

HOW SHOULD ONE BE AN OUTSIDER?: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S COMMON READER AS
A THEORY OF SUBJECTIVITY IN INTERWAR ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

This project examines Virginia Woolf's conceptualization of the outsider as a political position with recourse to the figure of the common reader she theorizes early in her writing career. Woolf's common reader, I argue, is first and foremost a response to the interwar "battle of the brows." Unique in their belief in the common reader, Woolf's early essays on form and aesthetics ask readers to consider their position as consumers in relation to the writers who insisted upon the discourse of the great divide between high and middlebrow art. This project suggests the common reader is more than Woolf's contribution to the "battle of the brows," however, and it presents the common reader as the precursory figure in a theory of intersectional subjectivity that is the foundation for Woolf's politics of everyday life, which reached maturity late in her career with the "Society of Outsiders." Viewing the common reader this way helps connect Woolf's later works, which are generally viewed as her more political writings, with her early, formally experimental works by way of a theory of subjectivity that makes one's discursive subject position central to an outsider politics based on performative subversion. Woolf's focus on subject positions and performative subversion marks hers as a politics of the body, and this work explores the role various social institutions, including the university, the military, the family, and the asylum, play in disciplining subjects and their bodies in Woolf's fiction and essays. In texts including *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, *Between the Acts*, as well as a number of Woolf's shorter essays, I examine Woolf's depictions of subjects, their bodies, and the institutions that shape and mould them, and through her theorization of the common reader and society of outsiders explore Woolf's theory of subjectivity designed to confound and subvert these institutions using the very same bodies they sought to discipline and optimize to serve their ideological purposes.

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DEDICATION

If not for a simple question asked by the right person at the right moment, this work would not exist. But let us not call it fate, for that would imply we knew where the answer would lead. And neither of us could have imagined this.

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INTRODUCTION

Tuesday 22 November, 1938. I meant to write Reflections on my position as a writer. [...] apparently I've been exalted to a very high position, say about 10 years ago: then was decapitated by W[yndham] Lewis & Miss Stein; am now I think—let me see—out of date, of course; not a patch, with the young, on Morgan; yet wrote *The Waves*; yet am unlikely to write anything good again; am a secondrate, & likely, I think, to be discarded altogether. I think that's my public reputation at the moment. It is based on C. Connolly's Cocktail criticism: a sheaf of feathers in the wind. How much do I mind? Less than I expected. But then of course, its all less than I realised. I mean, I never thought I was so famous; so don't feel the decapitation. Yet its true that after *The Waves*, or *Flush*, *Scrutiny* I think found me out. W.L. attacked me. I was aware of an active opposition. Yes I used to be praised by the young & attacked by the elderly. 3 Gs. has queered the pitch. For the G.M. Youngs & the Scrutineers both attack that. And my own friends have sent me to Coventry over it. So my position is ambiguous. Undoubtedly Morgan's reputation is much higher than my own. So is Tom's. Well? In a way it is a relief. I'm fundamentally, I think, an outsider. I do my best work & feel most braced with my back to the wall. Its an odd feeling though, writing against the current: difficult entirely to disregard the current. Yet of course I shall. (V. Woolf, *Diary 5* 188-9)

Looking back from our contemporary vantage point, where she exists as a literary, feminist, and intellectual icon, Virginia Woolf's anxiety about her position as a writer in this diary entry is difficult to understand. After all, quite apart from the fact that her novels are touchstones in English Literature courses around the world and *A Room of One's Own* is considered a foundational text for feminism, Woolf's image is emblazoned upon everything from mock Saint Candles, to postcards, to t-shirts in what has practically become a cottage industry of cultural iconography (Silver 9). But here she is contemplating her fame after the poor reception of *Three Guineas*, comparing herself to T.S. Eliot (Tom) and E.M. Forster (Morgan), fearing what F.R. and Q.D. Leavis (the Scrutineers) and Wyndham Lewis think of her might be true, apprehending middle age (she was 56 at the time) as that transition between annoying the old and frustrating the young, and worrying about once again having to writing criticism to support

herself. The Woolf of this passage is so far away from the Saint Virginia popular culture imagines that she is barely recognizable, yet it is perhaps the Woolf of this diary passage that I like the most. It is not that the passage somehow reveals the “real” Woolf, but rather that Woolf brings her existential crisis and the chaotic swirl of discourses that converge on her in this diary entry into order using the single word “outsider.”

While the word outsider has become fundamental to understanding Woolf’s work, her conception of identity, and her politics, she did not take the label on officially until quite late in her life. Her official acceptance of the term seems to come in an excited diary entry on 20 May 1938 as she was awaiting the publication of *Three Guineas*: “my mind is made up. I need never recur or repeat. I am an outsider. I can take my way: experiment with my own imagination in my own way. The pack may howl, but it shall never catch me. And even if the pack—reviewers, friends, enemies—pays me no attention or sneers, still I’m free” (*Diary* 5 141). We know, of course, from her November entry above, that the pack did howl, but not enough to make Woolf forgo the title of outsider that she had chosen for herself. This is not to say, however, that Woolf did not think in terms of insiders and outsiders before 1938. In 1903, at twenty-one years old, Woolf showed a keen awareness of insiders and outsiders during a family trip to Wilton House, a grand house in Wiltshire: “We—Adrian and I—[...] professed to find the whole country side ‘demoralised’ & clinging to the great man of the place. This I suppose is an exaggeration; at any rate if we had been inside those high brick walls our point of view might have changed” (*A Passionate Apprentice* 189-90). Moreover, insiders and outsiders play important roles in Woolf’s work from the beginning to the end of her career: from the consummate insider Jacob Flanders joining the Great War after a life spent being shaped and moulded by the patriarchal machine in *Jacob’s Room* (1922), to the consummate outsider Septimus Smith returning from the same war

only to have his shell-shocked body used politically by his doctors in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925); from the common reader Woolf suggested should read outside a system in *The Common Reader* (1925), to an elusive narrator carefully positioning herself outside the academy while lecturing at a women's college in *A Room of One's own* (1929), and thence to conceptualizing a "Society of Outsiders" for women to help men prevent war in *Three Guineas* (1938).

In the 20 May 1938 diary entry in which she officially accepts the term outsider, Woolf also writes that her decision is "the actual result of that spiritual conversion (I can't bother to get the right words) in the autumn of 1933—or 4—when I rushed through London, buying, I remember, a great magnifying glass, from sheer ecstasy, near Blackfriars; when I gave the man who played the harp half a crown for talking to me about his life in the Tube station" (*Diary* 5 141). There is no reference to this interaction with the harpist in her diary from that time so what he said to Woolf seems to have been lost, and the nature of her "spiritual conversion" is also vague but seems to have much more to do with politics than with religion given it is mentioned in relation to her discussion about *Three Guineas* and outsiders. Based on Woolf's suggestion in *Three Guineas* that, for outsiders, "to be passive is to be active" because "[b]y making their absence felt their presence becomes desirable" (245), recent critical attention has tended to theorize Woolf's politics as a politics of everyday life. J. Ashley Foster, for example, has recently noted that Woolf counted a number of Quakers amongst her family and Foster argues that Woolf's passive activity is similar to Quakerism's "strong history of civil dissent and fighting for egalitarian civil rights" (46). Foster never suggests that Woolf herself was a Quaker, but does note, referring to the distinction Woolf makes between the materialism of Edwardian writers and the spiritualism of Georgian writers in "Modern Novels" (177-78), that "writing for Woolf becomes a sacred act that can bridge the spiritual and material worlds, merging her

luminescent ontology of being with a call-to-action for a pacifism predicated on individual ethical participation in the global community” (43). Lorraine Sim, too, focuses on the individuality of Woolf’s political praxis, arguing that her ideas amount to a personal ethics of the ordinary that transforms things like clothing, gestures, and expressions into “the basis for moments of sympathy, intimacy and understanding between people” (177). And Charles Andrews focuses more on Woolf’s literary forms to note that the equivocating repetition of ideas and ellipses in *Three Guineas* constitute a style of passive activism that discursively counters the rapid escalation of masculine aggression and creates silences that demonstrate women’s “exclusion from masculine political discourse” (177). Common to all these discussions is a focus on the materiality of Woolf’s politics (for Foster and Sim in terms of actual actions in the world, and for Andrews in terms of formal innovations employed by Woolf herself) to point out that Woolf recognized politics was not only enacted in the bills and policies passed in Whitehall but expressed over and over again in the everyday actions of ordinary people.

My work likewise presents Woolf’s as a politics of everyday life, but in doing so it looks backwards from her later works that are generally considered Woolf’s most political to present these works as the culmination of many years thinking within, through, and against various cultural discourses during the interwar period. As her career-long focus on insiders and outsiders shows, if Woolf did go through a “spiritual conversion” in 1933 or 1934, it was certainly not brought about by a sudden recognition of the way power relations functioned in England’s social institutions. Nor was Woolf’s materialist understanding of politics and political praxis new in 1938, for her works throughout her career are full of politicized and political bodies, and the roles they play in realizing—that is, in making real—the ideologies of social institutions. Woolf, I will argue, viewed bodies as political and ideological weapons throughout her career, her views

of the body aligning with the performative materialism Louis Althusser later theorized when he argued that “Ideology has a material existence” (1352) inasmuch as an individual “behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which ‘depend’ the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject” (1353). Over and over again in Woolf’s work one sees this performative relationship between subjects of ideology and the material existence of ideology: a presumed member of the English royal family passes by in a car on a crowded London street while Clarissa Dalloway buys flowers for her party, so people stand at attention to acknowledge the monarchy; soldiers dutifully perish “with perfect mastery of machinery” as their ship sinks and generals look on through binoculars in *Jacob’s Room* (125); a Beadle approaches the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* as she absentmindedly walks on the grass of the Oxbridge quad and bodily instinct not reason comes to her aid to explain why what she has done is wrong (5). Furthermore, Woolf’s theorization of politics and ideology agrees with Althusser’s suggestion that “*individuals are always already subjects*” (1357) because there is no outside to discourse and the power relations constructed therein for Woolf. This may seem at odds with the fact that Woolf positions herself very clearly as a political outsider in her diary and posits the “Society of Outsiders” as a way to help men prevent war in *Three Guineas*; however, the outsider subject position for Woolf does not refer to escaping discourse, but rather to positioning oneself within discourse in a politically advantageous way by exploiting ideology’s reliance on performative materialism. Put simply, if realizing ideologies requires the participation of subjects, then Woolf advocates selective non-participation as an individual political praxis. This focus on actively choosing when and how one participates in political and ideological performances promotes a process of becoming in relation to one’s historical, legal,

economic, and educational realities, so there is for Woolf an intimate and reciprocal relationship between the subjects that perform actions in the material world and the subjectivities that guide these performances by choosing when and how to participate.

Subjectivity is a term that has seen a political rehabilitation since the rise of identity politics and theories of intersectionality. Drawing as it did upon an opposition with the term objective at a time when scientists were charting and defining the physical world empirically, subjective was made something of a dirty word during the scientific revolution. As Raymond Williams points out, it became associated with opinions “as based on impressions rather than facts, and hence as influenced by personal feelings and relatively unreliable” (311). Subjectivity was reexamined with recourse to discourse and psychoanalysis in the middle of the twentieth century when, Ruth Robbins notes, theorists began to suggest subjectivity was constituted discursively because “the subject is always *subject* to a pre-existing social, linguistic, and economic order over which he has very little control” (15). Subjection and the myriad discursive relationships that signify one’s subjection have played an important role in the way power is currently understood in theories of intersectionality, especially with regards to outsiders or marginalized people, identity politics, and political action. Intersectionality notes that identity markers such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, while they are codified and hierarchized discursively, affect one’s material existence depending on how words like “black,” “woman,” or “lesbian” function in cultural, legal, economic, etc. structures within society. Generally, intersectional approaches to identity have tended to produce political praxes focused on an essentialism that asks individuals to accept discursively hierarchized identity markers because, as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw points out, doing so “takes the socially imposed identity and

empowers it as an anchor of subjectivity; 'I am black' becomes not simply a statement of resistance but also a positive discourse of self-identification" (298).

While intersectionality's focus on the discursivity of identity and the structural implications of identity markers makes it useful when discussing Woolf's conception of insiders and outsiders, arguing that Woolf uses the term outsider as an anchor of subjectivity, even though she clearly chooses the label in her diary, is critically dubious. Woolf famously wrote in *A Room of One's Own* that "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being" (4), so let us take Woolf at her word and agree with post-structuralist and postmodernist critics like Toril Moi, Makiko Minow-Pinkney, and Pamela L. Caughie when they suggest Woolf practices "a 'deconstructive' form of writing" (Moi 9) that focuses on "no longer representing but rather presenting and constructing reality" (Minnow-Pinkney 3) to the extent that "I" for Woolf "is as much a fiction as is the text, for the 'I' is implicated in its own stories" (Caughie 42). While agreeing with such critics that Woolf's writing treats the self as a fundamentally discursive construction, however, let us also resist any notions that Woolf completely abandons the self to linguistic *différance* and disagree with critics like Herbert Marder and Tuzyline Jita Allen when they suggest that Woolf's philosophy of anonymity "referred not only to self-effacement but to an unknowable core or center of the being, which flourishes in obscurity" (Marder 102), or that Woolf enacts a "total erasure of the 'I'" (Allen 135) in order to leave "the burden of proof of the maker's personality in the hands of language" (136). Woolf's notion of the "I" remains respondent to and dependent on discourse, that much is true, but she also realizes one's discursive situatedness has material consequences, both in terms of how one is treated politically, legally, socially, and economically and in terms of how one can best effect political, legal, social, and economic change. "Woolf positions herself as part of a community of subjects,

accessible through language but with no transcendent position outside it,” Jane Goldman suggests, so what matters to Woolf is not that the subject is or is not defined (essentialism) or that subjectivity is or is not definable (post-structuralism), but instead the positionality of the subject at any given time and in any given place in relation to other subjects. Thus, rather than behaving as an anchor of subjectivity, the term outsider, I argue, provides a foundational but always becoming, never complete, subject position from which Woolf exposes the discursive power relations that intersect in her current outsider position in order to determine a political praxis based on and from that position. Her lived experiences as an outsider certainly help shape the outsider subjectivity Woolf uses to interpret the world, but her political praxis is guided not by her lived experiences but by what performative action is most politically beneficial given the temporal and spatial realities of the outsider subject position she currently occupies.

The mode of political praxis Woolf advocates in her writing appears to be akin ethically to moral relativism in that she picks and chooses how to respond politically based on the situation in which she finds herself, but her conceptualization of a performative politics makes sense given the historical realities of the Great War and the rise of ideologies like fascism and communism, which demonstrated the thresholds of biopolitical power. Biopolitics, according to Michel Foucault, was not new in the twentieth century and had existed to varying degrees since the Classical Age, finally reaching maturity between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Europe and America began moving from monarchies toward parliamentary governments that prioritized the rights of people, but it is in the total wars of the twentieth century that one sees the terrifying extremes of biopolitics. A form of government that focuses on disciplining the bodies of individuals, biopolitics aims to “incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it” and establishes “a power bent on generating forces, making them

grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (*The History of Sexuality* 136). Biopolitics does this through the use of social institutions (educational, legal, economic, medical, and military) like universities, barracks, prisons, and asylums, all of which form a diffuse network of power that functions to create what Foucault calls “docile bodies,” which are bodies subjected by these state institutions to the point that “Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (*Discipline and Punish* 138). Such bodies represent the material reality of the state’s power, their disciplined actions performatively realizing the state’s ideologies each time they participate in the traditions and rituals of state institutions. Given the biopolitic order’s focus on closely monitoring and optimizing bodies, it seems counterintuitive to find the logical end of biopolitics in the total wars and Holocaust of the twentieth century, but as Foucault explains wars in the twentieth century were not fought on behalf of kings but “on behalf of the existence of everyone” (*The History of Sexuality* 137). If the true economic, military, legal, intellectual, and cultural wealth of a nation is in the bodies of its people, if every Tom, Dick, and Harry carries the nation with him in his actions, then the wholesale slaughter of populations is not merely justified but integral to military victory. Moreover, once life has been instituted and the body made the nexus of political power, the industrialization of death witnessed during mindless assaults across no man’s land in the Great War becomes a kind of perverse and macabre celebration of a life disciplined into complete mechanization.

If bodies are so integral to state power and materializing the ideologies of state institutions, however, then they can also be used politically to subvert these ideologies through careful and considered participation in ideological actions, which is the foundation of Woolf’s

performative political praxis. Careful participation was a two-stage process for Woolf. First, since one is always already a subject of ideology given discursive power relations, one must determine and understand one's position as a subject within the power relations currently in play. Second, one must decide on a political action that can be made from one's current subject position. The first stage deals primarily with the mind (subjectivity) and the second with the body (the subject), but both are important to political action according to Woolf because, as a subject forced to participate, every decision about how one chooses to participate helps shape material reality. Thus, as Stephen M. Barber has argued, Woolf's late-life political beliefs and praxis are similar to the mode of ethics Foucault espouses in his later writings, which promote an aestheticization of life that advocates "an ethical self-fashioning" of the body (48). Foucault's later work deals with what he calls subjectivation, a process by which individuals establish a critical ontology of themselves as subjects in their biopolitical relationship with the state and its institutions. Just as the state never stops disciplining subjected bodies by expecting their continued participation in rituals that reify state ideologies, Foucault suggests that a "critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them" ("What is Enlightenment" 319). Subjection to the state and subjectivation both entail the body becoming a conduit for power through disciplined use, but whereas subjection disciplines the body to ensure the endless reproduction of state ideologies through ritualized actions, subjectivation practices politics with discipline through careful consideration of one's subject position in discursive power relations and taking actions that are temporally and spatially

specific to counter and subvert ritualized ideological actions. Woolf advocates such a disciplined monitoring of oneself as a subject and of how one's body is used when she says in *Three Guineas* that "to be passive is to be active" (245). Unlike Barber, I will argue this view of politics did not suddenly appear as a result of the "spiritual conversion" Woolf had in 1933-34 but was, in fact, the culmination of many years of thought about how best to effect political change as one subject in a biopolitical system. My aim in this work is to create a genealogy of Woolf's political thought by tracing political and politicized bodies through her works and, in doing so, establish a connection between Woolf's formal experiments with subjectivity and positionality, and her later political conceptualization of subjects, subjectivity, and embodied political action. I argue, therefore, that Woolf presents a coherent theory of subjectivation in her works that suggests the best way to effectively stymie the state ideologies that led, during her lifetime, to two total wars and one Holocaust is to undermine these ideologies by denying them the ritualized bodily performances they need to bring them into material existence.

This work is split into three parts, each of which examines one portion of Woolf's theory of politics by focusing on her conceptualization of subjectivity, the subject, and subjectivation. While these are not treated as being distinct from one another, the approach offers a convenient framework to discuss Woolf's enactment of a political theory that focuses on the mind (subjectivity), the body (the subject), and the careful use and consideration of both in determining political praxis (subjectivation). Section One explores subjectivity via Woolf's *Common Reader*, which I argue represents not only a theory of reading but also a theory of subjectivity for modern political subjects. Her theorization of the figure in *The Common Reader: First Series* offers the best way into Woolf's politics because the common reader is not only a subject position created within and through the discourse of the "battle of the brows" that raged

in the interwar period, but is also representative of the spatially and temporally performative politics Woolf advocated.

Chapter One outlines the “battle of the brows,” presenting how the terms were used to market literature in a crowded literary marketplace as literacy rates continued to increase during the twentieth century. The goal of this discussion is not to create clear definitions of high modernism and middlebrow texts, but to suggest that the marketing practices of both stripped readers of agency by subjecting them either to highbrow calls for professional readers properly able to appreciate their craftsmanship, or to the tastes and values of the “common man” that, according to the middlebrow, did not align with the effete aestheticism of highbrow snobs and their small coteries. Woolf unabashedly defined herself as a highbrow in this cultural landscape, and Chapter Two, in part, explores how Woolf positioned herself as a writer, thinker, and publisher in the contested interwar literary marketplace. It begins by examining the way she and Leonard steered the Hogarth Press through the “battle of the brows” and, as it matured, made the Hogarth a more egalitarian press that published highbrow and working-class literature, as well as highbrow, middlebrow, and working-class pamphlets. Such diversity was relatively rare in such a bifurcated literary marketplace, and the owners carefully maintained the press’s cultural capital by monitoring how, when, and where their imprimaturs were used in the aesthetic discourses of interwar England. In particular, I explore the Woolfs’ seemingly paradoxical decision to support Radclyffe Hall against obscenity charges stemming from *The Well of Loneliness* while also refusing to publish a work by John Hampson about a homosexual working-class man as an example of the Woolfs’ careful performative politics based on their current subject positions as writers, thinkers, and publishers.

Chapter Two then shifts to focus on two of Woolf's shorter essays, "Character in Fiction" (1924) and "Street Haunting" (1927), to explore how Woolf, as a writer, publisher, and thinker who supported readers' self-determination as both thinkers and consumers in the literary marketplace, placed her trust in the common reader to steer culture. In these essays, Woolf presents the common reader as a riposte to both highbrow professionalism and the middlebrow "common man" by defining a role for readers in cultural production beyond being partisan consumers in the "battle of the brows." One of the most important characteristics of common readers according to Woolf is their critical deficiencies as they hastily and inaccurately "run up some rickety and ramshackle fabric" with which they build a critical structure that creates "a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing" (1). A deficient and ephemeral critical framework may seem like a detriment, but Woolf makes it the common reader's saving grace against a discourse that asks readers to swear fealty to the high or middlebrow, for it outlines a theory of reading that focuses on active reading rather than reading according to a system. More than this, however, Woolf invites active reading in her essays by employing narrators that note the constructedness and positionality of their own arguments. Over and over again, Woolf's narrators position and reposition themselves in relation to institutions, characters, and readers, thereby establishing intersectional identities that highlight their discursive situatedness while simultaneously entreating readers to think about their own positions in relation to these narrators. In "Character in Fiction", for example, Woolf not only reveals how the high and middlebrow have constructed the "battle of the brows" to strip readers of their cultural agency but also invites readers, by performing the role of an inclusive hostess in the essay, to recognize they play an active role in cultural production and determine what books represent their own interests. Culture, Woolf argues, is always in the process of becoming and

should remain responsive to change as authors and readers negotiate the literary conventions and forms that best represent their shared time and place. The common reader's hastily built critical frameworks, therefore, represent a corollary for Woolf's theorization of modern political subjectivities that must take into account the myriad discursive power relations that intersect at one's subject position. Just as readers must position themselves in relation to texts and authors as they read, so too must subjects position themselves politically within and through the institutional discourses that attempt to discipline their bodies. While "Character in Fiction" focuses on the role the common reader's subjectivity plays in steering cultural production, "Street Haunting" highlights the subject's role in cultural production by moving the reader into the streets where books are purchased. In the essay, Woolf argues that the act of buying a book represents one's materiality in and material effects on the literary marketplace because in purchasing a book one guides culture, however slightly, toward one's tastes. For Woolf, that is to say, buying books is a performative action that has consequences on cultural production in a similar way that participating or not participating in the ideological rituals of institutions has political consequences. In the common reader, therefore, Woolf presents a theory of subjectivity that serves as the foundation of her theorization of politics and political action, which she employs in her writing throughout her career.

In Section Two, I move to the subject as it appears within and outside cultural institutions through an exploration of Woolf's fiction and the political and politicized bodies of Jacob Flanders in *Jacob's Room* and Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*. While the agency of the common reader is the question underlying Woolf's essays that address the "battle of the brows," the agency of the individual within the British education, military, and health institutions that attempt to shape subjects and subjectivity itself is the focus of these texts. Jacob, the

consummate institutional insider, is the focus of Chapter Three, which tracks his progress through the patriarchal machine during his short life that leads him from Rugby, to the halls of Cambridge, to the courthouses of Whitehall, to the no-man's land of Flanders. The novel, narrated by a female narrator using fragmentary vignettes gathered from the impressions of other women Jacob encounters throughout his life, positions Jacob as an absence at the centre of his own *Bildungsroman*, but it also provides an outsider's perspective on Jacob's experience as a cultural and institutional insider. The narrator, I argue, functions in the novel like a museum curator putting together an exhibition of artifacts from Jacob's life, so what emerges from the novel is a story that is as much the narrator's as it is Jacob's. She positions readers and characters in each vignette, never allowing the narrative to be taken over by Jacob's insider perspective while always allowing readers to track his progress through patriarchal institutions, especially the university, as his participation in their rituals progressively disciplines his body and strips him of his individuality. In the end, therefore, *Jacob's Room* becomes a warning for the dangers of unthinking participation in state ideologies as Woolf depicts Jacob's subjection to the state as something he willingly chooses over and over again throughout his life.

Chapter Four explores Septimus Smith as a liminal figure in a post-war England trying desperately to stabilize itself after the Great War, and suggests that his mad body, a constant reminder of the chaos the war wrought in England's patriarchal establishments, becomes the scapegoat Sir William Bradshaw uses to both extend his personal institutional power and expand the power his laws of proportion and conversion have over the bodies of English subjects. Septimus's mad body is the exception that Bradshaw, as a state functionary working for the government to help cure soldiers suffering from shell-shock, uses to establish the threshold of madness in England, thereby establishing a biopolitical space in which his laws of proportion

and conversion find legal coherence and can begin disciplining subjected bodies. When Septimus wrests control of his body back from Bradshaw, who wants to send Septimus to an asylum, by committing suicide, Bradshaw goes to Clarissa Dalloway's party with the intent of expanding his ability to confine the mad by enlisting the help of Richard Dalloway, a Member of Parliament, in the drafting of a legal bill concerning the treatment of shell-shock. Bradshaw, therefore, makes Septimus and the subject position he occupies in post-war discursive power relations the saviour of a political establishment still struggling with the psychological harm its wartime decisions caused to soldiers. It is only when Bradshaw brings death to the party by discussing Septimus's suicide, that Clarissa, deeply mistrustful of Bradshaw to begin with, has an epiphany that reveals how important Bradshaw's role is in determining madness and disciplining the bodies of many lives in England. Inasmuch as Clarissa is responsible for assembling the party—her only talent, she believes, is as a hostess—and she is able to do so based solely on her subject position as the upper class wife of an MP, *Mrs Dalloway* reveals that while bodies can be used to extend the biopolitical power of state they can also be used to open spaces of potential from which discourse and discursive power relations can be recognized and challenged. And, once again, it is Clarissa's performative action based on her subject position that brings about this potential.

In Section Three of this work, I present two examples of subjectivation using Woolf's longer essays, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. In *A Room of One's Own*, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Five, Woolf employs a narrator whose political praxis in the essay is grounded in the close examination of subject positions and how her position as a woman writer can best be used to advance political ends. As Clara Jones has shown recently, Woolf was no stranger to political activism, in particular on behalf of The People's Suffrage Federation and The Women's Co-operative Guild (4), and that the experiences of woman are important to

Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Own* is beyond dispute since the attacks her narrator levels at Oxbridge are born of her experience being shooed off the grass and excluded from its library. So it seems strange that Woolf's narrator positions herself as an outsider when she lectures to a collective of women's college students, despite the fact that the narrator supports women's education and, presumably, has a lived experience similar to that of the students. Stranger still, she explicitly rejects the term feminism because it and its proponents, specifically Emily Davies and Anne Clough (prominent members of the Suffragette movement and the first head mistresses of Girton and Newnham women's colleges respectively), divide the sexes from one another. In terms of political expediency, positioning oneself in this way amongst a group of women's college students is questionable, and nothing would be easier for the narrator than delivering a speech that affirms women's rights and their right to an education, but in this time and place the narrator writer views promoting a theory of the androgynous mind as the most politically and culturally useful thing she can do. She does not deny the historical patriarchal oppression of women and even repeatedly suggests topics—the role of chastity in women's lives, the effect of money on women's literature—that the women in her audience may explore to expand England's understanding of women's history. She asserts, however, that her contribution as a woman writer cannot be and will not be to write on behalf of her sex. Freed by her room of any anger she feels at being excluded from social institutions because of her gender, the narrator wants to write about things other than her gender because, she argues, it will repair a relationship between men and women that has been fractured by women's fight for civil rights and men's desperate attempts to prevent these civil rights by reasserting ever more vociferously their fragile superiority. An anchoring feminine subjectivity may have been politically necessary during the fight for women's civil rights and women's colleges, Woolf implies in the peroration of *A Room*

of *One's Own*, but now that women have the vote and educations and occupations there is no excuse for them not to invent, to write, and to imagine free from men and the femininity they discursively impose upon women, for at long last, Woolf argues, “our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women” (102). Her call for gender neutrality in the essay may be naïve or quixotic given there were then and still are many social inequalities women face, but Woolf uses her narrator’s outsider subject position to ask women what it has meant to anchor themselves to a feminine subjectivity for the last half-century or so in their fight for civil rights.

In contrast to her call for gender neutrality in *A Room of One's Own*, nearly ten years later in *Three Guineas* Woolf would argue almost the exact opposite when she called for outsiders to ground their politics in the subjective differences their exclusion from England’s social institutions had created. Woolf’s reversal in argument comes down largely to context: in 1929, England had put the Great War behind it for the most part and, along with much of the developed world, was enjoying an economic upturn, but by 1938 the Great Depression had taken its toll on the global economy and fascism was pushing Europe to the brink of war once again. If women could afford to work with men in building a more equitable society at the time Woolf was writing *A Room of One's Own*, they could ill-afford to do so as she was writing *Three Guineas* and while Hitler and Mussolini were elevating all the worst aspects of patriarchal hegemony to support their ideology. Chapter Six examines the way Woolf positions herself as an outsider in *Three Guineas* to make the argument that women must be careful when joining men in universities, businesses, and professions that they do not end up supporting patriarchal hegemony in England’s educational, economic, and legal systems. Woolf employs an argumentative structure in *Three Guineas* that pays homage to the formal essays written in

England's public educational institutions, but she also subverts this structure using an epistolary form—long associated with women and the private sphere—that continuously disrupts and intervenes in her argument. For Woolf, letters represent a highly personal, performative, and temporalized form of writing because what is captured in letters is a writing subject and a reading subject, both imagined through their shared relationship, as they exist on a given day in any given place. By disrupting her essay's structure with an epistolary form, therefore, Woolf models the type of careful private and disruptive engagement with public patriarchal institutions she counsels for her Society of Outsiders in the text. In the end, then, *Three Guineas* represents a purposeful failure at communication between her as the daughter of an educated man and the educated man she writes to, for Woolf breaks an argumentative structure long used by men and familiar in the public sphere with a personal, performative form that promotes timely political actions based on her difference as an outsider.

CHAPTER ONE

How Should One Sell a Book?: High- and Middlebrow Marketing Strategies Between the Wars

Any discussion of modernism's history must take into account the rapidly changing literary marketplace modernism found itself within. By the twentieth century, the literary marketplace in England was characterized by, above all else, competition. The English Education Acts of 1870 and 1881 had guaranteed free and compulsory education for all children in England, the result of which was the near eradication of illiteracy by 1900. "In 1841," Paul Delaney writes, "a third of English men and half the women could not write their own names in the marriage registers; by 1900, only three percent of both sexes were unable to do so" (101). To attend to the needs of this quickly expanding literate society, the production of books, magazines, and newspapers increased drastically. This increase can be seen in terms of material production and in terms of cultural production: from 125,000 in 1871, the number of workers employed in the production of paper and printed material had reached 397,000 in 1911, and the amount of paper produced rose "from 120,000 tons in 1870 to 774,000 tons in 1903" (102). The ranks of literary professionals in England also swelled: "in 1881, 3,400 authors, editors, and journalists [made lives in England]; in 1891, around 6,000; in 1901, about 11,000, and in 1911, around 14,000—a quadrupling in size in thirty years" (Miller 8). Thus, "By 1900 there were an estimated 50,000 periodicals being published in Britain by 200 publishers," of which the most popular saw rapidly escalating sales through the turn of the century and beyond: "The *Daily Mail*, launched in 1896, with a circulation of about 200,000, achieved 1 million circulation in 1906 and about 2.7 million by 1927" (Collier 18).

The literary marketplace was not only trying to keep up with the sheer demand for new things to read, however; it was also trying to cater to a diversity in taste heretofore unseen in the English reading public. Democratizing literacy had thrust literature, over the span of about half a century, into a market economy that had no clear qualitative distinctions concerning literature and was, instead, dominated by individual interests and tastes. The writers of high literature could to a great extent once have distanced themselves from the rigorous competition of the market economy either by seeking the patronage of an upper class invested in promoting high art or by finding work with literary periodicals, many of which functioned in ways not dissimilar to patronage. In the early twentieth century, modernist writers took this same approach to funding their art: Ezra Pound, for example, used patronage as his primary source of income well into the twentieth century, receiving £200 of his £400 annual salary in 1912 from Margaret Cravens, an American bohemian expatriate (Rainey 15). Literary periodicals also offered writers of high literature a reprieve from the market economy inasmuch as they were primarily supported by wealthy patrons and thus did not depend to any great extent on making money through advertising, a relationship that could potentially steer artistic production by placing demands or expectations on writers. *The Little Review*, for which Pound was foreign editor beginning in 1917, and *The Egoist*, co-edited by Richard Aldington from 1914-1918 and edited by T. S. Eliot from 1918 to 1919, both carried very few advertisements and were paid for primarily by wealthy benefactors: the former was supported by four contributors whose total contributions equalled \$2,350 per year, and the latter was supported by Harriet Weaver at the cost of £253 (\$1,265) per year (Rainey 94). And higher circulation literary publications could be much more expensive. *The Dial* had much higher advertisement to content ratios (1:3) than smaller reviews such as *The Little Review* and *The Egotist* (1:10), but it still required massive support from private

benefactors: “its deficits for the three years from 1920 to 1922 were, respectively, \$100,000, \$54,000, and \$65,000, a cumulative deficit of \$220,000 that was paid for directly by [Scofield] Thayer and [James Sibley] Watson at the rate of \$4,000 per month from each” (Rainey 94). While such publications remained a part of the literary marketplace throughout the modernist period, the rapid increase in literacy and readership in the early twentieth century was beginning to change the landscape of the literary marketplace as reading became a big business. “For the first time,” John Carey explains, “a huge literate public had come into being, and consequently every aspect of the production and dissemination of the printed text became subject to revolution” (5). Put most simply, the writers of high literature had to leave the drawing rooms of the coterie publics they had traditionally served in order to make their literature viable and sellable in a marketplace that had many more buyers than ever before. They had to make themselves commodifiable in a marketplace that demanded writers devise new marketing strategies to sell their products to an ever-increasing number of readers.

