the rise of Fascism, where people were coerced rather than reasoned into obedience. She suggests that such forces should be met with resistance: 'we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life.' (*3G,* 163) In the face of Fascism, a sense of social unity, of oneness, must lead people to opposition and conflict, not to consensus. [13]

This perception led Woolf to examine and revise Coleridge's view of the social role of poets. Coleridge argued that poets in a liberal society should draw people in: poetry should be 'the high spiritual instinct of the human being impelling us to seek unity by harmonious adjustment, and thus establishing the principle, that *all* the parts of an organized whole must be assimilated to the more *important* and *essential* parts' (*Works,* 7, ii. 72). Poets and other learned people are attuned to the 'natural' harmony of a society, and can help to reconcile individuals to it. Coleridge drew on acoustic theory to describe the aesthetic and social role of the artist or poet in creating harmony. He argued that:

---

[12] Coming from a clergyman, the speech also carries echoes of St Paul's idea that the Christian Church is made up of 'many members, yet but one body' (I Corinthians 12). Woolf had read and criticized St Paul while researching *Three Guineas.*

[13] The problem seems to have been partly anticipated by Coleridge, for in the second part of the essay quoted above he argues that Rousseau's theory has limited applications: the practical and expedient reasons for the foundation of states mean that reason cannot be the chief priority; and whole groups or societies — in his case, the Jacobins who perpetrated the Reign of Terror — can be misled by a collective lack of reason.

> All harmony is founded on a relation to rest — on relative rest. Take a metallic plate, and strew sand on it; sound an harmonic chord over the sand, and all the grains will whirl about in circles or other geometrical figures, but always round or as it were depending on some point of sand relatively at rest; sound a discord, and every grain will whisk about without any order at all, in no figures and with no points of rest.
>
> The Clerisy of a Nation — its learned — its poets — its writers are these points of relative rest. There would be no [order, or] harmony without them. (*Works,* 14, i. 284–85)

In this metaphor (drawn from Chladni's research into acoustics), Coleridge makes a connection between harmony and order: between a harmonic sound and the ordered visual patterns (the 'Chladni figures') which a harmonic chord produces in sand; and by implication, between poetry and social order. He suggests that poets and other learned people are able to intuit harmony and ensure its survival: they provide static points, around which other people can orientate themselves.

Woolf's perception of the artist's role in society was complicated by her perception of the political situation of the 1930s. Her awareness that nature included elements which were indifferent and even hostile to humankind led her to question Coleridge's assumptions about the 'natural' order. She also saw that the ability of artists to recognize and generate harmony and stasis was compromised in a time of crisis. As she had noted in 'The Artist and Politics' in 1936:

> [The artist's] studio now is far from being a cloistered spot where he can contemplate his model or his apple in peace. It is besieged by voices, all disturbing, some for one reason, some for another. ... With all these voices crying and conflicting in his ears, how can the artist still remain at peace in his studio, contemplating his model or his apple in the cold light that comes through the studio window? (*CE,* II. 232)

Artists could no longer respond simply to their subject-matter, but had to cope with the intrusion of world affairs. However, she was also sceptical about what might happen when writers responded to changing times and adopted intrusive outside voices as their own. In 'The Leaning Tower', she criticized the work of MacNeice, Day Lewis, Spender, and other poets of the 1930s for 'the pedagogic, the didactic, the loud-speaker strain that dominates their poetry' (*CE,* II. 175). She suggested that it was no longer possible to write poetry for private contemplation, as Wordsworth did, and that the Thirties poets, writing in a climate of social change and under the threat of war, addressed the public. This compromised their art: the poet in the thirties, she says, 'was forced to be a politician. That explains why the artist in the thirties was forced to be a scapegoat' (ibid., p.176).

Woolf sets up implicit and troubled contrasts between the situation of contemporary writers and Romantic ideals of creativity in her depiction of Miss La Trobe's attempt to stage a pageant. By making La Trobe a playwright and director rather than a poet or painter, Woolf depicts an artist who does not work in solitude, but, as Brenda Silver has noted, practises her art within a community. [14] Her creativity is contingent upon the actors, the audience, and her surroundings, and is affected by the mounting political crisis. La Trobe cannot create her play as a unified whole, for she has to contend with interruptions: the audience's chattering and lapses of attention, two intervals and a shower of rain. These interruptions represent some of the conflicting voices which, Woolf argued, impinged upon the artist in the 1930s. And like the thirties poets, whose work Woolf thought to be dominated by 'the pedagogic, the didactic, the loud-speaker strain', La Trobe incorporates the noises of modern life into her work: the pageant is driven by the sound of the gramophone, and she addresses the audience through a loud-speaker, an instrument which Woolf associated with Fascist dictators. La Trobe also attempts to be didactic, to make the audience see her point of view, although this didacticism is also shown to be ineffective because she continually despairs of any possibility of 'making them see'.

Like the thirties poets, La Trobe has taken the role of the politician, for her aim to teach her audience is dangerously close to a desire to coerce. Nicknamed Bossy, she plans her play like a naval battle: she stands 'in the attitude proper to an Admiral on his quarter-deck', and decides 'to risk the engagement out of doors' (*BA,* 57). The analogy between the staging of a pageant and a military engagement plays on an ambiguity implicit in the title of the novel: the acts of the play (between which the narrative of the novel takes place) are analogous to the two 'acts' of the World Wars between which the novel is set. And although La Trobe has organized the pageant for the villagers, she is an outsider to the community: she is not local and is possibly of foreign extraction, she is a lesbian with a mysterious past, and she is not befriended by the locals for she takes her post-show drink in the pub alone. In her social isolation, Miss La Trobe is, like the poets of the thirties, something of a scapegoat.

---

[14] 'Virginia Woolf and the Concept of Community: The Elizabethan Playhouse', *Women's Studies,* 4:2–3 (1977), 291–98 (p.295).

Woolf's description of the pageant suggests that social and aesthetic harmony are interrelated, for Miss La Trobe's desire to generate social cohesion goes hand-in-hand with her attempt to preserve the unity of her work. La Trobe is sensitive to the mood of the community: as the disparate crowd assembles to watch the play, she realises that their 'minds and bodies were too close, yet not close enough' (*BA,* 60) — not free to think independently, but not close either. As they wait for the first scene to begin they are united in expectation: even the click of a gramophone needle has the power to unite them, for the 'tick, tick, tick seemed to hold them together, tranced' (*BA,* 75). As an author, La Trobe struggles to preserve the unity of the crowd and of the play against the 'torture' of interruptions: the arrival of latecomers and the need for an interval, for which La Trobe has 'gashed' a scene. The song played at the start of the interval — 'Dispersed are we' — suggests that La Trobe orchestrates the departure of her audience, though she also realises that the sense of community among them cannot be sustained once the drama is over. La Trobe 'summons' her audience to gather for the second act by playing a gramophone record, which renews a sense of harmony among the villagers:

> The inner voice, the other voice was saying: How can we deny that this brave music, wafted from the bushes, is expressive of some inner harmony? ... Music makes us see the hidden, join the broken. (*BA,* 107, 108)

The 'inner voice' which makes individuals feel harmony with one another echoes a suggestion made by Mrs Swithin that 'all are one. If discordant, producing harmony — if not to us, to a gigantic ear attached to a gigantic head ... so ... we reach the conclusion that *all* is harmony, could we hear it.' (*BA,* 157) The tune is associated with the sounds of the natural world: 'the trees with their many-tongued much syllabling, their green and yellow leaves ... bid us ... come together' (*BA,* 108). However, this harmonious music is threatened with interruption by the chattering of the villagers, and Miss La Trobe, waiting in the wings, is aware that the audience has a tendency to disperse as well as to unite: 'Every moment the audience slipped the noose; split up into scraps and fragments.' (*BA,* 110) The short-lived nature of the social harmony generated by La Trobe's play, and the fact that this harmony is achieved by an act of coercion (with the audience corralled together as though in a noose), suggests that the modern artist only has limited powers to impose unity. Woolf thus both invokes and interrogates Coleridge's belief in the power of the artist to unite human beings, by demonstrating that this is an impossible aim in the modern age.

Woolf's picture of Miss La Trobe also suggests that the creation of social cohesion may not be a desirable aim for artists in an age when social order and conformity were being championed by totalitarian states on both right and left. Her portrait of Miss La Trobe displays an awareness that the fascist dictators possessed a charisma capable of uniting a crowd. In *Three Guineas,* Woolf associated megaphones with the European dictators, and gramophones with the establishment; both of which stand for a threat to the freedom of the individual. Yet both are used in La Trobe's play: the scenes of the pageant are linked by gramophone music, and towards the end of the play there is a speech by 'a megaphonic, anonymous, loud-speaking' voice (*BA,* 167–68). It makes an appeal for social cohesion: *'how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built up by ... orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?'* (*BA,* 169).[15] The speech emphasizes the fragmented nature of modern society and the artificial and potentially coercive nature of 'civilization', in contrast to Coleridge's ideal of individuals obeying the laws of society through an appeal to reason.

In the closing scene of the pageant, Woolf hints at a way in which artists may be able to manage the fragmentation of society without resorting to coercive tactics. She does this by proposing a new aesthetic which can deal with contradictions and fragmentation. Jazz music is used as a metaphor for this shift. The last scene of the pageant is introduced by a modern tune which some audience members dismiss as cacophony. They see it as typical of the 'young, who can't make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole' (*BA,* 164). The villagers' view of modern music as iconoclastic reflects a revolution taking place in popular music in the early 1940s, as the more melodic jazz of the swing era gave way to bop. Jazz began to acquire its characteristic syncopated style as it became 'predominantly chromatic with frequent cross-rhythms, interchange of metre, division of beat between bass and drums and so on'.[16] In other words, established approaches to tone, rhythm, and the hierarchy of instruments were being disrupted and re-shaped into a new musical form. Jazz music symbolizes a process of breaking with established structures to form new, complex, and (to the untrained ear) distorted ones.