This chapter focuses primarily on how highbrow modernist writers positioned themselves and their writing within the large, varied reading publics of the twentieth century literary marketplace, and it provides an overview of recent critical work on the marketing strategies modernists used to sell their products. Through this discussion, this chapter maps the cultural and discursive landscape of the literary marketplace that produced Virginia Woolf’s conceptualization of her common reader. As Kathryn Simpson points out, Woolf’s common reader “was brought into being by the emergence of the literary marketplace, opening literature up to readers other than the wealthy patrons of the arts” (*Gifts* 13), but her reliance on a figure other modernists abandoned—often times very publicly—indicates that Woolf wanted to stake her own ground in a literary marketplace that too often forgot the reader in its aesthetic squabbles

about browism. In the “battle of the brows,” that is, Woolf’s common reader not only reveals the inadequacies of an aesthetic discourse that, in pitting highbrow professionalism against middlebrow commonness, casts readers as mere passive consumers of culture, but also positions them as a cultural theorists, the common reader becoming a theory of subjectivity meant to demonstrate the active role individuals can and must play in their cultural, political, and ideological realities.

The “battle of the brows” was ostensibly concerned with marking clear qualitative distinctions between literatures, but this work treats them as terms in an aesthetic discourse that was constructed and used by writers from both sides in order to sell their products in the literary marketplace. That being said, I do want to make it clear from the outset that the terms high and middlebrow as I will use them here have nothing to do with phrenology and its debunked beliefs that racial differences in forehead size are indicative of racial differences in intelligence. The term highbrow was used in the interwar period to signify intellectual superiority, but as Melba Cuddy-Keane has pointed out, highbrow was generally used at the time as a pejorative because the term highbrow “usually assumes an attitude held by intellectuals toward non-intellectuals and, used with this connotation, it generally betrays an attitude *toward* intellectuals on the part of the user” (16), so at the time the term highbrow “is less about attributes than attitudes” (16). The word’s basis in attitudes rather than a clearly defined concept makes it particularly useful for advertising and marketing because, firstly, it carries connotations that evoke an emotion and, secondly, it makes the word particularly malleable as a signifier. Many modernist writers, who were generally accused of being highbrows by critics and other writers, took the word on, however, reappropriating it and using it to define themselves and their works. This includes Virginia Woolf, who wrote an essay, written as a letter to the *New Statesman and Nation* but

neither sent nor published during her lifetime, called “Middlebrow” (1932), in which she offers these rather difficult to parse definitions of the high, middle, and lowbrows: the highbrow is a person “of thoroughbred intelligence who rides his mind at a gallop across country in pursuit of an idea” (196); the lowbrow is a person “of thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at a gallop across life” (197); and the middlebrow is “the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige” (199). In and of themselves, these definitions do little to explain how we might distinguish between the brows, but Woolf does offer us one diagnostic tool for defining the middlebrow when she notes their strange passion “for being ‘seen’” (199)—being seen owning the right things, wearing the right things, and doing and saying the right things. Woolf’s is a useful definition because it notes the highbrow assumption that the middlebrow traded in mass-produced homogeneous art designed for a consumerist reading public, proving that highbrow definitions of the middlebrow were also based on attitudes with emotional resonance rather than actual attributes. Woolf admits as much in a letter to Ethyl Smyth, writing that she was “wound into a pitch of fury the other day by a reviewers attacks upon a friend of mine” when she wrote the essay and that she was glad Leonard Woolf talked her out of sending it by pointing out that “its [*sic.*] all about yourself” (*Letters* 5 194-95), a point she admitted two weeks later when she re-read the essay and discovered “there was ‘I’ as large, and ugly as could be” (195). Thus, while Woolf was very much aware of and interested in the “battle of the brows,” she was very careful about how she forayed into the discourse publicly. For the most part, however, each brow ultimately settled on definitions of the other that allowed them to best market their respective products, so this work

focuses on how these definitions were created and used for marketing purposes rather than attempting to define what constituted high and middlebrow literature during the interwar period.

Highbrow modernist writers transitioned from writing for the smaller reading publics established by patrons to writing for larger, more varied reading publics by establishing a niche market of their own based on the concept of craftsmanship, a marketing strategy that opposed mass-production and homogeneity to focus on a secondary economy that centred on cultural capital. This chapter begins with an examination of marketing strategies used in department stores like Selfridges that were designed to reinvigorate the aura of mass-produced goods by creating a commodified authenticity that centered on a product's value as a class or cultural signifier rather than its use value. By selling the culture associated with certain products instead of just the product itself, Selfridges created a secondary economy in which goods gained cultural value that could confer status onto their owners. Despite public claims that they eschewed the marketplace and created art for art's sake, many modernists employed similar marketing strategies to sell modernism. To distinguish their works as the authentic productions of professional writers as opposed to the homogenous offerings of mass-produced literature created merely for its high saleability, they established a secondary economy that traded in the cultural value connected to highbrow modernism and modernist writers. Based primarily on the creation and maintenance of authorial imprimaturs that could be used to confer status in the form of an introduction, a foreword, or a publishing insignia, this secondary economy was also manipulated in other ways, such as inciting bidding wars between competing modernist publications or creating market scarcity through limited editions. All of these marketing strategies helped create for modernism an authenticity and cultural value that was commodifiable and exchangeable,

helping modernists transition into a diverse marketplace dominated by niche demographics concerned more than ever with distinguishing themselves from one another.

Distinguishing themselves from the middlebrow, their main competitors in the interwar literary marketplace, was a crucial element of the selling of highbrow modernism. The foundation for the distinction between high- and middlebrow was a perceived cultural crisis as new literature flooded the marketplace and reading interests and tastes became more diffuse. The causes and symptoms of this cultural crisis, however, were different depending on which brow was making the argument. Highbrow writers and critics argued that the middlebrow pandered to readers by employing traditional narratives and familiar literary forms in order to ensure the saleability of products designed to be consumed easily and to reaffirm normative middle-class values and tastes. Middlebrow critics and writers, conversely, argued that the highbrow modernists had retreated to their ivory towers and abandoned readers with their experimental forms designed to impress small, elitist coteries and to neglect the material reality of common people. Thus, the marketing strategies of both high- and middlebrow hinged on what Andreas Huyssen has called the “great divide,” a “discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture” (viii), and which provided each brow with a convenient enemy against which to position itself in the marketplace. The highbrow would be the breakers of literary tradition and counter the homogeneity of mass production with difficulty in the form of unconventional signifying systems, formal innovation, and non-traditional narrative structures. The middlebrow would be the maintainers of literary tradition and present conventional forms that adequately represented the material reality of the majority of the reading public.

While this antagonistic discourse or “battle of the brows” was mutually convenient from a marketing standpoint, I argue that it largely neglected the reading public, who gradually

became either the bane of highbrow attempts toward aesthetic innovation due to that public's loyalty to traditional forms, or the object of middlebrow novels in which middle-class desires, tastes, and cultural signifiers were legitimized, normalized, and prioritized. Both high- and middlebrow writers, therefore, abandoned Dr. Johnson's "common reader"—a figure who represented "the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices" (456) and could be trusted to judge literature impartially—and focused on demographics and niche markets in which their art could be more commodifiable in the changed literary landscape. To aid in this process of niche building, middlebrow novels became sites of middle-class self-fashioning, texts in which middle-class readers could negotiate class performance and discover what it meant to be middle-class. Similar to behaviour manuals or buying guides, middlebrow novels were less focused on the common reader and oriented instead towards establishing the "common man," who ostensibly represented the desires, goals, and tastes of the everyday Briton, but who actually normalized the lifestyles of the middle-class as an arbiter and disseminator of taste. The highbrow abandoned the common reader for the professional reader, believing that professionalism both on the part of the reader and of the writer could begin to reshape and rebuild an English culture that was regressing due to mass-production and the crush of new literature. This was the landscape, then, for Virginia Woolf's writing, publishing, and marketing: the culture wars of interwar modernity.

Commodifying Authenticity: Selling Culture in a Mass-produced World

Just as the literary marketplace was going through its revolution in production and dissemination, the marketing of products in general was also going through a revolution as the growing middle classes acquired more expendable income. In the simplest terms, the dynamic of

production and consumption in England was transitioning throughout the beginning of the twentieth century from a capitalist to late-capitalist marketplace, in which products are marketed more in accordance with their status as signifiers of culture than with their use-value. As Elizabeth Outka explains in *Consuming Traditions*, marketers in twentieth-century Britain “began to focus less on a particular object for sale at a particular price, and more on aura and setting” that promised consumers “new identities and new ways to live,” a sales strategy that “was not simply a transition from formerly fixed identities or lives to the mobile flux brought by modernity, but a simultaneous embrace of modernity’s promise of exchange and the equally alluring promise of authenticity” (7-8). In a world in which mechanical reproduction provides the capability to endlessly produce objects for rapid consumption, any aura new products have is stripped away as the marketplace becomes saturated with many similar and almost indistinguishable products. In order to sell products that vary only slightly from any number of other products, businesses began promoting certain products as being indicative or symbolic of certain cultures, classes, and lifestyles, a process that worked to reinvigorate the aura of the product by attaching it to certain modes of consumption and to certain classes of consumers. The sales techniques employed in this new form of marketing were often quite intricate. Selfridges department store was one of the first examples of selling culture to its customers, and in order to do so set up ornate vignettes within the store that showed manikins performing in still life the tasks of the average middle-class or working-class family. Such scenes are, of course, common today, but at the time they were revolutionary. Packed with products that signified the class of the manikins, these vignettes served as mirrors for consumers: they allowed consumers to see what it meant to be middle class, and because the products they saw were available for purchase

just a short distance away, consuming these products became a process of self-fashioning, of becoming middle class by buying the lifestyle presented in the vignettes.

To facilitate the process, Selfridges made shopping an experience rather than a mundane chore. As one commentator noted at the store's opening, "The Selfridge idea—that Selfridges exists for the convenience and service of the public—took possession of every one who entered the building, and made every one easy. [...] There is nothing ugly from the garden on the roof to the ground floor. Everything is well chosen, in good taste, in harmony with everything else" (qtd. in Outka 104). This description captures the paradox of buying objects to self-fashion or signify class: the store was designed to make browsing and, just as importantly, being seen browsing the primary function of commerce by making shopping a public event, yet it promised to every one who entered the store a measure of personal service that created the illusion of individual importance. "One" and "We" simultaneously, the Selfridges consumer was able to feel a part of something and apart from everything in equal measure. In creating vignettes to sell culture and transforming shopping into an event, Selfridges had shown England that culture was commodifiable, and that any person could present oneself as middle- or upper-middle class merely by consuming the right products.

The view of consuming as self-fashioning is connected in several critical paradigms to the insidious operation of mass culture and the impulse to brainwash the masses by creating ideology-laden products and art that, as subjects unthinkingly consume them, creates an all-pervading and pernicious homogeneity. As Theodor Adorno argues "What parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up, remains the disguise for an eternal sameness; everywhere the changes mask a skeleton which has changed just as little as the profit motive itself since the time it first gained its predominance over culture" (100). The end of

consumption in this theory is consumption itself. As one consumes the same movies, the same sports, the same fashion, the same home decorations, the same literature as everyone else, one identifies oneself as a part of the whole, with the goals of the whole, the interests of the whole, and the desires of the whole becoming the goals, interests, and desires of the individual.

However, the Frankfurt School's view of consumption and mass culture is not just potentially condescending and reductive regarding the masses themselves, but also misreads a crucial dynamic of consumerism: the goal of consumers is not sameness but difference, not a desire to be just like everybody else but a desire to distinguish oneself from everybody else.

That consumer decisions are driven by a desire for distinction is not a new idea. Indeed, economist Thorstein Veblen first presented this idea in 1899 with the publication of *A Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which he suggests that "Wherever the institution of private property is found, even in a slightly developed form, the economic process bears the character of a struggle between men for the possession of goods" (24). The struggle for possession of goods, moreover, is particularly acute in advanced capitalist societies in which one sees a superfluous accumulation of wealth, as possessions become more and more important to the process of conferring and maintaining status. The acquisition of possessions in advanced capitalist societies is not necessarily attached to consumption for Veblen, but is, instead, attached to the idea of accumulation since property becomes "the accepted badge of [one's] efficiency" within capitalist systems to the point that the "possession of goods, whether acquired aggressively by one's own exertion or passively by transmission through inheritance from others, becomes a conventional basis of reputability" (29). Accumulation of property through wealth thus creates what Veblen calls an "invidious distinction" (26), as people accumulate more and more in order to distinguish themselves both within the community and from the community. As if this form of consumption

for the purpose of conferring status through the accumulation of property is not already conspicuous enough, we must also add to it class expectations regarding which products should be consumed. Where property is used to confer status, it is not considered sufficient to be seen accumulating property: one must accumulate the right property by cultivating the ability to “discriminate with some nicety between the noble and the ignoble in consumable goods” (75).

It is at the intersection of the conspicuous consumption practiced in advanced capitalist societies and the new marketing techniques practiced by stores like Selfridges that one finds what Elizabeth Outka refers to as the “commodified authentic,” a mode of commodification that constructs the authenticity of an object through class exclusivity while insisting that such authenticity can be had for a price. “Selfridges,” she explains, “was not simply selling notions of the authentic but frankly avowing that this authenticity was commodified, and that this very commodification in turn made the authenticity that much more appealing and available” (104). Put differently, the items in Selfridges vignettes were valuable only because they conferred status as class signifiers. They were not inherently more valuable or inherently more authentic than any other mass-produced products, but their authenticity was constructed, their aura reinvigorated, by their position as class signifiers: as that which symbolized membership in an exclusive club but also that which was readily accessible to the consumer. A secondary economy, therefore, was created based on class signification and the transfer of distinction or exclusivity that took place as one consumed and was seen consuming the correct items. Within this secondary economy, items that lacked authenticity were authenticated as they accumulated cultural value.

This secondary economy, based on distinction and exclusivity, promoted product authenticity—small batches of handmade products made by skilled craftspeople—within its marketing strategies in order to present the new and manufactured as if it were the old-fashioned

and crafted, thereby distancing products from the mass market while simultaneously making them consumable. As Outka demonstrates, much ink was spilled in advertising that promoted the authenticity of hand-made products in the old-fashioned ways used in English villages, which the taint of the mass production had not yet reached. An article entitled “How Selfridge’s [*sic.*] Gathers Its Goods from All Parts of the World,” which appeared in the *Times* leading up to the opening of Selfridges, decries the “painful uniformity” of mass produced products and points out that Selfridges buyers seek original products that “strike a distinctive and individual note” by travelling not only to places such as Japan, Germany, and the English countryside but also “literally off the high road of commerce to penetrate into little known villages, and sequestered districts where manufactures are still carried on in a simple human way by men and women whose workshop is their home and who themselves are artists in their craft rather than artisans” (qtd. in Outka 111). Mass production is both avowed and disavowed in this advertisement: the simple, commercially untainted, and authentic lifestyles of the English, German, and Japanese peasantry are juxtaposed against the homogeneity of heavily commercialized cities, yet these places are “penetrated” by Selfridges, who bring the authenticity of that place and its people to the city for the discerning consumer. The sexual language in this passage reveals much, both about what Selfridges was offering their customers and what their customers desired. Customers desired exclusive access to the pure wares of the peasantry because this access offered them power over a mass production process that stripped them of their individuality and the product of its aura, and Selfridges’ tireless search for the authentic ostensibly fulfilled this desire while, in reality, selling them the representation of purity. Thus, it seems Selfridges penetrated both peasantry and consumer, the former for the aura their evocation conferred and the latter for the exclusivity their consumption of these products established. Selfridges’ courtship of customers,

however, did not end with print advertisement. In the early years of the store's existence, the store offered exhibitions of "Old-time Industry" once a year, during which a skilled craftsman would come and make the actual products for sale in Selfridges so that customers could observe products in the making, thereby strengthening the veneer of Selfridges' incessant search for the authentic (Outka 112).

Still other attempts to capture the authentic centred on the marketing of what were considered more authentic cultural traditions. For example, as Michael North argues, with the increased excavation of Egyptian tombs during the early twentieth century, some clothing designers looked backward to find inspiration for the present. Bedell's in New York ran an ad in 1923 saying that the store was sponsoring "the Tut-ankh-Amen Influence in Silhouette and Embellishment in Spring Apparel," further explaining that "Bedell, always responsive to the newest and ever changing trends in fashion, takes the initiative in presenting the Tut-ankh-Amen silhouette, colorings and artful embellishment [...] inspired by the delicately wrought Egyptian carvings of three thousand years ago" (qtd. in North 25). The ad goes on to explain that "Just as the ancient tombs are resplendent with their rare works of art, so the Bedell Salons disclose a magnificent ensemble of brilliant attire for Springtime. As each treasure has its own particular beauty, so is there a treasured beauty in Bedell Apparel—each with an individuality so pleasing to the feminine heart" (qtd. in North 25). This ad obviously plays on many of the same principles as the Selfridges ads—invigorating the aura of mass-produced clothing, evoking Ancient Egypt as a time before mass production, and promising the consumer individuality—but note, too, how this marketing strategy is mirrored in the construction of a number of the sentences. The subordinate clauses that begin the last two sentences harken back to Ancient Egypt, which is then brought into the present through Bedell's fashion, promising as it were a direct connection

between the authenticity of Ancient Egypt and the consumer of Bedell fashion. Wearing Bedell clothing was not only stylish but showed also a discerning taste born of and borne by the authenticity of an ancient culture much more closely connected to the real than twentieth-century consumer society. Therefore, as North points out, “the Tut treasures themselves became valuable because they could be known, discussed, and reproduced, literally as well as figuratively. Thus, the ultimate auratic paradox governing the Tut phenomenon was that the new, the secret, the hermetic had to be hurriedly exploited before it became too common, and yet common knowledge of it was itself the value being mined” (24). Sellers, that is to say, had found a way to manufacture the authentic by selling culture rather than products, which became cultural signifiers imbued with value according to the distinction they conferred in secondary cultural economies governed by conspicuous consumption.

In addition to constructing these secondary cultural economies, sellers had found a way to ensure that the search for distinction through consumerist self-fashioning became an endlessly reproductive cycle. In part, the reproductive cycle of self-fashioning occurred naturally, for as one symbol became too ubiquitous it was replaced by other symbols capable of conferring cultural status. But because its value lay more in who was consuming it than in what was being consumed, commodified authenticity was much more malleable than product authenticity. Consequently, sellers could to a great extent manipulate the process of self-fashioning to suit their purposes. If one wanted to sell a new product as an upper-middle class cultural signifier, then one merely had to start selling old upper-middle class signifiers as new middle-class signifiers. In this way, the commodified authenticity of the product, which once conferred upper-middle class status, is transferred to confer middle-class status, and as more middle-class people consume the product, its commodified authenticity as an upper-middle class cultural signifier is

exhausted and new signifiers are needed to demonstrate one's exclusive inclusion in the upper-middle class. And this process repeats itself as old middle-class cultural signifiers become lower-class signifiers. At Selfridges, this entire process of distinction, exhaustion, and transformation was as easy as moving a product from one floor to another: what started on the upper floors as upper-middle class and middle-class wares eventually found themselves as sale items in the basement, where their commodified authenticity was exhausted for the final time.

Whither the Common Reader?: Cultural Crisis, the Leavises, and Professional Readers

Writers of both highbrow and middlebrow literature employed marketing strategies based on the construction of niche markets and commodified authenticity, and the foundation upon which these strategies rested during the pre- and interwar period was a perceived cultural crisis most clearly outlined in Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932). In this work, Leavis produces a bleak picture of the literary marketplace, suggesting that, as book and magazine publishers were becoming more involved with selling books than with producing serious literature, the reading public's critical faculties were steadily disintegrating. This disintegration did not take place for any one reason, according to Leavis, but was, rather, the result of an expanding reading public and the introduction of mass marketing approaches to selling literature. Magazines, she writes, now "provide reading fodder for odd moments, travelling and after business hours, glanced through with a background of household chatter or 'the wireless,'" and goes on to suggest that "it is essential too that the stories they provide should be short, 'snappy,' as crudely arresting as a poster and for the same reason, and easy enough for the jaded mind to take in without exertion" (28). Consequently, magazines advertised for easy-to-digest, not-too-difficult stories, and publishers refused work that mentally strained the reader,

issuing instead works that were “carefully chosen by the editors in accordance with the policy of what is called ‘Giving the Public what it wants’” (27). Publication, therefore, had become akin to a scientific formula, Leavis argues, as “the editor sets out to satisfy the common measure of taste, and he cannot (or thinks he cannot) afford to publish any story which fails to conform to type” (27).

Leavis illustrates her concerns regarding the formalization of taste in *Fiction and the Reading Public*, as does F.R. Leavis in *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*, with reference to lectures and books that outlined not just how to market fiction but, more specifically, how to write fiction that would sell. Such lectures and books became popular in the interwar period as the literary marketplace expanded, and Q. D. mentions in particular an instance in which editor ‘Bob’ Davis of the *Centurion* hosted a series of lectures in 1930 entitled “You *Can* Learn to Write Stories that *Sell*.” These lectures included topics such as “Write so a blind man can read,” “Write for children to read. If you must say it with flowers, go sell your stuff to the highbrow magazines,” and “Stories that Do Not Sell; Stories Editors do not Like; The Stories that do Sell; Selecting the Market” (qtd. in Q. D. Leavis 30-31). Things in the world of novels were not much better, according to F. R., due to book-borrowing clubs and book-selecting societies. Rapid turnover rates in book-borrowing clubs meant that readers frequently read novels, as they did magazines, for entertainment, so that “the book-borrowing public has acquired the reading habit while somehow failing to exercise any critical intelligence about its reading” (7). Similarly, book societies standardized the taste of readers by promising their selection committees would choose for their customers the right books for their shelves. As one Book Society advertisement read: “How often, sitting in some strange house, have your eyes wandered to the bookshelves in an effort to get some idea of the character of its owner? The books you read are often a guide to

your character. The Book Society will help you to get those books you most want to have on your bookshelf” (qtd. in *Mass Civilization* 23). Books, then, were marketed by these societies as cultural signifiers just like many other products, gaining and retaining value in secondary economies in which the person who was reading the books was as important as what was contained within their pages. That books had entered into the world of commodified authenticity is perhaps nowhere more clear than in one winner’s answer to a Book Society essay contest that asked clients to explain “What the Book Society Has Meant to Me”: “I have looked on the Book Society as a fold into which I can creep for shelter, knowing that the fleeces of the other sheep will be the same colour as my own” (qtd. in Q. D. Leavis 25-26). Q. D., not unjustifiably, sees in this response a pernicious and troubling homogenization of taste within the Book Society’s clientele, but there is also an element of exclusivity—of belonging to a distinguished club—in this response, for the client knows that they are part of a community, the shared values, interests, and goals of which are indicated by the books they keep on their shelves as cultural signifiers.

The end result of literature’s induction into the mass market and the use of mass marketing techniques to sell literature, as posited by Q. D. and F. R. Leavis, was a crisis in culture as the common reader of the English reading public became a less and less reliable judge of literary taste and value. The idea that the English common reader should be considered the ultimate arbiter of literary taste and value first appears in Samuel Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81), where, in the “Life of Gray,” he writes, “In the character of [Gray’s] Elegy [Written in a Country Churchyard] I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty [*sic.*] and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours. The Churchyard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every

bosom returns an echo” (456). This definition is troublingly vague, but Johnson seems to be suggesting that literature can be deemed great only if the common reader sees himself reflected back within that art, even if he is unaware he shares anything in common with the text until after he has read the text. There is a mutual and continuous creative process in this definition of the common reader: the common reader and literature inform one another, with neither existing in isolation from the other and both helping to create one another. Consequently, the common reader and literature should ideally grow together, the values, interests, and goals of one reflecting the values, interests, and goals of the other.

For the Leavises, this process of mutual growth had ceased entirely, in part because the market was deciding what common readers wanted by refusing to publish anything that didn't fit a specific mould, but also because mass marketing techniques designed to sell culture were creating niche markets that increasingly fractured the reading public and made one common taste an impossibility. Nowhere was this fracturing of the literary marketplace more apparent than in the literary magazine genre, which was designed, as Mark S. Morrisson has pointed out, to “control the market from production to consumption, using advertising to craft market niches and foster consumer demand for the products they produced” (4). Thus, as Q. D. Leavis explains, “The *Criterion* will review only those novels which have some pretensions to literary merit and can be criticised by serious standards (it is common even in literary circles to fling the epithet ‘highbrow’ at it); the *Times Literary Supplement*, representing a ‘safe’ academic attitude, will summarise and comment on the plot and merits of any work by a novelist of standing; while a handful of cheap weeklies appear to satisfy a demand for literary gossip and information about the readableness of books” (20). Leavis extrapolates from this information the suggestion that “We now have, apparently, several publics, loosely linked together, with nearly a score of

literary weeklies, monthlies, and a quarterly which serve to standardise different levels of taste” (21). One thus arrives at the foundation of the Leavisite cultural crisis, for F. R. Leavis writes much the same thing in *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930): “Here we have the plight of culture in general. The landmarks have shifted, multiplied and crowded upon one another, the distinctions and dividing lines have blurred away, the boundaries are gone, and the arts and literatures of different countries and periods have flowed together” (19). Gone were the “images which find a mirror in every mind” and the “sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo,” subsumed in a cultural wasteland that caters to the tastes and lifestyles of certain groups of readers. Faced with this dilemma, both Q. D. and F. R. pronounced the death of the common reader in the twentieth century. That death, according to Q. D., stemmed from what was perceived as an increasing divide, where “the lowbrow public” was perceived to be “ignorant of the work and even the names of the highbrow writers,” and where the common cultural texts are for “the highbrow public” known “from hearsay rather than first-hand knowledge” (35). For Q.D., this divide in reading publics

means nothing less than that the general public—Dr. Johnson’s common reader—has now not even a glimpse of the living interests of modern literature, is ignorant of its growth and so prevented from developing with it, and that the critical minority to whose sole charge modern literature has now fallen is now isolated, disowned by the general public and threatened with extinction. (35)

For F. R., too, the notion of the common reader was a thing of the past. Johnson’s age, he opines in *How to Teach Reading*, “enjoyed the advantages of a homogenous—a real—culture” that allowed readers “to move among signals of limited variety, illustrating one predominant pervasive ethos, grammar and idiom [...] and to acquire discrimination as one moves” (3). In

such a homogenous literary marketplace, one was able to “defer to the ultimate authority of the Common Reader” because one could trust the common reader’s cultural competence, but in a marketplace as diverse as that of the twentieth-century, F.R. was forced to conclude that “There is no Common Reader: the tradition is dead” (3-4).

Never ones to use a rapier where a cudgel will do, the Leavises’ statements are steeped in the hyperbole that became a hallmark of their critical work, which, as Iain Wright points out, tended to represent the cultural crisis “in histrionically absolute and apocalyptic terms” and positioned the Leavises and their retinue as “lonely heroic figures silhouetted against the lurid glow of the Last Days” (54). Wright is, of course, countering hyperbole with hyperbole with this statement, but reading the Leavises is indeed akin to reading a cultural battle manifesto. In Q. D. Leavis’s assertion that, under the influences of the mass market, “the reading habit is now often a form of the drug habit” (7), one recognizes how invested she was in solving the cultural crisis. In the Leavisite narrative, fiction “had once been in harmonious alignment with a reading public,” Jennifer Wicke explains, since “good literature has also, in effect, been popular literature, and there was no discrepancy between popular *taste* and high culture,” but “mass culture was an alien wedge” that was separating the two and rendering the common reader valueless as cultural arbiter (8).

The solution to this cultural crisis, according to the Leavises and their supporters, was the reinstitution of critical practices through a minority of people properly trained to effectively read modern texts and help guide culture in the right direction. This minority is alluded to by Q. D. in the passage above, but it finds its most cogent definition in F. R.’s *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* when he argues that the minority capable of appreciating earlier as well as contemporary masters demonstrate a “responsiveness to theory as well as to art, to science and

philosophy in so far as these may affect the sense of the human situation and of the nature of life,” and among them “they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition” (4). Within this minority, Leavis argues, reside the “implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which we must go, that the centre is here rather than there” (5). What Leavis is suggesting is the professionalization of a minority of readers, trained by him and the other members of newly-formed English Departments in British universities, who would then be able to act as something of an Arnoldian cultural steering committee to ensure that the best in culture was kept alive and passed on to future generations. Such intervention was perceived as necessary in the age of mechanical reproduction, for within the pages of great literature was contained the essence of what it meant to be human, an essence that was slowly being stripped away as increased mechanization made automatons of people. In the Leavisite conception of the twentieth-century cultural crisis, reading thus became both the poison and the remedy for a consumer culture that alienated people from themselves. The Leavises urged for rigorous textual analysis, Terry Eagleton states, “not simply for technical or aesthetic reasons, but because it had the closest relevance to the spiritual crisis of modern civilization,” a crisis in which “Literature was important not only in itself, but because it encapsulated creative energies which were everywhere on the defensive in modern ‘commercial’ society. In literature, and perhaps in literature alone, a vital feel for the creative uses of language was still manifest, in contrast to the philistine devaluing of language and traditional culture blatantly apparent in ‘mass society’” (27-28). Readers could be reinvigorated and brought back in touch with their humanity according to the Leavises and their critical retinue at *Scrutiny*, but first culture must be saved by properly trained readers capable of evaluating the best of modern literature in the common reader’s absence.

Make it New Again: Literary Modernism's Aura Enters the Marketplace

In an academy in which postmodernism's near complete deconstruction of the divide between high and low culture makes it possible to attend conferences on both Marcel Proust and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the same calendar year, the idea of a minority of well-trained readers acting as cultural arbiters seems, at best, quixotic and, at worst, quaint beyond compare. Indeed, Eagleton suggests that the "whole *Scrutiny* project was at once hair-raisingly radical and really rather absurd," entailing as it did a plan that suggested "the Decline of the West was [...] avertible by close reading" (30). But this seems a little harsh. Yes, the *Scrutiny* project was unquestioningly elitist; and yes, in the words of Eagleton, it "betrayed a profound ignorance and distrust of the capacities of those not fortunate enough to have read English at Downing College" (30); but the Scrutineers were by no means the only literary figures in the interwar period trying to teach people how to read. Writers, critics, and journalists of every class and brow attempted, in various ways, to instruct readers how to navigate the expanded literary marketplace. Virginia Woolf's *The Common Reader: First Series* (1925) and *Second Series* (1932) are clearly part of this instructional trend, as are T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920) and *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), Wyndham Lewis's *Men Without Art* (1934), and Ezra Pound's *How to Read* (1931), which would later become *The ABC of Reading* (1951). Reading instruction and the fashioning of taste were central to discourses of aesthetics in interwar England, as these are but a few of the more well-known book-length tomes, essay collections, and pamphlets on reading. Literary periodicals and journals were also the sites of numerous essays and letters concerning reading instruction and taste. Thus, as Melba Cuddy-Keane points out, if "the nineteenth century had been able to achieve almost universal *functional* literacy, *cultural* literacy

then became the immediate and more difficult goal” (60) for critics and writers in the twentieth century. The problem for literacy in the twentieth century, that is to say, became one not of teaching people *how* to read, but rather of teaching the reading public, first and foremost, *what* books were worth reading and, secondly, *why* those books were worth reading.

What books to read and why—questions that took on a magnified significance in a literary marketplace seemingly in the midst of cultural crisis—became the background against which the high- and middlebrow marketed their works, and through which writers attempted to theorize and utilize literature’s entrance into the mass market. If “The difference between the nineteenth-century mob and the twentieth-century mass is literacy” (Carey 5), producers of literature—of all genres, brows, and creeds—had to learn how to effectively sell their products in the mass market. This necessitated close attention to the fractured reading public outlined by the Scrutineers, for, as Paul Delany points out, “the sharper and more systematic segmentation of the literary marketplace after 1870 forced authors to be aware of their dependent and relative status as producers: to think more of how they were situated between readers, publishers, genres and potential rivals, and less of the intrinsic moral or formal possibilities of a given subject matter” (99). Prompted to think in terms of niche markets, to think of readers’ genders, lifestyles, aesthetic tastes, and interests, producers had to understand that the selling of literature, as of any commodity in an advanced capitalist economy, had become a careful negotiation of supply and demand, and, above all else, a creation of cultural niches in which one’s product could entice consumers. In short, selling literature had become a careful game of positioning oneself within the marketplace.

The first order of business in this game of positionality was to define precisely what one was selling, for doing so allowed one to begin constructing a sales niche in which one’s own

literary and cultural values could be validated. Thus, modernists began constructing a cultural space for modernism based on the idea of newness, the assertion that they were doing something fundamentally different than both their predecessors and their less serious contemporaries who wrote popular fiction for the masses. Newness is perhaps most fetishized in the Futurist and Imagist manifestos of the early twentieth century. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, in the aggressive tone that characterized Futurism, makes it clear in “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909) that his movement intends to wake literature from its long slumber, proclaiming that “Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry,” and that “Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish, insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap” (251). Similarly, in his Imagist manifesto, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” (1913), Pound excoriates the old conventions of poetry for the restraints they place on expression and demands: “Don’t chop your stuff into separate *iamb*s. Don’t make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause” (357-358). Imagism, then, suggested the poet must try to find the correct form for the idea being communicated rather than making that idea fit a specific form, a goal reiterated in the “Preface to *Some Imagist Poets*” (1915), where the contributors urge poets “To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. [...] In poetry, a new cadence is a new idea” (Lowell, 269). T. S. Eliot also takes up this notion of newness in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1920), but the impersonal theory of poetry he presents in the essay contrasts with Marinetti and Pound’s view of newness inasmuch as Eliot recognizes the importance of tradition and suggests tradition, a living, changing thing, is not something to be broken but rather

expanded. “The existing monuments [of art],” Eliot argues, “form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for the order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new” (50). Not long after publishing this essay that primed readers to reconceptualise literary tradition, Eliot published *The Waste Land* (1922), which with its many allusions to the work of writers past would slide quite easily into the modernist canon, representing as it did *les mots justes* of Eliot’s conception of a tradition that, to use Michael H. Levenson’s terms, “widens” rather than lengthens so as to create a “meaning-giving system” (187).

Through such stances, reinvention and upheaval were being billed as art’s greatest promise in the early twentieth century, but meaning had to be made of these new forms, these cultural reinventions and upheavals, and modernists acknowledged that fact as they explained the significance of such art through their critical and essayistic writings. Wyndham Lewis writes in a review of a 1914 Cubist exhibition in London, “These painters [...] form a vertiginous [*sic.*] but not exotic island, in the placid and respectable archipelago of English art. This formation is undeniably of volcanic matter, and even origin; for it appeared suddenly above the waves following certain seismic shakings beneath the surface. It is very closely-knit and admirably adapted to withstand the imperturbable Britannic breakers which roll pleasantly against its sides” (“The Cubist Room” 9). Woolf asks readers in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” to “Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure,” and ends the essay with “one final and surpassingly rash prediction—we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English

literature” (337). Even Bennett, Woolf’s sparring-partner and the defender—at least in her view—of the old literary ways, recognizes the innovative value of modern painting in his review of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910. He begins the review by stating that the guffaws being levied against the Post-Impressionist paintings are “merely humiliating to any Englishman who has made an effort to cure himself of insularity” (280), and asks the public for a little patience when considering art that, while new and odd, is not without its own merit, explaining that the Post-Impressionist is “illustrating his philosophy and consolidating his position” (284) rather than seeking realism in his art. The ubiquity of modernism’s discourse of newness suggests the vital part this discourse played in most modernists’ conceptions of themselves, their various schools, and the modernist movement in general.

At first glance, this attention to newness seems like a relatively simple marketing strategy: in an instance of supply and demand, the modernists noticed a gap in the market, a literary need that wasn’t being fulfilled, and created works designed to fill this gap. But there is much more to the modernist fetishization of newness than marketing, for if mechanical reproduction stripped mass-produced products of their authenticity, then it could be argued that popular literature, written according to specific formulas in order to achieve maximum sales amongst the masses, likewise stripped literature of its authenticity or “aura.” The notion of aura, an artwork’s “presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 220), has played a smaller part in the production of books since the invention of the printing press made texts easily reproducible, but modernist attention to form, formal experimentation, and the ceaseless invention of new techniques became ways of infusing their literary works with a market-based and commodifiable aura. By marking clearly through form how the artist’s hand had manipulated the text, modernists could distinguish their “handmade”

literature from the mass-produced literature that followed well-worn narratives and formal structures, for modernist formal experimentation, as Edward P. Comentale has suggested, “transfers all positive value from the object of mediation to the process of mediation itself. Art’s significance [...] lies solely within the activity of its production. Only the eccentric work of art, in its radical break from the commonplace, suggests both individualism and order” (54). Part of what modernists hoped to achieve through their formal experiments, therefore, was an aura that was severely lacking in mass-produced literature. Front and centre in their works was the author, not as key to textual interpretation—that author died for modernists long before Roland Barthes wrote his official obituary in 1967—but as maker, as fashioner, as arranger of the work. *The Waste Land*’s fragments, for example, bore Eliot with them as their catalyst if not their maker, for it is his arrangement that forges connections between shards and transforms literary tradition. Just as a master cobbler would be invited to construct “authentic” boots on the sales floor of Selfridges, so the master modernists built “authentic” literature apparently freed from mass culture’s homogeneity through its attention to crafted and innovative forms. Theirs was literature worthy of appreciation and valuable because it bore the skilled maker’s touch; but, more than this, and as Leonard Diepeveen has argued, the difficulty of modernism acted “as a barrier to what one normally expected to receive from the text, such as logical meaning, its emotional expression, or its pleasure” (x). Modernism, therefore, was most emphatically not Q. D. Leavis’s “reading fodder for odd moments” (28), but instead literature that was meant to be consumed slowly and with care, sufficiently suffocating readers’ appetites, not merely abating their hunger.

While the care with which modernist texts were created and meant to be consumed lent them gravitas as “authentic” cultural productions, it must be remembered that this authenticity

was also designed for commodification. Discussing modernism's widespread and well-documented break from representing a purely material reality, Comentale writes that "Since the autonomy of the art object exists only as long as it can claim difference from actual life, it immediately ceases to hold any aesthetic value once it establishes that relational position. Significance is simultaneously produced and consumed and thus exists only in its continuous renewal. Order must be upheld by the ceaseless production of 'shocks,' each reviving and confirming all that has occurred before" (55). This is not an entirely different situation than the one faced by marketers trying to capitalize on the Tut discoveries, as the new in modernism must be hurriedly exploited. In the modernist fetishization of the new, the sense of authenticity created by new formal experiments in individual modernist texts could reinvent the modernist tradition and reinvest modernism with positive auratic potential. However, it must be remembered that this new formal experimentation was also consumed by readers as a signifier of modernism's cultural value in the process. Created and consumed, the new became a part of the modernist tradition, something that could be looked back upon and transformed, but something that was no longer the new. Modernism's newness, which was claimed to represent authenticity in the literary marketplace, must be viewed as a commodified authenticity; that is, as a mode of commodification that constructs the authenticity of an object through exclusivity while insisting that this authenticity can be had for a price. In short, modernism was not viewed as authentic because it excluded itself from the mass market and held art to a higher standard, but rather because it was able to effectively position itself within and against the mass market and, thereby, create a market niche in which its products could be interpreted *as* authentic precisely because they were exclusive.

Modernism's commodified authenticity in the literary marketplace was, recent studies have shown, monitored very closely by modernist writers, who oftentimes found subtle ways to manipulate the marketplace in order to maintain the cultural value of modernist texts and authors. For example, Aaron Jaffe argues that, in order to deal with the constraints of a modernist marketplace that demanded constant reinvention, formal experimentation, and the simultaneous creation/consumption of the new, modernists built between themselves a complex relational network that produced a secondary economy of cultural exchange based on the "imprimatur" or signature of the artist. Essentially cultural reservoirs in which cultural value could be stored depending on one's fame within the discourse of modernism, these imprimaturs were established based on the writer's original literary output but generally maintained by secondary or extra-literary output. When Eliot, or Pound, or Woolf wrote an introduction for another's book, or wrote an article for a magazine, or decided to publish a writer's work in their magazine or through their press, a working relationship was implied with these modernist elites, their name functioning as a stamp of approval. In essence, this secondary economy based on fame "turns the author into a formal artefact, fusing it to the text as a reified signature of value" (Jaffe 20), and what emerges in the marketing and dissemination of modernism is a modernist marketplace in which names are hierarchized and exploited to confer cultural value upon works. "In the critical wings of modernism," Jaffe argues, "1) authors' names are compared and weighed, until 2) they come to comprise makeshift registers, in which value is adjudicated relationally, that is, 3) they are couched in a mystified entreaty to the *things in themselves*, to the originals" (62). Imprimaturs functioned to mitigate the bind of simultaneous creation and consumption in a modernist market that fetishized newness, for those truly original and ground-breaking works became the cultural references that empowered author imprimaturs and that allowed these

imprimaturs to “regulate a literary ideology based on exhaustively maintained scarcity” (62). In other words, the imprimatur allowed those artists who had already created truly original, groundbreaking works to act almost as surrogate patrons to works they chose to support with their signature, an act which had a profound effect on the saleability of new artists and texts but which also played an important role in maintaining the exclusivity of modernism by prioritizing texts within the modernist marketplace. An introduction written by Eliot or a wolf’s head stamp from the Hogarth Press told readers roughly the cultural value of a work at a glance, helping to inform the reading habits of modernism’s audiences and controlling the number of works that were associated with modernism’s greatest successes. “Ironically,” therefore, as Jaffe points out, “writers often so censorious about the de-creating consequences of capitalist valuation were actively involved in the promotion of an economy that was itself based upon a kind of fetishized commodity, the scarce supply of literary ‘originals’” (62). Conspicuous consumption through the buying and selling of products as cultural signifiers was, whether modernists admitted it or not, as much a part of the modernist marketplace as it was for the low- and middlebrow.

Indeed, Lawrence Rainey argues that the selling of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* relied on the careful marketing of its cultural value as—in Pound’s opinion—the preeminent example of the modernist project up until that point. The poem, whose marketing was largely overseen by Pound, was set to be published in the Eliot-edited British magazine the *Criterion* in October 1923, but it was also being considered for publication in three American magazines—the *Little Review*, the *Dial*, and *Vanity Fair*—in November 1923. Unremarkably, Eliot chose to publish in the *Dial* after they offered him the annual Dial Award of \$2000 in addition to the \$150 they paid all literary contributors for their work. Combined, Eliot’s pay out totalled “nearly three times the national [US] income per capita” (Rainey 88). Somewhat more remarkably, the *Dial* offered him

the award without ever having seen *The Waste Land*. Why had they paid so much? First of all, it was due in no small part to Pound's ability as a salesman. Second, and as a result of Pound's efforts, the text became "important precisely for its representative quality, and publishing it was not necessarily a matter of appreciating its literary quality or sympathizing with its substantive components [...] but of one's eagerness to position oneself as the spokesperson for a field of cultural production" (81). Pound and Eliot were selling modernism as much as they were selling *The Waste Land*, the latter being transformed through the marketing process into a cultural signifier valuable in accordance with its ability to confer status and distinction—conferred firstly on the *Dial*, which got to publish the work that was set to expose once and for all the "intellectual moribundity of England" (qtd. in Rainey 80), and secondly on the readers of the poem, whose belief in the modernist project was justified. This is not, of course, to say that *The Waste Land* has no cultural value based on its own merits as a work of literature, but it is to suggest that its marketing demonstrates clearly the poem's participation in a secondary economy that generates cultural value through conspicuous consumption.

Conspicuous consumption also lay behind the marketing of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Originally published in France, *Ulysses* would appear in three limited editions with prices corresponding to the ornateness and scarcity of each edition: copies 1 to 100 were to be sold at 350 francs (£7 7s or \$30); copies 101 to 250 at 250 francs (£5 5s or \$22); and copies 251 to 1,000 at 150 francs (£3 3s or \$14) (Rainey 62). Such prices, at the time, were nothing short of exorbitant. In 1924, the average English household per capita made around £210 per year, about £3 per week (63), meaning the average worker in England would have to work for two and a half weeks in order to pay for the deluxe edition of *Ulysses*. Further, one thousand copies was a very small print run for a book that was already famous due to the fact that when the *Little Review* published the

“Nausicaa” episode of the novel in September, 1920 the magazine was charged with distributing obscene material, a crime of which they were found guilty when the case went to trial in 1921 (47-48). When the publication of *Ulysses* was announced in the middle of 1921, orders began almost immediately, and when it was published in February 1922, there were very few editions left unaccounted for. That the deluxe and limited editions were selling was almost inconsequential, however; what mattered was who was buying the editions and for what purpose. By and large, the editions were sold to book dealers and collectors not because they wanted to read *Ulysses* but because they wanted to flip the text for a profit, a gamble that paid off in a big way for most. By March 1922, the \$14 edition was generally selling in New York for \$20, and one sold for \$50; in June 1922, the 150 franc edition was selling in Paris for 500 francs; and in August 1922, the £3 3 s. edition was regularly fetching £10 with some going for £20 (69-70). The astonishing increase in prices for *Ulysses* can be attributed to two factors: firstly, these deluxe and limited editions, much more than simply books, were art objects similar to paintings; and, secondly, due to *Ulysses*’ publication history and the manufactured scarcity of the first print run, the editions became powerful signifiers both of culture and class. As Rainey writes, *Ulysses* “was an experiment in adopting exchange and market structures typical of the visual arts, a realm in which patronage and collecting can thrive because its artisanal mode of production is compatible with a limited submarket for luxury goods” (75). More than anything else, therefore, the first editions of *Ulysses* were designed to be displayed on shelves: certainly they contained a literary work that would become central to modernism, but their marketing depended largely on their ability to confer status on the owner seen consuming them.

Fighting Words: Literary Modernism’s Difficult History

Eliot's poem and Joyce's *Ulysses* were products that conferred and continue to confer status, thanks in no small part to the cachet of newness and scarcity, yet they display another facet of modernist marketing too: rebellion and conflict, even beyond the rejection or inevitable transmutation of tradition. In a literary marketplace oversaturated with books and in which an attention to one's relative status as a producer was imperative, modernism had its product in newness, but it also needed a sales pitch. Any marketers worth their salt will tell you that nothing sells like a good fight, and this lesson was not lost on the modernists. "Literary enemies were useful," Leonard Diepeveen explains, for "they allowed one to heighten the rhetoric, to draw in one's arguments with decisive strokes, and to point out the clear direction literature, if it was to have any integrity at all, must follow" (1), and so it was that modernism set about finding literary enemies. In the early years of English literary modernism, roughly the two years before World War I, modernists tended to choose enemies from within: Vorticists fought with Futurists, Imagists fought with each other, and Futurists fought with everyone, all in a bid to shock the reading public into paying attention to art in general and to their art in particular. This was a sales strategy Pound learned in the spring of 1912 when Marinetti made his second Futurist tour of England. Pound was still under the patronage of Margaret Cravens at the time, but he and Marinetti, it turned out, were both presenting lectures in London in March 1912. Pound's were a very exclusive series of lectures held at a private home and attended by upper-class supporters of the arts who had paid 10s. 6d. (about half a pound). Marinetti's lectures, on the other hand, were held in a hall that seated over five hundred people, were open to the public, and were accessible for as little as 1s (Rainey 28). Pound's lectures, because they were attended by those who were essentially his patrons, demanded that Pound maintain his relationship with the audience, but Marinetti's events were very different for he had "not flattered his audience but berated it,

castigating the English as “a nation of sycophants and snobs, enslaved by old worm-eaten traditions, social conventions, and romanticism” (28). Marinetti’s lectures were also lucrative: his instant notoriety (some 350 newspaper articles were written about the Futurists during the tour) earned for the Futurists about £440 through the sale of paintings (28). Thus, Marinetti’s 1912 tour was “Pound’s first experience of what might be termed ephemeral seduction, the powerful allure of art conceived as public practice, as a spectacle capable of attracting an audience much larger than fifty, as performance that could arouse curiosity, debate, desire” (28). The precise role Marinetti’s lectures played in Pound’s personal beliefs concerning how best to market modernism is hard to determine, but there is little doubt that Pound helped shape English literary modernism through directly antagonistic relationships to other works in the literary marketplace, and there is little doubt that he and others in his retinue often used spectacle to do so.

This love of spectacle was perhaps no more apparent than in Marinetti’s return to London in 1914, during which Pound and some of his Vorticist retinue disrupted one of Marinetti’s lectures. In a Futurist manifesto published in the *Observer*, at a point in his 1914 tour, Marinetti had berated a few English artists, including Wyndham Lewis, for their conventionality and unwillingness to accept technological progress. In response, the artists, “joined also by Pound and Aldington, sent a letter to the *Observer*, dissociating themselves from the Futurist movement” (Levenson 124) and setting the stage for their intervention of Marinetti’s lecture a few nights later. The encounter is remembered in Lewis’s *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) in his description of Marinetti’s desire for “a Futurist *Putsch*”:

It started in Bond Street. I counter-putsched. I assembled in Greek Street a determined band of miscellaneous anti-futurists. Mr. Epstein was there: Gaudier

Brzeska, T. E. Hulme, Edward Wadsworth and a cousin of his called Wallace, who was very muscular and forcible, according to my eminent colleague, and he rolled up very silent and grim. There were about ten of us. After a hearty meal we shuffled bellicose round to the Doré Gallery.

Marinetti had entrenched himself upon a high lecture platform, and he put down a tremendous barrage in French as we entered. Gaudier went into action at once. He was very good at the *parlez-vous*, in fact he was a Frenchman. He was sniping him without intermission, standing up in his place in the audience all the while. The remainder of our party maintained a confused uproar.

The Italian intruder was worsted. (36)

The absurdity of this situation is almost palpable, and even Lewis himself comments upon this absurdity when he writes that all of the artistic in-fighting in the early days of modernism, all of the manifestoes, and all of the grown men turning art lectures into public spectacles was merely “organized disturbance” and “Art behaving as if it were Politics” (35). Most importantly, however, Lewis and Pound had staged this entire spectacle to help sell the first issue of *Blast*.

A Vorticist magazine they were working on at the time, *Blast* was—from its very name to the seemingly endless manifestoes contained within it—quite consciously marketed to antagonize the art world in general and the Futurists in particular: in its pages Pound called Futurism one of the artistic schools that formed the “CORPSES OF VORTICES” and proclaimed Marinetti “a corpse” (“Vortex” 154). But perhaps the best example of just how well organized artistic disturbance became before the war comes in the actions of one little magazine, the *New Weekly*. At one point in 1913, the magazine “recruited [G. K.] Chesterton to attack Futurism, and then recruited Lewis to attack Chesterton” (Levenson 137). As mawkish as all this

sounds, the artistic in-fighting, the manifestoes, and the public disturbances appear to have worked according to Ford Madox Ford, who wrote in *Thus to Revisit* that “it was amazing to see these young creatures not only evolving theories of writing and the plastic arts, but receiving in addition an immense amount of what is called ‘public support’” (136), for “in 1914 Les Jeunes [...] had forced the public to take an interest not in the stuff but the methods of an Art” (137). Such modernist in-fighting ended on July 28, 1914 with the start of World War I. The public suddenly had real battles to worry about and soon lost interest in battles over whether the machine or the vortex was the most apt metaphor for modernity.

Luckily, however, Pound had found another enemy just before the outbreak of war that was to relieve English literary modernism of its cannibalistic beginnings and that would prove a far more useful and enduring enemy for modernism: the reading public. In the “The New Sculpture” (1914), Pound writes that “The artist has no longer any belief or suspicion that the mass, the half-educated simpering general, the semi-connoisseur, the sometimes collector, and still less the readers of the ‘Spectator’ and the ‘English Review’ can in any way share his delights or understand his pleasure in forces” (68). Consequently, he argues, “The artist has at last been aroused to the fact that the war between him and the world is a war without truce” (68). Richard Aldington would continue in this vein in “Some Reflections on Earnest Dowson” (1915): “The conditions of modern popular art are so degrading that no man of a determined or of a distinguished mind can possibly adopt them. ‘What the public wants’ are the stale ideas of twenty, of fifty, of seventy years ago, ideas which any man of talent rejects at once as banal” (42). So banal had the masses become, according to Aldington, that “The arts are now divided between popular charlatans and men of talent, who, of necessity, write, think and paint only for each other, since there is no one else to understand them” (42). These are just two of many

modernist statements about the reading public, but Pound's use of the word "masses" and Aldington's use of the word "public" as a pejorative represent an increasingly important facet of the way modernists spoke about the reading public.

The meaning of the word "mass" was changing in the twentieth century as it increasingly became used to signify the causes or symptoms of the homogenous culture created in advanced capitalist societies and designed to optimize, prioritize, and organize the tastes of the people. As Raymond Williams points out, in the twentieth century, "masses was a new word for mob, and the traditional characteristics of the mob were retained in its significance: gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit. [...] Mass-thinking, mass-suggestion, mass-prejudice would threaten to swamp considered individual thinking and feeling. Even democracy, which had both a classical and a liberal reputation, would lose its savour in becoming mass-democracy" (288). It was this definition of the masses as a homogenous, undifferentiated mob that underscored the Leavisite cultural crisis, for the masses and their literary tastes, which had become unreliable because mass-produced literature aimed at saleability rather than challenging readers, were used to insist on the need for English literature departments capable of creating capable, professional readers. For similar reasons, the masses offered modernists a useful enemy against which they could create their own niche market, and it is remarkable how many modernists comment—whether with open or veiled negativity—upon some aspect of mass culture (the masses, mass production, mass marketing) in the process of positioning themselves within the interwar literary marketplace. Modernists publicly decried the masses for their unwillingness to accept experimental literature, allowing themselves, on one hand, to further establish their own cultural space within the literary marketplace, and, on the other hand, to clarify how their formally difficult and innovative texts would solve the cultural crisis that had

ostensibly been brought about by mass production and that was transforming the reading public into the homogenous masses.

Difficulty is advocated most famously, perhaps, by Eliot in his essay “The Metaphysical Poets” (1921) when he writes “it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning” (31). As much sales pitch as sincere criticism—notice how Eliot’s justification for the use of difficulty supports his own mode of allusive and indirect writing—this passage nevertheless offers insight into the reasons as to why difficulty could be potentially useful for modernists. Their project was to represent as best they could a chaotic, swirling modernity of rapid technological progress, depersonalizing metropolitan centres, speeding automobiles, and even faster cultural production, or variety and complexity as Eliot calls it. Formal difficulty better captured this complexity than did conventional forms.

Formal difficulty and innovation, however, did much more than merely allow modernists to capture modern reality; they also allowed modernists to actively manipulate the reading process. Each new text required new interpretative strategies, forcing readers to approach each text afresh and to resist the engrained reading strategies forged by the homogenous output of mass culture. This aspect of formal experimentation is explained by Eliot in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, in which he points to four reasons modern poetry tended to be difficult. Firstly, he suggests that “there may be personal causes which make it impossible for a poet to express himself in any but an obscure way”; secondly, he suggests that “difficulty may be due

just to novelty” and points out that the Romantics were at one time considered obscure; thirdly, he argues that readers’ expectations of difficulty can adversely affect their ability to read obscure works because, “Instead of beginning, as he should, in a state of sensitivity, he obfuscates his senses by the desire to be clever and to look very hard for something, he doesn’t know what—or else by the desire not to be taken in”; and, finally, he suggests that some readers get frustrated when they fail to find something they expect to find in the text, “so that the reader, bewildered, gropes about for what is absent, and puzzles his head for a kind of ‘meaning’ which is not there, and is not meant to be there” (150-151). The first of these reasons is immaterial (the inability to express oneself in any but an obscure way is a failure of the writer rather than of the reader), and the second is a consequence of cultural change as much as of literary trend, but the third and fourth reveal how modernists used difficulty to rectify the ills of the mass literary market. The third reason on Eliot’s list—in which the reader approaches difficult texts with the desire to see something clever in them or to cleverly avoid being taken in by them—is what he refers to not as a case of “stage fright” on the reader’s part but as a case of “pit or gallery fright” (151). Readers in Eliot’s view are afraid to engage with difficult texts because they are afraid of not understanding or of misunderstanding the text. More than this, they are afraid of how this not understanding or misunderstanding will be perceived by others and with whether or not they will see in the text what others expect them to see in the text. Reading is reduced, then, from an individual search for enjoyment, intellectual engagement, and enlightenment to a closely monitored public experience, the rules of which seem based upon the formulaic conventions of mass culture intended to ensure all people share the same tastes and all texts represent these tastes.

These regulative textual standards that are imposed by mass culture are the foundation for Eliot's final suggestion that readers find texts difficult because they go to literature expecting to find certain formal elements they have been trained to look for, and thus these standards serve as the very reason many modernists suggested difficulty was so necessary. Difficulty, as Diepeveen explains, "stymied the strategies one typically used to generate meaning from a text, and it demanded to be addressed first in order for one to have a significant interaction with the text" (49). The desire to provide a unique aesthetic experience, to confound traditional reading strategies, was therefore intended to reinvigorate readers who were being reduced to the mere consumers of spoon-fed ideology by mass culture. There was also a marketing dimension to difficulty's reinvigoration of the reader, however, because difficulty was also seen as that which prevented the mindless consumption of literature. Comentale writes that "The work's very promise of fulfillment is denied by its own coldness or inaccessibility; it thus both inspires and impedes the spectator's desire for identification or sublimation. British artists valued this intentional *halting* insofar as it could transform blind desire into conscious choice, as it could expose the treacherous identifications of modern culture and reground the subject within the world" (8). Comentale certainly affords difficulty much gravitas in the modernist project with this statement, suggesting as he does the profound impact difficulty can have on subject formation, and I don't disagree with his argument; but in downplaying that this subject formation is being negotiated through commodified objects in the literary marketplace, he elides the fact that modernist difficulty also played a role in the marketing of modernism. Modernists, contra the purveyors of mass culture who made their products as consumable as possible, offered the not-so-easily consumable and relied on its difficulty to confer distinction unto those readers who put the time and effort into reading such highbrow cultural productions. While modernists were

adjusting the speed of the consumption process that fulfills the reader's desire for sublimation, as Comentale suggests, it is dubious to argue that this halting process necessarily transformed desire into conscious choice. Instead, it seems more likely that, as Jaffe points out, modernist culture is "ordinary" and that "modernist cultural production is, in fact, cultural production" (7). In short, modernists knew they were selling difficult literature to serious readers, and they also knew that having names such as Eliot and Pound signified one's exclusion from the unwashed masses and their conventional, formulaic fare, so to keep their names valuable in the marketplace they retained difficulty as an integral part of their profession.

Thinking about the act of writing modernist texts as a profession, and regarding difficulty as the key tool of that profession, allowed modernists to further position themselves against the mass market, but it also offered their project an end goal in terms of solving the cultural crisis. As Diepeveen explains, professionals address crucial needs in society that amateurs or the general public cannot effectively address (engineering bridges, performing open heart surgery, colliding sub-atomic particles, etc.); their work is viewed as urgent and important, for the "profession argues that its activities are specialized, demanding full-time attention and education if the work of the profession is to develop and the crisis is to subside" (96). The language of professionalism is employed by Pound in "The Serious Artist," an essay published in *The New Freewoman* in October 1913. In the essay, he suggests that the serious artist "is as often as far from the ægrum vulgus as is the serious scientist" (47) and laments the fact that the "people would rather have patent medicines than scientific treatment" (48). Pound's essay shies away from directly critiquing the reading public and directs itself primarily toward the artist, and suggests that serious art should not offer the patent medicine of conventional forms but, instead, the scientific treatment of language in an attempt to communicate an idea using the most

effective forms, meters, rhythms, and techniques. In this way, the serious artist shapes and transforms the tastes of a reading public grown, in Pound's opinion, unreceptive and unappreciative of all but the most conventional forms of literature.

Professionalism, too, lies at the heart of Eliot's conception of tradition in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot glorifies "the mind of Europe" in his essay and suggests that the artist must be much more aware of this mind than his own (51), but Eliot's mind of Europe is not coterminous with the opinions and tastes of the reading public. The mind of Europe is directly connected to tradition for Eliot, for if the "existing monuments [of art] form an ideal order among themselves" (50), so too do these existing monuments form the ideal order of the mind of Europe. It is incumbent upon the individual talent (a figure that seems very much like the serious artist Pound writes of in his essay) to speak from and with this mind of Europe if his art is to be truly new and valuable. In other words, his work is valuable precisely because it interacts with and within the meaning-making systems of tradition. Similar to Pound, Eliot uses the language of science to describe the process by which the individual talent becomes a catalyst. He explains that oxygen and sulphur dioxide only form sulphuric acid if a filament of platinum is present and suggests that the "mind of the poet is the shred of platinum" that causes the reaction but remains unchanged itself, for "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material" (54). In their use of scientific language to describe the process of writing, Pound and Eliot do not view art as an amorphous feeling and expression of an inner voice; theirs is an art of almost empirical detail, of *le mot juste*, of capturing one single image in one single phrase of unparalleled precision and concision, of cultural erudition that allowed them to first break and then reassemble the traditions of Western culture. But most

of all, as they would have their readers believe, their art involved the martyrdom of self in the cultural waste land of Europe in order to invigorate it anew. Experts of culture, Pound and Eliot presented themselves as professionals who would tame the chaos of the literary marketplace using formal difficulty, for “the crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century was not the *fashion* for difficulty, as modernism’s opponents argued; rather, the crisis was that there was so much sloppy writing being produced, to which difficulty was the *necessary* corrective” (Diepeveen 102). Objectivity was required to solve the cultural crisis according to Pound and Eliot, a de-personalized art that could reemphasize and realign the literary marketplace with the mind of Europe to create in the reading public a standard of aesthetic value and taste based on the existing monuments of art. Difficulty played a key role in this objective art as it let readers know they were reading art that was crafted carefully by cultural professionals, that they were receiving the highest quality literature, and that they must, likewise, work to appreciate this difficulty if they were to become serious readers who rose above the fray of mass culture.

Money Can Buy Me Class: Self-Fashioning the Middlebrow’s “Common Man”

Purveyors of mass culture, especially the middlebrow, saw modernist difficulty as being the root cause of the cultural crisis inasmuch as it distanced writers from the reading public and abandoned that public using needless erudition and formal experimentation. While not technically a middlebrow publication, Harold Monroe’s mock review of *The Waste Land* in little magazine *The Chapbook* in February 1923 offers an introduction to the basic argument between the middlebrow and the modernists. Entitled “Notes for a Study of ‘The Waste Land’: An Imaginary Dialogue with T. S. Eliot,” much of the review comes in the form of Monroe’s questions or observations about *The Waste Land*, to which a fictional Eliot infrequently interjects

with comments such as “*Well?*”, “*I am not prepared to judge,*” and “*That depends*” (162). Eliot’s longest answer comes at the end of an exchange in which Monro’s speaker points to the poet’s distance from his audience:

May I direct some criticism upon your poem? But first I should mention that I know it was not written for me. You never thought of me as among your potential appreciative audience. You thought of nobody, and you were true to yourself. Yet, in a sense, you did think of me. You wanted to irritate me, because I belong to the beastly age in which you are doomed to live. But, in another sense, your poem seems calculated more to annoy Mr. Gosse or Mr. Squire, than me. I imagine them exclaiming: ‘The fellow *can* write; but he *won’t*.’ That would be because just when you seem to be amusing yourself by composing what they might call *poetry*, at that moment you generally break off with a sneer. And, of course, they can’t realise that your faults are as virtuous as their virtues are wicked, not that their style is, as it were, a mirror that distorts the perfections they admire, which are in truth only imitations of perfections. Your truest passages seem to them like imitations of imperfections. I am not indulging in personalities, but only using those gentlemen as symbols. – *Well, direct your criticisms anywhere you like. You are becoming slightly amusing, but not yet worth answering....* (163-64)

This passage, inasmuch as it presents Eliot as a characteristically pompous elitist who, rather than writing for a wide audience of ordinary readers, writes for a small coterie of high-minded, professional aesthetes, cleverly lampoons many of the middlebrow’s initial reviews of *The Waste Land*, which accused Eliot of being obfuscating, needlessly complex, and purposefully exclusionary. For example, Louis Untermeyer’s January 1923 review in the *Freeman* proclaims

Eliot's poem "a pompous parade of erudition, . . . a kaleidoscopic movement in which the bright-coloured pieces fail to atone for the absence of an integrated design" (151). Likewise, in his October 1923 review for the *Manchester Guardian*, Charles Powell wrote that the poem "is not for the ordinary reader," as "meaning, plan, and intention alike are massed behind a smoke screen of anthropological and literary erudition, and only the pundit, the pedant, or the clairvoyant will be in the least aware of them" (194). And, as Monro predicted, it seems that *The Waste Land* did indeed irritate J. C. Squire. In Squire's October 1923 review for *The London Mercury*, of which he was the long-time editor, he suggested that Eliot's poem hopes to impose upon the credulity of his reader through "the cultivation of a deliberate singularity" ("On Eliot's Failure to Communicate" 191), and that while the poem seems to present "the poet's wandering thoughts when in a state of erudite depression" there is little doubt that "a grunt would serve equally well" for "what is language but communication, or art but selection and arrangement?" (192). It's important to note, however, that none of these responses to *The Waste Land* dispute the existence of the cultural waste land in crisis Eliot presents in the poem. Indeed, most of these reviews recognize in the myriad allusions, difficult syntax, shifting perspectives, and fragmentation of *The Waste Land* a formal experiment that attempts to represent modernity. What they questioned was whether this experimentation achieved anything other than the exclusion of ordinary readers. Did superfluous erudition and formal experimentation, the middlebrow asked, help ordinary readers navigate the current cultural crisis or merely further their disorientation? After all, as many in the middlebrow pointed out, not everyone was looking for difficulty.

In his autobiography *Delight*, J. B. Priestley, one of the best know middlebrow writers in the interwar years, recounts a conversation between he and a young man in which the young man

claims his writing seems “too simple” (71). Priestley responds by explaining that the simplicity the young man sees as a vice is what he sees as a virtue, suggesting that the young man “and his lot, who matured in the early ’thirties, wanted literature to be difficult” because they “did not want to share anything with the crowd” (71). Priestley and his lot, on the other hand, grew up unafraid of the crowd, and he explains that “No matter what the subject in hand might be, I want to write something that at a pinch I could read aloud in a bar-parlour” (72). Priestley’s comments bring up an important aspect of the middlebrow’s conception of themselves and their literary project: namely, as John Baxendale and Chris Pawling have suggested, “in the readers who, finding Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence hard to take, sought the continuance of nineteenth century realism, the ‘middlebrow’ was born” (qtd. in Habermann 32). Put differently, the formal elements of the middlebrow novel—realism, linearity, sustained narrative viewpoint—were the formal elements that had largely defined the novel since its inception in the seventeenth century. The vast majority of people, if we judge by the popularity of middlebrow novels, wanted their literature to retain these more accessible literary features. As Diepeveen explains, middlebrow writers “considered themselves as the defenders of tradition, who thought that modern art had abandoned the universal qualities of great art” (13). They were loyalists who sought to democratize art and ensure its values remained the values of the people—values the highbrow had apparently abandoned. Much more than merely aesthetic abandonment, however, the highbrow abandonment of the “crowd” had tangible political implications for Priestley. The highbrows, Priestley claimed, “grew up terrified of the crowd, who in this Mass Age seemed to them to be threatening all decent values” (71), and, consequently, came to fetishize complexity, which became less a formal necessity than “a password to their secret society” (70) that restricted access to their art. Having self-consciously cut themselves off from the ordinary

reader, highbrows removed themselves and their texts from social and cultural obligation according to Priestley, so that, as Baxendale explains, while “The nineteenth-century narrative of social progress had promised a steadily more inclusive political and cultural community [...] the avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s had deliberately reneged on this promise, for purely selfish reasons” (17). Withdrawing inward to the small coterie in which they found unanimous and, to Priestley, uncritical support, highbrows ceased to concern themselves with projecting their voices outward, thereby abandoning their readers in the cultural waste land they themselves had mapped.

Priestley’s criticisms of modernist exclusivity have become relatively common in contemporary critical discussions of the middlebrow, one of the most interesting of which is Nicola Humble’s innovative article “Sitting Forward or Sitting Back: Highbrow v. Middlebrow Reading.” In the article, Humble notes the “nebulosity of the divide between the highbrow and the middlebrow” (42), and suggests critics navigate this ambiguity by understanding that “middlebrow and highbrow books are distinguishable, fundamentally, not by any stable intrinsic differences, but by *how they are read*” (46). Humble bases her argument on the suggestion that, in the twentieth-century literary marketplace, there was a gradual separation between professional readers and leisurely readers, and that, in their condemnation of the masses, highbrow, professional readers were reacting more against the changing uses for reading than against the content of middlebrow literature. The “self-appointed guardians of the highbrow,” according to Humble, modernists and their supporters were concerned about the “co-option” of literature into entertainment (48). That said, to position the highbrow as the only guardians of literature in early twentieth century England downplays the fact that the middlebrow was striving just as hard to steer aesthetic taste. While we can learn much from the highbrow “acts of

inclusion and exclusion” and their “various models of literary culture preoccupied with...what can be ruled out in order to validate and place as securely ‘literary’ that which is ruled in” (43), we can learn as much from middlebrow acts of inclusion and exclusion.