---

[15] The phrase 'orts, scraps and fragments' is a literary fragment, for it is found in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (V. 2. 157–58). The phrase 'scraps and fragments' is also used by Wordsworth in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' (1.10).

This process is given a visual counterpart in the pageant, as the actors appear on-stage holding a variety of shiny objects, which they move about, so as to reflect the audience in parts rather than as a whole. The audience find the gimmick 'distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair' and in the chaos which ensues, divisions are broken down: 'the reticence of nature was undone, and the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved' (*BA,* 165). This breakdown of the assumed order of being is emblematic of the post-Darwinian position that the human race has descended from animals. (It also plays on an anxiety voiced by Coleridge, that humankind was only separated from other animals by the actions of Reason and the spirit. For example, he acknowledged that 'the lower or bestial states of Life rise up into action and prominence', in human beings, for example in madness which he described as 'the sleep of the Spirit' (*Works,* 14, i. 107), and so Woolf unpicks and exposes as superficial the assumption of order she had inherited from Coleridge.) The wall of mirrors deconstructs the familiar notion of art (and drama) as a 'mirror of nature', which, as M.H. Abrams has pointed out, was a popular metaphor for poetry among the Romantics. Coleridge uses the mirror metaphor in *Table Talk* to describe his philosophy:

> My system is the only attempt that I know of ever made to reduce all knowledges into harmony; ... I have endeavored to unite the insulated fragments of truth and frame a perfect mirror. I show to each system that I fully understand and rightfully appreciate what that system means; but then I lift up that system to a higher point of view, from which I enable it to see its former position where it was indeed, but under another light and with different relations; so that the fragment of truth is not only acknowledged, but explained. (*Works,* 14, i. 248–49)

This passage holds fragmentation and unity in tension, for although Coleridge claims that his aim is to 'reduce ... to harmony' and to 'unite' fragments of truth, he nonetheless appreciates the discrete nature of each fragment or system, and aims to take it firstly on its own terms and then to view it from another perspective (as though viewing it in a second mirror) in order to understand it. Thus, his endeavour for unity — or oneness — is undercut by his recognition of the importance of the multiplicity of perspectives.[17] Woolf's reading of the mirror imagery in *Between the Acts* picks up on these fault-lines in Coleridge's apparently unified vision. She uses the fragmentary mirror to exploit multiplicity of perspectives and undermine the possibility of creating unity and coherence out of difference. When the mirrors stop moving, the audience sees itself, but it is 'not whole by any means' (*BA*, 167), thus resisting (and exposing as false) the desire to unite the disparate, which Coleridge aimed to do in his philosophy.

---

[16] Denis Arnold (General Editor), *The New Oxford Companion to Music,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), I. 989.

Woolf proposes a new aesthetic (founded in a re-reading of Romanticism), which stresses the necessity to accommodate discordant elements without reducing them to harmony, and to take multiple points of view without fusing them into Coleridge's one 'perfect mirror'. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf is more concerned with managing and accommodating conflict than with achieving resolution. Even when the audience is united — such as at the end of the mirror scene, when the gramophone plays a conventional piece of music which nobody can identify but everybody recognizes — there is an undercurrent of dissonance beneath the harmony:

> the distracted united ... from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder ... they crashed; solved; united. (*BA*, 169, 170)

The sequence suggests that the resolution achieved at the end of a piece of music is in part the result of discordant notes sounded earlier; that unity can only be achieved (and perhaps only be perceived) through the experience of conflict and fragmentation. This idea is echoed in a social setting at the end of the novel, when the narrator notes that Giles and Isa Oliver must fight before they can enter an embrace, from which 'another life might be born' (*BA*, 197). War and interpersonal tension cannot simply be eradicated, but, if seen through to their conclusion, may end in new creativity. Woolf holds unity and dispersity in tension during the novel, for she suggests that unity can only be perceived in contrast with fragmentation. Ultimately, *Between the Acts* resists resolution — musically, artistically, and socially. As Judy Little notes, the pageant does not restore a sense of community, even though it resembles a festive comedy or seasonal ritual; [18] or, as Melba Cuddy-Keane argues, Woolf celebrates 'an irreversible dismantling of order and actually advocates a permanent instability'. [19] This process has implications for Woolf's response to her artistic and literary inheritance.

---

[17] The metaphor of the multiple mirrors also had a contemporary counterpart in Cubism. As Roger Fry observed of the work of Matisse: 'By the magic of an intensely coherent style our familiar every day world ... has been broken to pieces as though reflected in a broken mirror and then put together into a far more coherent unity in which all the visual values are mysteriously changed — in which plastic forms can be read as pattern and apparently flat patterns are read as diversely inclined planes.' (*Henri Matisse* (London: Zwemmer, 1930), pp.33–34).

In the musical metaphor of jazz and the visual metaphor of the broken mirror, Woolf hints at new art forms which might be able to accommodate interruption and conflict. And although Miss La Trobe is not successful in managing interruptions, Woolf nonetheless suggests that literature in general may be able to survive interruption and the fragmentation it can bring. The metaphors of jazz and fragmented mirrors, as reactions against ideas of harmony and mimesis, are keys to understanding Woolf's treatment of the literary past in the novel. As the actors put down their reflective objects, they recite 'some phrase or fragment of their parts'. Some of these phrases had been part of the play, but many of them are taken from other works of literature: *'Home is the hunter, home from the hill', 'Sweet and low; sweet and low, wind of the western sea'* and *'Is that a dagger that I see before me?'* (*BA,* 166). [20] In these echoes, the literary past is reflected in a fragmentary way (as the audience is seen in the mirrors). The mirror scene is a microcosm of the novel as well as the play, for fragmentary quotes and allusions are also part of Woolf's description of life at Pointz Hall. [21] These quotes, like those in the mirror scene, are interrupted and so heard only in snatches. For example, in the opening pages of the novel, Bart Oliver interrupts a conversation with a half-finished observation — '"I remember," the old man interrupted, "my mother..."' — then mentions his mother giving him a copy of Byron. He tries to recite a poem aloud, but only remembers three unconnected lines from two different poems: the first line of 'Hebrew Melodies', 'She walks in beauty like the night' and a conflation of the first and last lines of 'So we'll go no more a-roving' (*BA,* 4, 5). Bart's poor memory means that Byron's words appear as broken fragments within a statement which is itself an interruption of a conversation. The process of interruption is central to Woolf's treatment of the past in the novel and in the pageant.

---

[18] 'Festive Comedy in Woolf's *Between the Acts*', p.26.

[19] 'The Politics of Comic Modes in Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts', p.280.

[20] The quotes are from, respectively: Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Requiem'; Tennyson, *The Princess;* and Shakespeare *Macbeth* II. 1. 33: 'Is this a dagger, which I see before me?' (*BA,* 202 n.166).

[21] For full discussion of allusions, see Jean Wyatt, 'Art and Allusion in *Between the Acts*', *Mosaic,* 9:4 (1978), 91–100; G. Patton Wright, 'Virginia Woolf's Uncommon Reader: Allusions in *Between the Acts*', in *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk (New York: Pace University Press, 1992), 230–33.

The fragmentary quotations can be viewed in terms of the collection of mirrors which make up a composite though not unified picture of the crowd. Woolf invokes the mirror analogy in her description of the library at Pointz Hall, where she says that the eclectic set of books suggest that, if books are the mirrors of the soul, then 'the mirror that reflected the soul sublime, reflected also the soul bored' (*BA,* 15). The two perspectives cannot be unified, but must sit in tension. Woolf does not weave the parts into harmony as James Naremore suggests, [22] for the quotations remain unconnected to one another and their otherness is not reduced. However, neither are they, as Alex Zwerdling argues, 'mere cultural detritus, bits of flotsam and jetsam floating about in the characters' minds like fragments of a sunken vessel', [23] or like the 'fragments ... shored against my ruins' at the end of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.* The short quotations invoke a chorus of literary precursors, speaking from different perspectives, which together (as in Miss La Trobe's pageant) make up the wider picture of literary history. An extended description of the library in the earlier typescript of the novel makes this clear, for Woolf comments: 'What Chaucer had begun was continued with certain lapses from his day to this very morning.' [24] This suggests that lapses are as important as continuity in the evolution of literary history.

Woolf presents her composite picture of literary history as fragmented and interrupted of necessity, in order to compensate for the coming of war, the noise of modern life which constantly interrupts the making and enjoyment of art, the passage of time itself, and the inefficacy of memory. The desire expressed in *Three Guineas* (p.163) to 'make unity out of multiplicity' by listening to the voices of poets answering one another, has been replaced in *Between the Acts* by the need to find space for poetic voices between the interruptions of the gramophone, the megaphone, and casual talk.

---

[22] *The World Without a Self,* p.229.

[23] '*Between the Acts* and the Coming of War', p.231.

[24] *Virginia Woolf: Pointz Hall: The Earlier and Later Typescripts of* Between the Acts, ed. with an introduction, annotations, and afterword by Mitchell Leaska (New York: University Publications, 1983), pp.25–26.

This presentation of the literary past has profound implications for Woolf's response to influence at the end of her career. It was suggested earlier that Woolf's desire to listen to 'the voices of poets, answering one another' was a desire to listen to Coleridge's voice, which comprised voices of poets in conversation. In *Between the Acts*, Woolf suggests that such a dialogue had been interrupted by the coming of war; in the same way as she suggested that Coleridge's poetic voice was not unitary or integrated, but fragmented and shifting. Woolf's view of Coleridge is shared by other critics. For example, M.H. Abrams, describes him as a 'master of the fragment', who buried echoes and allusions in his texts and was often charged with appropriation (p.170). John Beer writes that:

> In looking at his work as a whole, it is perhaps more accurate (as Max Schultz has maintained) to speak of 'poetic voices' than of a single 'poetic voice' in Coleridge. The age demanded a new mode of expression, yet it was hard for a single man to produce this on his own. Under the encouragement of others he developed the intimate, directly expressive mode of the conversation poems, but it was a fragile growth. In periods of isolation and insecurity it was natural to fall back on a voice more like that of the poetry he had been trying to supersede. [25]

Beer's analysis proposes a dynamic relationship between originality and influence. Coleridge needed to be original, to find 'a new mode of expression', but he pursued this quest by opening himself up to influence, through dialogue with others. This is found particularly in his conversation poems, where his thoughts are addressed to specific friends, thus causing him to frame his ideas in ways which were congenial to them. For example, 'The Eolian Harp' is addressed to his wife Sara, who makes a shadowy intervention towards the end of the poem. Imagining her 'mild reproof' of his ideas, Coleridge interrupts himself to add a final stanza in a different vein, where he dismisses the earlier part of the poem as the 'shapings of the unregenerate mind'. Coleridge's conversation poems were thus in a sense influenced by their recipients. (Coleridge's conversation poems also offered Woolf examples of how poetry could accommodate and be built around interruptions.) On the other hand, as John Beer points out, Coleridge sometimes gave in to a different form of influence: when he found the new voice difficult to sustain, he reverted to styles of poetry he had inherited.