One of the best examples of middlebrow exclusion comes in the “Editorial Notes” of the November 1919 first issue of the *London Mercury*, in which J. C. Squire attempts to explain the purpose of his magazine by purposefully positioning it against modernists and their experimental literature. His “Notes” start out rather innocuously, stating that the magazine is an “attempt to make known the best that is being done” in British literature, and is not an attempt “to make universal the shibboleths of some coterie or school” (2). Honourable indeed; there was a catch, however, for Squire continues:

There has been [in contemporary England] a central body of writers—from Mr. Hardy, Mr. Bridges, and Mr. Conrad to the best of the younger poets—who have gone steadily along the sound path, traditional yet experimental, personal yet *sane*. But there has been also a large number of young writers who have strayed and lost themselves amongst experiments, many of them foredoomed to sterility. [...] They have been, such of them as profess the moralistic preoccupation, very contemptuous of “clean living and no thinking,” but the *dirty living* and muddled thinking that they have offered as a substitute have been no great improvement. They have been, such of them as have the preoccupation of the artist, so anxious to look at the abnormal and the recondite that they have forgotten what are and must be the main elements of man’s life and what the most conspicuous features in man’s landscape. We have had an *orgy of undirected abnormality*. [...] Bad writers will, without intellectual or aesthetic impulse, pretend to burrow into

psychological (or physical) obscurities which are no more beyond the artist's purview than anything else, provided he responds to them, but which have the advantage for an insincere writer that *they enable him to talk nonsense that honest unsophisticated readers are unable to diagnose as nonsense.* (4 emphasis added)

The "they" Squire is referring to in this passage are highbrow modernist writers, and while it's comforting to know that literary journalists have always been blatantly if naively hypocritical, what interests me in this passage is the way Squire positions these writers. His objection is not that the modernists write bad literature; rather, it's that they are insane, dirty living things who take advantage of honest unsophisticated readers in their orgies of undirected abnormality. Squire's criticism is not merely a critique of literature; it is the active marginalization of certain artists. Significantly, this marginalization is connected to a discourse of perversity and is based upon what are considered abnormal bodily states: madness, dirty living or immoral behaviour, and orgies. Such criticism is designed not to determine the value of experimental modernist literature but to discipline readers by branding certain artistic expressions as not just uncommon but aberrant.

Determining the abnormal or different is, of course, to simultaneously construct the normal, and, following Richard Hoggart, I want to suggest that what was being constructed as normal by the middlebrow in the wake of modernist abnormality is the "common man." The common man, Hoggart suggests, was a fictional figure who ostensibly represented the shared cultural and social values of common Britons but who, in fact, represented the homogenous values of commodity capitalism built on class conflict and the conspicuous consumption of the right things. It was, therefore, the common man who arose out of the cultural crisis the Leavises had mapped in their work, for the production of the common man in middlebrow culture,

Hoggart claims, was a byproduct of the democratic egalitarianism that accompanied increases in worker's rights and literacy levels in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While greater equality amongst people was undoubtedly a positive change, Hoggart suggests that, as an assertion of "self-respect, 'Ah'm as good as you' can turn into the surly 'Yer no better than me', which is the harsh ass-cry of the philistine in his straw, who will tolerate no suggestion of a challenge or awkward example. It can become a cocksure refusal to recognize any sort of differentiation, whether of brains or of character" (180). To put that a little less bluntly, the common man became the subject and hero of magazine and newspaper articles written for the increasingly literate English masses, but he also became a specific construction of what the majority should be and acted as the arbiter of proper taste and artistic achievement for this majority. He teaches people, Hoggart claims, that "since [they] share the opinions of the great majority, [they] are more right than the odd outsiders" (179), and tells them that modernism is not worth their time because it is difficult and does not seem to represent their material reality. This common man makes an appearance in Squire's passage as the "honest unsophisticated reader" unable to diagnose modernist experimentation as nonsense. As Diepeveen points out, Squire's main criticism is that the modernist "coterie of professionals is self-serving and self-congratulatory, and...ignores, or worse, abuses, the common reader" (10). Thus, what starts for the modernists as a strategic marginalization designed to protect highbrow art's integrity against the homogeneity of mass culture, becomes an increasingly forcible exclusion through which mass culture—and particularly middlebrow culture—positions itself as not merely more accessible, but *normal*.

The use of deviance to establish the normal was a prominent and conscious element of feminine middlebrow novels, which became the sites of much self-fashioning through the

conspicuous consumption of commodity culture but which were also sites of class negotiation. In the pages of feminine middlebrow novels, class and cultural signifiers were created, transformed, and destroyed, a process that provided middle-class women readers with a comprehensive guide to what and how one must consume to become a proper member of a certain class. What unites the feminine identities being created in the feminine middlebrow to the concept of the common man, therefore, is an attention to prioritizing consumption in order to ensure that middle-class women supported the right moral and class values with their increasing economic empowerment. It was not enough, in other words, that middle-class women consumed; they must also consume, firstly, things that conveyed the appropriate values of the middle class, and, secondly, things that conveyed they were respectable middle-class women who have money and recognize signs of class distinction. The rise of feminine middlebrow novels in the interwar period, Nicola Beauman argues, positively correlates with the changing lives of middle-class women at the time, for advances in household technologies and rising levels of expendable income meant that middle-class women “had time, warmth, freedom from drudgery and an intelligence unsullied by the relentless and wearying monotony of housework” (6). Alison Light, too, notes the changing conditions of women in the interwar period, arguing that, while, “as the nomenclature suggests, the ‘inter-war’ years are easily seen, from the masculine point of view, as a kind of hiatus in history, an interval sandwiched between more dramatic, and more historically significant acts,” women at the time were offered “new kinds of social and personal opportunity [...] by changing cultures of sport and entertainment, from tennis clubs to cinema-going, by new forms of spending which hire-purchase and accessible mortgages made possible, by new patterns of domestic life which included the introduction of the daily servant rather than the live-in maid, new forms of household appliance, new attitudes to housework” (9). The feminine middlebrow

thus became a significant niche in the interwar literary marketplace, and the lifestyles, beliefs, and politics of middle-class women were both represented and made manifest within feminine middlebrow novels. Within the given social circles described in the texts, Beaumann argues that “writer and reader were linked by their mutual ‘pre-assumptions’; they spoke the same language, were interested in the same kind of things, led the same kind of lives” (4). Feminine middlebrow novels, therefore, played a significant role in establishing what it meant to be a middle-class woman in interwar England by providing textual spaces in which normative middle-class identity was negotiated and deviance from this identity was measured.

This is not to suggest, however, that feminine middlebrow novels were merely middle-class propaganda or the stuff of homogenous ideologues trying to impose their normalizing beliefs onto readers. Indeed, the “‘middle class’ was itself undergoing radical revision between the wars and any use of the term must ideally stretch from the typist to the teacher, include the ‘beautician’ as well as the civic servant, the florist and the lady doctor, the library assistant and the suburban housewife, and the manifold differences between them,” meaning, Light argues, “that being ‘middle-class’ in fact depends on an extremely anxious production of endless discriminations between people who are constantly assessing each other’s standing” (12, 13). Thus, in middle-class symbolic economies, in which almost everything one did (how one spoke, what one wore, what one ate, what one read, etc.) signified class in some way, and in which adequate navigation required a keen knowledge of oftentimes rapidly changing class signifiers, feminine middlebrow novels became sites “where the battle for hegemonic control of social modes and mores was closely fought by different factions of the newly dominant middle class” (Humble, *Feminine* 5). Middle-class identity in these novels was fluid, shifting, and provisional: class signifiers were frequently created, consumed, and destroyed in a never-ending attempt to

distinguish oneself as an exclusive member of a certain class. “In an era when almost every member of the middle class experienced grave anxieties about their class status,” Humble notes, “there was something deeply seductive in a mode of thinking about class that allowed you to confirm your own status by ruling others out” (84). This process of ruling others out meant that one could learn how to become upper-middle class by reading feminine middlebrow novels and mimicking the actions and consumption habits of the protagonists; consequently, the relational dynamic created between the reader and the classes being represented in the novel is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive.

Interestingly, what one read played an important signifying role in middle-class inclusion within feminine middlebrow novels, with the books that characters read often acting as surrogates for character description. Books and the relative values they held as cultural signifiers let readers know what kind of person a character was, but more importantly told readers what to read if they wanted to emulate that character. Thus, books in the feminine middlebrow were “enjoyed, ridiculed, used as social and moral guides, as comfort objects, as symbols of class and status; they formed bonds between people, or emphasized their difference” (Humble, *Feminine* 46-47). A certain amount of modernist reading was acceptable as it connected one to bohemian lifestyles that were oft-romanticized in the feminine middlebrow, but reading Karl Marx, according to Humble, was a sign not only that characters did not fully understand their social position within the bourgeoisie but also that they had pretensions toward seriousness. The normalizing relationship between middle-class women’s buying power and the purpose for which that buying power should be used is never more obvious than in this feminine middlebrow tendency to marginalize those who read Marx. One should partake in what the marketplace has to offer, readers are told, but consuming the wrong things reveals not only that one considers

oneself above others in one's class but also that one's deviance from this norm betrays a serious lack of understanding in what it means to be middle-class. Buying as self-fashioning in the feminine middlebrow, therefore, becomes as much an act of stabilization as it is an act of fluidity: certainly the ever-changing signifiers of class offered buyers ever-changing ways of presenting themselves, but buying is a fundamentally stabilizing act because the goal remains always the reification of class as opposed to the individuation of the buyer.

Masculine middlebrow novels of the same period tend to be less concerned with self-fashioning, but they maintain a focus on stabilizing class inasmuch as they attempt to rediscover and reconstruct English character by providing the reader with strong, morally upright characters on whom normal Britons could model themselves. Rather than focusing on middle-class identity as fluid and commodifiable, they tended to present characters who could, in representing all that was best in the English character, act as the focal points of a renewed and stable identity. Thus, if the feminine middlebrow presented the reader with identities furnished by commodified class signifiers meant to be quickly consumed while they still retained cultural value, the masculine middlebrow presented the reader with what Ina Habermann calls "an imaginative projection of lived experience conducive to a negotiation of identity and emotional 'entertainment' in the sense of providing sustenance" (35). To provide this sustenance, masculine middlebrow writers often employed symbols from the various mythologies that make up English masculinity, and these symbols in their collective form created an Englishness that had "a definite *shape*, although it is represented, or expressed, by a multitude of divergent and often contradictory images" (20). Thus in J. B. Priestley's *The Good Companions* (1929), as Habermann explains, the music hall is used as a "symbol of English community life" and connotes creativity, wit, and social involvement (50), but this symbol is juxtaposed with the North of England, which embodies the

“rough, masculine and working class, while the Cotswolds are genteel and feminine and peopled by the descendants of the builders and administrators of Empire” (49). What emerges from this combination of images, then, is a vision of English masculinity that valorizes individualism and hard work rather than Imperialism and greed, but that also valorizes the ability to be of the people and to partake joyfully in the simple entertainments of the masses. More importantly, however, as John Baxendale has noted, redemption is always at hand in Priestley’s writing, for even in the Cotswolds, a den of Imperial vice, the locally quarried stones are used to build houses, a fact that “establishes an organic relationship between people and the landscape, the connection between the two made by human labour” (84). In Priestley’s work, therefore, a common sense of Englishness can be saved if people abide by those symbols that have always founded the English character. Identity formation in his work becomes an act of imagining oneself as stoical and ever-enduring rather than of ceaseless self-fashioning.

The identity that is situated as normal and as a given rather than as constructed, marketed, and normalized is a symptom of the interwar period in Britain. The middlebrow speaks to what many saw as a cultural crisis caused by rapidly increasing literacy rates and rapidly expanding literary tastes among the reading public. But highbrow as well as middlebrow writers adjusted to this changing marketplace by commodifying their work and developing marketing strategies that focused on notions of inclusivity and exclusivity. Making formal innovation and difficulty a fundamental part of their art, many modernists used the idea of commodified authenticity to sell their art by suggesting that fine art must be finely crafted art, the originality and skill of the artist maker establishing the auratic value of the work in a marketplace full of homogenous, mass-produced literature. This strategy focuses on creating a feeling of exclusive inclusion for the readers of modernism, for it positions them amongst an elite group of readers who recognize and

appreciate good art. Contra to modernist difficulty, the middlebrow insisted that the formal experimentation of modernism was needlessly complex and abandoned the reading public to pedantry and intellectual elitism. In place of this difficulty, the middlebrow advocated art that, if it was not formally experimental, ostensibly represented the shared cultural, social, and moral beliefs of common Britons but that, in fact, represented the ideological and economic values of the middlebrow in the figure of the common man. The middlebrow, then, focused more on fostering a feeling of inclusive exclusion in its readers, for it represented accessible literature that marginalized the abnormal or different formal elements of modernism that were out of touch with the material reality of the reading public. These were the battle cries in what has become known as the battle of the brows, a discourse that positioned the middlebrow and the highbrow against one another and asked readers to choose which side they supported. The reader's choice, both brows agreed, had the most dire cultural consequences, but the oppositional discourse of the battle of the brows stripped readers of agency by suggesting there was no middle ground to this debate. Neither the middlebrow nor the highbrow, then, chose to place their faith in common readers coming to their own aesthetic and critical decisions concerning literature, for readers must become either professionalized according to the highbrow or prioritized consumers according to the middlebrow.

What makes Virginia Woolf unique in this cultural landscape is her continued faith in the common reader. And rather than staying out of or positioning herself above the limiting discourse of the battle of the brows, Woolf participated actively in the debate, positioning both highbrow—herself included—and middlebrow within a shared cultural landscape, and operating a press that blurred the boundaries by publishing diverse works that ranged from lowbrow publications, highbrow art, and even middlebrow pamphlets. Through her careful positioning of

the brows in her minor essays and through the intersectional nature of the Hogarth Press, Woolf acknowledged the discursive framework of the battle of the brows and showed readers the active rather than passive role they must play in the aesthetic discourses of the interwar period.

CHAPTER TWO

“His deficiencies as a critic are too obvious to be pointed out”: Virginia Woolf’s Common Reader as a Theory of Intersectional Subjectivity

Where the previous chapter represents an overview of the literary marketplace and its stakes in interwar Britain, this chapter aims to position Virginia Woolf as publisher, writer, thinker, and consumer in that literary marketplace and to examine how these various roles intersected in her conception of the Common Reader. Amongst modernists and highbrows, Woolf demonstrated a firm commitment to Dr. Johnson’s common reader, putting faith in the idea that, given the opportunity, the reading public and their tastes could be trusted to steer English culture. The problem was that the reading public was rarely given the opportunity to trust their own tastes in the literary marketplace of interwar England: told by the Eliots, Pounds, and Leavises of the world that the acquisition of cultural taste required studied professionalism, and told that the highbrows were out of touch with the common man and his concerns by the Squires, Bennetts, and Priestleys of the world, the common reader was forced to choose sides in a debate that divested them of individual agency and seemed to reduce them to mouthpieces for one of two literary camps. Each of these camps focused on creating the readers they wanted by identifying the aspect of the reader and of the act of reading they believed most important. The highbrows, arguing that a disciplined mind would allow readers to discriminate more effectively and efficiently between books in an over-saturated literary marketplace, aimed publicly to save culture from the waste land Eliot predicted by teaching readers how to read the right books to foster cultural taste. The middlebrow, on the other hand, focused their public efforts on disciplining the bodies of readers by telling them that buying the right books could demonstrate they represented the interests and material existence of common Britons. Importantly, therefore,

each brow's public persona downplayed certain aspects of the newly expanded literary marketplace—commodification in the case of the highbrows, and the growth and maintenance of cultural originality and ingenuity in the case of the middlebrow—as a reasoned strategy to sell their wares to the reading public.

Woolf, however, walks something of a middle ground between these two extremes by employing the common reader as a negation of the professionalism advocated by much of the highbrow and as a foil to the common man of the middlebrow. She was able to position the common reader in this dual role by focusing on the reading public as both reading subjects (or minds) and as buying subjects (or bodies) in the literary marketplace. Her common reader is thus an intersectional subject who exists simultaneously in multiple historical, socio-economic, cultural, and personal narratives, a subject far too complex to be adequately represented in what amounted, in the end, to a rather limiting discourse of reading and culture put forth in the battle of the brows. My goal is not to suggest that Woolf, ever the consummate rebel and freethinker, stood outside this discourse wagging her finger and poo-pooing the other combatants. Like other modernists, she knew her way around the no man's land of the battle of the brows: she built the same imprimatur in the same secondary cultural economy in the same commodity cultures as did Eliot and Joyce. Where she differs from other modernists is in her active critique of the very discourse they were using to sell modernism to the reading public. Woolf's shorter essays, which are the focus of this chapter, are full of references—some subtle, others overt—to the battle of the brows; but rather than propping up this discourse and entrenching herself on one side of the great divide, Woolf constantly punctures its assumptions, allowing readers to see and navigate its dimensions with increased clarity. Let there be no mistake: Woolf was unequivocally and unapologetically highbrow. At the same time, she was not averse to pointing out that hers was a

position with inherent bias, and that she and other artists, both the high- and the middlebrow, benefitted financially and culturally from the discourse they had created to sell literature. She was also not averse to pointing out that readers, as buyers and consumers of high- and middlebrow cultural products, had a special and active role to play in cultural production. Put simply, she was bad at keeping guild marketing secrets. She was good, however, at providing readers with textual spaces in which they could exercise their agency as textual analysts and buyers in the literary marketplace of interwar England.

Woolf's ability to occupy a liminal space in the institutions of modernism in particular and in the literary marketplace in general was predicated on her ownership of the Hogarth Press, which typified in the books it produced the intersectionality she advocated for her common reader, and from which she was able to publish with near total freedom. While many other modernists were using the battle of the brows to create niche markets in which they could sell their products to select groups of properly educated readers, the Woolfs were creating a more democratic press that sold everything from highbrow literature and criticism, to working-class literature and socialist pamphlets, to middlebrow poetry, novels, and criticism. The press, therefore, provided a rather unique publishing space in interwar Britain that brought interests together and provided writers from diverse social backgrounds, many of whom had very different political and cultural beliefs, a place to publish. Hogarth, that is to say, operated under the premise that a plurality of voices would most benefit their readers. In this plurality, readers could find authors writing with, to, and against one another, and thus could begin to form ideas and opinions with and between these voices, actively participating in a production of knowledge that resisted the oppositional logic of the battle of the brows. Woolf made this active participation in the reading process and in the production of knowledge the keystone of her

Two important aspects of the Hogarth Press are revealed in this notice. Firstly, the exclusivity of the press is conveyed by the phrase “limited edition,” and, secondly, the amateurism of the press is betrayed in the unevenly inked and evidently hand-set lettering. In the beginning, the press was what Leonard Woolf called “a hobby which [he and Virginia Woolf] carried on in afternoons, when [they] were not writing books and articles or editing papers” (78), and the mistakes made by the Woolfs as they learned how to print were many and varied. “Among the more famous printing *faux pas*,” Drew Patrick Shannon notes, were

errors in the running head of a Katherine Mansfield story (“The Prelude” rather than “Prelude”, with the offending pages not being corrected once the error was noted); Leonard crossing out Laura Riding’s married name with black bars rather than printing out a new title page; “campion” for “champion” in Virginia’s own *On Being Ill*, to note one of many misspellings and typographical errors; and many instances of poor inking, awkward typography, skewed spacing. (130)

The Woolfs’ lack of ability as printers were the hallmark of the press in its early years, yet this seems to have made their books more enchanting to some of their customers. In the age of mechanical reproduction, the amateurishness of Hogarth hand-printed editions connected them to the Arts and Crafts movement, which sought to reinvigorate the aura of art works by expressly revealing their history as original handmade objects rather than mass-produced products. When it comes to the aura of an art object, Shannon notes, “The key difference is not in the content, which in the original and the reproduction are the same (at least theoretically, not taking into account mistakes in printing, typographical errors, and so on), but in the context surrounding the original, the knowledge on the part of the observer that the act of creation occurred *here*, that this is the site, to some extent, of the artist’s creativity made manifest” (127). What one received in a

Hogarth hand-print—in addition, apparently, to some rather unevenly printed text—was the knowledge that what one held had been printed at Hogarth House by Leonard and Virginia Woolf. The cultural capital associated with this history contained an authenticity that was readily commodifiable and that set it apart from the large publishing houses' mass-produced editions; and because it carried with it the Woolf imprimatur, a stamp that conveyed the cultural status of Bloomsbury, the text itself connected the buyer, however tangentially, to one of the most exclusive highbrow coteries in England.

The Woolfs were not oblivious to the fact that they were dealing in a secondary economy based on cultural capital and commodified authenticity, and they took steps to ensure the press and their names remained under their control as the enterprise became an increasingly viable economic entity. In *Downhill All the Way*, Leonard writes that by 1922—the year that saw literary modernism blossom with the publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, and just the fifth year after the Hogarth printed its first publication—the press had become much more than a “hobby,” so much so that he and Virginia entertained offers from bigger publishing houses and investors. Ultimately, they declined deals from both American business man James Whitall and the Heinemann publishing house that sought to help the Woolfs with production by taking the Hogarth in as a subsidiary. Heinemann's offer to take over the production process and the advertising of the press but leave the Woolfs the autonomy to select what the Hogarth would print (L. Woolf 79) reveals just how valuable the Woolf name was in the literary marketplace at the time, and Leonard's response to Heinemann's and Whitall's offers suggests that he and Virginia wished to retain control over the cultural capital their names had accrued. Leonard's fear was that under either Heinemann's or Whitall's influence the press would

become one of those (admirable in their own way) ‘private’ or semi-private Presses the object of which is finely produced books, books that which are meant not to be read, but to be looked at. We were interested primarily in the immaterial inside of a book, what the author had to say and how he said it; we had drifted into the business with the idea of publishing things which the commercial publisher could not or would not publish. [...] We also dislike the refinement and preciosity which are too often a kind of fungoid growth which culture breeds upon art and literature; they are not unknown in Britain and are often to be found in cultivated Americans. (80)

Virginia agreed with Leonard, writing in her diary on 16 August 1922 that she and Leonard were “a little alarmed by the social values of Mr W[hital] for we don’t want the Press to be a fashionable hobby patronized & inspired by Chelsea. Whittal [*sic.*] lives only two doors off Logan” (*Diaries 2* 189-90). These responses can be viewed as a resistance to production strategies that, as in the case of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, centered on the creation of deluxe editions for collectors and dealers rather than for readers, and Woolf’s snobbish disdain for Chelsea shows her reluctance to wade too willingly or naively into the economy of deluxe editions, manufactured scarcity, and conspicuous consumption.

Virginia’s diary entry about Heinemann’s offer is even more candid: “The Hogarth Press is a travail. Heinemanns made us a most flattering offer—to the effect that we should give us [*sic.*] our brains & blood, & they would see to sales & ledgers. But we sniff patronage. If they gain, we lose. Our name has to be coupled with theirs. [...] We are both very willing to come to this conclusion, & have decided for freedom & a fight with great private glee” (*Diaries 2* 215). Virginia’s entry, which recognizes that the Woolf name was as valuable culturally as Hogarth’s

books were economically, also reveals anxieties about her position as both a writer and a publisher in the literary marketplace. As the former, Woolf required freedom to write what she liked, and it was her position as the latter that allowed her that freedom. Just how valuable the press was to Virginia's writing is made clear in her diary entry on 22 September 1925:

what I owe the Hogarth Press is barely paid for by the whole of my handwriting. Haven't I just written to Herbert Fisher refusing to do a book for the Home University Series on Post Victorian—knowing that I can write a book, a better book, a book of my own bat, for the Press if I wish! To think of being batted down in the hold of those University dons fairly makes my blood run cold. Yet I'm the only woman in England free to write what I like. (qtd. in Marcus 130)

Her roles as writer and publisher became inextricably interrelated for Virginia, since the existence and maintenance of the one was dependent on the existence and maintenance of the other. Heinemann's offer to hitch their economic capital to the Woolfs' cultural capital, therefore, signaled a concession to Virginia because it meant splitting her mind (which created her art and which held great cultural capital) from her body (which created books at the Hogarth Press and which connected her physically to the literary production process and to the economic capital required to allow her mind freedom). The press, that is to say, enabled Virginia to stay connected to myriad aspects of literary production, for, as Kathryn Simpson has pointed out, it signaled "a more holistic process of literary production, as [she] was involved not only in the writing of her texts, but also in their printing, binding, marketing, packaging and posting—the elements that capitalist mass production isolates in the production of alienable commodities exchanged in an impersonal market" (*Gifts* 9). The Hogarth became for Virginia, then, a means of control within a marketplace that, due to its distribution of production, too often placed writers

and publication houses at odds. In other words, it allowed her not only artistic freedom but also market freedom by providing her with agency to decide how she was presented, as writer and critic, to the reading public.

The Woolfs' responses to Whitall and Heinemann mark the Hogarth Press's rather complicated and conflicted position in the institutions of modernism. The Hogarth was an exclusive press and it undoubtedly used the cultural capital associated with its owners' names to foster this exclusivity, but it was also remarkably democratic, providing a voice to highbrow authors as well as to middle- and lowbrow authors. The Hogarth's place within the institutions of modernism is the topic of an increasing wealth of critical discussion, much of which aims to reevaluate the press in light of the critical dismantling of the Great Divide and the complex interrelationships between high art and mass production. Such a reevaluation is useful because, of all the modernist institutions (little magazines, coterie presses, deluxe editions, imprimaturs) the Hogarth is perhaps the most troubling to position effectively. For instance, the Woolfs did as much to build and safeguard their imprimatur as any other highbrow, guarding the press from bigger publishing houses, but their wolf's head logo encapsulates how important marketing and branding were in the newly expanded literary marketplace and how important they became to the Woolfs. Most of the press's early newspaper ads were created by Leonard, who gradually got better at designing ads. The first Hogarth Press ads, J. H. Willis points out, were "functional but inelegant," pronouncing the name of the press at the top of the ad before listing the authors and titles of the books to be published (375). This style soon changed to position the name of the press below the authors and titles to be published, a common practice amongst presses that wished to promote the value of their writers more than the value of the press, but the ads were still "visually unsophisticated, the type heavy and black, the copy cramped, the list of titles and

prices assaulting and dulling the eye” (375). By 1926, Leonard had become a much better ad man inasmuch as he “had lightened the Hogarth Press ads, reducing the number of titles to two or three and using a variety of type sizes so that the author’s name or the book’s title stood out clearly from the supporting copy” (376), yet the Woolfs still thought they needed something to make their ads stand out. Thus, in 1928, they hired E. McKnight Kauffer, who had been a part of Roger Fry’s Omega workshop earlier in his career and had experience as a poster designer. Kauffer designed the now unmistakable wolf’s head logo and Leonard employed it first in December 1928. The logo, Willis suggests, “communicated a new degree of stylishness, efficiency, and crisp intellectuality” and finally struck the right balance between advertising the press and its owners as well as the author’s name and title of the work (377). The design of the logo—a wolf’s head based on bold, geometric shapes, which played on modernist trends of abstraction in both the art and the advertising worlds—was important to be sure, but the logo also had value as a unifying symbol between and among Hogarth texts. As Elizabeth Wilson Gordon has pointed out, while logos indicate “merit, authorization, [and] the symbolic capital the publisher confers on the book,” they must also be “transferable, a unifying element among various objects” (“On or About” 194). Each Hogarth title was unique in its content, since the press began, as Leonard pointed out in his response to Heinemann, with the “idea of publishing things which the commercial publisher could not or would not publish” (*Downhill All the Way* 80), but each Hogarth title was also brought together, made part of a set, under the wolf’s head, so that what remained constant and, according to Gordon, what “creates the possibility of ongoing demand” is the reputation associated with the logo rather than the uniqueness of the book (“On or About” 194). The logo, that is to say, created brand recognition and thus became cultural currency within the secondary economy of the institutions of modernism.

The uses to which this carefully maintained imprimatur were put reveal the press's complicated position at the intersections of modernism's institutions, for the press, especially as it matured in the late 1920s and early 1930s, began publishing work that seemed outside the highbrow art and ideas associated with its owners and the Bloomsbury group. Indeed, Laura Marcus has argued that the "distinguishing characteristic of the Press was heterogeneity," and that while it was responsible for publishing many modernist texts and pamphlets, it also had "strong links to the political institutions of the Left, including the Labour Party and the Fabian Society" (128). While this is hardly surprising considering Leonard's political beliefs, the result was that, increasingly, voices from the working-class and even the middlebrow found a home at the Hogarth. Where middlebrow writers were concerned, the press published mostly those political and critical pamphlets that bigger publishing houses wouldn't publish. As Melissa Sullivan has pointed out in her work on Rose Macaulay and E. M. Delafield, middlebrow writers were doubly rewarded in terms of cultural capital when they published with the Hogarth, "for they were first approved by the audience of their editors, the highbrow Woolfs, and then integrated with the network of readers, contributors and supporters of the well-respected press" once their work was emblazoned with the wolf's head (55). But the Woolfs, too, gained something from the arrangement, as they "used the Hogarth Press to craft a new portrait of the literary field that included a heterogeneous modernism and a hybrid middlebrow; this accounted for the diverse tastes of the reading public and created new opportunities for women writers to refigure the contentious concerns over interwar cultural hierarchies" (54). Thus, where many presses, small magazines, and periodicals were trying to carve out a niche for themselves in an increasingly segmented and specialized literary marketplace, the Hogarth Press began diversifying its publications by providing an outlet for writers who would otherwise not be

published. Such diversification addressed several cultural gaps that existed in the literary marketplace, but, more importantly, it challenged the cultural hegemony of large presses that marginalized certain voices and expanded the boundaries of both literature and public intellectualism in England.

The balancing act of managing the press's identity within various cultural and economic spaces was not always easy, which becomes clear in the relationship between the Woolfs and John Hampson, a working-class writer who had a number of novels published by the Hogarth Press, beginning in 1931 with *Saturday Night at the Greyhound*. As was the case with the middlebrow pamphleteers Macauley and Delafield, the relationship between Hampson and the press seems to have been mutually beneficial. In addition to benefitting from the cultural cachet associated with being published by the Woolfs, Hampson, Helen Southworth explains, gained literary mentors, including E. M. Forster and William Plomer, and the press gained "access to a network of Midlands and northern writing talent" ("Going Over" 223). The relationship between the Woolfs and Hampson had not started very smoothly, however. Hampson sent the manuscript of his first novel, entitled *Go Seek a Stranger*, to the Woolfs in 1928. About a gay working-class man who aspires to be a writer, the manuscript was rejected by the Woolfs. In the rejection letter to Hampson, Leonard admits that the manuscript "has interested [he and Virginia] greatly and has such merits that we should have liked to publish [it]," but continues that "unfortunately we do not think that this would be possible under present circumstances" (qtd. in Southworth, "Going Over" 218). The present circumstance Leonard refers to is the obscenity trial that was underway against Radclyffe Hall and *The Well of Loneliness*. The Woolfs' willingness to speak at the obscenity trial on behalf of the defense, and their unwillingness to publish literature similar to that being tried, reveals what seems to be a paradox in their political

and artistic support for queer literature and queer voices. In fact, it reveals the fraught nature of the dual roles they fulfilled as both writers/thinkers and publishers. Agreeing to speak at Hall's trial seems like no small gesture when one considers that such a public statement would connect the Woolfs with the book and influence the way they were perceived in the literary marketplace, especially given the much more covert but still potentially objectionable content of *Orlando*, published in the same year. That said, the number of prominent intellectuals who had volunteered to speak at the trial suggests that the Woolfs with their cultural capital as public intellectuals did not face much danger in testifying. Indeed, if anything, their personal connection to the trial could have had the effect of strengthening the cultural value of their imprimatur by adding to the Woolfs already well-established liberal views of gender and sexual fluidity.

The press's place in the literary marketplace was somewhat different though. An obscenity trial of one's own—a distinct possibility were the Woolfs to publish Hampson's book in the midst of the trial—could have hampered the press's ability to continue publishing. Any legal problems at the press would limit not only the Woolfs' ability to publish their own work but also the work of other writers, some of whom may not have found publication outside the Hogarth Press, since for many, Southworth notes, the press represented an “alternative to the commercial press” (“Introduction” 8). Put differently, the Woolfs occupied a contentious position in the literary marketplace that was simultaneously inside the judicial obscenity laws governing publication, given their role as press owners, and outside the hegemonic values of many social and political institutions, given their positions as writers and thinkers. As individuals, the Woolfs were able to perform a tactical micro-politics by attending the trial: their presence at the trial confirmed and strengthened their outsider status as thinkers and artists who cared about art for art's sake and who positioned themselves against the idea that art must

represent the moral principles of hegemonic institutional powers. As publishers, the Woolfs had to perform a strategic macro-political positioning within the body politic of the literary marketplace: the absence of queer literature (at least overtly queer literature like Hampson's *Go Seek a Stranger*) at the Hogarth Press helped maintain the Woolfs' insider status in a marketplace still governed by delimiting social and political institutions. What unites the two positions the Woolfs occupied as artists and publishers, therefore, is performance: a shrewd understanding, on one hand, of how to position oneself at the intersections of numerous cultural and economic spaces, and a keen awareness, on the other hand, of the role performative actions can play in such cultural and economic spaces.

The Hogarth Press had, therefore, what might be best called an intersectional identity within the literary marketplace and within the institutions of modernism. The Woolfs understood that the press existed simultaneously in a number of different cultural and economic spaces that operated according to distinct discourses, and they worked hard to ensure that the press occupied the best possible position within these discourses to make money while at the same time upholding the artistic and political principles of its owners. Their management of the press, Gordon argues, shows "a sophisticated and productive negotiation of seemingly contradictory positions," including the "commercial/artistic, professional/amateur, traditional/avant-garde, elitist/democratic" ("How Should" 108), and it is precisely this careful negotiation that made the press both economically viable in the saturated literary marketplace and culturally significant in the institutions of modernism. The Hogarth Press, therefore, truly was a press of the Woolfs' own, for the identity of the press within the literary marketplace mirrors the identities of the Woolfs within the cultural and political institutions of England. The Woolfs, particularly Virginia, practiced an intersectional form of personal and political identity in which the "I,"

rather than being viewed as a stable self unchanging over time and space, was considered a fluid subject position capable of change depending on the various cultural spaces in which it was located. The Woolfs extended this notion of complex relationality and of a subjectivity at the intersections of competing discourses to their press, creating a business that was never one thing at all times and in all spaces but, rather, a malleable entity that could be positioned differently as required. This malleability gave the press the ability to both benefit from and challenge the multiple cultural and economic spaces it functioned within, and made it a much more democratic press than many commercial publishing houses and modernist institutions. A democratic press was important because it could accommodate artists unable to publish elsewhere, but it was also important to Virginia Woolf's concept of the common reader, a figure that she believed should read without specific goals or ends and who would necessarily benefit from a press that fetishized neither difficulty and professionalism nor the common man.

Virginia Woolf's Common Reader: Critical Deficiency and the Reading Subject

Virginia Woolf's conceptualization of the common reader can be separated into two different but, to Woolf, connected aspects of the reading process: *how* a text is read and *what* text is read. To employ one of the Western critical traditions most enduring dichotomies, we might say that the *how* of reading is concerned with the mind of the reader (how the reader shapes and is shaped by the reading process), whereas the *what* of reading is concerned with the body of the reader (what books one buys and what one does while reading). Because the bulk of critical discussion concerning Woolf's common reader has focused on the how of reading or the mind of the reader, it is here that I begin.

Woolf's definition of the common reader in *The Common Reader: First Series* (1925) does not seem too much different than the definition of the common reader Samuel Johnson gave some 150 years earlier in *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81). Indeed, when Woolf defines the common reader in her introductory essay, "The Common Reader," she pays homage to Johnson, quoting from his work this passage: "I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours" (1). To this definition, however, Woolf adds:

The common reader, as Dr Johnson implies, differs from the critic and the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing. He never ceases, as he reads, to run up some rickety and ramshackle fabric which shall give him the temporary satisfaction of looking sufficiently like the real object to allow of affection, laughter, and argument. Hasty, inaccurate, and superficial, snatching now this poem, now that scrap of old furniture, without caring where he finds it or of what nature it may be so long as it serves his purpose and rounds his structure, his deficiencies as a critic are too obvious to be pointed out. (1)

There are two important characteristics of the common reader raised in this definition. First is the ephemerality of his critical vision, which Woolf conveys using words associated with temporality and change: he "never ceases" to create "rickety," "ramshackle" theories and

frameworks of knowing; he enjoys only “temporary satisfaction” with these frameworks before he must change them; he is “hasty,” “inaccurate,” and “snatches” at fragments all in an attempt to build “some kind of whole” that will inevitably disappear. The ephemerality of the common reader’s perception is, of course, opposed to the supposed timelessness of the critic’s attempt to “impart knowledge” and “correct the opinions of others” in Woolf’s description. Her common reader, put simply, has not become a professional reader with all the academically-provided critical tools required to understand the text once and for all; instead, he is always becoming a reader—reviewing, revising, changing with each new text.

It is during the process of becoming a reader that her common reader reveals his second most important characteristic: deficiency. Woolf not only casts critical deficiency, often considered something one should downplay or elide as a critic, as a positive attribute of her common reader; she makes it his salvation. The common reader’s deficiencies make him receptive, and make it impossible for him to complete the action of becoming. Indeed, as Randi Saloman has argued, “It is [the reader’s] ‘deficiencies’ that force him to work as hard as he does to construct his readings and to enter into dialogue with the works he encounters. Determined to succeed in his attempt to produce meaning, the common reader turns these deficiencies to his own advantage. He becomes writer as well as reader, adopting a hybrid role that brings about new possibilities for the essayistic experience” (59). In this view of deficiency, Woolf differs from other modernists, as from the purveyors of mass culture. Instead of trying to cure the common reader’s taste with professionalism, and instead of fetishizing the common man whose taste ostensibly represented all Britons and was an egalitarian rallying cry against elitism and intellectualism, Woolf places her trust in the gaps and inconsistencies of the common reader’s

knowledge. Neither abandoning the common reader nor forcing him to embody the arbiter of common tastes and values, Woolf believes in the power of his deficiencies.

This notion of deficiency plays a role in many critical discussions of Woolf's common reader, but these discussions usually focus on the way Woolf modeled common reading in her essays: that is, the formal aspects of Woolf's essays that invite readers into the essay and ask them to become active participants in the production of knowledge with her essay's narrators, who are constructed within the essays to facilitate this active participation. Katerina Koutsantoni as well as Beth Carole Rosenberg, for example, compare Woolf's common reader to Johnson's in order to show that both authors believed the relationship between reader and writer depended on an active dialogue between two personalities and the sharing of authority. As Koutsantoni points out, Woolf insists on the authority of both the writer and the reader in the reading process throughout her essays and, in doing so, "stresses the power of personality possessed by both" (3). Concerning individuality in the essay, Woolf writes in an early essay, "The Decay of Essay-writing" (1905), that "Almost all essays begin with a capital I—'I think', 'I feel'" (25). She goes on to suggest that the personal essay "owes its popularity to the fact that its proper use is to express one's personal peculiarities, so that under the decent veil of print one can indulge one's egotism to the full" (26). Such words seem to suggest the tyranny of the authorial "I," but Woolf explains that the personal essay is decaying precisely because its writers refuse to express their own opinions and, instead, choose to write in generalities so as to please their readers' expectations and confirm their opinions: "if [essayists] told us frankly not of the books we can all read and the pictures which hang for us all to see, but of the single book to which they alone have the key and of that solitary picture whose face is shrouded to all but one gaze—if they would write of themselves—such writing would have its own permanent value" (26). As is so

often the case with Woolf's essays, the pronouns are the most important elements here. Indulging one's egotism in the essay is useful, Woolf argues, precisely because it creates a dialogic relationship between "they" (the writer) and "us" (the reader) in which each side plays an active role. Woolf's they/us dichotomy marks for her readers that there may be discrepancies between the opinions "they" espouse, how "we" receive those opinions, and the opinions "we" ourselves hold as readers. What may at first look like a clash of personalities becomes for Woolf a discussion of peculiarities, a feeling out of where and how one's own opinions differ from others' opinions. This exploration of particulars and positions creates the potential to find one's deficiencies as a reader, so that active participation as a reader for Woolf is less an aggressive search for answers and more a dialogical back-and-forth, in which meaning is created between writer and reader. Thus, Rosenberg argues, in Woolf's essays the "authority of the essay, which was once found in the author, is now found in the reader, who constructs meaning as he or she moves through the text" (71). Reading becomes a creative process in Woolf's conceptualization, for one reads not as a means to an end but in order to explore the boundaries of one's knowledge and experience, where the limitations or deficiencies of readers and writers bring them together in order to create, as best they can and however temporarily, some kind of understanding of the text.

In her own personal essays, Woolf frequently emphasizes the relationship between active writer and active reader by demonstrating in many instances her narrator's lack of authority and deficiencies. The dismantling of authorial authority is perhaps most blatant in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which Woolf's narrator freely admits, "I should never be able to fulfil [*sic.*] what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer—to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for

ever” (3). As if this does not undermine her narrator’s authority enough, Woolf writes shortly afterwards that,

I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; ‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the waste-paper basket and forget all about it. (4)

The reader’s role could not be stated more plainly: yea verily, Woolf hits the reader about the head with the narrator’s deficiencies, almost goading the reader to intervene immediately in the reading process and question the veracity of what is to come. That a one-hundred page essay begins with the immediate and thorough dismantling of its narrator’s authority is remarkable, but this tactic speaks to the fact that Woolf was trying to create with her essays an alternative to the academic essay of the learned man. The reader is given an example of this learned man later in *A Room of One’s Own* when the narrator discusses Mr A, a novelist who possesses a “well-nourished, well-educated, free mind” (90). Nevertheless, the narrator finds Mr A’s work tiresome to read, for “after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped like the letter ‘I’” (90). Here, then, is the tyrannical “I” Woolf tries so hard to avoid presenting at the beginning of her own essay, and her narrator continues, “One began to be tired of ‘I’. Not but what this ‘I’ was a most respectable ‘I’; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. I respect and admire that ‘I’ from the bottom of my heart. But—here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other—the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter ‘I’ all is shapeless as mist”

(90). It's important to note that there are two I's here: one is the I of Woolf's narrator, already described as a personal, malleable "convenient term for somebody who has no real being" and full of biases and deficiencies (4); the other is an unchanging "I" imbued with all the institutional knowledge that comes of a good but restrictive education spent chasing ends rather than questioning means. The problem with this second "I" is its impersonality, for it has been polished for centuries by the academic institution and represents that institution, its discipline and training, rather than the individual. Oxbridge strips away the individualities and peculiarities of its students and dons, and so Woolf's narrator, when she is turned away from the library, thinks that however "unpleasant it is to be locked out" of Oxbridge, "it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (21). This imprisonment is visually represented in the passage, for it is only the "I" of Mr A that is surrounded by quotation marks, which become physical representations of his mental rigidity.

On the other hand, in accepting his or her outsider status, Woolf's common reader resists closed systems of institutional knowledge and, as Susan Stanford Friedman argues, "establishes an authority outside the university, one that reflects, assesses, prods, probes, pushes and judges what s/he reads" (119). To prod and to push requires, at least according to Woolf, that one write personally—limited though personality may be by critical deficiencies and ignorance—to allow for the productive meeting of reader and writer. More than this, however, Woolf fairly dares the writers of impersonal academic essays to acknowledge the limitations of their own writing, for, according to Anne E. Fernald, in "objecting to a criticism that was broad, impersonal, and interested in fixing boundaries, Woolf accepted and even rejoiced in a criticism that would necessarily be limited, personal, and erratic. By describing her method in terms of its disadvantages, Woolf forces her critics to defend an impersonal reading of literature, if they can"

(198). Woolf's introduction to *A Room of One's Own*, therefore, draws attention to its own form as a personal essay in relation to a "you," holding itself to account for its flaws and shortcomings in order to expose how the formal elements of essays shape the content within, and to ask impersonal essays to do the same. She offers through her deficient I a place for the reader in the critical and creative process, and provides the reader the authority needed to become an active participant in the making of the text.

It's important to note, however, that Woolf's attempts to share her authorial authority are not designed to completely blur the boundaries between reader and writer but, quite the opposite, to draw attention to how writer and reader intersect with one another as distinct subjects in the text. We've already seen that Saloman conflates writer and reader when discussing the common reader when she suggests that the reader "becomes writer as well as reader, adopting a hybrid role that brings about new possibilities for the essayistic experience" (59), and this sentiment is mirrored by Rosenberg, who writes, "We find that, ultimately, for Woolf, there is no difference between reader and writer; they are one and the same, and they both participate in the interactive and interdependent process of creation and interpretation" (xxi). A more productive approach to understanding the relationship between writer and reader and the way subjectivity is imagined in Woolf's essays is offered by Friedman when she suggests that the "defining element of the 'common reader' is his or her *positionality* as outsider—or to be more precise, since no one can exist 'outside' culture, as one who occupies and interrogates the borders between canonical and marginalized traditions" (118). I agree with Friedman that Woolf conceptualizes the common reader as a cultural outsider, but I think the far more important point being made in this passage is that Woolf, by thinking in terms of the subject's positionality within discourses, or without as the case may be, is advancing a theory of relational and intersectional subjectivity. Leila Brosnan

describes the relational status of readers and writers in Woolf's essays when she suggests that the "dialogue Woolf imagines [between writer and reader] abandons the paradigmatic subject/object configuration of the essay—a binary which is traditionally a sexed one with the masculine as the privileged term—in favour of a temporary yet ongoing intersubjective collision, thereby avoiding the exclusion and restriction contingent upon the established 'I' of the essay and language" (120). To discuss Woolf's essays in terms of abandoning the subject/object paradigm of the traditional critical essay in a temporary gesture towards a shared position acknowledges Woolf's frequent invitations to the reader to become an active participant in the creative process of making the essay. More than merely revealing the role of readers in the reading process, Woolf's essays actually create spaces for readers by asking, perhaps even requiring, them to assume a subject position in relation to the narrator. This interactive process between writer and reader ends in the consistent renewal of the "I" in the essay, according to Brosnan, for she explains that, "By writing the oppositional object as another subject or the space in which another subject can speak, and then letting that process recreate the original scriptive subject, by a self-reflexive reflection, the 'I' of the essayist is created anew" (122-3). I'd add to this that both subject positions—the "I" of the writer and the "I" of the reader—are renewed in the self-reflexive repositioning of the reader, for with each repositioning of the authorial "I," the reading "I" is ever so slightly repositioned as well and must forge anew his or her subjectivity within the new discursive space created by the authorial "I." In short, *both* reader and writer are *both* subject and object in a complex game of identity formation within Woolf's essays: both are placed within a textual space in which their "I"s take on meaning in relation to each other. The subject positioning of one, that is to say, affects the subject positioning of the other—a process that inevitably reveals each other's status as objects within the system of meaning created in the text.

One clearly sees the positioning and repositioning of the authorial “I” in one of Woolf’s most famous shorter essays, “Character in Fiction” (1924), and with each new positioning Woolf compels her readers/audience, oftentimes very outwardly, to reposition themselves as their relational position to the authorial “I” changes. “Character in Fiction” (originally presented as a speech to the Cambridge Heretics Club in May 1924, published in the *Criterion* in July 1924, and later published by the Hogarth Press in October 1924 as “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”) was penned in response to Arnold Bennett’s March 1923 review of *Jacob’s Room*, and attempts to explain what Woolf and many other Georgian writers saw as a shift in the cultural and aesthetic ground of English literature. Bennett’s review, entitled “Is the Novel Decaying,” asserts that the “foundation of good fiction is character creating,” and that the Georgians, while having “a number of young novelists who display all manner of good qualities,” have failed to write good fiction because they “are so busy with states of society as to half forget that any society consists of individuals, and they attach too much weight to cleverness, which is perhaps the lowest of all artistic qualities” (113). About *Jacob’s Room* specifically, he writes that he has “seldom read a cleverer book than Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, a novel which has made a great stir in a small world” (113). Bennett’s charge of cleverness refers to the formal complexity of *Jacob’s Room*, a critique that positions his review firmly within the realm of the “battle of the brows” inasmuch as it imagines the difficulty of *Jacob’s Room* as an attempt to exclude the vast majority of the reading public and to appeal to a small coterie of highly educated readers, hence Bennett’s claim that Woolf’s clever book “made a great stir in a small world.”

Woolf responds to Bennett in “Character in Fiction” with an in-depth discussion of the differences between Georgian and Edwardian literature, and while she agrees with Bennett that character is central to good fiction, she argues that the Georgians have failed because the tools

the Edwardians used to create characters are of no use to the Georgians. Too concerned with what Woolf calls in “Character in Fiction” “the fabric of things” (432), the Edwardians displace in various ways their central subject. Woolf reduces the Edwardian propensity to entangle readers in the “fabric of things” down to the single term “materialist” in “Modern Fiction” (1921)—Woolf’s other famous essay on modernist aesthetics and very much a companion piece to “Character in Fiction”—where she argues that in Edwardian materialism one finds only an immense amount of time and energy “making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring” (105). What lasts for the Edwardians are the external realities of existence. Where Mrs Brown lives, who her father is, how her mother died, what she pays in rent: these details form the basis of character development in Edwardian fiction and are conventions that, if they make sense when describing a hierarchical social structure where tradition may determine character with at least some degree of accuracy, fail to be useful in a chaotic, swirling modernity of rapid technological progress, depersonalizing metropolitan centres, speeding automobiles, and even faster cultural production. Thus, Woolf writes the Edwardians “have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature” (“Character in Fiction” 430). The Georgian view of character, as presented in “Modern Fiction,” is identified as an “attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist. Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (106-107). This description of what Woolf suggests is a general shift in Georgian fiction toward

presenting psychological reality rather than material reality has become central to the study of modernist fiction, and represents one of the most accurate definitions of free indirect discourse narration, a style of writing that Woolf helped popularize in her novels.

“Character in Fiction” is most remembered for this aesthetic discussion, but it’s important to note that it is also a skirmish in the much larger interwar debates over culture and literary markets, a point that becomes clear when Woolf very consciously and very visibly takes a position within the “battle of the brows” discourse. “Do not let me give you the impression that I do not admire and enjoy their books” (427), Woolf says of Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy, but “what odd books they are! Sometimes I wonder if we are right to call them books at all. For they leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something—to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque. That done, the restlessness is laid, the book finished; it can be put upon the shelf, and need never be read again” (427). Woolf’s critique is scathing. At once, she lampoons the trinity not only for writing what she believes is inadequate literature but also for writing the types of books that book clubs and societies would choose for their readers—often with an eye to the class performance entailed by the contents of the bookshelf. Woolf, therefore, takes up the mantle of the downtrodden highbrow Georgian artist trying to make art new and positions herself against the stodgy decrepitude of middlebrow Edwardian traditionalists like Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells. She does so again when discussing the particulars of her debate with Bennett. Woolf disagrees with Bennett’s assertion that the measure of effective character construction in fiction is the reality with which the character is represented, yet defers to the reader by saying “I am well aware that this is a matter about which I am likely to be prejudiced, sanguine, and near-sighted. I will put my view before you in the hope that you will make it

impartial, judicial, and broad-minded” (427). This critical deferral reinforces the highbrow Georgian subject position Woolf is taking and situates the Edwardian writers and the reading public in relation to this subject position, but it simultaneously acknowledges how her position creates critical deficiencies and outwardly asks the reader to intervene in the critical argument. Such self-reflexive interventions create critical moments for readers to privately readjust their beliefs about aesthetics and asks they test the validity of Woolf’s argument in light of the discursive space in which they find themselves, but, more than this, they demonstrate how the reader is implicated in the literary process as an active participant within both the text and the literary marketplace.

Woolf’s use of exaggeration within the essay likewise asks the reader to identify her critical deficiencies and intervene where necessary. Indeed, while the grand proclamation that “on or about December 1910 human character changed” (421) has become, like Pound’s demand to “Make it New,” a foundational statement of modernist aesthetics and modernist studies, in the moment before she utters the pronouncement, the narrator “hazard[s]” that her audience will find it “more disputable perhaps” than her previous arguments in the essay (421). And in the moment after the claim, the narrator immediately equivocates: “I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; and since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910” (421-422). On the surface, such performative phrasing does not matter much—after all, it is the value of the idea rather than the sincerity of the speaker that should be considered when evaluating ideas—but Woolf’s exaggeration once again positions her as the highbrow defender of Georgian aesthetics and Bennett, Gallswothy, and Wells as the middlebrow defenders of Edwardian aesthetics, a

relational paradigm between the authors that, in turn, places the reader firmly in the “battle of the brows” and creates a space into which the reader can intervene and become an active participant in both the text and the debate. Thus, by abdicating her own authority to the reader and by exaggerating her own claims, Woolf demonstrates her own critical deficiencies in order to activate the reader/audience and to demonstrate that they, too, must play a role in the production of literature.

The role readers must play in the “battle of the brows” is, according to Woolf, very much different than the role they are currently playing, yet both their current role and their ideal role are explored through Woolf’s analysis of the power that literary conventions wield in the debate. Woolf suggests that aesthetic conventions can be compared to social conventions:

A convention in writing is not much different from a convention in manners. Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other. The hostess bethinks her of the weather, for generations of hostesses have established the fact that this is a subject of universal interest in which we all believe. [...] The writer must get in touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognises, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-operate in the far more difficult business of intimacy. (“Character in Fiction” 431)

Positioning the writer as host to the reader, where both are guided by a common understanding of practices, be they social or literary, emphasizes the most important aspect of reading for Woolf: the *relationship* between reader and writer, in which each participant carries an equally important and active role as the co-creators of a space in which ideas can be exchanged and

dialogues created. Just as importantly, this comparison removes the reading process from places like Eton, Oxford, and Cambridge—institutions that Woolf believed responsible for both propagating and normalizing the patriarchy and for teaching an impersonal form of reading—and relocates it to the home, an important site in many of Woolf's novels and a place in which hostesses such as Clarissa Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay act as central nodes in relational networks. Reading is cast, here, not as an individual search for knowledge, a search for a “nugget of pure truth” (*AROO* 3), but as a relational activity. Shortly after the passage about hosting in “Character in Fiction,” however, Woolf neglects her own advice and is unspeakably rude to the English reading public. “In England,” she writes, “[the public] is a very suggestible and docile creature, which, once you get it to attend, will believe implicitly what it is told for a certain number of years” (432). She continues by comparing the reading public to lap dogs who, “sitting by the writer's side” (433), attend to the trinity too faithfully, and who believe that materialist realism is the only appropriate novelistic convention because ““Old women have houses. They have fathers. They have incomes. They have servants. They have hot water bottles. That is how we know that they are old women. Mr Wells and Mr Bennett and Mr Galsworthy have always taught us that this the way to recognise them”” (433). Such mimicry is most unbecoming in a hostess, but, once again, one must ask to what end Woolf employs this mockery of the public. Here it seems that imitation is the most flattering form of insincerity, for Woolf, far from desiring actual separation from the public, positions herself antagonistically to the public in order to distance the common reader from both the Georgians and the Edwardians, who are the real antagonists in this aesthetic debate as they vie for market share and recognition. The reader is urged by Woolf to begin realizing that it is they, not the Georgians or the Edwardians, who must inform literary conventions if literature is to achieve its highest aim: *i.e.* to accurately represent

Mrs Brown. Their role is not to sit and say in a “vast and unanimous way” (433) what they have been told to say; theirs is to reason why, to think and make reply, as writers try to reshape conventions that can build an intimacy once more between reader and writer.

For all her lampooning of the trinity, for all her equivocatory pronouncements about human character, for all her suggestions that the Georgians have had to reinvent the tools of literature anew, Woolf very clearly positions herself, the Georgians, the Edwardians, and the readers in the aesthetic debate so that the reader might understand where they fit into the cultural landscape. In the end, she admits that such debates are perhaps “inevitable whenever from hoar old age or callow youth the convention ceases to be a means of communication between writer and reader, and becomes instead an obstacle and an impediment. At the present moment we are suffering, not from decay, but from having no code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship” (434). On one hand, Woolf personifies writing conventions in this passage, their age and innocence becoming factors that limit their usefulness in creating connections between reader and writer. On the other hand, this passage concisely sums up the “battle of the brows” that, by pitting the hoary old age of the Edwardian conventions against the callow youth of the Georgian conventions and asking readers to choose a side, has created an impediment to the common reader and created of him an obedient lapdog good for little else than yapping out the pronouncements of his chosen master. Neither the Georgians nor the Edwardians are let off the hook in “Character in Fiction,” for both play their part to win readers and convince them there is a wrong and a right way to write.

This is not, of course, to say that Woolf does not come down firmly on one side of the debate, for, in soliciting her readers’ help in discovering what aesthetic conventions best represent the change in human character she espouses in “Character in Fiction,” and by asking

them at the end of the essay to “Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure” (436) that has, up to that point, defined the Georgian writing conventions, she undeniably makes an argument that supports Georgian rather than Edwardian conventions. But at the same time, Woolf is remarkably candid with her reader about how the “battle of the brows” is constructed, and she goes to remarkable lengths to ensure that her reader is empowered. In fact, at the end of the essay, Woolf thoroughly challenges her own position by foregrounding the active, authoritative role of the reader—the ideal role of the reader according to Woolf—and using shifts in pronouns, where repetition becomes a visual not merely linguistic mode of emphasis. These pronouns draw attention to the reader’s responsibility in relation to literature and literary practices:

Thus *I* have tried, at tedious length, *I* fear, to answer some of the questions which *I* began by asking. *I* have given an account of some of the difficulties which in my view beset the Georgian writer in all his forms. *I* have sought to excuse him. May *I* end by venturing to remind *you* of the duties and responsibilities that are yours as partners in this business of writing books, as companions in the railway carriage, as fellow travellers with Mrs Brown? For she is just as visible to *you* who remain silent as to *us* who tell stories about her. In the course of your daily life this past week *you* have had far stranger and more interesting experiences than the one *I* have tried to describe. *You* have overheard scraps of talk that filled *you* with amazement. *You* have gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of your feelings. In one day thousands of ideas have coursed through your brains; thousands of emotions have met, collided, and disappeared in astonishing disorder. Nevertheless, *you* allow *the writers* to palm off upon *you* a version of all

this, an image of Mrs Brown, which has no likeness to the surprising apparition whatsoever. In your modesty *you* seem to consider that *writers* are of different blood and bone from yourselves; that *they* know more of Mrs Brown than *you* do. Never was there a more fatal mistake. (435-6 emphasis added)

The heavy repetition of “I” at the beginning of the passage demonstrates the personal nature of the argument Woolf has presented thus far and positions her with authority within the “battle of the brows,” but once she begins to discuss the role of “you” the reader this “I” changes to “us,” the authors, as Woolf becomes part of an aggregate while increasingly allowing the “you” to become the nexus of power in the passage. By the end, she abandons all personal pronouns for writers, either singular or plural, and refers to them simply as “the writers” who “palm off” inaccurate versions of Mrs Brown and as “writers” whom readers believe to be “of different blood and bone from [themselves]” (436). More than merely a slow reversal of power, however, this play with pronouns and positioning asks readers to continually re-evaluate their position and centrality as Woolf slides from prominence to near obscurity in the space of a paragraph. Readers, that is to say, are asked to recognize that they are, in addition to being individual consumers, both a subject and an object in a far vaster artistic discourse and literary economy. This complex positioning of the reader is most clearly acknowledged when Woolf then suggests that “It is this division between reader and writer, this humility on your part, these professional airs and graces on ours, that corrupt and emasculate the books which should be the healthy offspring of a close and equal alliance between us” (436). Reader/writer, yours/ours: with this labeling Woolf presents the intersectional identities that inform both production and consumption in the literary marketplace, and she brings these intersectional identities together in

the end with the personal pronoun “us,” a word that suggests community, unity, and, as she suggests, “a close and equal alliance” between members.

The suggestion that the division between reader and writer “emasculates” literature is particularly interesting because it challenges the idea that impersonal objectivity and an unwavering and authoritative “I”—the very foundation of institutional educations and patriarchy according to Woolf—are necessary for effective critical argumentation. In “Character in Fiction” one does not find the same Mr A one finds in *A Room of One’s Own*, does not find the “I” that, although it has been “polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding,” casts a shadow that renders everything “shapeless as mist” (90). Such “I’s” are the very stuff of the institutional masculinity polished at Eton, Cambridge, and Oxford, yet they lead, paradoxically, to an emasculating infertility inasmuch as they allow only submission to authority and, thereby, limit the reader’s role in the text. Relocating power to the aggregate or communal, however, Woolf favours an “I” that is much more intersectional and relational; an “I” that does not assert its power but, rather, invites dialogue and asks readers to express their personality in the presence of and in relation to the organizing personality of the narrator. Fertility becomes possible in such a textual space, for this is the space of the gracious hostess rather than of the learned scholar. Much like Clarissa Dalloway, whose “offering” to society it is “to combine, to create” by bringing people together at her parties (*MD* 103), and who “must assemble” (158) her guests even after the Bradshaws bring Septimus’s death to her party, or like Mrs Ramsay, who acts as the central node in the domestic life of her family and assembled guests so that, as Lily Briscoe finally realizes, in “bringing them together” she makes “of the moment something permanent” (*TtL* 133), Woolf’s narrator brings all of the protagonists—Georgians, Edwardians, and common readers—together in “Character in Fiction.” The speaker also organizes the protagonists,

positioning them in relation to one another, laying bare their deficiencies and acknowledging their roles in the “battle of the brows,” thereby enabling them to enter into discourse more productively and more equitably. Or, as Fernald has suggested, Woolf asks “readers to form their own conclusions not only about the books themselves but about the shape of the essay that has discussed them,” so that she “creates a map of discovery, suggesting much about what is yet unknown as it traces the uncertain boundaries of what is” (209). Woolf’s essays on reading, though, are much more than maps: they create a living space in which all participants are invited to recognize themselves as active members in the reading process, for the creation of knowledge and meaning in the text becomes a process of communal making rather than of singular authority.

Virginia Woolf’s Common Reader: Shopping For and Buying a Culture of One’s Own

Unlike modernists such as Pound, who offered readers a reading syllabus in *The ABC’s of Reading*, or the Leavises, who predicted the downfall of Western society if people continued to read the wrong books, or Eliot, who believed authorial professionalism could save European culture by reforming literary production and creating professional readers, Woolf neither made suggestions concerning what readers should read, nor saw any reading as wasted reading. This does not mean that Woolf believed there were no poorly written books: in an interview she and Leonard gave on the BBC, Virginia argued that first editions of books should be printed on “some perishable material which would crumble to a little heap of perfectly clean dust in about six months time,” giving readers ample time to decide which books “could be printed on good paper and well bound” in second editions (qtd. in Cuddy-Keane 66). Woolf’s argument leaves readers to discover and hone their literary tastes on their own, and reading bad books, for Woolf,

thus remains an integral part of this process. She reinforces this idea in “Hours in a Library” (1916), in which Woolf writes that “We owe a great deal to bad books; indeed, we come to count their authors and their heroes among those figures who play so large a part in our silent life” (37), not because they inform good taste but because “we soon develop another taste, unsatisfied by the great—not a valuable taste, perhaps, but certainly a very pleasant possession—the taste for bad books” (37). Woolf offers much the same advice in “How Should One Read a Book?” (1935), the final essay in *The Common Reader: Second Series*, when, after again warning readers not to blindly acquiesce to the evaluations of critics and suggesting that “we cannot suppress our own idiosyncrasy without impoverishing it,” she writes,

as time goes on perhaps we can train our taste; perhaps we can make it submit to some control. When it has fed greedily and lavishly upon books of all sorts—poetry, fiction, history, biography—and has stopped reading and looked for long spaces upon the variety, the incongruity of the living world, we shall find that it is changing a little; it is not so greedy, it is more reflective. It will begin to bring us not merely judgments on particular books, but will tell us that there is a quality among certain books. (268)

Here again, one sees Woolf’s desire to empower the reader by insisting that they, and not only professional critics, are perfectly capable of making decisions about taste if they only enter the text as active participants in the reading process. Her agenda is not to fashion good taste in the reader by prescribing a course of “good” reading—a palliative treatment that ignores the underlying causes of the “culture crisis” in Europe—but rather to show readers that they can come to know the good by discerning the bad. In this context, “good” pertains to a personal critical assessment come to on one’s own or in collaboration with other readers after close

examination of the text and other like texts. Conversely, “bad” pertains to an impersonal critical assessment to which a reader acquiesces, taking on the critic’s judgment of a work without testing those official pronouncements. The reader’s deference to authority, whether critical or authorial, rather than the reading of “bad” books, is the ultimate sin according to Woolf, for it transforms reading from an active gathering of ideas and impressions into a passive moving of one’s eyes over the page.

But if prescribing “good” books is merely a palliative treatment to the cultural crisis, then Woolf’s suggestion that readers should read what they want seems to be no treatment at all. After all, the fact that readers were being subsumed under a crush of new literature (much of it “bad” according to the highbrows) and didn’t know what to read was precisely the problem in the newly expanded literary marketplace. It’s here that the other role of the common reader as an economic subject plays an integral role in Woolf’s conception of that figure. Woolf herself had a strained relationship with money. Forced to live frugally for much of her young adult life, by 1925 Woolf was able to begin spending more freely due, in no small part, to her success as an essayist. In 1924, she received £10 per 1000 word article in *Vogue*, but by 1927 she was making considerably more, as she was able to “boast to Vita that she was being paid £120 to write four reviews for the *Herald Tribune*” (Lee 559). These rises in rates for individual essays corresponded with an overall rise in the Woolfs’ total income. As she noted in her diary “In 1924 our income was £1,047 and our expenditure £826, in 1934 our income was £3,615 and our expenditure £1,192” (qtd. in Lee 559). Much of the Woolf’s increasing wealth came via the press, especially when Vita Sackville-West published the enormously successful *The Edwardians* (1930) through Hogarth. A best-seller, *The Edwardians* boosted the press’s sales enormously in 1931-32: in 1931 the press made the Woolfs £2,373, up from just £530 in 1930;

and 1932 was their most profitable year as writers and publishers, the press making them £2,209 and their total income equaling £4,053 (Barkway 242). While the Woolfs' income was rising quite considerably, their expenses stayed roughly the same over a ten-year period, so that, for Woolf, "money changed its dimensions, and became something she could control" for the first time in her life (Lee 562). And control it she did, writing to Sackville-West that "out of the profits [from *The Edwardians*]—did I tell you?—I've bought a boat and a camera. Such are the blessings you shower" (qtd. in Barkway 242). Woolf's excitement at having money is palpable in these passages, but this excitement belies Woolf's rather conflicted relationship with consumerism and capitalism.

Woolf recognized that consumerism, bound so inextricably to the marketing of both culture and status, had the positive potential to offer the consumer agency within the marketplace by allowing one to "become" what one pleased through the act of buying, and the negative potential to divest one of this agency when consumption becomes merely conspicuous. The negative potential of conspicuous consumption is presented clearly in "Middlebrow," a posthumously published essay originally written as a letter to the editor of the *New Statesman* in 1932 but never sent. "Middlebrow" is recognized as the essay in which Woolf offers her most clear and concise definition of the middlebrow as a "man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige" (199). In and of itself, this definition does little to explain how we might distinguish a middlebrow, but Woolf does offer one diagnostic tool when she notes their strange passion "for being 'seen'" (199) owning the right things, wearing the right things, and doing and saying the right things. Conspicuous consumption by another name, it is this

criterion, this passion for performing one's commodified identity that Woolf returns to again and again to critique the middlebrow. Seeing and being seen create a culture of commonness in which variety is diminished and ordinariness (or at least the appearance of ordinariness) is fetishized, and it is this culture that the middlebrow "try to teach the [the lowbrow] culture," thus becoming in Woolf's eyes the "bane of all thinking and living" (202). Consumerism's negative dimension is most exposed by middlebrow status seekers, according to Woolf, as any potential to individuate oneself through consumerism is replaced by the homogenizing desire to represent a certain construction of social class.

Consumerism is not, however, always treated so disparagingly in Woolf's essays, for it is frequently connected to the idea of individuation in that it is seen as a way for consumers to abandon those objects that have come to define their lives and identities, and to begin the process of identity-building anew. Woolf does not suggest that people can escape capitalism and consumerism—indeed, none of Woolf's works ever suggest there is an outside to capitalism—but she does suggest that one can control how to become as a consumer because one has agency in choosing what to buy and in enjoying the goods. As Kathryn Simpson has suggested, "Although Woolf's representation of consumer culture in her essays is tempered always by a firm resistance to capitalist values and activities, and also exposes the exploitative power at work in this consumer (and consuming) activity, her essays also delight in the sensual, erotic pleasures and creative stimulation that commodity culture can offer" (*Gifts* 15). Simpson's assessment of Woolf's ambivalent relationship with consumerism is important because it draws attention to the fact that Woolf frequently distinguishes between the act of shopping (looking at products) and the act of buying. It's dangerous to risk conflating these separate but equally important aspects of consumerism when discussing Woolf's essays because each act plays a specific role in what she

sees as the positive potential of consumerism. Shopping is important to Woolf because it allows the shopper to imagine themselves differently through the process of browsing crowded city streets and shopping districts. Moving, browsing, looking, for Woolf, were actions associated with possibility and fluidity, where the density of (culture, gender, class) signifiers and the vastness of the symbolic field offers the browser freedom to begin thinking of themselves not as a static individual with an essential being but as a subject becoming in relation to other subjects and objects. Shopping, then, was an action that challenged essentialist views of identity and reified the intersectionality of subjectivity by exposing the relationship between consumerism and identity formation, for if one could buy the right things in order to become a middle-class English woman, then the innateness of class, gender, and culture must be questioned and performativity examined. If shopping created possibilities for consumers to imagine differently, then buying brought these possibilities into material existence. Buying, Woolf suggests, is the material action the consumer performs in order to realize the ideology of consumerism, and, as such, buying judiciously and with purpose is the best way to ensure that producers create objects worth consuming. “Buy the change you want to see” might be Woolf’s motto concerning consumerism—a motto that may seem hopelessly naïve with the critical hindsight of the Frankfurt School’s explanation of the culture industry—but it suggests how subjects can deploy their agency as consumers in a commodity culture.