Analysed in this way, there are profound parallels between Coleridge's method and Woolf's own. Woolf, too, wanted to be innovative and push back boundaries, but, like Coleridge, she achieved this through dialogue with others. Since Woolf invokes other writers in her fiction, they can be seen as 'conversation novels': for example, Jane Austen is invoked in *The Voyage Out,* Anne Thackeray Ritchie in *Night and Day,* Leslie Stephen in *To the Lighthouse,* and, especially, Vita Sackville-West is addressed as though in a letter, in *Orlando.* Like Coleridge, Woolf incorporates quotations and allusions from other writers into her novels. Her voice, like Coleridge's, was a composite of many voices, shifting to incorporate many different styles. Yet, my analysis of *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* suggests that Woolf's sense of the presence of other voices increased during the 1930s. Woolf seems to have been aware of this, for she comments in 'A Sketch of the Past', as she looks at some of her intellectual and personal influences (her word): 'I see myself perpetually taking the breath of these voices in my sails, and tacking this way and that, in daily life as I yield to them' (*MB,* 134). In drawing on Coleridge, Woolf turned to a writer who was like herself, whose susceptibility to influence validated her own, and whose composite poetic voice provided her with a model for managing, and working with, her own multiple influences.

---

[25] Introduction to Coleridge: *Poems* (London: Everyman, 1963; repr. 1983), p.xvi.

Woolf's interrogation of the concepts of harmony and mimesis can be read as part of a complicated strategy for dealing with influence. While Woolf is in sympathy with many of Coleridge's ideas, she interrogates them to explore her doubts about her own aesthetic practice, and her uncertainty about the future. In the process, she deconstructs Coleridge to point to and open up areas of doubt and contradiction within his writing; then she claims this deconstructed (or fragmented) version of Coleridge, his work and opinions, as her own. By questioning the concept of harmony or unity, and by refusing to harmonize the disparate voices of other writers in her text, Woolf resists the idea of a writing which is the sum of its influences. By characterizing Coleridge's words as a 'swarm' (*CE,* III. 217), not a unified whole forged from the combination of his many influences, she resists the idea that he was the end result of his literary or philosophical influences, by pointing to the gaps, silences, and inconsistencies which undermine any apparently unified work of art.

In *Between the Acts,* Woolf sought to open up and explore these fissures in three ways, all of which stem from her identification with Coleridge. The first, as we have seen, is to demonstrate the intervention of nature in art: Woolf took to an extreme Coleridge's belief in subordinating art to nature in order to indicate how art and literature might emerge even after current forms were destroyed. The second is Woolf's use of parody in the novel which harnesses the multiplicity of voices she found in Coleridge and forms part of her resistance to the idea of a unified voice. Coleridge's parodies include his 'Sonnets Attempted in the Manner of Contemporary Writers', where he copied the styles of Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb, and also parodied his 'own' style; and some the translations or imitations of other poems he wrote in Germany in 1798. (Since parody was generally condemned by the Romantics, Woolf's use of it is an anti-romantic gesture, which also draws attention to Coleridge's own lapses from the Romantic aesthetic.) Miss La Trobe's play is made up of three sketches in the manner of recognizable literary styles: an Elizabethan drama of mistaken identity; a Restoration comedy revolving around a love story; and a Victorian family drama. These parodies are unlike anything else found in Woolf's novels, for even in *Orlando*, she *assimilated* older styles and vocabulary into her novel's narrative voice. In *Between the Acts* the scenes are set apart from the rest of the text as the work of Miss La Trobe, and they are recognizably and self-consciously written in the styles of previous ages. Linda Hutcheon has defined parody as 'extended repetition with a critical difference' (p.7): in *Between the Acts,* there is pleasure in repetition and recognition but also discomfort in the differences (or the dissonance) between the various styles. The acts of Miss La Trobe's play can thus be seen as differently shaped, imperfect mirrors reflecting different styles of drama within Woolf's text; the mirrors do not come together to form a whole, but whole centuries of history are left out, leaving gaps in between. Hutcheon has suggested that parody may be used in order to deflect the 'anxiety of influence' (p.96), but this is not the case in *Between the Acts*, for the sketches of the play are too generic to suggest the impact of any particular individual. Nor does Woolf use parody, as Christopher Ames has suggested, to play voices off against one another to diffuse the 'stultifying' effect of her legacy from the writers of the past.[26] Woolf suggests that literary history was not a stultifying, monolithic tradition (along the lines of the father-to-son inheritance proposed by Harold Bloom), but the product of many voices. These voices speak from many different perspectives, and the tradition also incorporates (and survives through) many 'lapses' into silence.

---

[26] 'The Modernist Canon Narrative: Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun"', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 37: 4 (1991), pp.390–404.

Woolf's third strategy for undermining the concept of the unified work of art is her use of silence. Although she enjoyed 'listening' to Coleridge's voice in his poetry and table-talk, Woolf was also aware of a silence that surrounded his words. In 'The Man at the Gate', she wrote that 'We ... when the voice stops only half an hour before he passed that July day in 1834 into silence, feel bereft' (*CE,* III. 221). This is a strangely first-hand epitaph to a man who had died almost 50 years before she was born. Silence can be seen as part of Coleridge's poetry, for his output was fragmentary. His *Marginalia* are comprised of relatively unconnected comments which rely upon their 'host' texts for their full meaning; his *Table Talk* (though not compiled by himself) rambles from one subject to another, with gaps in between; and there are lapses between the different voices he uses in his poems. Many of his poems incorporate silence by remaining unfinished: famously *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel,* but many poems which have a beginning and an end lack lines or verses at some point along the way. These silences in his texts have potential, because closure is avoided and so all possibilities suggested can be entertained. In Miss La Trobe's play, Woolf shows how silence — the breakdown of narrative and theatrical illusion — could have potential. By setting fragments of quotation against one another without joining them and particularly by frequently using ellipses in the novel, Woolf emulated the power and potency of the silences found in Coleridge's work.

The incompleteness of Coleridge's *oeuvre* made him an inspiring rather than an inhibiting precursor, for his work is a case-study in communal literary activity (by which I mean one which comprises contributions from many individuals, rather than one in which a group works together in harmony). Coleridge planned far more works than he ever completed: for example, in *Biographia Literaria,* he refers to a number of philosophical works which were never started. Rather than being a strong precursor, who left nothing for future generations to do, Coleridge readily provided work for later writers. The activity of Sara and Henry Coleridge is a case in point, for they collected and edited the first complete edition of Coleridge's poems and Henry collected his sayings into the *Table Talk.* Coleridge actually welcomed the idea of other writers completing his work. For example, in the introduction to an unfinished poem, 'The Blossoming of a Solitary Date-Tree: A Lament', he notes that he has lost the manuscript for the first two stanzas of the poem, and instead has provided a summary of their contents in prose. He adds: 'It is not impossible, that some congenial spirit, whose years do not exceed those of the Author at the time the poem was written, may find a pleasure in restoring the Lament to its original integrity by a reduction of the thoughts to the requisite metre.' (*Poems*, p.295) Although this reads like a will — for example, he suggests how old the future poet should be — and although he writes about restoring the poem to its 'original' form, as though his original thoughts could be recovered by someone else, the passage suggests Coleridge's acceptance of the communal nature of literary activity. And, as Woolf noted in her essay on Sara Coleridge, it is the later writer who is in control and who finds fulfilment in completing someone else's work, for it brings 'not self-sacrifice, but self-realization' (*CE*, III. 225).

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf drew on the idea of literature as a communal activity (which Coleridge's example suggested and justified) to move towards a more profound acceptance of influence than is found in any of her previous novels. In her last essay, 'Anon', begun while she was writing the novel, Woolf testified to the communal nature of the creative process. There she wrote about the lost writers whose work had emerged from the community: Anon was 'sometimes man; sometimes woman. He is the common voice singing out of doors'.[27] In *Between the Acts*, Woolf developed an aesthetic and practised a writing style which accommodated influence as never before: she allowed many voices to be heard within her text and exploited the potential of the fissures which opened up between them. In doing so, she pointed to a way in which literature might be able to survive the coming political and cultural crisis: not through the direct transmission of culture from one famous author to another, but by taking detours through the work of writers who are anonymous and silenced.

The process of finding power in gaps and silences is also a popular trope for the feminist reclamation of history, but here we see that Woolf had been inspired to pursue this strategy through her reading of Coleridge. Indeed, although Woolf once described Coleridge in the masculine image of the procreative '"insemination" of ideas ... into the receptive, the acquiescent, the entirely passive ear', (*CE*, III. 220) his influence can be characterized by another, more maternal, image. Gilbert and Gubar have described the legacy of literary mothers in terms of the Sibyl: the Sibylline Leaves only survive in fragments which must be put back together by future generations of women writers, in contrast to the supposedly monolithic and phallic legacy of the male writers. [28] Coleridge was a Sibyl for Woolf: some of his works were fragmentary and his output was incomplete; he was aware that works of literature were written collaboratively and he left his literary descendants room to manoeuvre. He even named one of his poetry collections *Sibylline Leaves*. What Woolf found in Coleridge was not a monolithic, phallic father figure, but a poet with gaps in his output: spaces into which she could insert her own writing.

---

[27] '"Anon" and "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Last Essays', ed. and intro. by Brenda R. Silver, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 25:3-4 (1979), 356–441 (p.382).

---

[28] *The Madwoman in the Attic*, pp.96-99.

Conclusion

Virginia Woolf's Haunted Houses

> If I looked down at my book I could see Keats and Pope behind him, and then Dryden and Sir Thomas Browne — hosts of them merging in the mass of Shakespeare, behind whom, if one peered long enough, some shapes of men in pilgrims' dress emerged, Chaucer perhaps, and again — who was it? some uncouth poet scarcely able to syllable his words; and so they died away.
> — Virginia Woolf, 'Reading' (*CE*, II. 13)

In her late memoir, 'A Sketch of the Past', Virginia Woolf sought to explain 'what makes me a writer' and discussed personal influences on her writing. There, she suggested that influence is itself a kind of awareness — it is the *'consciousness* of other groups impinging upon ourselves' — and that *responses* to influences are important, for they shape the individual as she is 'tugged this way and that' by 'invisible presences' (*MB*, 93). Prominent among these 'invisible presences' are the dead (Woolf was writing particularly about her lost mother at this point in the memoir). The idea of these ghostly *presences* suggests that Woolf saw the past as deeply influential, not simply in terms of cause and effect, but, more dynamically, because it was part of her consciousness and because she continued to negotiate it and reshape it from a changing present. Past writers were also strong presences, because Woolf read and re-read their work from her changing perspective and recreated them in her imagination. As the foregoing chapters have shown, Woolf was involved in an ongoing process of engaging with and negotiating her literary and personal past throughout her career.

By consciously negotiating dead people and past writers, Woolf articulated and entertained other writers as part of herself and so the boundaries between the self and the 'world out there' became blurred. In the terms of Patrocinio Schweickart's account of the reading process, Woolf's imagination was a space where a 'subjectivity [is] roused to life' which, though 'attributed to the author, is nevertheless not a separate subjectivity but a projection of the subjectivity of the reader' (p.627). The subjectivities I have shown Woolf to 'rouse to life' in her novels have all been dead writers: the one exception was Vita Sackville-West, whom Woolf regarded as lost to her as a person, but whose texts were still available to her. These writers were recreated in Woolf's imagination; their voices reanimated in her voice.

Loss and absence provided the dynamic for Woolf's encounter with the past in her novels. When she speculated on 'a new name for my books to supplant "novel"' in June 1925, the term she suggested was 'elegy' (*D,* III. 34). An elegy is a work of literature which responds to loss and attempts to come to terms with the past: Woolf's novels work as elegies on both a personal and a literary level, for she both wrote about her dead relations and she sought intimacy with other writers, often in spite of social and educational structures which sought to deny women access to 'great' literature. Juliet Dusinberre (pp.16–17) has suggested that Woolf found work 'inseparable from personal loss', for she began her career as a writer in the summer after Leslie Stephen died. The connection partly bears out Woolf's suggestion that her father, when alive, was an inhibiting influence ('His life would have entirely ended mine. ... No writing, no books' (*D,* III. 208)), but, more powerfully, it suggests that Woolf's writing was in part an attempt to gain intimacy with her lost father, by becoming a writer like him. In doing so, Woolf could also claim her own 'makeshift' inheritance of literature through him (*L,* III. 344). The climate of loss which marks Woolf's engagement with the past makes the theories of influence which stress rejection or suppression inappropriate to a reading of her novels. Rather than suppressing the past in her novels, Woolf sought to capture it in her work, to address it squarely and deal with it.

An example of Woolf's attempt to capture and deal with the past is her negotiation with the complex forces she eventually summarized and satirized in 1931 in the figure of the 'Angel in the House'. These comprised the popular definitions of the woman writer, which threatened to impinge upon her sense of herself as a writer, and which threatened to make earlier women writers (such as Jane Austen) inaccessible as role models. Woolf wrestled with these issues until the mid-1920s. *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* show her dealing with the relatively recent legacy of nineteenth-century women novelists, negotiating the romantic novel and comedy of manners which were supposedly the provinces of women writers. Woolf's treatment of romance in particular — disrupting the marriage narrative in *The Voyage Out* and subverting it to expose its comedy and theatricality in *Night and Day* — suggests an unease with and a need to distance herself from conventional ideas and attitudes. Although Woolf did not write another courtship narrative after *Night and Day,* the motif appears in Clarissa's memories of choosing between Peter and Richard in *Mrs Dalloway,* and in Mrs Ramsay's matchmaking in

To the Lighthouse. In the latter two novels, Woolf committed the marriage narrative to the past (and thus questioned the social prescriptions which encouraged women to become wives and mothers): in *To the Lighthouse* in particular, romance is made to appear antiquated in Lily's vignette of the Ramsays' courtship as an 'old-fashioned scene ... which required, very nearly, crinolines and peg-top trousers' (*TL,* 267).

However, while fighting the phantom Angel in the House, Woolf also explored the other ways in which it might be possible to write or read as a woman. Her first two novels display an urge to resist chronology in order to lay claim to an earlier literary past which was less readily available to women readers and writers. *The Voyage Out* invokes Milton, and *Night and Day* seeks to claim Shakespeare as a precursor to a tradition of women writers. In *The Voyage Out Jacob's Room,* and *Mrs Dalloway,* she pits the established, patriarchal reading of canonical texts — the attempt to appropriate literature and turn it into social currency — against a more imaginative reading practised by female characters like Rachel in *The Voyage Out,* Betty Flanders in *Jacob's Room,* and Clarissa in *Mrs Dalloway.* All three characters approach literature not as entire works or *oeuvres,* but through single lines or phrases, to claim subversive access to a literature which society has sought to withhold from them.

In her novels of the later 1920s, Woolf dealt with the problem of the absence of people and of a readily-available literary tradition by seeking to re-make other writers to be like herself. In *To the Lighthouse,* Woolf appropriated the writings of her father, using his philosophical and theological ideas for feminist purposes. By encountering her father through his words, Woolf began to identify herself with Stephen — whose agnosticism had excluded him from religious and educational institutions — and to remake herself as a 'feminist outsider'. The manoeuvre effectively undermined Stephen as a Victorian patriarch and custodian of literature, by placing him in a marginalized position. The reconciliation Woolf negotiated with her father in *To the Lighthouse* enabled her to take a more critical — and humorous — view of his work in *Orlando* as she subverted and parodied his practice of scholarly biography and literary criticism, manipulating the genres to fit a 'woman's life'. Woolf also remade herself in *Orlando* by parodying Vita Sackville-West. Where she had claimed Leslie Stephen for the outsider's position in *To the Lighthouse,* her picture of Sackville-West emphasized her sympathy and affection for the past over her status as a member of an aristocratic family.

In *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando,* Woolf's attempt to elegize others involved the reciprocal process of remaking others in her own words, while absorbing other writers' texts to make her own voice like theirs. This act of identification continued and intensified in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts,* where Woolf used verbal echoes and the ideas of other writers to seek intimacy with them. In particular, she reshaped her own literary biography to match those of Wordsworth and Coleridge (particularly as they were articulated in the *Prelude* and *Biographia Literaria).* Although Woolf did not present her ideas about 'what makes me a writer' until 1939 (*MB,* 83), she explored this question in fictional form in *The Waves* — where she drew on Wordsworthian ideas of creativity to describe 'moments of being' — and in *Between the Acts,* in which she drew on Coleridge's ideas of poetic creativity and the role of artists in society.

As Woolf began to identify more closely with other writers (starting with *Orlando,* and continuing in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*) she also used literary allusion more frequently. There are fewer examples of what Schlack calls buried or absorbed quotations in *The Waves* and *Between the Acts:* instead, the words of other writers are frequently marked off in quotes or ellipses, sometimes simply juxtaposed as unrelated fragments. In these later novels, Woolf began to internalize the voices of her influences to develop a conversational — or antiphonal — style, in which she had a heightened sense of the ghostly presences or *voices* of other writers in her text. By the time she wrote *Between the Acts,* her 'voice' was a mixture of different voices, articulated in her text; when she adopted Coleridge as a conscious influence, a genderless literary precursor, it was because his voice (as she described it in her essays), was antiphonal like hers.

In *The Waves* and *Between the Acts,* Woolf began to remake tradition not by breaking away from the past to assert her originality (as Bloom's theory would suggest), but by finding in past writers a fluidity of identity, or even an anonymity, which would enable her to claim identification with them. And notwithstanding feminist theories of female traditions and responses to influence, Woolf did not incorporate herself into a tradition of women writers. Instead, she reworked the concept of a literary tradition from the perspective of someone who was not an heir to tradition, but a trespasser in it: in other words, she reclaimed literary history from a female point of view. Thus, Leslie Stephen becomes a fellow trespasser. For example, in 'The Leaning Tower' in 1940, she quoted him to encourage working-class women to assert their right to read: 'Whenever you see a board up with "Trespassers will be prosecuted", trespass at once.' (CE, II. 181) Wordsworth and Coleridge are neither venerated nor feared as great writers, but are seen as troubled individuals whose sense of self was insecure. Coleridge, in particular, is adopted as a poet with a suffering sensibility, who is as susceptible to shocks as Woolf felt herself to be.