Shopping’s positive potential as a liberating action is explored in “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” (1927), in which the narrator walks through the streets of London on her way to buy a pencil. Upon leaving the house to go shopping, the narrator suggests “we shed the self our friends know us by and become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers, whose society is so agreeable after the solitude of one’s own room. For there we sit

surrounded by objects which perpetually express the oddity of our own temperaments and enforce the memories of our own experience” (256). One’s own room, which would become the symbol of freedom just two years later in *A Room of One’s Own*, is presented as confining and claustrophobic here, the objects within impressing the narrator with a meaning she longs to escape, if only momentarily, as she walks to buy a pencil. The street, on the other hand, offers freedom in the form of a “vast republican army of anonymous trampers.” A study in seeming contradictions, this phrase suggests, all at once, that the crowded streets create a republican equality amongst individuals, allow shoppers take on the unity of a military unit, and provide shoppers a diversity through anonymity. Thus, as Leslie K. Hankins has pointed out, the interior is “associated with capitalism, the bourgeois subject, possession of objects and protection” while the exterior scene is a “radically different space,” through which the essay “probes dialectical tensions between the sometimes claustrophobic individuality of the room and the adventure and mutability of the street” (18). If the street is freeing, that is to say, it is so because it removes the individual from the small symbolic economies of the home, in which one’s objects signify one’s identity to friends, family, and guests. By inserting the individual into a much vaster and denser symbolic economy, the subject’s significance can become partially obscured by the oversaturation of a symbolic field in which sales items, shop windows, cars, animals, signs, and people all fight for the viewer’s attention. However, there are some signifiers one cannot so easily leave behind. It may be true, as the narrator suggests when she leaves the house, that “when the door shuts on us [...] [t]he shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughness a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye” (257), but it is worth noting that, even though she has been synecdochically reduced to nothing more than an

eye, the narrator becomes a *flâneuse* strolling the streets and indulging in their visual pleasures. Woolf is careful not to make gender the issue for her narrator *flâneuse*, using the gender neutral first-person pronouns “we,” “us,” and “our” throughout the essay, but she does let slip the fact that a bowl from Mantua was sold to the narrator by a “sinister old woman [who] plucked at our skirts” (257), and later imagines herself transformed into a woman attending a dinner party in Mayfair while looking at a string of antique pearls (260). From the beginning, then, we are able to situate Woolf’s narrator in terms of gender and in terms of class, for she has money enough for her own room and leisure enough to go shopping for a pencil in the late afternoon “between tea and dinner” (256). Moreover, Hankins argues, Woolf’s *flâneuse* in this essay is positioned historically in relation to first-wave feminism, for “freely occupying a street of one’s own was impossible until one had a room of one’s own” (19). If the narrator is nothing more than an enormous eye, therefore, it is an eye that is positioned, however subtly, at the intersections of gender, class, and history to remind the reader that bodies matter and play a role in the agency the subject has within different spaces.

So much do bodies matter, indeed, that not even the shiny commodities of consumer culture, which Woolf points out when the narrator delays her shopping trip to describe a dwarf in a women’s shoe store, can gloss over the body’s importance to subjectivity. Although the dwarf is initially treated irreverently by her companions and the shop worker, they are all amazed when she unveils a foot that is “the shapely, perfectly proportioned foot of a well-grown woman” (258). Glad of the viewers’ attention, the dwarf self-confidently tries on shoe after shoe while people watch her so that “this was the only occasion upon which she was not afraid of being looked at but positively craved attention, she was ready to use any device to prolong the choosing and fitting” (259). The act of shopping relieves the dwarf of her self-consciousness, the

store and the commodities held within allowing her to imagine herself as an object people look at with respect, perhaps even envy, rather than with derision. Having made a decision and paid for her purchase, however, “the ecstasy faded, knowledge returned, the old peevishness, the old apology came back, and by the time she reached the street again she had become a dwarf” (259). Suddenly and harshly returned to her—in her opinion—malformed body, the dwarf once again feels herself an object of derision as she goes out into the street where the glossy items in the store cannot hide her from the eyes of strangers. As Simpson argues, in the attempt to buy her way out of her body, the dwarf reveals to the reader “the way capitalism not only manufactures desires in the consumer, but does so through engendering a powerful sense of lack that is [...] out of all proportion to our needs or to actuality” (*Gifts* 23). Worse still, Simpson continues, the “impossibility of commodity culture being able to deliver all its promises causes the bubble of illusion, the fantasy of perfection, to burst but, simultaneously, keeps the cycle of desires in motion, shoring up the imperative to buy more” (23). Here is revealed the dark side of commodity culture that produces and then preys upon people’s desires to ensure that consumption continues, that status signifiers continue to change, and that people continue to need the right things. The grand illusion that one can buy whatever identity one wants is pierced by the reality of the body in this scene: some things, it seems, cannot be covered over by commodity culture’s glossy veneer.

A consequence of the dwarf’s attempt to buy away her body is that the illusion of consumption is ruined for the narrator as well. “She had changed the mood,” the narrator says; “she had called into being an atmosphere which, as we followed her into the street, seemed actually to create the humped, the twisted, the deformed” (259). The dwarf initiates a change to the very street and the people on it for the narrator, for she “had started a hobbling grotesque

dance to which everybody in the street now conformed” (259). Gone is the care-free narrator who can enjoy the liveliness and spectacle of the street; her illusion, too, must burst, Simpson suggests, as the “essay scratches beneath the glittering surface of the consumer economy to glimpse the ruthlessness that underlies it, and the effects of an economic ethos based on acquisition and greed rather than on a redistribution of wealth” (*Gifts* 19). At the same time, however, the scene points out the body’s power in commodity culture as much as it points out the power of commodity culture. There is no doubt that the bodily deficiencies that the dwarf experiences and the desire she feels to control these deficiencies are preyed upon by commodity culture, but this same body reveals the mechanisms of consumerism to the narrator. After all, the street as a space of commerce takes on the same physical deformities as the dwarf once the narrator witnesses her buying shoes; her lack becomes the lack at the heart of commodity culture in the narrator’s mind. Woolf suggests, therefore, that what we do with our bodies in commercial spaces matters. It is unfortunate that what the dwarf does with her body in buying the shoes leads to little more than unfulfilled desires, but Woolf does point out that the actions we undertake can have a profound effect not only on our own identity but on the spaces in which we live.

All these negatives attributes of commodity culture and consumerism are not to suggest, however, that Woolf found nothing of positive value in commerce, for before her encounter with the dwarf the narrator *flâneuse* imagines new selves and identities as she walks through the busy streets of London looking at the objects for sale. It is imperative, Woolf writes, that consumers encountering the thick, tangled, signifiers of the streets remain steadfastly noncommittal to buying and focus instead on “only gliding smoothly along the surface” of the street’s visual pleasures (257). It is this gliding on the surface of things, this remaining ever the shopping eye while resisting the buying “I,” that brings forth consumerism’s positive potential, for

With no thought of buying, the eye is sportive and generous; it creates; it adorns; it enhances. Standing out in the street, one may build up all the chambers of a vast imaginary house and furnish them at one's will with a sofa, table, carpet. That rug will do for the hall. That alabaster bowl shall stand on a carved table in the window. Our merrymakings shall be reflected in that thick round mirror. But, having built and furnished the house, one is happily under no obligation to possess it; one can dismantle it in the twinkling of an eye, build and furnish another house with other chairs and other glasses. Or let us indulge ourselves at the antique jewelers, among the trays of rings and the hanging necklaces. Let us choose those pearls, for example, and imagine how, if we put them on, life would be changed. It becomes instantly between two and three in the morning; the lamps are burning very white in the deserted streets of Mayfair. (260)

Goodness, how much rests on the short dependent clause that begins this passage. The caveat to consumerism's positive potential—not buying indiscriminately—is small only in its expression; it is massive in its performance, and is made all the more massive by the ostensible promises of commodity culture. With this passage, Woolf shows us once more that consumerism does not permit dreaming easily. Ceaselessly creating desire that is ceaselessly deferred in increasingly ephemeral status symbols, consumerism's price of admission is the act of buying the commodities that correspond to whatever it is one wants to become. After all, it is owning the pearls, not necessarily the pearls themselves, that changes one's life because it is their commodity value that confers social status. The relationship between shopping and buying, therefore, is a dangerously tenuous one full of both positive and negative potential depending on one's ability to look without necessarily buying. Such an ability, Woolf suggests in the essay,

requires in many regards a cognitive dissonance between eye and mind: “The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream, resting, pausing, the brain sleeps perhaps as it looks” (257). The form of the last sentence demonstrates the difficulty of looking without becoming desirous, of creating the cognitive dissonance necessary to harness the positive potential of consumerism and commodity culture. All that separates the eye from the brain is a comma splice, but which comma is the agent of the splice remains frustratingly unclear: is it the eye that rests and pauses on object after object as it looks or is it the brain falling into slumber? The conditional “perhaps” almost transforms the final clause into a question that challenges this dissonance still further, transforming it from an easy task into an endeavour that requires constant vigilance.

And constant vigilance is necessary, too, if one is to manage the desires manufactured by commodity culture, a reality Woolf reveals to the reader directly after the passage in which she imagines how pearls can change one’s life. “What could be more absurd,” the narrator asks, than looking at a string of pearls and imagining one is on a balcony in Mayfair rather than on the Strand going to buy a pencil? “Yet,” she continues, “it is nature’s folly, not ours. When she set about her chief masterpiece, the making of man, she should have thought of one thing only. Instead, turning her head, looking over her shoulder, into each one of us she let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with this main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture; the colours have run” (261). Finally, Woolf brings the reader to the crux of the problem concerning consumerism: humans, she argues, are not singular entities so they become easy prey to a commodity culture that promises them unity through the acquisition of things. Buying things centres the individual; it offers coherence to the fragmented or variable being. And yet, Woolf does not look upon this function of buying as necessarily a bad thing, for

“Circumstances compel unity; for conveniences’ sake a man must be a whole. The good citizen when he opens his door in the evening must be banker, golfer, husband, father; not a nomad wandering the desert, a mystic staring at the sky, a debauchee in the slums of San Francisco, a soldier heading a revolution, a pariah howling with scepticism and solitude” (261). Tempered buying is presented almost as a social moral imperative in this passage, the suggestion being that one should be careful to buy only that which is either required of their position or that which will not directly harm society, rather than buying to fulfill flippant desires. Such desires are to be squelched in deference to the betterment of the individual and, consequently, to the betterment of society in general. There seems to be an element of social conservatism in this statement inasmuch as Woolf suggests one must be this or that if society is to be upheld, but her end here is to point out that wandering the desert, heading a revolution, or howling with scepticism and solitude is as absurd for most people as believing one’s life will be transformed simply by buying a string of pearls or by buying the right pair of shoes. Behind the glossy simulacrum of consumerism, behind the status symbols of commodity culture, reality must eventually and finally intervene, as it intervenes in the life of the dwarf. Looking and browsing are fine, imagining too, yet the reader is given constant reminders in “Street Haunting” that the eye must “be content still with surfaces only,” and that one must not risk the “danger of digging deeper than the eye approves” (258) lest one become lost seeking status rather than buying discriminately.

To buy discriminately, however, requires that the creeping desires and instincts of the variegated shopper, aroused by viewing the glossy veneer of the street, be quenched, a problem Woolf solves by suggesting that books represent a different kind of commodity than the ephemeral status symbols of the street which create lack and desire only to leave them

unfulfilled. For what if, after attending the narrator through the streets, one still wants to become the desert wanderer, the howling sceptic, the pearly lady, the shoed dwarf? What if one wants to touch, to buy, to fix one's lacks or deficiencies as well as to look? To fulfill these desires, Woolf suggests, one has always the second-hand bookstores, where "we find anchorage in these thwarting currents of being; here we balance ourselves after the splendours and miseries of the streets" (261). Books occupy the common ground between the spectacular veneer of commodities in the street and the abject sense of unfulfilled promise one feels when, like the dwarf, one purchases the status object. They manage this, Woolf argues, not by embodying existence in a marketed form but by bringing the reader into contact with another's existence:

There is always a hope, as we reach down some grayish-white book from the upper shelf, directed by its air of shabbiness and desertion, of meeting her with a man who set out on horseback over a hundred years ago to explore the woollen market in the midlands and Wales; an unknown traveller, who stayed at inns, drank his pint, noted pretty girls and serious customs, wrote it all down stiffly, laboriously for sheer love of it (the book was published at his own expense); was infinitely prosy, busy, and matter-of-fact, and so let flow in without his knowing it the very scent of hollyhocks and the hay together with such a portrait of himself as gives him forever a seat in the warm corner of the mind's inglenook. One may buy him for eighteen pence now. (262)

What gets exchanged in the second-hand book store is radically different than what gets exchanged in the street. Outside, one buys the right products to signify the right life at this moment; inside, one buys lives of "variegated feather," unchanged over centuries, to fulfill other lives that "are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture" (261). Thus, as Simpson argues, books form

a “different kind of ‘commerce,’” for they “are not simply alienable objects generating a short-lived moment of ecstasy. Rather, they fulfill a social and emotional function that can be long-lasting. The narrator’s description of the different relations books create with the buyer—an intimate or capricious friendship, an affectionate bond—recalls Woolf’s own notion [in “How Should One Read a Book?”] of the ideal reader for her books: a ‘fellow worker and accomplice’” (*Gifts* 24-25). Much more than this, however, it is deficiency that brings reader and book together in this passage: after having one’s desires piqued to chaos by the commodities sold in the street that are marketed as compensation for some perceived lack, the shopper finds “anchorage” in the second-hand bookstore (261). And yet it is also some perceived lack in the books that have landed them in the second-hand book store. Indeed, it is the second-hand book’s very deficiencies—its prosaic awkwardness, the *jejune* topic that required it be self-published—that endears it so to the reader and infuses it with the “very scent of hollyhocks and the hay.” This description mirrors the crucial role deficiency plays in Woolf’s conception of the common reader, for it is in the bringing together of the common reader’s critical deficiencies and the deficiencies of the text that each finds ultimate fulfillment and agency. Just so, it is the shopper/narrator’s ability to manage consumer desire, which functions by revealing all that she lacks, that brings her to the bookstore, where she finds a more lasting fulfillment in the lives she finds within the books.

And yet, all the glittering surfaces of commodity culture, all the “splendours and miseries of the street,” have not been for naught. All she has seen (the dwarf in the shoe store, some blind men navigating the streets, a quarrel in a store), all she has imagined (the party at Mayfair) may all be used. “Into each of these lives,” the narrator says, “one could penetrate a little way, far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind but can put on briefly

for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others” (265). In the final thoughts of the essay, therefore, the reader is reminded of the positive potential of consumerism, for by leaving the comfort and confinement of her room and browsing the streets as a shopper, the narrator sees different lives, begins to understand how these different lives and bodies influence and are influenced by space, and imagines the possibilities and limitations of her own intersectional subjectivity. For these reasons, it is no small thing with which the narrator has returned from her journey: “here—let us examine it tenderly, let us touch it with reverence—is the only spoil we have retrieved from the treasure of the city, a lead pencil” (265). Safely at home again, where “the old prejudices, fold us round; and the self, which has been blown about at so many street corners, which has battered like a moth at the flame of so many inaccessible lanterns, sheltered and enclosed” (265), the narrator is free to begin creating in her own room. She has survived the gauntlet of the glistening commodities in the street, enjoyed their surfaces, and bought discriminately to return with what she needs rather than with what she has desired. What she does not buy, therefore, is as important as what she does buy: in determining how she will use the marketplace—what she will buy and what she will only allow her eye to glide over—she exercises a consumer’s agency in the only way she can: through active, mindful, and vigilant choice.

The powerful role consumers play within consumer societies is similarly revealed in “The Docks of London,” the first essay in a series Woolf wrote for *Good Housekeeping* in 1931-32, as her narrator wanders near the docks of London and realizes consumers help determine what is produced with the raw products that enter England by boat. On the docks, where cargo is unloaded from ships and where “every commodity in the world has been examined and graded according to its use value” (12), the narrator comes to recognize that the cranes and warehouses

and workers all have a “rhythm in their regularity” (13), as if they are part of some vast and powerful mechanism beyond her control. In the final paragraph of the essay, however, she realizes that rhythm of the docks mirrors the rhythm of buyers: “It is we—our tastes, our fashions, our needs—that make the cranes dip and swing, that call the ships from the sea. Our body is their master. [...] Trade watches us anxiously to see what new desires are beginning to grow in us, what new dislikes. One feels an important, a complex, a necessary animal as one stands on the quayside watching the cranes hoist this barrel, that crate, that other bale from the holds of the ships that have come to anchor” (14). Consumers’ choices in the marketplace steer production and determine the value of every commodity, and so these choices must be made reasonably and judiciously if the buyer is to have any agency in the marketplace. If production is to mirror our desires, Woolf’s narrator implies, then let it mirror them as accurately as possible by buying, or not buying, those objects that do not disfigure our reflection in the marketplace. In the end, the marketplace can be used subversively as a powerful tool for identity formation and individuation, but only if consumers bend it to their will.

But I began this section talking about common readers and their reading choices, and one may look to the reader’s buying potential to discover how Woolf imagines consumer agency in the literary marketplace. Woolf tries to foster reader agency by democratizing the reading process and, in insisting that common readers mark their own role in the creative process, revealing to common readers the co-creative role they play in cultural production as the consumers of culture. In order to reveal just how much agency reader-buyers have abandoned in the literary marketplace, Woolf returns in a number of her essays to the middlebrow and their strange fascination for being seen to remind readers that their choices matter. In “The Modern Essay,” for example, Woolf suggests that middlebrow essayists lack a vital personal voice. In

part, she blames this on the writing requirements of the modern literary marketplace. Essayists of the past, she argues, had the luxury of knowing their readers had the time to read carefully and contemplate their writing, but modern essayists, writing as they do for a much greater readership with much less leisure time, are forced to start writing “as close to the top of the sheet as possible, judging precisely how far to go, when to turn, and how, without sacrificing a hair’s-breadth of paper, to wheel about and alight accurately upon the last word his editor allows” (218). Consequently, Woolf insists, modern essayists “must masquerade” so as to “draw out of harm’s way anything precious that might be damaged by contact with the public, or anything sharp that might irritate its skin. And so if one reads Mr. Lucas, Mr. Lynd, or Mr. Squire in the bulk, one feels that a common greyness silvers everything” (219-220). This is as much a critique of the reading public as of the middlebrow, so that what rests at the heart of her essay is the intimate relationship between reader and writer. Readers are asked to become more active and demand something more from their essayists, but also to accept writing that may irritate their skin. The middlebrow essayist is asked to stop writing the “common man” into a bland and confined and commodified existence by writing with personality and in spite of possible irritation. “We have no more the ‘I’ of Max [Beerbohm] and of [Charles] Lamb,” Woolf concludes, distinguishing that writer’s voice from the arid “I” of *A Room of One’s Own*, in whose shadow nothing whatever can grow (90), through her invocation of a personalized “I” who experiences art for and by itself, free from the limitations of a constructed communal identity. The contrast is thus “the ‘we’ of public bodies and other sublime personages. It is ‘we’ who go to hear the *Magic Flute*; ‘we’ who ought to profit by it; ‘we’ in some mysterious way, who, in our corporate capacity, once upon a time actually wrote it. For music and literature and art must submit to the same generalisation or they will not carry to the farthest recesses of the

Albert Hall” (220). This “we” attempts to define what should be read and how it should be read through a common and restricting denominator.

While “The Modern Essay” focuses on the relationship between essayist and reader and asks the common reader to acknowledge his position in cultural production, “Reviewing” promotes reader agency through the strategic exclusion of the reader, thereby marking their current absence in cultural production. The essay focuses on the relationship between artist and reviewer, and Woolf again returns to the middlebrow’s strange passion for being “seen” in order to make her argument. Comparing the writing process in the literary marketplace to working in a tailor’s shop, Woolf asserts writers must “work under the curious eyes of reviewers,” who ill-content to “gaze in silence...comment aloud upon the size of the holes, upon the skill of the workers, and advise the public which of the goods in the shop window is the best worth buying” (204). Such a practice has the result, Woolf argues, of transforming the reviewer into a louse whose job it is to entertain the public by deriding the writer and by pandering to the public. Far more could be accomplished with private reviews, according to Woolf, as, out of the public eye, the reviewer “would speak honestly and openly, because the fear of affecting sales and of hurting feelings would be removed. Privacy would lessen the shop-window temptation to cut a figure, to pay off scores. The [reviewer] would have no library public to inform and consider; no reading public to impress and amuse” (212). Woolf seems to ride roughshod over the public in this passage, as she casts them as gaping fools staring blankly at the showmanship of the reviewer. Indeed, Patrick Collier notes that Woolf vacillated “between the poles of a deep respect for the audience’s claims and a more pessimistic view of the public that led her to flirt with writing only for her coterie of friends and colleagues,” and suggests that this essay “ultimately shuts out the book-buying public” (76). Collier has a point: the public is rarely mentioned in this essay. But to

believe with Collier that Woolf positions the public as relatively meaningless to the production of art is to neglect the strong compliment she pays the public when, after noting that the demands of the literary marketplace force the reviewer to act first this part and then that in order to please an audience, she writes: “Now the public though crass is not such an ass as to invest seven and sixpence on the advice of a reviewer writing under such conditions; and the public though dull is not such a gull as to believe in the great poets, great novelists, and epoch making works that are weekly discovered under such conditions” (209). A back-handed compliment if ever there was one, but what it acknowledges is both the role readers can play in cultural production within the literary marketplace and their complete absence in the economy of reviewing that, like it or not, has a profound influence on what culture is produced. The reviewer cares nothing for the actual reader; instead his performance is aimed at the “common man,” to whom the reviewer pitches works that will make them proper cultural citizens. It is the public, facetiously mocked in Woolf’s humorous rhyming, who has the last laugh however. They have the seven and sixpence to spend in the literary marketplace, and they should demand more, she tells them, than an affected reiteration of the “common man.”

Woolf, therefore, defines reader agency in the literary marketplace of early-twentieth century England partly in terms of the buying potential that defines their relationship to writers. Woolf was not naïve enough to believe that one could exist outside or escape culture: again and again in her works readers are asked to recognize that as individuals they are always intertwined in a complex network of power relations where position matters immensely. The choices readers make concerning how they position themselves in the marketplace, how they choose to spend their seven and sixpence, and thus interact with it, make a tangible difference in the reality of the marketplace. They should neither read by a system in order to become a professional, as some

highbrows advocated, nor should they buy those books one most wants “seen” on one’s bookshelf, as the middlebrow advocated. Rather readers should shun the posturing and affectation of the critic who writes for an imaginary “common man,” and choose a position within the literary marketplace from which they, and only they, can decide how to spend their seven and sixpence. And, by doing so, readers can change the landscape, however incrementally, of the literary marketplace by making it reflect the personal desires of a self-conscious and self-fashioned “I” rather than the desires of a louse-ridden, limited conception of the “common man” and his culture based on conspicuous consumption and being seen.

Woolf’s construction of and faith in the common reader is not just a commitment to active cultural participation, but also a theory of subjectivity that acknowledges the intersectionality and relationality of identities caught at the cross-roads and thresholds of diverse cultural, historical, and personal narratives, and that resists a normalizing discourse of exclusion. These are the identities she traces in her fiction and theorizes in her critical work through analyses of the institutions that work to mould bodies and minds, and to exclude others. Such institutional spaces are met by the textual space created relationally by the common reader and the modernist writer. Jacob Flanders in *Jacob’s Room* (1922) becomes representative of the young men interpellated by the traditions of Oxbridge and who make material the ideology of patriarchal capitalism and its cultural exclusions, as he fails to engage meaningfully with the discourses that shape his identity. In contrast, Septimus Smith’s practices as a common reader position him as an outsider to the educational systems that mould Jacob, as well as an outsider to the ruling class that is the focus of Woolf’s critique in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). In this role, he demonstrates his lack of access to institutions that determine—as in Jacob’s experience—the bodies that come to control cultural and social capital. His trauma is produced by such systems,

and then his mad body is policed by the medical establishment and Dr Bradshaw who, as a representative of the state, attempts to position Septimus as a scapegoat to further legitimate the nation's and his own discursive power over madness and mad people. These disciplined male bodies inform the unease that is evident in the lecturer-narrator's position in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), where the common theme of the individual's relationship to the group, and its institutions and expectations, is made manifest through the speaker's address to a woman's college at Oxbridge. The lecturer's thesis regarding the necessity of social and economic capital is a way to position herself in connection to that group, but she complicates an easy identification with a collective through the theory of the androgynous mind that maintains her autonomy as an "I" but in relation to a "we." An intersectional, multiply-positioned speaker is evident also in *Three Guineas* (1938), which represents one of Woolf's most overt critiques of patriarchal capitalism and the educational and political institutions that entrench its power. Against such discursive systems, Woolf enacts a textual strategy that calls for the common reader and their labour. The text's formal and stylistic complexities—in particular, its blurring of the boundaries between the personal and the public, or the private letters between people and the larger discourses and forces that frame such correspondence—makes overt the primary reader's, the imagined readers', and the speaker's critical deficiencies, positioning them as subjects and objects that may resist systems of inclusion and exclusion towards a truly common and interpersonal cultural exchange.

Indeed, Woolf's figuration of the common reader connects powerfully to the political strategy she presents in *Three Guineas*, where the same sense of individual choice and positioning anchor her conceptualization of the Society of Outsiders. The main distinction between the Society of Insiders and the Society of Outsiders, she writes, is that "whereas [the

Society of Insiders] will make use of the means provided by your position—leagues, conferences, campaigns, great names, and all such public measures as your wealth and political influence place within your reach—we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private” (239). In the context of *Three Guineas*, such experimentation means choosing not to perform those public displays of power connected to patriarchal militarism and to the “Mulberry Tree” (190), a clear echo of the rejection of conspicuous consumption associated with the middlebrow; but it is also a troubling of the capital, both cultural and socioeconomic, one may accrue through the institutions of the professional class. This political strategy compares to the reading strategy Woolf advocates for the common reader in the literary marketplace: for outsiders, “to be passive is to be active” because in “making their absence felt their presence becomes desirable” (245), and Woolf’s common reader demonstrates a politics of presence through absence by refusing to perform the reading process as expected.

CHAPTER THREE

“To see what the other side means”: Woolf’s *Bildungsroman* of the Patriarchal Machine

The common reader models a theory of subjectivity that focuses on both the buying and reading strategies of readers within the discourse of the “battle of the brows” that shapes the literary marketplace, and, as figured in Woolf’s fiction, such a reading position offers an estranged perspective not merely on the debates surrounding writing, reviewing, buying, reading, and interpreting literature in the early twentieth century, but also—and especially—on the patriarchal traditions and institutions that inform the structures and stakes of these disputes. For example, in *Jacob’s Room* (1922) Jacob’s battle is not against a fate randomly assigned: his end is propelled forward by his participation, and the participation of so many others, in patriarchal institutions that promise to create autonomous individuals ready to change the world but, in reality, produce disciplined subjects ready to serve institutional ends. Thus, it is the patriarchal machine that Woolf approaches in *Jacob’s Room* through a narrator who enacts the dynamic figured by the common reader and by the Outsider alike. In the novel, Woolf explores systems of inclusion and exclusion from the outside, presenting Jacob as a cultural artefact positioned within the patriarchal machine, and presenting the narrator as a common reader whose agency in the modern era represents a strategic riposte to Jacob’s uncritical participation in the rituals of the cultural institutions he moves through in his short life. The novel represents Woolf’s own refusal to perform the reading, writing, and above all the legitimation of patriarchy as expected, but it is Jacob’s engrained inability to do the same that marks the power of the “I” cultivated by Cambridge. A *Bildungsroman* that foregrounds not individual agency but the interpellating power of a class and gender ideologies, and ultimately a tragedy in terms of its depiction of the

title character's truncated existence as a subject to patriarchy, the novel represents a curated, critical presentation of cultural systems predicated upon the entrapping norms of inclusion.

In her memoir *A Sketch of the Past* (1939), Virginia Woolf mentions reading her cousin H.A.L. Fisher's autobiography, and she asks herself what effect his privileged access to England's educational and governmental institutions had on his life and career. Fisher had been a civil servant much of his life, having served as a commissioner to India, as Vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, as a Member of Parliament for Sheffield, and as the President of the Board of Education during David Lloyd George's Premiership, yet Woolf's comments focus less on his achievements than on the social institutions that helped provide the opportunity for those achievements:

What, I asked myself, [...] would Herbert have been without Winchester, New College and the Cabinet? What would have been his shape had he not been stamped and moulded by that great patriarchal machine? Every one of our male relations was shot into that machine at the age of ten and emerged at sixty a Head Master, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister, or a Warden of a college. It is as impossible to think of them as natural human beings as it is to think of a carthorse galloping wild maned and unshod over the pampas. (*Moments of Being* 153)

Woolf spent her entire life surrounded by men who were cast into this "great patriarchal machine": her father, her brothers, her husband, and most of her male Bloomsbury friends had gone from English boarding schools to Cambridge, and many, at some point during their lives, filled either a governmental or academic position in England's educational and political establishment. Moreover, from Arthur's Education Fund (*Three Guineas*), to Shakespeare's sister (*A Room of One's Own*), to Jacob's feeling of being the rightful inheritor and protector of

English culture at Cambridge (*Jacob's Room*), Woolf's work is full of examples that demonstrate men's privileges within England's social structures. And yet Woolf's criticisms of male privilege and the institutions that shape and maintain this privilege are always more sympathetic than they are envious. This sympathy for the men cast into the "patriarchal machine" finds its most succinct expression in *A Room of One's Own* when, having been scolded for walking on the grass at Oxbridge and denied access to its library because of her gender, its narrator reveals, "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (21). These words echo through Woolf's comments about her cousin Herbert Fisher: what must it be like, she asks, to be stamped and moulded by England's patriarchal machine? To have one's life trajectory decided by one's gender? Such questions are integral to Woolf's work, for, whether her focus is on women's exclusion from England's social institutions or on men's inclusion therein, it is the unnaturalness of the lives produced by England's patriarchal institutions that is revealed in so much of her writing.

This chapter examines the unnatural life of Jacob Flanders, a young man who seems not to want the life he inherits when he goes to Cambridge yet is so unable to escape the patriarchal ideologies he learns at this institution that he becomes little more than an absence at the centre of *Jacob's Room*. Woolf's first extended experimental work, *Jacob's Room* is a *Bildungsroman* that follows the life of Jacob Flanders as he grows from childhood to young adulthood before dying in the Great War. Like so many heroes of *Bildungsromans* past, Jacob is well-positioned socially to make his emergence into manhood, yet the novel provides less the roving adventures of a young man overcoming adversity than the story of a young man largely subsumed by the educational tradition he finds himself within when he goes to Cambridge. In the majority of *Bildungsromans*, Mikhail Bakhtin notes, the protagonist is presented as a "ready-made" hero

whose character remains stable throughout the novel and who changes the world around him for the better as he passes through it (20), while in a smaller number of *Bildungsromans* time becomes an important part of the hero's development so that he "emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself" (23). Inasmuch as Jacob's development fits neatly into either of these two typical growth patterns, it fits more neatly into the latter, but Jacob's historical emergence is cut violently short because it coincides with a world emerging into the industrialized death made possible by the Great War's technology and deemed permissible by the patriarchal traditions that supported and propagated patriotic notions of sacrifice and honour. As she describes Jacob and his friends at Cambridge, the narrator's blunt assertion that "there is no need to think of them grown old" (32) serves as a fitting refrain for her protagonist who emerges, along with the world, into death. Yet Woolf's decision to create a doomed young protagonist is important because it helps shift the narrative focus from the individual subject being formed to the processes behind the formation of the subject. *Jacob's Room*, that is to say, is less about the man Jacob transforms into than it is about the traditions that shape and discipline him as a subject of patriarchal ideology. Jacob becomes the ceaselessly vanishing ground of the great patriarchal machine in Woolf's *Bildungsroman*, and those things that are supposed to transform him into an individual—Cambridge, the Grand Tour, and finally the military—only obscure Jacob further by submerging his character within their patriarchal traditions and ideologies.

While Jacob is obscured within traditions and institutions he is scarcely able to see beyond, the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, "Granted ten year's seniority [over Jacob] and a difference of sex" (74), has been excluded from England's patriarchal institutions and chooses a narrative form to accentuate the unnaturalness of Jacob's life within these places by relying

mostly on the accounts of other women outsiders. The narrator is less a biographer of Jacob's experiences or stenographer of his thoughts than she is the organizer of the impressions Jacob leaves upon the mostly female subjectivities that focalize the narrative in *Jacob's Room*. The impressions of these women are often dubious according to the narrator, who frequently intervenes in the text to complain about the quality of the scraps of information these women provide about Jacob, yet they represent an intersectional form of narration that, by juxtaposing institutional outsiders and insiders, presents a layered view of Jacob that is not limited to his perception of reality. This layering of voices subverts the common *Bildungsroman* mode of narration that relies on an authoritative subjectivity to centre the text, for the narrator denies her *Bildungsroman* an "I" that might positively distort and justify patriarchal hegemony. Like a museum curator, then, the narrator constructs Jacob's story by organizing disparate pieces of his life into an exhibit for our perusal. The narrator's curatorial approach to narration captures a single moment of time in Jacob's life while simultaneously acknowledging the apparent timelessness of the institutions he exists within, an approach to temporalizing Jacob that helps reveal how the actions of one individual are connected to the ideologies that shape his existence.

When *Jacob's Room* was published in 1922, its initial reviewers focused primarily on the layering of voices in the text, many arguing that the novel fails to tell a coherent narrative and represents Woolf's modernist vanity and sensibilities more than anything else. This is not to suggest that *Jacob's Room* received no critical praise for its formal innovation, just that any praise it did receive was tempered equally with questions concerning the literary usefulness of her innovations. Most reviewers examined the usefulness of Woolf's style by comparing it to visual art, but most ended up proclaiming the novel a failed experiment. Rebecca West, for example, praised Woolf's craftsmanship by comparing the novel to an artist's portfolio filled

with individual sketches, but she suggested that *Jacob's Room* privileged form over the exploration of humanity and demonstrated "that [Woolf] is at once a negligible novelist and a supremely important writer" (101). W. L. Courtney made the visual art comparison more bluntly, writing that "To be impressionist is often to be incoherent, inconsequent, lacking all design and construction" (105). And Courtney's focus on Woolf's failure as the maker or shaper of the text was mirrored by many other early reviewers. Arnold Bennett most famously levied complaints of Woolf's intervention in the novel in his review of *Jacob's Room*, "Is the Novel Decaying," in which he argued that moderns like Woolf forgo creating characters in their novel because they "are so busy with states of society as to half forget that any society consists of individuals, and they attach too much weight to cleverness, which is perhaps the lowest of all artistic qualities" (113). Bennett's position was hardly new, however. Gerald Gould made much the same argument in his review months earlier when he wrote "to stress one's own cleverness by a sort of humorous indulgence toward one's creations, and to leave the simple-minded reader guessing at connexions which might just as well be made clear for him, is a positive injury to art" (106). This charge of elitism was also leveled by Courtney, once again more bluntly: "Mrs Woolf confidently chatters as though she were seated in an armchair playing with her puppets. It is she who gives them life. It is she who imparts to them such character as they are allowed to possess" (104). The discourse of the Great Divide is evident in many of these comments, as reviewers accuse Woolf of elitist cleverness to suggest the work is written for none but a small coterie of highbrow readers, but contained within their focus on Woolf's formal failures is a key to understanding the difficulty of *Jacob's Room*.