This thesis has traced three loosely-defined stages in Woolfs responses to influence — from the quest for role-models, through elegizing the dead, to seeking identification with other writers — all of which are conditioned by Woolfs sense of intimacy with the past. This pattern suggests an alternative to Harold Bloom's three-tiered scheme of antithetical responses to influence. [1] Although Woolfs treatment of the courtship narrative in *The Voyage Out* seems to enact a swerve away from convention, it differs from *clinamen,* because it does not correct or criticize earlier work, and from *tessera,* because it does not supply something which was missing from the original narrative. Instead, Woolfs reaction to Jane Austen, for example, seeks to act out and engage with the silences and contradictions in Austen's text. The presence of the words of past writers as fragments in Woolfs texts differs from Bloom's second pair of strategies, *kenosis* and *daemonization.* Rather than making the precursor's work appear inadequate, fragmented, or unoriginal, Woolf uses echoes as a way of gaining access to or intimacy with other writers, for they represent a longing for something which is lost. Where the later writer faces and fears the loss of originality in *daemonization,* Woolf relishes the impossibility of originality as she embraces and willingly engages with past writers. Finally, rather than asserting and establishing her own identity, as in Bloom's final pair of ratios, Woolfs increasing intimacy with past writers over the course of her career suggests a relinquishing of identity, or more accurately, the development of an identity which incorporated or extended those of others. Bloom's final ratio, *apophrades* 'the return of the dead', involves the repetition of a precursor's work to make it look as though the later poet had written the precursor's characteristic work. By contrast, the echoes from other writers in Woolf's work affirm her likeness to them: her writerly self is openly composed of other voices. If Harold Bloom's theory of the repression of influence can be read as a fear of ghosts, Woolf's eager absorption of influence suggests a longing for the ghostly presences of past writers.

---

[1] The three pairs of revisionary ratios outlined in *Anxiety of Influence,* pp.14-16 and *Map of Misreading,* pp.92-105.

Bloom's scheme (like T.S. Eliot's conception of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'), emphasizes the need for a writer to attain posterity by establishing himself as heir to a tradition. Although Woolf sought intimacy with past writers and celebrated her inheritance from them, she did so by rewriting the idea of literary history: by emphasizing the circularity of literary history rather than positing a linear chain of descent leading down to her. During the course of her career, she also became increasingly sceptical of the possibility of posterity or of a continuing tradition. By the time of writing *Between the Acts,* she anticipated a conflict which would destroy culture as she knew it. Where her early works had sought to maintain connections with a literary and social world which had passed, her later ones feared that the culture she had contributed to might soon cease to exist. By emphasizing fragmentation in her last novel, Woolf moved towards a postmodern view of tradition. The strategy of piling up fragments of quotes suggests that Woolf did not only want to reinforce her own sense of intimacy with other writers, but to emphasize their interconnections with one another — Shakespeare and Marlowe stand 'cheek by jowl' (*JR,* 147–48), rather than in chronological descent — and with silent, lost authors, whom she characterized in the figure of 'Anon'.

Woolf's attitudes towards established religion and belief systems played a part in her conception of influence and a literary tradition. Unlike many other studies of Woolf, this thesis has emphasized the agnosticism which counterbalanced the 'mysticism' in Woolf's thinking. In doing so, it suggests that Woolf's rejection of organized religion went along with a rejection of textual authority: the kind of received wisdom implicit in the notion of a literary tradition. The question of personal and cultural survival — or literary posterity — is closely connected with this. In *Mrs Dalloway,* Woolf suggested that the individual might survive in other people, for individuals 'lived in each other' (*MD,* 11). As a result, Woolf saw that the memory of the dead was kept alive by the living, and that later writers were needed to preserve the work of earlier writers. As she suggested in *A Room of One's Own,* although 'great poets do not die; they are continuing presences', the power to give them 'the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh' lies with the young woman writer (p.108).

I suggest that Virginia Woolf's novels were 'haunted houses'. A haunted place is one in which a past event or trauma has been inscribed so deeply that it leaves an impression for future visitors. In a sense, all books are haunted spaces, for writers are marked by their encounters with other writers before they begin to write and, when they do so, they enter a discourse shared by other writers, and so their writing practice takes place in relation to that of others. However, this marking was especially strong for Woolf: the vividness and powerful sympathy of her imagination as a reader and her intense awareness of her own writing practice made her particularly aware of this process. If Woolf was haunted by the 'Angel in the House' and by memories of the past in her early novels, her great achievement was to name and clothe her ghosts, to bring them to life in her texts, and to tame them. By the end of her career, Woolf found herself as a writer in others: in the conversations with the ghostly voices she articulated in her texts.

Bibliography

Editions of works by Virginia Woolf

The Voyage Out, ed. and intro. by Lorna Sage (1915; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Night and Day, ed. and intro. by Suzanne Raitt (1919; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Jacob's Room, ed. and intro. by Kate Flint (1922; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Mrs Dalloway, ed. and intro. by Claire Tomalin (1925; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

The Common Reader, ed. and intro. by Andrew McNeillie, 2 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1925–32; repr. 1984–86)

To the Lighthouse, ed. and intro. by Margaret Drabble (1927; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Orlando, ed. and intro. by Rachel Bowlby (1928; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

A Room of One's Own (1929; repr. London: Grafton, 1977)

The Waves, ed. and intro. by Gillian Beer (1931; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Three Guineas, intro. by Hermione Lee (1938; London: Hogarth Press, 1986)

Between the Acts, ed. and intro. by Frank Kermode (1941; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Collected Essays, 4 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966–67)

Letters, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, asst. ed. Joanne Trautmann Banks, 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975–1980)

Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings, ed. and intro. by Jeanne Schulkind (1976; repr. Triad/Granada, 1978)

Diary, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, asst. ed. Andrew McNeillie 5 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977–84)

Essays, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1986 –)

Other editions consulted

The Waves: The two holograph drafts, transcribed and ed. by John W. Graham (London: Hogarth Press, 1976)

'"Anon" and "The Reader": Virginia Woolf's Last Essays', ed. and intro. by Brenda R. Silver, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 25:3–4 (1979), 356–441

'*Orlando:* An Edition of the Manuscript', ed. and intro. by Madeline Moore, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 25th Anniversary Number, Virginia Woolf Issue, 25:3 (1979), 303–46

Melymbrosia: An Early Version of The *Voyage Out*, ed. and intro. by Louise A. DeSalvo (New York: New York Public Library, 1982)

'"Le Temps passe" and the Original Typescript: an Early Version of the "Time Passes" Section of *To the Lighthouse*' intro. by James M. Haule; including a French trans. by Charles Mauron (originally published in *Commerce*, Winter 1926), *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 29:3 (1983), 267–311

To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft, transcribed and ed. by Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1983)

Pointz Hall: The Earlier and Later Typescripts of Between the Acts, ed. with an introduction, annotations, and afterword by Mitchell Leaska (New York: University Publications, 1983)

A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals 1897–1909, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1990)

Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves, intro. by Stella McNichol (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992)

Women & Fiction: The Manuscript Versions of A Room of One's Own, ed. by S.P. Rosenbaum (Oxford: Blackwell, for the Shakespeare Head Press, 1992)

Between the Acts, ed. and intro. by Jane Wheare (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

The Waves, ed. and intro. by Kate Flint (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

Orlando: The Original Holograph Draft, transcribed and ed. by Stuart N. Clarke (London: Stuart Nelson Clarke, 1993)

Other primary sources

Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice*, edited by Tony Tanner (1813; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)

— *Mansfield Park,* edited with an introduction by Tony Tanner (1814; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)

— *Persuasion,* ed. and intro. by D.W. Harding (1818; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre* (1847; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)

Byron, George Gordon, *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron,* ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1905)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Poems,* ed. by John Beer (London: Everyman, 1963, repr. 1983)

— *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* 16 vols. General Editor: Kathleen Coburn (London and Princeton, NJ: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Bollingen Series LXXV, Princeton University Press, 1969–)

Defoe, Daniel, *Moll Flanders,* ed. and intro. by Juliet Mitchell (1722; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978)

— *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress*, ed. and intro. by David Blewett (1724; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982)

Eliot, George (Mary Ann Evans), *Middlemarch*, ed. and intro. by W. J. Harvey (1871–72; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)

Eliot, T.S., *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1932; repr. 1986)

— *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969)

Graves, Robert, *Poems (1914–1926)* (London: Heinemann, 1927)

Gray, Thomas, *Complete Poems,* ed. by H.W. Starr and J.R. Hendrickson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

Hume, David, *A Treatise on Human Nature and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1736), ed. by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 2 vols. (London: Longmans and Green, 1874)

Ibsen, Henrik, *A Doll's House,* Cambridge Literature series, trans. by Kenneth McLeish, ed. by Mary Rafferty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Milton, John, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Longman, 1968)

Owen, Wilfred, *The Complete Poems and Fragments,* 2 vols., ed. by Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto & Windus with Hogarth Press and Oxford University Press, 1983)

Ritchie, Anne Isabella (née Thackeray), *The Story of Elizabeth* (London: Smith & Elder, 1863)

— *The Village on the Cliff* (London: Smith & Elder, 1867)

— *A Book of Sibyls: Miss Barbauld, Miss Edgeworth, Mrs Opie, Miss Austen* (London: Smith & Elder, 1883)

— *From the Porch* (London: Smith & Elder, 1913)

Ruskin, John, *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century: Two Lectures Delivered at the London Institution, February 4th and 11th, 1884* (Orpington: George Allen, 1884)

Sackville West, V. (Victoria Mary), *Poems of West and East* (London: Bodley Head, 1917)

— *Heritage* (London: W. Collins & Sons, 1919)

— *Orchard and Vineyard* (London: Bodley Head, 1921)

— *The Heir: A Love Story* (printed for private circulation, 1922)

— *Knole and the Sackvilles* (London: Heinemann, 1922)

— *Seducers in Ecuador* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924)

— *Passenger to Teheran* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926)

— *The Land* (London: William Heinemann, 1926)

— *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astra* (London: Gerald Howe, 1927)

— *Challenge*, first UK edition (London: Collins, 1974)

— *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Louise A. De Salvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Virago, 1992)

— (ed.) *The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford* (London: William Heinemann, 1923)

Shakespeare, William, *The Complete Arden Shakespeare,* General Ed.: Richard Proudfoot (London and New York: Methuen, 1985)

— *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* ed. by W.G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath (London: University of London Press, 1964)

Stephen, Julia, *Notes from Sick Rooms* (London: Smith & Elder, 1883)

— *Julia Duckworth Stephen: Stories for Children, Essays for Adults,* ed. by Diane F. Gillespie and Elizabeth Steele (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987)

Stephen, Leslie, *Hours in a Library,* 3 vols. (London: Smith & Elder, 1874–79)

— *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,* 2 vols. (London: Smith & Elder, 1876)

— 'Humour', unsigned review, *Cornhill Magazine,* 33 (1876), 318–26

— *An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays* (London: Smith & Elder, 1893)

— *Social Rights and Duties,* 2 vols. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1896)

— *George Eliot,* English Men of Letters series (London: Macmillan, 1902)

— *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1904)

— *Men, Books, and Mountains: Essays by Leslie Stephen,* collected with intro. by S.O.A. Ullmann (London: Hogarth Press, 1956)

— *Sir Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book,* with an intro. by Alan Bell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)

Tennyson, Alfred, *Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910)

Wordsworth, William, *Poetical Works,* with intro. and notes, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson; new edn., rev. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)

— *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807,* ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983)

Other works consulted

Abel, Elizabeth, '(E)merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women', *Signs,* 6:3 (1981), 413–35

— *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)

— (ed.) *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982)

Abrams, M.H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; repr. 1971)

Allott, Miriam, (ed.) *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1974; repr. 1995)

Althusser, Louis, *For Marx,* trans. by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977)

Ames, Christopher, 'The Modernist Canon Narrative: Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun"', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 37: 4 (1991), 390–404

Annan, Noel, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (New York: Random House, 1984)

Apter, T.E., *Virginia Woolf: A Study of her Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1979)

— 'Self-Defence and Self-Knowledge: The Functions of Vanity and Friendship in Virginia Woolf', in *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective,* ed. by Eric Warner (London: Macmillan, 1984)

Armor, Richard W., and Raymond F. Howes, (ed. and intro.), *Coleridge the Talker: A Series of Contemporary Descriptions and Comments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1940)

Arnold, Denis, (General Ed.), *The New Oxford Companion to Music,* 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

Baldanza, Frank, '*Orlando* and the Sackvilles', *PMLA,* 70:1 (1955), 274–79

— '*To the Lighthouse* Again', PMLA 70:3 (1955), 548–52

Barrett, Eileen, 'Matriarchal Myth on a Patriarchal Stage: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 33:1 (1987), 18–37

Barthes, Roland, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller, pref. by Richard Howard, (1973; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)

— *Image–Music–Text*, essays selected and trans. by Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977)

Beach, Christopher, *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992)

Beede, Margaret, 'Virginia Woolf — Romantic', *North Dakota Quarterly*, 27: 1 (1959), 21–29

Beer, Gillian, 'Hume, Stephen, and Elegy in *To the Lighthouse*', *Essays in Criticism*, 34:1 (1984), 33–55

— 'Virginia Woolf and Pre-History', in *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective*, ed. by Eric Warner (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.99–123

— *Arguing with the Past: Essays in Narrative from Woolf to Sidney* (London: Routledge, 1989)

Beer, Patricia, *Reader, I Married Him: A Study of the Women Characters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1974)

Bell, Quentin, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, 2 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1972)

Benstock, Shari, 'At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text', *PMLA*, 98:2 (1983), 204–25

Bernikow, Louise, 'Comment on Joanne Feit Diehl's "'Come Slowly — Eden': An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse"', *Signs* 4:1 (1978), 191–95

Bicknell, John W., 'Mr Ramsay was Young Once', in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.52–67

Bishop, Edward, *Virginia Woolf*, Modern Novelists series (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991)

Blain, Virginia, 'Narrative Voice and the Female Perspective in Virginia Woolf's Early Novels', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy, (London: Vision, 1983), pp.115–36

— 'Thinking Back Through Our Aunts: Harriet Martineau and Tradition in Women's Writing', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 1:3 (1990), 223–39

Blake, Kathleen, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature: The Art of Self-Postponement* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983)

Bloom, Harold, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973; second edition 1997)

— *A Map of Misreading* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)

Blotner, Joseph L., 'Mythic Patterns in *To the Lighthouse*', *PMLA*, 71:4 (1956), 547–62

Booth, Alison, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992)

— (ed.) *Famous Last Words: Changes in Gender and Narrative Closure* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1993)

Boyd, Elizabeth F., 'Luriana, Lurilee', *Notes and Queries*, N.S. 10:10 (1963), 380–81

Brogan, Howard A., 'Science and Narrative Structure in Austen, Hardy, and Woolf', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 11:4 (1957), 276–87

Brownstein, Rachel, *Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984)

Bruffee, Kenneth A., *Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983)

Bullen, J. B., 'George Eliot's *Romola* as Positivist Allegory', *Review of English Studies*, New Series 26, (1975), 425–35

Burling, William J., 'Virginia Woolf's "Lighthouse": An Allusion to Shelley's *Queen Mab?*', *English Language Notes*, 22:2 (1984), 62–65

Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990)

— *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993)

Cafarelli, Annette Wheeler, 'How Theories of Romanticism Exclude Women: Radcliffe, Milton, and the Legitimation of the Gothic Novel', in *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism,* ed. by Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.84–113

Caramagno, Thomas C., *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)

Carlson, Marvin, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996)

Chodorow, Nancy J., *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989)

Clayton, Jay, and Eric Rothstein, (eds.) *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991)

Clements, Patricia and Isobel Grundy (eds.), *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays,* (London: Vision, 1983)

Cohen, Steven, 'Why Mr Ramsay Reads *The Antiquary', Women and Literature,* 7:2 (1979), 14–24

Collini, Stefan, 'A Monumental Footnote', *TLS* (5 October 1984), 1113

Comstock, Margaret, '"The Current Answers Don't Do": The Comic Form of *Night and Day', Women's Studies*, Virginia Woolf Special Issue, ed. by Madeline Moore, 4 (1977), 153–71

Cook, Blanche Wiesen, '"Women Alone Stir My Imagination": Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition', *Signs,* 4:4 (1979), 718–39

Costello, Bonnie, 'Response to "Tradition and the Female Talent"', in *Literary History: Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the Northeastern University Center for Literary Studies*, 2, ed. by H.L. Sussman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984)

Cramer, Patricia, 'Virginia Woolfs Matriarchal Family of Origins in *Between the Acts'*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 39:2 (1993), 166–84

Cuddy-Keane, Melba, 'The Politics of Comic Modes in Virginia Woolfs *Between the Acts'*, *PMLA*, 105: 2 (1990), 273–85

da Silva, N. Takei, *Modernism and Virginia Woolf* (Windsor: Windsor Publications, 1990)

Daugherty, Beth Rigel: 'Face to Face with "Ourselves" in Virginia Woolfs *Between the Acts'*, in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations: Selected Papers from the Second Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993), pp.76–82

Davidson, Cathy N. and E.M. Broner (eds.) *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (New York: F. Ungar, 1980)

Davies, Stevie, *Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse*, Penguin Critical Studies (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989)

de Gay, Jane, *'Orlando* and its Muse', *English Review*, 8:3 (1998), 2–4

— '"The bray of the gramophones and the voices of the poets": Art and Political Crisis in *Between the Acts'*, *Critical Survey*, special issue on the literature of the 1930s, 10:3 (1998)

— 'Behind the Purple Triangle: Art and Iconography in *To the Lighthouse'*, in *Woolf Studies Annual* (New York: Pace University Press, 1999)

DeSalvo, Louise A., *Virginia Woolf's First Voyage: A Novel in the Making* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980)

— 'Lighting the Cave: The Relationship Between Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf', *Signs* 8:2 (1982), 195–214 di Battista, Maria, 'Joyce, Woolf and the Modern Mind', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays* ed. Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision Press, 1983), pp.96–114

Dick, Susan, 'The Tunnelling Process: Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Use of Memory and the Past', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays* ed. Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision Press, 1983), pp.176–99

Dictionary of National Biography, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 22 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917–)

Diehl, Joanne Feit, '"Come Slowly — Eden": An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse', *Signs* 3:3 (1978), pp.572–87

Dolberg, Lynn, Review of Beth Carole Rosenberg, *Virginia Woolf and Samuel Johnson: Common Readers*, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 48 (1996), 7

Dole, Carol M., 'Oppression, Obsession: Virginia Woolf and Henry James', *Southern Review,* 24:2 (1988), 253–71

Du Plessis, Rachel Blau, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985)

Dusinberre, Juliet, *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance: Woman Reader or Common Reader?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

Edwards, Lee R., *Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1984)

Eisenberg, Nora, 'Virginia Woolf's Last Words on Words: *Between the Acts* and "Anon"', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Jane Marcus (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp.253–66

Ellison, Julie, *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990)

Faderman, Lilien, 'Comment on Joanne Feit Diehl's "'Come Slowly — Eden': An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse"', *Signs,* 4:1 (1978), 188–91

Fetterley, Judith, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978)

Fisher, Jane Elizabeth, 'The Seduction of the Father: Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen', *Women's Studies,* 18:1 (1990), 31–48

Fleishman, Avrom, *Virginia Woolf : A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975)

Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader: 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)

— 'Drawing the Line: Lily, Paintings and *To the Lighthouse*', *English Review,* 4:1 (1993), 38–41

Fogel, Daniel Mark, *Covert Relations: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Henry James* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990)

Forster, E.M., *Abinger Harvest* (London: Edward Arnold, 1936)

Fox, Alice, 'Literary Allusion as Feminist Criticism in *A Room of One's Own*', *Philological Quarterly,* 63 (1984), 145–61

— *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

Freedman, Ralph (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity: A Collection of Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)

Freud, Sigmund, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Standard Edition,* trans. under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1948–74)

Friedman, Susan Stanford, 'Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author', in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History,* ed. by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp.146–80

Froula, Christine, 'Virginia Woolf as Shakespeare's Sister: Chapters in a Woman Writer's Autobiography', in *Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare: On the Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot, and Others,* ed. by Marianne Novy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp.123–42

Fry, Roger, *Henri Matisse* (London: Zwemmer, 1930)

Frye, Joanne S., '*The Voyage Out:* Thematic Tensions and Narrative Techniques', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 26:4 (1980), 402–23

Fuss, Diana, *Identification Papers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995)