Woolf knew from the time she conceived of *Jacob's Room* that its form would need to be innovative in order to achieve her aims for the novel, and she wondered privately in her diary

whether she was skilled enough to manage the project effectively. Imagining what the novel's form would be before she even had a subject for it, Woolf wrote in her diary that her goal was to create a novel in which "one thing should open out of another" before asking "doesn't that give the looseness & lightness I want: doesn't [sic.] that get closer & and yet keep form & speed, & enclose everything, everything?" (*Diary 2*, 13). It's difficult to know precisely what Woolf means when she suggests that one thing should open out of another, but it's clear that she is searching for a form unlike the weighty descriptive materialism of the Edwardians she critiqued in "Character in Fiction," where she argues that the Edwardians have not provided her generation with the tools they needed to create modern fiction because they "laid an enormous stress on the fabric of things" and have thereby "given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there" (432). There's a heaviness, a permanence, that exists in Edwardian materialism, therefore, that Woolf abandons to create a form capable of capturing looseness, lightness, and speed. Rather than telling her readers where and how her characters live, Woolf aims to express why they live the way they live—what motivates their decisions, what limits their experiences, what influences their perceptions. The goal of Woolf's writing, in other words, is psychological realism, not so much the accurate presentation of her character's material existence but the presentation of characters shaped by their material existence. Thus, in 1920—two years before she published *Jacob's Room*, and three years before she accused the Edwardians of giving readers a house rather than characters—she wrote in her diary that her next novel would be completely different than anything she'd written before, for it was to have "no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as a fire in the mist" (*Diary 2*, 13-14). Woolf not only abandons the master's tools but also disassembles his house to show him, finally, what lives within. Her characters will

not appear in the bright light of midday, however, but in the twilight of the evening, when all things become indefinite shadows backlit by the reds and oranges of the setting sun. The physical details of her characters, Woolf intimates, are less important than the light in which one sees them.

Positioning her characters in this way allows Woolf to focus on them less as individual characters than as the subjects of social institutions, her fiction becoming an examination of the ideologies that hail her characters and, when answered, shape and define their lives rather than the creation of characters who transform their world through individual heroism or greatness. For Louis Althusser, ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1350) and constitutes an illusion that people use to make sense of their existence and determine their actions. In the example of his cultural protectionism, Jacob is hailed by the privileges he enjoys at Cambridge and, imagining he and his friends are the rightful inheritors of England’s cultural and intellectual traditions, goes to burn the moderns on the altar of these traditions. In doing so, Jacob and his friends also demonstrate that “Ideology has a material existence” that is constituted by and constitutive of the subjects interpellated by an ideology (Althusser 1352), for the young men reinforce their subject positions by metaphorically destroying modern writers, which in turn reifies the protectionist ideology they serve. *Jacob’s Room* is less a story about one young man’s coming of age at Cambridge, therefore, than it is the story of the various social institutions that shape his life. Thus, as Edward L. Bishop argues, the text is not interested in “representing *character*” but in “exploring [...] the construction, and representation of, the subject” (148). “Don’t palter with the second rate. Detest your own age. Build a better one” (Woolf, *JR* 85): these are the interpellative hails Jacob answers on his excursion to the British Library, calls from an ideology that promise him inclusion in a

patriarchal educational institution that provides its members life-long economic, legal, and governmental privilege.

Of course, Jacob never really gets to take full advantage of the economic, legal, and governmental privilege being a Cambridge graduate confers because the very same patriarchal ideology that is meant to grant him a place in the world ends up sending him to the Great War that cuts his life short. Jacob's ironic reversal of fate from the inheritor of patriarchal power to cannon fodder in the Great War has formed the central focus of most critical interpretations of *Jacob's Room*. Discussing expectations about character, Bishop suggests that readers often look to "attribute the cause of events to characters rather than to other circumstances in the situation" (148), but this expectation goes unfulfilled with Jacob because his motivations are not apparent, resulting in a "slight sense of dislocation" that derives from the fact that he "seems continually impinged upon" (149). Bishop associates Jacob's continual impingement with a lack of freedom that persists throughout his short life, and compares Jacob to a crab the boy catches in a bucket in the novel's opening scene. The crab, "trying with its weakly legs to climb the steep side; trying again and falling back, and trying again and again" (Woolf, *JR* 9), metaphorically represents Jacob, Bishop argues, but the image "is more of a motif than a method of characterization" inasmuch as the image "is the *text* associating Jacob with entrapment and death rather than anything in his character deciding his fate" (151). And Jacob's own entrapment is often metaphorically extended to the entire generation of young European men who lost their lives in the Great War, particularly since his last name is Flanders. Alex Zwerdling, for example, argues that *Jacob's Room* initiates a "covert critique of the romantic posturing so common in the anthems for doomed youth" (73) in order to reveal that Jacob's youth is doomed by a patriarchal establishment that, rather than providing him a comfortable, privileged life, "sends him off to

war instead” (74). Likewise, Christine Froula describes Jacob Flanders as “at once an elusive being no net of words can capture and [...] a puppet moved hither and thither by fate, one of the war dead, a ghost” (63). Froula, Zwerdling, and Bishop all point toward a paradox that underpins Jacob’s life: as Froula so succinctly points out, Jacob is both an “elusive being” and the “puppet” of a patriarchal ideology that pervades English social institutions—literally an everyman whose last name commemorates all of England’s dead yet, at the same time, an unknowable product of the patriarchal machine.

Woolf presents this central paradox in Jacob’s life formally using free indirect discourse and a narrator who not only shifts perspectives at will but also takes up different subject positions as a metanarrative character depending on the events she is narrating and the participants in the event. This complex narration has been theorized in a number of different ways in the past, but my theorization of *Jacob’s Room*’s curatorial narrator draws, in particular, on the work of Froula, Kathleen Wall, and Pamela L. Caughie. Froula refers to the narrator of *Jacob’s Room* as an “essayist-narrator,” which she characterizes as an invention of Woolf’s that allows her to examine her subject without directly embodying his voice. Froula argues that this essayist-narrator creates a formal freedom that allows Woolf to explore Jacob from a number of different subject positions, the result being a novel in which “Woolf does not tell Jacob’s story but unwrites it to expose the social forces that initiate him into masculinity and leave him dead on the battlefield” (69). Froula’s essayist-narrator, therefore, does not occupy a single subject position in relation to the text, but is able to shift and examine people, institutions, and events from many perspectives, often choosing a position that subverts Jacob’s story. Wall also notes the slipperiness of the narrator’s subject position, pointing out that Woolf employs a figure that is both outside the text inasmuch as she “possesses the authority of the omniscient narrator or

narrator-focalizer,” and inside the text inasmuch as she is, at times, “a character-focalizer who functions simply as a witness” of the events in the novel (289). The effect of this dual positioning is a work in which the narrator creates the text while also commenting upon the text as she creates it, a strategy that allows her, “through the use of vivid, composed descriptive passages which resemble verbal paintings [...], to create both a momentary timelessness and an almost tragic fall back into time, in order to fix images of Jacob and of his world in her text” (283). Woolf’s form supports her elegiac intent according to Wall because it allows her to memorialize the dead without memorializing the war by juxtaposing the timeless, aestheticized fragments of Jacob’s life with the historic time period that led him and so many other young men to war. Such an emphasis on time and on moment intersects with what Caughie suggests is the narrative uncertainty of *Jacob’s Room*, which, rather than being Woolf’s way of pointing out the unreliability of individual perspective, emphasizes “the observer’s *situatedness*, both the narrator’s and the characters’ in relation to Jacob and the readers in relation to the narrative. Knowledge of another is not relative to each individual but to certain perspectives and relationships” (69). For Caughie, the narrative difficulty of *Jacob’s Room* is connected to the positioning and repositioning of the narrator, for as she shifts positions in the text she highlights different aspects of Jacob and her characters depending on where she stands and how she chooses to position herself in relation to these characters. The reader, too, is taken into account when the narrator chooses a narrative position because how she chooses to relate herself to the text influences how she presents the material. Sometimes very earnest while other times irreverent and even dismissive of her characters, the narrator’s position—especially because she makes a habit of making her position overt—always asks readers to decide on their own position within the fragment they are reading. Thus, as Caughie points out, “Jacob changes shape, not

because the modern (or postmodern) self is unstable, and not because the modern (or postmodern) character is unreal, but because the narrator changes roles” (69). To read *Jacob’s Room*, then, is to constantly reassess where one stands in relation to the characters, the narrator, and the events taking place, for the narrator, like the narrator hostess in “Character in Fiction,” invites readers to explore the relationality between Jacob, the women passing through his life, and the institutions that shape his subjectivity, so the point of the novel becomes less about the limitations of perspective than about how perspectives change depending on one’s position.

The significance of such shifting locations is evident in a fragment in which the narrator travels through the streets of London on her way to the Covent Garden Opera House. The passage begins with the narrator as *flâneuse* walking through the crowds of London commenting on random passers-by: it moves to the street-sweeping Mrs. Lidgett, who sits resting at the feet of the Duke of Wellington’s statue in St. Paul’s looking at the carved cherubs on the wall opposite (50); to the businessmen James Spalding and Charles Budgeon passing one another on omnibuses and each with “his own past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart” (49); to Mr. Sibley, the accountant, who sits late into the night transferring “figures to folios” from “a bunch of papers, the days nutriment slowly consumed by the industrious pen” (51). As in Woolf’s “Street Haunting,” the narrator revels in the movement, liveliness, and variety of the city streets, and when she gets to the opera house can hardly contain herself as she looks through the crowd trying to comment on everyone before admitting that “the observer is choked with observations” (53). To prevent the chaos this glut of observation brings, the narrator explains that a simple classification system has been designed using “stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery” (53) to indicate who belongs where. However, this system still requires the narrator to choose where she sits: “Never was there a harsher necessity! or one which entails greater pain,

more certain disaster,” she explains, “for wherever I seat myself, I die in exile” (53). This death in exile comes because where one sits in the opera house both limits one’s perspective and influences the way the other boxes are viewed, but the narrator solves this problem by refusing to use just one narrative voice. By narrating in the aggregate, she limits herself to a certain view for a time, but each new situation of the narrator brings with it a new set of intersectional relationships that the reader must parse. The novel, therefore, continually dislocates readers using a difficult form that forces them to purposefully relocate themselves in each new fragment of the novel, and through this realignment process readers play a creative role—the role played by Woolf’s ideal “common reader”—as they determine how each new situation alters their view of the narrator, characters, and events.

I draw from all these ideas in my theorization of the narrator as a curator who provides artefact after artefact of Jacob’s life less as fragments meant to be pieced together to present Jacob, and more as an exhibit that represents, aesthetically, historically, and culturally, what he is at various stages of his life. I use the word “what” rather than “who” because Jacob very rarely feels like an autonomous character in the novel: his thoughts are so rarely transcribed and so often filtered through the subjectivity of the narrator that he becomes an object for the reader to look at and examine rather than a character whose interests, desires, and goals drive him forward. Who Jacob is existentially, in other words, is largely irrelevant to *Jacob’s Room*, but this existential irrelevance does not mean that Jacob is insignificant. Indeed, by making Jacob so common for his class, Woolf highlights his importance to the ideologies he manifests materially through his actions, for Jacob becomes a conduit for these ideologies rather than an interesting character readers might look to as an agent of change in the world. An interesting man might journey out to Cambridge in search of an answer to some burning question that would improve

his life and the lives of the people around him, or he might go off to war for some reason that rises above rank notions of nationalism and duty. Jacob is unerringly average and does neither, going to Cambridge because his mother tells him he must and going to war because the patriarchal notions of manliness he learns at Cambridge tell him he should. And it is precisely his unmitigated averageness that makes Jacob useful to England in the lead up to a war between the nation states of Europe, for while he is no agent of change in the world, his unwavering adherence to the status quo makes him a valuable asset to the state and its institutions. Every now and then interesting men do interesting things that change the world, but the world, Woolf's *Bildungsroman* reminds us, is shaped by Jacob and his kind: government, business, education, the law, all are shaped by the actions and performances of average, conventional men. The narrator's exhibition of Jacob, therefore, is an ode to a most unremarkable man who, at each stage of his life, maintains the patriarchal establishment simply because, after many years in the patriarchal machine, he lacks the imagination to do anything other. She asks readers to contemplate what it means to eulogize men like Jacob as heroes by presenting him as a singular example of a cultural, historical, and aesthetic object that represents the millions of men who died in the Great War, but the narrator also never lets readers forget that men like Jacob made total war possible by not refusing to perform what they'd learned in Europe's patriarchal institutions.

The figure of the narrator as curator is implicit in both the imagery of the novel and the artefacts that are displayed to mark Jacob's progression through the patriarchal machine. Early in the novel, a then tourist-narrator visits Scarborough, the home of the Flanders family, and provides a brief recounting of her time in the city: she visits the Aquarium, goes to the pier where a "band played in the Moorish kiosk" (12), and takes a trip to the museum to see

“Cannon-balls; arrow-heads; Roman glass and a forceps green with verdigris” (12), all of which, as explained on a “little ticket with faded writing on it” (12), had been unearthed near the Roman fort on Dods Hill. Museums are places that simultaneously celebrate and collapse time. Taken from their temporal context, the artefacts in museums become timeless pieces of a historical collection, yet these artefacts are venerated precisely because they signify humankind’s achievements and the relentless march of human progress. Each artefact in a museum, that is to say, is a curio that reveals a single, static moment of time, but it is also one piece of a temporal spectrum that stretches back into the past and forward into the future to reveal how the passage of time effects humanity, consciousness, and being. As she leaves the museum the narrator asks “what’s the next thing to see in Scarborough?” (12), there is a section break, and we find Mrs. Flanders, who has climbed Dods Hill with her sons, sitting mending clothes near the Roman fort. The narrator, therefore, positions herself as the curator of the Flanders’ lives, specifically Jacob’s, a role that is unique in that it allows her the closeness to describe the fragments she includes and the distance to determine how the fragments will be exhibited. Each piece in the exhibit is chosen by her, but so too is the overarching narrative produced by the exhibit, so that *Jacob’s Room* is as much the narrator’s story as it is Jacob’s. Each static fragment she presents for the reader’s inspection constitutes one moment in Jacob’s life while simultaneously marking his progression through the patriarchal machine—one piece of a larger continuum that reveals the intersection between Jacob and the institutions he exists within. Because these fragments are constructed mainly by the voices of women who exist outside England’s patriarchal traditions, however, neither Jacob’s consciousness nor England’s patriarchal ideology are given authority over the text. Indeed, even the authority of the narrator is constantly in question as the fragments she must use to build her story are frequently interrogated for their veracity or, on occasion,

outwardly distrusted. The result is a text that insists on its own constructedness even while it is being constructed. And this constructedness begs our participation as readers because it demands we attend to how the narrator, characters, and events are situated within both the singular fragment and the curator's exhibit as a whole. In short, *Jacob's Room* is about storytelling more so than it is about Jacob. Certainly, Jacob's is the life around which the narrator's story coalesces, but by using outsider accounts not determined by the sacrosanct notions of national sacrifice propagated by England's patriarchal institutions, the narrator eulogizes Jacob as not merely the victim of a patriarchal machine that delivers him to his death but as an active participant in the ideologies that fuel this machine.

Before young adulthood Jacob has little say in the way his life will proceed, for many of the decisions concerning his education and what university he will attend are decided for him by his mother and her social network. It is Mr. Polegate, of whom nothing is known save that he is an acquaintance of Captain Barfoot, who advises Captain Barfoot that there could be "nothing better than to send a boy to one of the universities" (20), and it is upon this recommendation that Jacob goes to Cambridge. Jacob's entrance into the patriarchal machine, however, comes at age thirteen when he attends Rugby public school. There is little indication before this that Jacob takes much interest in school, for, of his Latin lessons with the clergyman who helps Mrs. Flanders by seeing to Jacob's education before he goes to Rugby, Jacob says "Oh, bother Mr. Floyd!" (13). Jacob's interests lie more in the outside world: collecting crabs on the beach and, even at Rugby, collecting butterflies. Nevertheless, when Mr. Floyd offers Jacob and his brothers a present each before leaving for another parish, "Archer chose a paperknife, because he did not like to choose anything too good; Jacob chose the works of Byron in one volume; John, who was still too young to make a proper choice, chose Mr. Floyd's kitten, which his brothers thought an

absurd choice, but Mr. Floyd upheld him when he said: ‘It has fur like you’” (14). When Mr. Floyd then goes on to speak “about the King’s Navy (to which Archer was going); and about Rugby (to which Jacob was going)” (14) the boys’ choices become more meaningful. Archer’s simple paperknife is in keeping with the austere simplicity of military service, something Captain Barfoot has surely instilled in the boy over the years, and Jacob’s choice of Byron’s works is symbolic of the public school education that will initiate him into the patriarchy. Just twelve or thirteen in this passage, Jacob has already begun shaping an image of himself that fits the life chosen for him, despite the fact that this image seems ill-fitting to his personality and interests. Already becoming obscured by an education he is disinterested in, Jacob plays no role in the decision to attend Cambridge, for after hearing Mr. Polgate’s recommendation via Captain Barfoot, Mrs. Flanders makes the decision, which is relayed simply with the single sentence “Jacob Flanders, therefore, went up to Cambridge in October, 1906” (21). Preceded by a textual break like the ones Woolf uses throughout *Jacob’s Room* to separate the fragments in her text, and followed by a chapter break, this decision stands entirely apart from the rest of text. While isolating the passage seems to signify that Jacob’s entrance into Cambridge is a significant event in his young life, the conjunction “therefore” marks the inevitability of Jacob’s progress to Cambridge and connects the important decision to a letter from an unknown contact of Barfoot’s rather than to anything Jacob actually wants.

In addition to using her contacts to procure Jacob’s access to Rugby and then Cambridge, Mrs. Flanders works very hard to shape Jacob for success in the patriarchal machine by roughing away personality traits unnecessary to his future success. Described by his mother as an “obstinate” child (6) and the “only one of her sons who never obeyed her” (16), Jacob has a wandering spirit as a child and teenager that angers and concerns Mrs. Flanders in equal

measure. Mrs. Flanders is well acquainted with spirited men—her deceased husband Seabrook “had broken horses, ridden to hounds, farmed a few fields, and run a little wild” in his youth (10), and her brother Morty seems to have disappeared without a trace and is rumoured to have become a “Mohammedan” (28)—so she is resolute in her attempts to ensure her boys become responsible, productive men. These attempts begin with an inspiring, if somewhat revisionist, engraving on Seabrook’s tombstone that refers to him as a “Merchant of this city” (9) and is meant to serve as an “example for the boys” to follow (10). In reality Seabrook had only “sat behind an office window for three months” when he died (9), yet Mrs. Flanders is shrewd enough to know that “she had to call him something” on his tombstone (10) and chooses a label that gives her boys something to aspire toward by prioritizing Seabrook’s more conventional late-life achievements rather than his early life adventures. Concerning Jacob specifically, Mrs. Flanders focuses her attention on eliminating Jacob’s love of butterflies, which she finds worrisome because the hobby gets in the way of his responsibilities. Her worries are not misplaced. What little influence Jacob may have had on Mrs. Flanders’ decision that he will attend Cambridge is squandered because he is “after his butterflies as usual” (20) when Mrs. Flanders and Barfoot discuss Mr. Polegate’s letter. The night before the meeting, moreover, Mrs. Flanders chastises Jacob when he returns home at midnight from chasing butterflies because, firstly, there was what sounded like “a volley of pistol-shots” in the woods that night and she “thought something dreadful had happened” (16) and, secondly, because he wakes the maid, Rebecca, “who [has] to be up so early” (16). Mrs. Flanders, then, attempts to curtail Jacob’s butterfly chasing because she sees the activity as unproductive and inessential. More a pastime than something he can pursue as a career, this interest is extraneous to his future success and she begins shaping and moulding him before sending him to Cambridge where he will be hewed,

chiselled, and sanded down into a productive and disciplined member of the English social establishment.

Mrs. Flanders's decisions demonstrate that her agency is limited inasmuch as it depends on her position within a social network that she works to maintain so that her sons may reap the benefits of her position. Since the death of Seabrook, Mrs. Flanders has been living in relative "poverty" (9), but she does have social connections that enable her to provide Jacob opportunities that will essentially guarantee him a place in the English social establishment. Using her connections and position to enhance her sons' lives is a balancing act for Mrs. Flanders: she must be careful to advance their causes while closely monitoring how her own position will either aid or hinder their futures. Her careful positioning is necessary because, as Kathleen Dobie has pointed out, Mrs. Flanders, being a woman, is only able to accrue social status through her relationships with powerful men, thereby acting as a conduit that "merely transfers that status from educated and influential men to her sons" (196). For example, when she turns down a marriage proposal from Mr. Floyd, she justifies the decision to herself by remembering that she "had always disliked red hair in men" while justifying it to him by citing their age difference in a "motherly, respectful, inconsequent, regretful letter" (14). It is her youngest son, John, chasing geese through the yard that actually makes the decision for her though. Until John and the geese come rushing by, Mrs. Flanders is overtaken with emotion by Mr. Floyd's letter, for her breast moves up and down as she leans "against the walnut tree to steady herself" while remembering Seabrook and looking "through her tears at the little shifting leaves against the yellow sky" (13). But in an instant the emotions Mrs. Flanders feels while reading the letter change to anger as she seizes hold of John, snatches the stick from his hand, and scolds the child, crumpling Mr. Floyd's letter in the process and muttering "'How could I

think of marriage!’ [...] to herself bitterly” (14). John’s intervention reminds Mrs. Flanders that any relationship she makes will adjust the relational network she is able to provide her children, so against Mr. Floyd’s marriage proposal she must weigh what access he would grant them to England’s social establishment and whether that access will be more gainful than what she and Captain Barfoot currently provide. After he and Mrs. Flanders decide that Jacob will go to Cambridge, Barfoot reveals that a councilman has recently resigned and when Mrs. Flanders asks “‘Then you will stand for Council?’” he responds, “‘Well, about that,’ [...] settling himself rather deeper in his chair” (21). The fragment of their discussion ends here and leaves Barfoot’s personal involvement with the government frustratingly unclear, but the presumption of Mrs. Flanders’ question makes it apparent they have discussed Barfoot’s running for council before while his motion to make himself more comfortable suggests he sees Mrs. Flanders as a confidant. Captain Barfoot’s secondary connections to government are more than theoretical, however: his wife, Ellen, is the daughter of James Coppard, the “mayor [of Scarborough] at the time of Queen Victoria’s jubilee” who erected a fountain in her honour (17), and whose name is still “painted upon municipal watering-carts and over shop windows, and upon the zinc blinds of solicitors” (17). Through Barfoot, therefore, Mrs. Flanders offers her sons the best chance at becoming successful in England’s social establishment by providing them a ready-made social network that includes connections in the military, government, and academy.

Mr. Floyd’s social network, on the other hand, is smaller and offers Mrs. Flanders’ sons considerably less social leverage, and while she does not explicitly state that she rebuffs Mr. Floyd for calculated reasons, she is happy to have avoided the marriage when she discovers Mr. Floyd has taken a job as a school administrator in a small town. Mrs. Flanders finds out one morning as she sits reading the *Scarborough and Harrogate Courier*, and, looking around the

dining room at Rebecca and her sons eating breakfast, thinks about how “They were all alive [...] while poor Mr. Floyd was becoming the Principal of Maresfield House” (15). She then goes over to Topaz, the cat that used to belong to Mr. Floyd but that was gifted to John, and pets him: “Poor old Topaz,” said Mrs. Flanders, as he stretched himself out in the sun, and she smiled, thinking how she had had him gelded, and how she did not like red hair in men. Smiling, she went into the kitchen” (15). The pathetic language Mrs. Flanders uses to describe poor Mr. Floyd and poor old Topaz connects the two, and Topaz’s inability to reproduce sexually symbolizes Mr. Floyd’s social sterility, for, like his father before him, he is a small town clergymen able to grant only limited access to the English social establishment. Just as Topaz has grown old and “a little mangy around the ears” (15), Mr. Floyd’s social capital has suffered now that he has become the principal of a small school, so Mrs. Flanders is pleased she had the good sense to avoid tying her lot, as well as her sons’ lots, to Mr. Floyd’s progress.

For Mrs. Flanders, then, the primary value of a Cambridge education is the access it provides to the English social establishment, but this value is not shared by Jacob, who, shortly after he arrives at Cambridge, gets swept up in the belief that he has arrived at the centre of England’s cultural and intellectual heritage and begins to shape an identity around this position. Much of the novel involves Jacob’s experiences at Cambridge and plays with some of the stock conventions and episodes of university novels: Dons’ lunches, intellectual conversation with friends, and descriptions of Dons. There isn’t an overwhelming desire to get the descriptions of Cambridge “right” in *Jacob’s Room*, though, for the descriptions of Jacob come either from an essayist-narrator who seems never to have been to Cambridge and who at times consciously positions herself outside the university looking at the young men inside, or from random women Jacob encounters while he is at Cambridge. Thus, at the same time as Jacob tries desperately to

fashion an identity that accords with his new position as a Cambridge student, the narrator continuously unwrites this “I” by choosing and exhibiting fragments of Jacob’s life that undermine his attempts at actualization or that demonstrate his actualization is often little more than a performance of the rituals associated with Cambridge’s institutional patriarchal ideology. What *Jacob’s Room* does attempt to get right, therefore, is Jacob’s imaginary relationship to his changing material reality, but this process, rather than revealing Jacob as the heroic figure of his own adventure, reveals he is little more than a conduit for the patriarchal traditions of Cambridge.

Jacob’s meeting with Mrs. Norman, a middle-aged woman he shares a carriage with, is a good example of the way the essayist-narrator unwrites Jacob and the *Bildungsroman* form, for it reveals that the beginning of Jacob’s journey out, far from being heroic, is marred by banality and misconception. The meeting takes place as Jacob travels to Cambridge for his first college term, and should represent one of the defining events in the life of a *Bildungsroman*’s hero: the journey away from his childhood home into the greater world he will one day change for the better. If the hero’s journey should begin with a momentous event, however, then Jacob’s voyage out starts off rather slowly with Mrs. Norman “nervously but very feebly” reminding the “powerfully built” Jacob that their carriage is non-smoking (21). Believing that Jacob does not hear her, Mrs. Norman responds by checking her bag to find a “scent-bottle and a novel from Mudie’s,” and devises a plan should Jacob attack her: “She would throw the scent-bottle with her right hand, she decided, and tug the communication cord with her left. She was fifty years of age, and had a son at college. Nevertheless, it is a fact that men are dangerous” (21). Mrs. Norman’s fear of Jacob initiates what will be a rather inauspicious start for Jacob, who, rather than being borne gloriously toward his future by some prolific event or adventure, is borne to Cambridge in

a train carriage with a middle-aged woman who is afraid he might attack her. Jacob's voyage out, then, is part of a comedic unraveling of the *Bildungsroman* form, for, as Judy Little argues, "the traditional male growth-pattern, full of great expectation, falls like a tattered mantle around the shoulders of the indecisive hero, heir of the ages" (229). From the off, Jacob's is a story that suggests nothing great will come of its protagonist: there is no compulsion to growth, no grand reason for Jacob's voyage out, only a letter from the friend of a family friend.

The limitations brought about by gender in this passage prevent the narrator from gleaning any valuable information about Jacob other than the status read onto him in the train carriage, so, as the narrator herself points out, Jacob becomes even more obscure in this fragment of his story. The signifying economy within the carriage becomes central to the passage as soon as Mrs. Norman chooses to "decide the question of safety by the infallible test of appearance" and stealthily steals glances at Jacob as they travel (21), but this test yields little information beyond the fact that he's a loose-socked, shabby-tied young man reading the *Daily Telegraph* (21). Indeed, what each person reads becomes one of the only indicators of identity in the passage, for Mrs. Norman carries a book from Mudie's, a "Popular circulating library, known for its strict moral standards in the selection of its books" (Brake and Demoor 21), and the *Morning Post*, a "Right-wing daily newspaper popular with retired officers" (21), whereas Jacob's *Daily Telegraph* is an intellectually serious liberal-leaning paper "directed at a wealthy, educated readership" interested in politics and the arts (159). Of course, the reader already knows that Jacob is, for the most part, disinterested in intellectual pursuits, so his choice of newspaper seems to be a performance undertaken in an attempt to fit into his new role as a Cambridge student. The verisimilitude of this performance is also hinted at in this passage, as Mrs. Norman notes that, having lost interest in the paper, Jacob "looked up, past her" and "fixed his eyes—which were

blue—on the landscape” (21). Mrs. Norman has no way to know of Jacob’s general disinterest in education, however, and does the best she can with Jacob’s shabby clothing, the fact that he is travelling to Cambridge, and the *Daily Telegraph* to quickly assess that Jacob is similar to the son she is travelling to visit at Cambridge. In this fragment, therefore, Jacob becomes ever more indistinguishable at a time when his recent departure from home should allow his identity to become more definite and refined. Absent in all but what he wears and what he reads, Jacob once again escapes representation, a point the narrator brings to the reader’s attention when she interjects to explain that “Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole—they see all sorts of things—they see themselves” (22). In her own mind, Mrs. Norman goes from being a sexual object to being completely anonymous in mere moments, a transition predicated entirely on how she imagines herself in relation to the young man she shares a train carriage with. Consequently, Jacob’s indifference comes to guide the entire interaction and leaves the frustrated narrator with little to build upon but this indifference, which she does by noting that “since, even at her age, [Mrs. Norman] noted his indifference, presumably he was in some way or other—to her at least—nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy?” (22). In the end, therefore, Jacob—into the world for the first time—is the ceaselessly vanishing ground of a gender performance that renders him indistinguishable from every other Cambridge undergraduate. But it is the equivocation in the narrator’s voice that is most telling here, for even she, the compiler of the exhibit she is constructing for the reader, must finally admit that Mrs. Norman’s deficiencies as a source of information are too many to draw an accurate description of Jacob. In the end, a presumption about Jacob’s assumed similarities to Mrs. Norman’s son based on what

she notices at her specific age is the sum total of the information the narrator is able to get from Mrs. Norman, so it seems it's not only Jacob whose story has an inauspicious beginning.

The narrator doesn't leave Jacob's train carriage empty-handed, though, for her interaction with Jacob and Mrs. Norman, marred as it is by the latter's deficiencies as a narrating consciousness, provides her opportunity to begin outlining the epistemology her exhibit will use to present Jacob. Following the narrator's admission that Mrs. Norman's description has more to do with her own personal circumstances than with Jacob, she explains that hers will not be a story of heavy exposition: "One must do the best one can with [Mrs. Norman's] report. Anyhow, this was Jacob Flanders, aged nineteen. It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done—for instance, when the train drew into the station, Mr. Flanders burst open the door, and put the lady's dressing-case out for her, saying, or rather mumbling: 'Let me' very shyly; indeed he was rather clumsy about it" (22). Woolf's desire that in *Jacob's Room* "one thing should open out of another" (*Diary* 2, 13) is fully realized in this passage. Jacob, it appears, has also been concerned with gender during this train ride, but the narrator lets a simple act of awkward chivalry as he exits the carriage reveal it. Rather than being completely indifferent to Mrs. Norman's presence as she fears, Jacob's clumsiness suggests an adolescent nervousness and lack of self-confidence in the presence of women, which isn't surprising given Jacob attended an all-boys public school. Whether this shyness is caused by a general lack of familiarity with women's company or the fact that he did indeed hear Mrs. Norman's reminder about the non-smoking carriage is unclear, but it is clear that Jacob falls back on the conventions of chivalry to ease his discomfort. Both characters, therefore, resort to performances and norms of gender—Mrs. Norman to her chastity and Jacob to chivalry—to help them navigate the situation they've found themselves in, so what comes of

this first fragment in the narrator's exhibit is naught but a conventional encounter between a conventional middle-aged woman and a conventional Cambridge undergrad. Thus, the narrator's metanarrative intrusion about summing people up reminds readers that character, much more than simply the expression of an essential identity, is an accounting of many different factors such as gender, class, age, family, and, in this case, even travel destination. At the same time that her exhibit of Jacob insists upon this intersectionality, it never lets him come into complete focus by never allowing his consciousness, or indeed any one consciousness, centre the narrative, and the result is a formal framework that builds character piecemeal rather than creating a ready-made character and loosing him on the world. Jacob's is a continual process of becoming, but it is a becoming always narrated from the outside to ensure the focus remains on the institutions and ideologies that shape Jacob as he disappears within them.

The extent to which Jacob disappears into the university as well as the vast banality of his voyage out is made clear when he and Mrs. Norman leave the train carriage, for no sooner does Jacob step onto the platform than his memory fades into the signifying vacuum of Cambridge. Mrs. Norman almost asks her son about Jacob but stops because "As this was Cambridge, as she was staying there for the week-end, as she saw nothing but young men all day long, in streets and round tables, this sight of her fellow-traveller was completely lost in her mind, as the crooked pin dropped by a child into the wishing-well twirls in the water and disappears for ever" (22). Quite aside from the fact that he fails to make an impression in Mrs. Norman's mind, Jacob almost fails to make an impression in this sentence. Lost among subordinate clauses that continually defer meaning, that shift the narrative emphasis ever further toward the institution at which he has arrived, that present him as the ceaselessly vanishing ground of his own life story, Jacob all but finally disappears. Into the patriarchal institution that will eventually convince him to

sacrifice his life ambles Jacob, the future victim of a war absurd in its pointlessness and grotesque in its voraciousness. One of many, many young men ambling toward this death, Jacob is not so much lost as he is subsumed by a signifying system that will quickly come to define him as he strives to become a Cambridge man.

The text introduces Cambridge immediately after Jacob's train ride with Mrs. Norman, and in the passage the narrator imagines Cambridge as a fixed point of light in the darkness. This indicates that, for all the perceived beauty of the intellectual tradition it represents, the institution has the effect of establishing constitutive differences between insiders and outsiders. Cambridge acts as a guiding light for humanity in the narrator's initial description of the university; indeed, after she notes that "the sky is the same everywhere" and that "Travellers, the ship-wrecked, exiles, and the dying draw comfort from the thought" of this consistency (22), she suggests there is something different about the sky above Cambridge. "Out at sea," the narrator explains, "a great city will cast a brightness into the night. Is it fanciful to suppose the sky, washed into the crevices of King's College Chapel, lighter, thinner, more sparkling than the sky elsewhere? Does Cambridge burn not only into the night, but into the day?" (22). Praising Cambridge in the form of questions rather than declarative statements indicates the narrator's equivocation in presenting the city as a beacon of light that differs from other cities harkening people in from the darkness. Importantly, she doesn't even ask whether or not the sky above Cambridge is actually different, but, instead, whether the act of supposing such a thing unduly romanticizes Cambridge as different. That Cambridge is a place to find knowledge, discover new ideas, and become enlightened does not seem under dispute in this passage; the narrator's questions imply, instead, that this tradition has the potential to establish a dichotomy between those inside Cambridge's light and those travellers and exiles outside who aspire towards this light. This division between

inside and outside is only strengthened when the narrator begins to describe the light inside King's College Chapel. The stained glass of the chapel colours the outside light as it enters and shines upon the space within, and, "where it breaks upon stone, that stone is softly chalked red, yellow, and purple. Neither snow nor greenery, winter nor summer, has power over the old stained glass" (23). Once again, the beauty of the chapel, dappled in a mosaic of different coloured light, is not disputed by the narrator, but at the same time she presents this beauty askance by noting how the chapel's windows change the outside light to ensure it does not disturb the inner sanctum of the chapel. An institution of control and discipline, the Church is not presented here as a force that prepares its congregation to confront the maelstrom outside. Rather, it is a building that buttresses them against the outside by ordering everything within. A final simile from the narrator makes this clear: "As the sides of a lantern protect the flame so that it burns steady even in the wildest night [...] so inside the Chapel all was orderly" (23). Thus, at the same time as the stained glass windows are transforming the light from without, they are also protecting the light that shines within, thereby ensuring the enlightenment the Church provides will remain forever unmolested by the outside world. A closed system, the Church insists upon the threshold between inside and outside in order to construct a coherence within its walls that legitimizes its traditions and rituals.