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)

Gardiner, Judith Kegan, 'The (US)es of (I)dentity: A Response to Abel on "(E)merging Identities"', *Signs,* 6:3 (1981), 436–42

— 'On Female Identity and Writing by Women', in *Writing and Sexual Difference,* ed. Elizabeth Abel (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp.177–91

Gay, Penny, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Gérin, Winifred, *Anne Thackeray Ritchie: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979)

— *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century,* 3 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988–94)

Gill, Stephen, *Wordsworth: The Prelude* in 'Landmarks of World Literature' Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Gillespie, Diane Filby, 'Virginia Woolf's Miss La Trobe: The Artist's Struggle Against Masculine Values', *Women and Literature,* 5:1 (1977), 38–46

Glendinning, Victoria, *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983)

Gordon, Lyndall, *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984)

Gorsky, Susan, '"The Central Shadow": Characterization in *The Waves', Modern Fiction Studies,* 18:3 (1972), 449–66

Graham, J.W., 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in *Orlando', University of Toronto Quarterly,* 30:4 (1961), 345–66

— 'Editing a Manuscript: Virginia Woolf's *The Waves'* in *Editing Twentieth Century Texts: Papers Given at the Editorial Conference, University of Toronto, November 1969*, ed. by Frances G. Halfpenny (Toronto and Buffalo: Toronto University Press, 1972), pp.77–92

— 'Point of View in *The Waves:* Some Services of the Style' in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Criticism,* ed. by Thomas S.W. Lewis (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), pp.94–112

— 'Manuscript Revision and the Heroic Theme of *The Waves*', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 29:3 (1983): 312–32

Green, David Bonnell, '*Orlando* and the Sackvilles: Addendum', *PMLA,* 71: 1 (1956), 268–69

Hafley, James, *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954)

Hampshire, Stuart, 'The Heavy Victorian Father', *TLS,* (10 February 1978), 159

Hanson, Clare, '"As a woman I have no country": Woolf and the Construction of National Identity', in *Contemporary Writing and National Identity*, ed. by Tracy Hill and William Hughes (Bath: Sulis Press, 1995), pp.54–64

Harrison, Suzan, *Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf: Gender, Genre, and Influence* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997)

Haule, James M., '*To the Lighthouse* and the Great War: The Evidence of Virginia Woolf's Revisions of "Time Passes"', in *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth,* ed. by Mark Hussey (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), pp.164–79

— and Philip H. Smith, (eds.), *A Concordance to the Novels of Virginia Woolf,* 9 vols., microfiche (Vols. 1–6 Oxford: Oxford Microform Publications, 1981–85; Vols. 7–9: Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1988)

Heine, Elizabeth, 'The Evolution of the Interludes in *The Waves*', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly,* 1:1 (1972), 60–80

— 'The Earlier *Voyage Out:* Virginia Woolf's First Novel', *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities,* 82:3 (1979), 294–316

Hill, Katherine C., 'Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution', *PMLA,* 96 (1981), 351–62

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

Hoffmann, Charles G., 'Fact and Fantasy in *Orlando:* Virginia Woolf's Narrative Revisions', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 10:3 (1968), 435–44

— '"From Lunch to Dinner": Virginia Woolf's Apprenticeship', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 10:4 (1968), 609–27

Homans, Margaret, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1986)

Howatson, M.C. (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature,* second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

Hunting, Constance, 'The Technique of Persuasion in *Orlando', Modern Fiction Studies,* 2 (1956), 17–23

Hussey, Mark (ed.), *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991)

Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985)

Hyman, Virginia R., 'The Metamorphosis of Leslie Stephen', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly,* 2:1–2, (1975–6), 48–65

— 'Reflections in the Looking-Glass: Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf', *Journal of Modern Literature,* 10 (1983), 197–215

— *To the Lighthouse and Beyond: Transformations in the Narratives of Virginia Woolf,* American University Studies, Series 4, 66 (New York: Peter Lang, 1988)

Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which is Not One,* trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985)

Jacobus, Mary, *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on* The Prelude (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Johnston, Judith L., 'The Remediable Flaw: Revisioning Cultural History in *Between the Acts',* in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration,* ed. by Jane Marcus (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.253–77

Jones, Danell, 'The Chase of the Wild Goose: The Ladies of Llangollen and *Orlando',* in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations: Selected Papers from the Second Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993), pp.181–89

Joseph, Gerhard, 'The Antigone as Cultural Touchstone: Matthew Arnold, Hegel, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Margaret Drabble', *PMLA,* 96:1 (1981), 22–35

Kauffman, Linda S., *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986)

Kellermann, Frederick, 'A New Key to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando', English Studies,* 59 (1978), 138–50

Knoepflmacher, U.C., 'Genre and the Integration of Gender: From Wordsworth to George Eliot to Virginia Woolf', in *Victorian Literature and Society: Essays Presented to Richard D. Altick,* ed. by James R. Kincaid and Albert J. Kuhn (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), pp.84–118

Knopp, Sherron E., '"If I saw you would you kiss me?": Sapphism and the subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando',* in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing,* ed. by Joseph Bristow (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.111–27

Kolodny, Annette, 'A Map for Rereading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp.46–62

Kristeva, Julia, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* trans. by Margaret Waller, intro. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)

— *Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)

Kurtz, Marilyn, *Virginia Woolf: Reflections and Reverberations,* American University Studies, Series 4, 9 (New York: Peter Lang, 1990)

Lambert, Elizabeth, 'Evolution and Imagination in *Pointz Hall* and *Between the Acts',* in *Virginia Woolf: Themes and Variations: Selected Papers from the Second Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Vara Neverow-Turk and Mark Hussey (New York: Pace University Press, 1993), pp.83–89

Laurence, Patricia Ondek, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991)

— 'The Facts and Fugue of War: From *Three Guineas* to *Between the Acts*', in *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth,* ed. by Mark Hussey (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), pp.225–45

Leaska, Mitchell, *Virginia Woolfs Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method* (London: Hogarth Press, 1970)

— *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: From Beginning to End* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977)

Lee, Hermione, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977)

— 'A Burning Glass: Reflection in Virginia Woolf', in *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective,* ed. by Eric Warner (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.12–27

— introduction t*o To the Lighthouse,* ed. by Stella McNichol (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

— 'Orlando and her Biographer', *TLS* (18 March 1994), 5–6

— *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996)

Lee, Judith, '"Without Hate, Without Bitterness, Without Fear, Without Protest, Without Preaching": Virginia Woolf Reads Jane Austen', *Persuasions,* Journal of the Jane Austen Society of North America, 12 (1990): 111–16

Lilienfeld, Jane, '"The Deceptiveness of Beauty": Mother Love and Mother Hate in *To the Lighthouse*', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 23:3 (1977), 345–76

— 'Reentering Paradise: Cather, Colette, Woolf and Their Mothers', in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. by Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner (New York: F. Ungar, 1980), pp.160–75

Little, Judy, 'Festive Comedy in Woolf's *Between the Acts*', *Women and Literature* 5:1 (1977), 26–37

— '(En)gendering Laughter: Woolf's *Orlando* as Contraband in the Age of Joyce', *Women's Studies,* 15:2 (1988), 179–91

Logan, James V., *Wordsworthian Criticism: A Guide and Bibliography* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1961)

Love, Jean O., '*Orlando* and Its Genesis: Venturing and Experimenting in Art, Love, and Sex', in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity,* ed. by Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp.189–218

Low, Lisa, 'Two Figures Standing in Dense Violet Light: John Milton, Virginia Woolf, and the Epic Vision of Marriage', in *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf,* ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk (New York: Pace University Press, 1992), pp.144–45

— and Anthony John Harding (eds.), *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

MacDonald, Susan Peck, 'Jane Austen and the Tradition of the Absent Mother', in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. by Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner (New York: F. Ungar, 1980), pp.58–69

MacKay, Carol Hanbery, 'The Thackeray Connection: Virginia Woolf's Aunt Anny', in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration,* ed. by Jane Marcus (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp.68–95

— 'Hate and Humor as Empathetic Whimsy in Anne Thackeray Ritchie', *Women's Studies,* special issue on women and comedy ed. by Regina Barreca, 15:1–3 (1988), 117–33

Mahler, Margaret, 'On the First Three Subphases of Separation–Individuation Process', in *Essential Papers on Object Relations*, ed. Peter Buckley (New York: New York University Press, 1986)

Maitland, Frederic W., *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London: Duckworth, 1906)

Majumdar, Robin and Allen McLaurin, (eds.) *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975; repr. 1997)

Mansfield, Katherine, review of *Night and Day, Athenaeum* (21 November 1919) 1227. Repr. in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage,* pp.79–82

Marcus, Jane, 'Some Sources for *Between the Acts', Virginia Woolf Miscellany,* 6 (1977), 1–3

— *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987)

— 'Britannia Rules *The Waves',* in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century 'British' Literary Canons,* ed. by Karen R. Lawrence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp.136–62

— (ed.), *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981)

— (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983)

— (ed.), *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987)

Marshall, Denise, 'Slaying the Angel and the Patriarch: The Grinning Woolf', *Women's Studies,* 12:12 (1988), 149–77

McConnell, Frank D., '"Death Among the Apple Trees": *The Waves* and the World of Things', in *Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. by Claire Sprague (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp.117–29

McGavran, J. Holt, Jr., 'Shelley, Woolf, and *The Waves:* A Balcony of One's Own', *South Atlantic Review,* 48:4 (1983), 58–73

McLaurin, Allen, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973)

McWhirter, David, 'The Novel, the Play, and the Book: *Between the Acts* and the Tragicomedy of History', *English Literary History,* 60:3 (1993), 787–812

Meese, Elizabeth, 'When Virginia Looked at Vita, What Did She See?; or, Lesbian: Feminist: Woman — What's the Differ(e/a)nce?', *Feminist Studies,* 18: 1 (1992), 99–117

Meisel, Perry, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980)

Mendez, Charlotte Walker, 'I Need a Little Language', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly,* 1:1 (1970), 87–105

Mepham, John, 'Mourning and Modernism', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision, 1983), pp.137–56

— *Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991)

Miller, Nancy K., *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)

Minow-Pinkney, Makiko, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987)

Mishkin, Tracy, 'Theorizing Literary Influence and African-American Writers', in *Literary Influence and African-American Writers: Collected Essays,* ed. by Tracy Mishkin (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996) pp.3–20

Moore, Madeline, 'Nature and Community: A Study of Cyclical Reality in *The Waves*', in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity,* ed. by Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp.219–240

Naremore, James, *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973)

— 'The "Orts and Fragments" in *Between the Acts*', *Ball State University Forum*, 14:1 (1973), 59–69

Neuman, Shirley, '*Heart of Darkness*, Virginia Woolf, and the Spectre of Domination', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision, 1983), pp.57–76

Nicolson, Nigel, *Portrait of a Marriage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973)

— 'Vita and Orlando', *Spectator* (20 March 1993), 48

Novak, Jane, *The Razor Edge of Balance: A Study of Virginia Woolf* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1975)

Paul, Janis M., *The Victorian Heritage of Virginia Woolf: The External World in her Novels* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1987)

Pedersen, Glenn, 'Vision in *To the Lighthouse*', *PMLA*, 73:5 (1958), 585–600

Pellan, Françoise, 'Virginia Woolf's Posthumous Poem', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 29: 4 (1983), 695–700

Philipson, Morris, 'Virginia Woolf's *Orlando:* Biography as a Work of Fiction', in *From Parnassus: Essays in Honor of Jacques Barzun*, ed. by Dora B. Weiner and William R. Keylor (1976; repr. New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp.237–48

Poole, Roger, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)

Pratt, Annis, 'Sexual Imagery in *To the Lighthouse:* A New Feminist Approach', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 18:3 (1972), 417–31

Pykett, Lyn, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century*, Writing in History (London: Edward Arnold, 1995)

Rackin, Phyllis, 'Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage', *PMLA*, 102:1 (1987), 29–41

Raitt, Suzanne, *Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse,* Critical Studies of Key Texts (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990)

— *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)

Richter, Harvena, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970)

— 'Hunting the Moth: Virginia Woolf and the Creative Imagination', in *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity,* ed. by Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp.13–28

— 'The *Ulysses* Connection: Clarissa Dalloway's Bloomsday', *Studies in the Novel,* 21 (1989), 305–19

Roberts, John Hawley, '"Vision and Design" in Virginia Woolf', *PMLA,* 61:3 (1946), 835–47.

Rose, Phyllis, *Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf* (1978; repr. London: Pandora, 1986)

Rosenbaum, S.P., 'The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf, in *English Literature and British Philosophy: A Collection of Essays,* ed. and intro. by S.P. Rosenbaum (Chigaco and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp.316–56

— 'An Educated Man's Daughter: Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf, and the Bloomsbury Group', in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays,* ed. by Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision, 1983), pp.32–56

Rosenberg, Beth Carole, *Virginia Woolf and Samuel Johnson: Common Readers* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995)

Rosenman, Ellen Bayuk, *The Invisible Presence: Virginia Woolf and the Mother–Daughter Relationship* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1986)

— 'Sexual Identity and *A Room of One's Own:* "Secret Economies" in Virginia Woolf's Feminist Discourse', *Signs,* 14:3 (1989), 634–50

Ross, Stephen M., '"Voice" in Narrative Texts: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*', *PMLA,* 94:2 (1979), 300–10

Ruddick, Sara, 'Learning to Live with the Angel in the House', *Women's Studies,* 4, Virginia Woolf issue (1977), 181–200

— 'Private Brother, Public World', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf,* ed. Jane Marcus (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp.185–215

Sackville-West, V., 'Virginia Woolf and "Orlando"', *Listener* (27 January 1955), 157–58

Sanders, Valerie, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996)

Schaefer, Josephine O'Brien, *The Three-Fold Nature of Reality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1965)

Schlack, Beverly Ann, *Continuing Presences: Virginia Woolf's Use of Literary Allusion* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979)

— 'The Novelist's Voyage from Manuscripts to Text: Revisions of Literary Allusions in *The Voyage Out*', *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities,* 82:3, (1979), 317–27

— 'Fathers in General: The Patriarchy in Virginia Woolf's Fiction', in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant,* ed. by Jane Marcus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), pp.52–77

Schwartz, Beth C., 'Thinking Back Through our Mothers: Virginia Woolf Reads Shakespeare', *English Literary History,* 58:3 (1991), 721–46

Schweickart, Patrocinio P., 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading' (1986) in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism,* revised edition, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp.609–34

Scott, Alison M., '"Tantalizing Fragments": The Proofs of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America,* 88:3 (1994), 279–351

Showalter, Elaine, *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978)

— (ed.) *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (London: Virago, 1986)

Silver, Brenda R., 'Virginia Woolf and the Concept of Community: The Elizabethan Playhouse', *Women's Studies,* 4:2–3 (1977), 291–98

— *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983)

Slatoff, Walter J., *The Look of Distance: Reflections on Suffering and Sympathy in Modern Literature — Auden to Agee, Whitman to Woolf* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985)

Snider, Clifton, '"A Single Self": A Jungian Interpretation of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 25 (1979), 263–68

Southam, B.C. (ed.), *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1968–87; repr. 1995)

Spilka, Mark, *Virginia Woolf's Quarrel with Grieving* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980)

Squier, Susan M., 'Mirroring and Mothering: Reflections on the Mirror Encounter Metaphor in Virginia Woolf's Works', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 27:3 (1981), 272–88

— 'Tradition and Revision in Woolf's *Orlando:* Defoe and "The Jessamy Brides"', *Women's Studies* 12: 12 (1986), 167–77

Steele, Elizabeth, *Virginia Woolf's Literary Sources and Allusions: A Guide to the Essays* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1983)

— *Virginia Woolf's Rediscovered Essays: Sources and Allusions* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987)

Stewart, Garrett, 'Catching the Stylistic D/rift: Sound Defects in Woolf's *The Waves*', *English Literary History,* 54:1–2 (1987), 421–61

Stewart, Jack F., 'Existence and Symbol in *The Waves*', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 18:3 (1972), 433–47

— 'Historical Impressionism in *Orlando*', *Studies in the Novel,* 5:1 (1973), 71–85

— 'Light in *To the Lighthouse*', *Twentieth-Century Literature,* 23:3 (1977), 377–89

Sutton-Ramspeck, Beth, 'The Personal is Poetical: Feminist Criticism and Mary Ward's Readings of the Brontës', *Victorian Studies,* 34:1 (1990), 55–75

Tate, Trudi, 'HD's War Neurotics', in *Women's Fiction and the Great War,* ed. by Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp.241–62

Todd, Janet, 'Who's Afraid of Jane Austen?' in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives,* ed. by Janet Todd Women & Literature, New Series 3 (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1983), pp.107–27

Trautmann, Joanne, *The Jessamy Brides: The Friendship of Virginia Woolf and V. Sackville-West,* Pennsylvania State University Studies, 36 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1973)

Vlasopolos, Anca, 'Shelley's Triumph of Death in Virginia Woolf's *Voyage Out*', *Modern Language Quarterly,* 47:2 (1986), 130–53

Warner, Eric, *Virginia Woolf: The Waves* Landmarks of World Literature series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

— (ed.) *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1984)

Watkins, Renée, 'Survival in Discontinuity: Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*', *Massachusetts Review,* 10:2 (1969), 356–76

Wilson, J.J., 'Why is *Orlando* Difficult?', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp.170–84

Woolf, Leonard, 'Virginia Woolf and *The Waves*', *Radio Times* (23 June 1957), 25

Worton, Michael, and Judith Still, (eds.) *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990)

Wright, G. Patton, 'Virginia Woolf's Uncommon Reader: Allusions in *Between the Acts*', in *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk (New York: Pace University Press, 1992), 230–33

Wright, T.R., 'George Eliot and Positivism: A Reassessment', *Modern Language Review*, 76 (1981), 257–72

Wyatt, Jean, 'Art and Allusion in *Between the Acts*', *Mosaic*, 9:4 (1978), 91–100

Zuckerman, Joanne P., 'Anne Thackeray Ritchie as the Model for Mrs Hilbery in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', *Virginia Woolf Quarterly* 1:3 (1973), 32–46

Zwerdling, Alex, '*Between the Acts* and the Coming of War', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 10: 3 (1977), 220–36

Unpublished sources

Cuddy-Keane, Melba, 'Thinking Historically about Historical Thinking', a paper given at the Seventh Annual Virginia Woolf Conference (Plymouth State College, New Hampshire, June 1997)

Greene, Sally, 'Virginia Woolf, "Poet Historical"', paper given at the Seventh Annual Virginia Woolf Conference (Plymouth State College, New Hampshire, June 1997)

Lyons, Brenda, 'Textual Voyages: Platonic Allusions in Virginia Woolf's Fiction' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1995)

McNeillie, Andrew, 'Virginia Woolf as Batwoman: Poetry, Fiction, and De Quincey', paper given at 'Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing' conference, Oxford, September 1992

Pines, Davida Beth, 'William Wordsworth and Virginia Woolf: Assertion and Dissolution of Self' (unpublished M.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1993)

Saunders, Max, 'War, History, and Madness in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*', a paper given at 'The Cultural and Intellectual Contexts of Modernism' conference, Centre for English Studies, University of London, 31 May – 1 June 1996

Warner, Eric, 'Some Aspects of Romanticism in the Work of Virginia Woolf' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1980)

Whitehead, Jean, 'A Study of the Relationship between Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Intellectual Interests of her Time' (unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1979)

Woolf, Virginia, Reading notes, January 1909-1911, at the back of her [*Night and Day*] Chapters 11-17. Berg Collection, New York Public Library

— Reading notes for *The Possessed.* Holograph Reading Notes, vol. 14. Berg Collection, New York Public Library

— Holograph reading notes, vol. 24 (1939–40). Berg Collection of the New York Public Library