Just as light is shaped and ordered inside the chapel, so too are the bodies of the people within. In particular, the boys participating in the church service appear more as statues that signify the majesty of the chapel and the Church's traditions than as individual, complex people: "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. In what orderly procession they advance" (23).

Critics have pointed out that the boys' individuality is displaced by the disciplinary process that shapes them into Church figurines, but this displacement is generally imagined as the boys' disappearance into the institution rather than as ideological embodiment. Jane De Gay notes that the young men in this passage seem to be "insubstantial" because "their gowns appear empty, reinforcing the anonymity and insignificance of the thousands who died in battle" (70).

Similarly, William R. Handley focuses on Woolf's use of the word "sculptured" to argue that "these young men, robbed of their bodies, become objects of war—but objects that, like war, have been rendered aesthetic" (120). Thus, their "lives serve as an exchange value for the status quo" inasmuch as they become commodities the patriarchal establishment exchanges to maintain their power (120). Being stripped of their individualities does not, however, make them "insubstantial" or "rob them of their bodies"—quite the opposite. The young men's individualities are replaced in this instance by bodily performances that realize—that is, make real—the patriarchal ideology of the Church by bringing it into material existence. Rather than losing their bodies, these young men are embodied as representatives of the Church's traditions because they wear its robes and march in orderly procession as they enact its rituals. Disciplined ideological subjects, they may have lost their individuality, but they have not become anonymous: if anything, indeed, they have become more substantial—in the sense of gaining agency within the English patriarchal establishment—as a result of their embodiment, for their actions connect them to a tradition that empowers men by legitimating patriarchal power.

That these young men are treated both as the victims of a patriarchal tradition that strips them of their individuality and as embodied members of that tradition is in keeping with the narrator's uncertain view of Cambridge, and her unease with the young men's enactment of the Church's traditions is further indicated grammatically. The young men's embodiment is most

evident in the phrase “*as though nothing dense and corporeal were within*” (23, emphasis added). Handley and De Gay seem to treat this clause as a simile that suggests there is nothing substantial underneath the airy gowns. However, the comma before this clause, which cuts it away from the rest of the sentence and makes it non-restrictive, and the use of the subjunctive “were” indicate this is not a simile so much as a sarcastic comment that the billowing gowns do not actually hide or distract attention from the all-too substantial bodies beneath. These grammatical subtleties transform the gowns from a veil that obscures the young men and makes them anonymous into a mask that hides the true power conferred when they embody the Church’s patriarchal traditions. It is with “certainty” and “authority” that these young men march in “orderly procession,” and the narrator draws our attention to the “great boots [that] march under the gowns” (23) because it is these boots that more accurately signify the underlying power of patriarchal institutions than the decorative gowns they wear to distract the eye. When Woolf revisits the issue of ceremonial dress almost twenty years later in *Three Guineas*, she points explicitly to the spectacular aspect of the military costumes of men, which are as disciplined as those who wear them: “every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolic meaning” (134) and thus designates the achievements of each man to every other. All these baubles, Woolf goes on to explain, serve two primary functions. On one level, ceremonial clothing’s “splendour is invented partly in order to impress the beholder with the majesty of the military office, partly in order through their vanity to induce young men to become soldiers” (138). On another level, these costumes are ways “for educated men to emphasize their superiority over other people” and, along with adding titles before and letters after their names, constitute “acts that rouse competition and jealousy” by insisting upon difference (138). Clothing then becomes constitutive of difference: it marks those inside the tradition that the ceremonial

dress ritualizes and, just as importantly, those outside the tradition. Far from merely obscuring the young men by stripping them of their individuality, these sartorial signifiers add layer upon layer of ideological meaning to their bodies until they, too, symbolize and propagate the beliefs and traditions of patriarchal institutions. Put differently, the patriarchal ideologies of England's institutions are made real by the clothing, rituals, and performances of these young men, who have become conduits of power rather than merely its victims.

Sartorial choices are also at issue when the narrator finally comes to mention Jacob and his objection to women attending the church service because their dresses break the illusion of the ideological ritual taking place before him. His disinterest in the service at King's College Chapel is apparent: "Jacob looked extraordinarily vacant," explains the narrator, "his head thrown back, his hymn book open at the wrong place" (23), and he believes that "if the mind wanders it is because several hats shops and cupboards upon cupboards of coloured dresses are displayed upon rush-bottomed chairs" (23). What distracts Jacob is the disorder the women's dresses introduce into the orderly space of the chapel and the orderly dress of the Church's institutional reproduction taking place at the service. The dresses ruin the illusion of the service for him, where their variety is juxtaposed with the conformity of the gowns worn by the young men participating in the Church's rituals, and they remind him that there are outsiders permitted into the ceremony. The particular reason these outsiders upset Jacob has little to do with protecting the sanctity of the chapel as a physical space, however, for he is largely unconcerned they are in the chapel. Rather, his concerns veer more toward how their presence, and specifically their presence in colourful dresses, affects the chapel as an ideological space. Looking at the women, Jacob thinks that "Though head and bodies may be devout enough, one has a sense of individuals—some like blue, others brown; some feathers, others pansies and

forget-me-nots” (23). Their attention to fashion, which draws attention to individuality through clothing, does not adequately defer to the Church’s austere traditions according to Jacob; he chastises the women more for their refusal to take part in the Church’s performance of authority than for their presence in the chapel. Unlike the young men who walk together with ordered discipline and dress uniformly, the women’s dresses and less regulated movement signals to Jacob a misperformance in the structured production of the church service. He imagines that the results would be the same if one brought a dog to the service: “For though a dog is all very well on a gravel path, and shows no disrespect to flowers, the way he wanders down an aisle, looking, lifting a paw, and approaching a pillar with a purpose that makes the blood run cold with horror [...] a dog destroys the service completely” (23). The fact that Jacob imagines the women as male dogs scenting the pillars in the church with their urine reveals that he fears the women might ultimately corrupt the service by leaving their own individual impression on the proceedings in a deviation of the rituals that realize the protected patriarchal power of the institution.

Ideologically speaking, he has come a long way since arriving at the university. No longer the nervous young man who shared a train cabin with Mrs. Norman and remained quietly deferential to the older woman, Jacob has now begun to embody the cultural privilege that comes with a being Cambridge insider. He has begun to mark the threshold between being an insider and outsider, and has made these differences constitutive. Women, like dogs, destroy the service completely, and they are tolerated only because they are “separately devout, distinguished, and vouched for by the theology, mathematics, Latin, and Greek of their husbands” (24). The women are reduced to mere extensions of their husbands in Jacob’s assessment, and their husbands are also reduced to the fields of knowledge they have come to represent in the academy. To be an

insider, therefore, is to be validated, whether by virtue of being the wife of a professor or by virtue of having one's contribution to a certain field of knowledge guaranteed by the academy. Once an insider, one is protected by a closed system of knowledge that ensures its coherence by demanding participants perform according to its rituals, traditions, and ideologies, so that what emerges in the academy is a never-ending production of knowledge that self-legitimizes itself. Woven seemingly naturally into the academy's studies, theses, and dissertations are the epistemic limitations of the academy itself, and to become an insider one must write, speak, and think within acceptable deviations of these limitations. This is not to say that these epistemic limitations are not useful or valuable, but it is to say that they create difference and make this difference constitutive: one is either an insider or an outsider in accordance with one's ability to mirror the forms, structures, and methodologies deemed acceptable by the academy. What underlies Jacob's vapid critique of the women at the church service, for instance, is an insistence upon difference that is largely built upon the structural and ideological foundations of an institution that privileges men by excluding women. It is almost inevitable that Jacob begins to rely on the threshold between insiders and outsiders to order his imaginary relationship to the material conditions of his existence. Jacob goes to classes in which he is surrounded by men, is taught exclusively by men, and studies knowledge created almost exclusively by men (apart from the rather marginalized Miss Umphelby). Little wonder, then, that Jacob imagines he is different than those outsiders who do not share these privileges.

While the narrator is hesitant about the social value of these institutions and, from the Outsider's position, points out both their advantages and their flaws, Jacob is clear that access to the enlightenment Cambridge provides should be limited. The narrator's opening passage on Cambridge suggests that the city is a beacon that calls the exiled and the shipwrecked in from the

darkness, but Jacob's description of Cambridge as a source of light is much less flattering to those who are not citizens to begin with:

If you stand a lantern under a tree every insect in the forest creeps up to it—a curious assembly, since though they scramble and swing and knock their heads against the glass, they seem to have no purpose—something senseless inspires them. One gets tired of watching them, as they amble round the lantern and blindly tap as if for admittance, one large toad being the most besotted of any and shouldering his way through the rest. (23)

The ellipses that begin this description transition the reader to Jacob's consciousness and initiate an image that is familiar to Jacob, who as a child and young man used a lantern to attract butterflies so he could examine them during midnight butterfly chases. That this image is connected to Jacob's past experiences is made clear when he imagines that "A terrifying volley of pistol-shots rings out" when, in fact, it is just a tree that "has fallen, a sort of death in the forest" (23). This very event took place the night Jacob returned home late from chasing butterflies and was chastised by Mrs. Flanders, as that night Mrs. Flanders, too, heard the pistol-shots of a falling tree. Jacob seems to connect this personal experience and the image he uses to understand the women's presence at the church service based on his role as a voyeur, for in both instances, Jacob is participating in a categorization of the creatures that congregate around the lantern. At the church service, however, his categories seem less refined and more oppositional. He had noticed the "kidney-shaped spots of a fulvous hue" and "no crescent upon the underwing" of the butterflies he chased as a young man (16), yet at the church he insists the blues, browns, feathers, and forget-me-nots of the women's dresses merely distract them, and him, from properly revering the service (23). The butterfly had circled round the lantern in a

flash then disappeared as quickly as it appeared (16); while watching the women, the bugs he imagines “knock their heads against the glass” as if “something senseless inspires them” to “blindly tap for admittance” (23). Jacob had marked each butterfly down in his guidebook, meticulously making notes when the guidebook had provided the wrong information (16); the women, on the other hand, are cast aside with the spurious question “why allow women to take part in [the service]” (23). The answer is delayed until Jacob dismisses it with “For one thing, thought Jacob, they’re as ugly as sin” (24). In short, Jacob can see the women only as outsiders trying to ruin his service. Having reduced gender to a simple dichotomy, due largely to the insider privilege he enjoys as a man of Cambridge, the women are as insects gathering round the light of Cambridge—a light their presence dims through the individuality they express during its rituals. The transformation of Jacob’s previous experience, from an activity that allowed Jacob to explore the complexity and diversity of the world to an image he uses to assert the threshold between those who belong and those who do not, reveals the extent to which Jacob’s ideological view has changed since coming to Cambridge. More than this, however, it reveals that Jacob is not merely a victim of a patriarchal ideology that insists on and amplifies differences in order to find coherence but a subject whose beliefs are beginning to be shaped by this ideology.

One of the women vouched for by her husband’s place in Cambridge is the focal point of a fragment in which Jacob and his friends attend a luncheon hosted by the Plumers. As Mrs. Plumer tries to ensure the luncheon is a success when Jacob arrives late, the narrator once again explores what role performance and participation plays in the legitimation of institutions. The entire scene is the group’s awkward attempt to feel comfortable in a situation that neither the Plumers nor the students seem particularly to enjoy, and Mrs. Plumer lets her frustration at Jacob’s tardiness come to the fore: “‘How tiresome,’ Mrs. Plumer interrupted impulsively. ‘Does

anybody know Mr. Flanders?" (24). Her outburst brings forth an ashamed response from Durrant who "blushed slightly, and said, awkwardly, something about being sure—looking at Mr. Plumer and hitching the right leg of his trouser as he spoke," while "Mr. Plumer got up and stood in front of the fire" (24). The men's nervous fidgeting does not go unnoticed by Mrs. Plumer, the hostess of the luncheon and the one responsible for establishing a comfortable environment for her guests. To set everything in order once more, "Mrs. Plumer laughed like a straight-forward friendly fellow" (24), an action so awkward that the narrator feels the need to account for the awkwardness she is describing: "In short, anything more horrible than the scene, the setting, the prospect, even the May garden being afflicted with chill sterility and a cloud choosing that moment to cross the sun, cannot be imagined" (24). While just pages before the narrator had positioned herself sympathetically to the Cambridge wives who must live at the margins of the institution, she takes a more subversive position in this instance to question Mrs. Plumer's participation in the rituals of an institution that marginalizes women and delegitimizes their voices. It is not difficult to imagine a good many things more horrible than a tardy undergraduate, so the narrator's hyperbole points out that both Mrs. Plumer's initial annoyance and her awkward attempt to hide this annoyance are disproportionate responses to what is ultimately a rather mundane situation. This hyperbole and the irreverence it implies is continued when the narrator shifts her focalization to Mr. Plumer, who thinks as he cuts the mutton that "There can be no excuse for this outrage upon one hour of human life, save the reflection [...] that if no don ever gave a luncheon party, if Sunday after Sunday passed, if men went down, became lawyers, doctors, members of Parliament, business men—if no don ever gave a luncheon party——" (24). His inability to complete his own conditional statements questions the relevance of the ritual being performed, but it also accentuates the role performativity plays in

the perpetuation of patriarchal power. Not holding luncheons is unimaginable to Mr. Plumer not because they are actually integral to the lives of the men who pass through Cambridge, but because they are integral to the traditions of the institution. The awkwardness of Durrant, the annoyance of Mrs. Plumer, and the momentary anger of Mr. Plumer all indicate that none of the actors involved in this production gain anything valuable, let alone tangible, from the luncheon, but because it happens Sunday after Sunday this ritual legitimates the institution through simple reenactment. “Now,” Mr. Plumer asks as he carves the mutton, “does lamb make the mint sauce, or mint sauce make the lamb?” (24). This ontological question might equally be asked of rituals like the luncheon: does the institution make the ritual, or the ritual the institution? The ontological reciprocity between rituals and institutions is, of course, not meant to be meaningfully questioned lest one realize the self-legitimizing nature of each and begin to wonder seriously what would happen if dons no longer invited undergrads to luncheon.

The narrator’s subversive critique of women’s participation in Cambridge’s rituals comes under scrutiny itself later in the passage when Mrs. Plumer’s history provides some context for her luncheon, and these duelling critiques present the personal, social, and political conundrum the patriarchal establishment has created for women like Mrs. Plumer. When Jacob finally arrives at the luncheon, the rest of the diners are already done their main course, so Mrs. Plumer takes a second helping to ensure Jacob doesn’t have to eat alone and orders the dessert to be brought in (25). Mrs. Plumer notices that there will not be much mutton left over, a thriftiness that is attributed to her middle-class upbringing in Manchester: “how could she do other,” the narrator asks, “than grow up cheese-paring, ambitious, with an instinctively accurate notion of the rungs of the ladder and an ant-like assiduity in pushing George Plumer ahead of her to the top of the ladder?” (25). This rhetorical question reveals that few better options than participation

exist for Mrs. Plumer in a patriarchal system that restricts women's access to property, employment, and education, as well as denying them the right to vote. If she wants to elevate her station in life, this is the best way available to Mrs. Plumer, so she plays the game according to the rules she has been given and worries about pleasing the disinterested and ungrateful undergraduates of an institution she would not be allowed to enter were it not for her husband. Quite rightly, the narrator points out that, as a woman unable to participate in the law, business, education, and politics, "It was none of [Mrs. Plumer's] fault" (25) that she must participate in the patriarchy to build a life for herself. However, she also points out that the end of Mrs. Plumer's participation aligns with the ends of the institution as described in the church service passage. All that awaits one at the top of the ladder, the narrator suggests, is a "sense that all the rungs were beneath one" (25), for once Mr. Plumer becomes a professor "Mrs. Plumer could only be in a condition to cling tight to her eminence, peer down at the ground, and goad her two plain daughters to climb the rungs of the ladder" (25). Just as Cambridge's exclusivity creates constitutive differences between insiders and outsiders, Mrs. Plumber's social climbing creates constitutive differences between the rungs of the social ladder. Participating in this luncheon helps Mrs. Plumer solidify a place, however tangential, within a patriarchal institution that excludes her by supporting the husband who grants her access. In doing so she legitimates the very framework of power Cambridge uses to codify difference and exclude outsiders. More than this, however, Mrs. Plumer initiates this same complicity in her own daughters, indicating that this participation in patriarchy is a learned response passed down from mother to daughter. If, as Woolf suggested in *A Room of One's Own*, "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (69), then what Mrs. Plumer's daughters have to think back to is a life participating in the rituals of men. They enter the luncheon after it is all over wearing "white frocks and blue

sashes” and handing out cigarettes to the men, and the narrator is quick to explain the daughters’ role in legitimating the patriarchy by indicating “It was none of *their* fault either” (25). That said, the repetition of this exculpatory phrase—having now been used to pardon both mother and daughters—fairly begs readers to consider the implication of these and generations of women participating in luncheons like this one. The narrator, here, chooses a subject position similar to that chosen by the “daughter of an educated man” narrator of *Three Guineas*, whose critique of Mrs. Plumer aligns with the Society of Outsiders’ experiment to “show that to be passive is to be active” (245) by refusing to participate in the rituals that legitimate the patriarchy. At some point, the narrator implies, women must stop performing rituals that support institutions that marginalize or oppress them; at the same time, Mrs. Plumer’s personal experience warns that such refusal may not be feasible given the economic, educational, and legal restraints placed on women. What the reader is left with, then, is a political conundrum that the narrator presents but never resolves, thereby inviting readers to become active participants in interpreting the curated fragment of Jacob’s life that she exhibits, not necessarily to take a firm position one way or the other, but to acknowledge that women are often faced with political choices that are difficult to navigate.

As for Jacob, the Plumers’ luncheon party becomes the backdrop against which Jacob’s youthful anarchism begins to confront the trajectory of a life shaped by the patriarchal machine. Now comfortably situated at Cambridge, Jacob has the chance to examine his life, and what he encounters at the Plumers’ house scares him. As he leaves the luncheon, Jacob refers to it as “Bloody beastly!” the only words he can conjure for “summing up his discomfort at the world shown to him at lunch-time” (26). The beastly discomfort Jacob feels comes over him because he suddenly understands that “the cities which the elderly of the race have built upon the skyline

showed like brick suburbs, barracks, and places of discipline against a red and yellow flame” (26). This is a rare moment of self-reflection for Jacob, and the luncheon seems to represent an experience that could change his life until the narrator explains that his youthful rebellion is merely an attempt to differentiate himself from the Plumers based on his class. What the Plumers choose to read plays an important role in this differentiation: “such a thing to believe in—Shaw and Wells and the serious sixpenny weeklies! What were they after, scrubbing and demolishing these elderly people? Had they never read Homer, Shakespeare, the Elizabethans?” (26). Here, Wells and Shaw are connected with the strict, choreographed luncheon world of the Plumers and set against the red and yellow flame of youth, freedom, and exuberance represented by Homer and Shakespeare. The irony, of course, is that for all Jacob waxes poetic about these literary masters we later find out that he has never “managed to read [a Shakespeare play] through” (35). His claims after the luncheon to be “a young man of substance,” therefore, appear to stem from as “meager” an “object” as that the Plumers have erected (26). What makes him substantive, that is to say, is no less performative than the luncheon at the Plumers, for he bases his identity on his ability to perform youthful freedom, the font of inspiration for which are the books he has been told to read at university by professors like Mr. Plumer.

Despite the fact that Jacob’s anarchic spirit seems to be built on a shaky idealization of cultural elitism, the narrator still insists this luncheon represents an epiphanic moment that has the potential to change the trajectory of his life. In words reminiscent of Woolf’s discussion in *A Sketch of the Past* of “moments of being” (72), in which the “nondescript cotton wool” (72) of everyday life is pulled back—often with “a sudden violent shock” (71) or “peculiar horror” (72)—to epiphanically reveal a profounder reality beneath, Jacob knows that each Sunday will bring the same series of events “shock—horror—discomfort—then pleasure” as he gets to leave

the stifling luncheons to re-join the freedom of the outside world (Woolf, *JR* 26). However, the extent to which Jacob truly understands this as an epiphanic moment is unclear because most of the actual explanations of what this epiphany means to his life are provided by the narrator. In addition, the fact that he still intends to attend these luncheons of a Sunday and that he counters the banality of the Plumers' existence with a youthful exuberance born of the words of others makes one question whether his revolutionary spirit will persist. In addition, the narrator explains that Jacob's epiphany is not all that unique. The world of the elderly, she suggests, comes "as a shock about the age of twenty" to every person, so Jacob's current revolutionary cry "I am what I am, and intend to be it" comes with the narrator's caveat "for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself" (26). On one hand, this is merely an assertion that Jacob will never gain autonomy if he is unwilling to stop performing the rituals of other people, but, on the other hand, it is a solemn reminder that there is a danger of disappearing in these performances. As Zwerdling has pointed out, the narrator's caveat reminds readers that with repeated performances comes the risk of complaisance owing to "the possibility, perhaps even the likelihood, that our rebellious adolescence will give way not to strong adult individuality but to a stale, despairing conformity" (67). Such complaisance is particularly likely in Jacob's case since he steels himself for the "shock—horror—discomfort—then pleasure" of continually attending these Sunday luncheons. Jacob verily courts interpellation with this response as, at some point, even the strongest shock will fail to pass through the cotton wool of everyday life.

The threat that Jacob will slip into complaisant acceptance of a banal adult life like that of the Plumers is heightened when he leaves the luncheon, for he does not use the shock of his epiphany to reflect on what caused his feeling of horror. Jacob and Durrant travel down a river in a rowboat, and Jacob, having escaped the banality of the Plumers' luncheon, is hyper-attentive to

the “grey spires soft in the blue,” “chestnut bloom, pollen, whatever it is that gives May air its potency,” meadows “gilt with buttercups” and the “munch, munch, munch” of cows “as they tore the grass short at the roots” (26-27). Such imagery engages eyes, nose, and ears alike to create an impression of a sensual experience. Juxtaposed against the drab claustrophobia of the Plumers’ dining room with its awkward formality, Shaw, Wells, sixpenny weeklies, and daughters perfunctorily handing out cigars, this passage brings Jacob into the light and freedom of the natural world where all his senses are engaged simultaneously and image after image fights for his attention. Like Impressionist paintings that focus more on how light alters one’s perception of visible objects, fine contours are not drawn between the senses in this passage. The air of May, potent with fragrance, seems to have an effect on the visual world by “blurring the trees, gumming the buds, daubing the green” (26), and the grass of the meadow, which “did not run like the thin green water of the graveyard grass about to overflow the tombstones, but stood juicy and thick” (27), connects the sensations of touch and sight. Everything moves in this passage, the broken thresholds of the senses indicating a freedom that does not exist during the stifling luncheon. Such pastoral impulses remind the reader of Jacob’s early life chasing butterflies, but they also connect him to a past of revolutionary non-conformity in the Romantics and to a mythology that challenges the entrapments of social niceties in the pastoral as if to ask whether he will ever achieve such autonomy and simplicity in his own life. The outcome is not at all certain, especially when Durrant, looking up from his novel at Jacob who is now lying in the boat, notes that “Jacob’s off” (27). For all his shock and horror, then, Jacob has fallen asleep after gaining his freedom, only to be woken again with a groaning “Oh-h-h-h” when Durrant moors the boat outside “Lady Miller’s picnic party” and explains she is a friend of his mother’s (27). Jacob’s epiphanic moment seems to have passed him by for the time being, for the shock he

has felt and the sense of freedom he has momentarily revelled in after leaving the luncheon dissipate quickly as he moves from one performance at the Plumers' to the next at Lady Miller's picnic. Jacob agrees to go with Durrant, but shortly afterwards a "sort of awkwardness, grumpiness, gloom came into his eyes" as he asks "Shall we move on...this beastly crowd" (28). As shock and horror become awkwardness and gloom—two words that are often used to describe Jacob going forward—Jacob's complaisant acceptance of a life of conformity and banality seems more and more certain. Even the exclamation "Bloody beastly!" that expressed his horror over the luncheon has become a cowed question, its lack of enthusiasm demonstrating a diminishing spirit and its repetition a lack of introspection.

How the narrator situates herself in these chapel and luncheon fragments does not remain coherent but, instead, changes depending on what aspect of patriarchal ideology she is exploring and on Jacob's progress through the patriarchal machine of Cambridge. In the church service fragment, the narrator enhances the opposition between the men and the women at the service by positioning herself more clearly on the side of the women who are objectified and marginalized by Jacob. She begins the passage by gently questioning the exclusivity of Cambridge before making the women the object of reader sympathy as Jacob crassly questions their presence in the chapel. By choosing to treat Jacob's harsh views as a predetermined consequence of the institution and its ideology rather than as a personal fault, the narrator lets Jacob hoist himself with his own petard and allows the women to become victims of an institution whose very intellectual foundations oppress them. Rather than approaching the issue of patriarchal oppression head on, therefore, the narrator's voice is there to guide readers to recognize that Jacob's changing view of women and growing sense of insider privilege is indicative of institutions that shape minds to accept constitutive differences between different groups in

society. The Plumers' luncheon, on the other hand, represents a cross-roads Jacob has come to in the trajectory of his life, for it is an epiphanic moment between the freedom of youth and the conformity of adulthood. Since Jacob's epiphany establishes a clear opposition between the Plumers and himself, the narrator resists codifying this opposition in order to retain focus on participation and its role in legitimating institutions and their ideologies. She gives each position in the opposition context but does not sympathize strongly with either side, choosing instead to demonstrate that the threshold between young and old is not as definite or impermeable as Jacob makes it seem. Her focus on performativity once again guides readers to consider how the rebelliousness of youth often transforms into the conformity of middle age via complaisance and inattention to the ideologies people reify with their actions. The narrator accentuates performativity further by choosing a position in relation to Mrs. Plumer that is markedly different than that she chose to the women at the church service: the women at the church service are treated with sympathy, but Mrs. Plumer is challenged for her participation in a luncheon whose exclusivity aligns with that of the institutions described at the church service. Such inconsistencies in narrator positioning are not indicative of unreliability, however, as readers are shown very early on using free indirect discourse that perspective and situatedness will be important themes in *Jacob's Room* and that normal interpretive strategies concerning narration will be subverted or insufficient. These narrator inconsistencies, rather, demonstrate that the narrator's first priority is story telling. The consummate curator of Jacob's life, she chooses a subject position in each fragment that allows the fragment to tell the story she wants it to in her overall exhibit of the patriarchal machine. The narrator's fidelity is not to the material realism of the lives she narrates, but to the formal presentation of Jacob's life in a way that accurately represents how patriarchal institutions interpellate individuals as subjects.

Indeed, for the narrator, the academy is primarily an ideological state apparatus rather than a place to find enlightenment, a point she makes using three professors, Huxtable, Cowan, and Sopwith, who represent the epistemic limitations of Cambridge while also emphasizing its role in interpellating young men for the patriarchy. Referring back to her previous description of Cambridge as a beacon of light for outsiders and outcasts, the narrator insists that “If any light burns above Cambridge, it must be from three such rooms” as those occupied by Huxtable, Cowan, and Sopwith (29). Huxtable and Cowan are treated rather light-heartedly by the narrator and appear themselves to be victims of the institution they have come to represent. Huxtable, a man of great intellectual breadth and erudition, is machine-like in his thinking, which like “a procession tramps through the corridors of his brain, orderly, quick-stepping, and reinforced, as the march goes on, by fresh runnels, till the whole hall, dome, whatever one calls it, is populous with ideas” (30). An example of the reclusive academic trapped in his ivory tower, Huxtable is unique in his ability to process information, yet he feels “stranded” in a mind that examines the world while never actually leaving the comfortable confines of Cambridge (30). While Huxtable synthesizes vast amounts of information from variable sources, Cowan has mastered the art of storytelling until his brain has become “Virgil’s representative among us” (31). Unfortunately, all his stories are limited to his experiences at Cambridge and his only audience is “one rosy little man, whose memory held precisely the same span of time” (31), so while “language is wine upon his lips” (31), Cowan spins the insular yarns of Cambridge dons rather than the epic tales of Virgil that explore humanity in all its variation. For all the jocularity used to describe these two professors, however, their role in the academy is still concerning to the narrator because the mental asceticism of Huxtable and the mimesis of Cowan both help to legitimate the academy by reproducing its epistemes and stories. Huxtable’s mind is expansive yet limited because it draws

only on the work of other men who have constructed knowledge with the same ordered discipline and epistemic limitations. And, as for Cowan, he is the keeper of Cambridge's present history, the story-teller who helps construct the academy by incessantly reproducing the tales of its members. Both Huxtable and Cowan, therefore, bask in what the narrator calls the "lamp of learning" or the ideological light of Cambridge that they themselves have created, and she notes "how priestly they look!" in the self-legitimizing sheen of their institution (30). By any other light, the two would look much less impressive—Huxtable troubled by "corn twinges, or it may be the gout" (30), while Virgil would certainly ask "'This my image?' [...] pointing to the chubby man" were he to meet Cowan (31)—but in this ideological light that they and the other insiders have constructed, they can be revered and validated. Men like this, the narrator explains, are "the fabric through which the light [of Cambridge] must shine, if shine it can" (31). Here, light refers to the actual enlightenment that one can receive from studying the cultural and scientific achievements of past generations, but this is an enlightenment that one must struggle to find through the ideological filter of educational epistemes that exclude certain voices and prioritize certain forms of knowledge in order to ensure their own coherence.

It is Professor Sopwith, however, who causes the narrator the most amount of concern, for while Huxtable and Cowan have rather limited access to their students, Sopwith spends much time speaking with his students, extolling the virtues of the academy, and fashioning illusions meant to feed the young men for the rest of their lives. Sopwith is directly compared to a priest in this passage as the undergraduates who visit his room in groups "sometimes as many as twelve" come to him as if taking communion: "Sopwith went on talking. Talking, talking, talking—as if everything could be talked—the soul itself slipped through the lips in thin silver disks which dissolve in young men's minds [...]. Oh, far away they'd remember it, and deep in dulness gaze

back at it, and come to refresh themselves again” (30). Unlike the ascetic Huxtable and the insular Cowan, Sopwith is more Socratic in his communication with undergraduates, whom he guides gently toward a lifelong attachment to the academy by creating moments they may look back on fondly. The narrator imagines an undergraduate, Chucky Stenhouse, meeting Sopwith years after graduation only to recognize that Sopwith’s proselytizing “all seemed childish, absurd” (30), and that his taking the awkward phrases of young men and “plaiting them round his own smooth garland” until they showed “the vivid greens, the sharp thorns, manliness” amounted to little once Sopwith’s silver disks began to “tinkle hollow” with the passing of time and the living of life (31). Sopwith’s illusions are not enough to make Stenhouse break the traditions of the patriarchal machine, however, for “he would send his son there. He would save every penny to send his son there” (30). What makes Sopwith so much more threatening than his peers is the role he plays in mythologizing the exclusivity of being a Cambridge man, for he teaches the undergraduates that they are different, that this difference will be with them always, that this difference is connected to “manliness,” and that this difference is worth protecting and continuing into the future.

Thus, the narrator places herself in direct opposition to Sopwith when she proclaims that, while these undergraduates may continue to respect their old professor no matter how thin his illusions, “A woman, divining the priest, would, involuntarily, despise” (31). Where the narrator has been reluctant to take the side of women like Mrs. Norman and Mrs. Plumer in past fragments, she firmly positions herself as a woman in this passage, but in doing so, as Froula points out, she “embraces interpellation as ‘feminine’ only to turn it into a critical outsider’s perspective” (75)—here, of the academy as an ideological state apparatus. The most important thing she does as an outsider is merely refuse to respect Sopwith and his hollow silver coins: it is

the work of ideology to naturalize the performance of its rituals, to so thoroughly interpellate the subject that he or she acts without stopping to think what ideology these actions help realize, so the narrator simply intervenes in the smooth functioning of this process by refusing to respect Sopwith. Despite long questioning the value of Sopwith's "childish, absurd" nightly talks, it never occurs to Stenhouse that he should not send his son to these three priests of Cambridge, so the narrator's simple act of disobedience opens a space of potential change in a patriarchal machine that retains its shape by limiting what can be expressed legitimately within its confines. Formally, too, the sentence "A woman, divining the priest, would, involuntarily, despise" (31) mirrors the disruptive intent of the narrator. If Sopwith goes on talking, talking, talking with eloquence about manliness and the academy, the narrator uses a difficult-to-navigate sentence that slams and crashes its way toward meaning. It interrupts readers by making them linger on its meaning, but it also interrupts itself, finally getting to the verb, twice removed from the subject by subordinate words and phrases, by the final word of the sentence. The sentence powerfully interjects in Stenhouse's reverence for his priest Sopwith, but by inelegantly lurching towards its tendentious critique as if a little nervous to make this interjection, it never lets readers forget that it speaks from a marginalized subject position that is not meant to be heard amongst Sopwith's nightly perusals of manliness.

Against these three priests of Cambridge, the narrator juxtaposes the lives of the undergraduates they shape, and she connects the heritage of Cambridge with the future of Jacob and his friends to suggest that, while they appear to be merely one cohort of undergraduates in Cambridge's long tradition as an ideological state apparatus, their fates as part of England's Lost Generation gives their lives a significance beyond the continuation of the patriarchal hegemony in England. This group of men form a literal break in the reproductive cycle of the patriarchy,

their deaths creating a historical, cultural, and, in the case of *Jacob's Room*, textual rupture in which Woolf's narrator, and the text more generally, find the potential to consider what sent so many young men to their deaths. Standing outside Cambridge, the narrator watches the undergraduates return at night to their dormitories, when suddenly she sees Jacob through the window: "He looked satisfied; indeed masterly; which expression changed slightly as he stood there, the sound of the clock conveying to him (it may be) a sense of old buildings and time; and himself the inheritor; and then tomorrow; and friends; at the thought of whom, in sheer confidence and pleasure, it seemed, he yawned and stretched himself" (34). She without, he within, the cultural inheritance of each sex is revealed by the distance and pane of glass that separates the narrator outside from Jacob inside. More than this, however, the narrator's language seems to give Jacob's existence a permanence through both time and space: the buildings belong to him—and have belonged to men like him throughout history—so while the clock marks time's progression it also marks the stability of his cultural inheritance and the structures it has built to reinforce its power. Of course, the past and inheritance that lives on through these men will come to a crashing halt with the Great War, a fact the narrator reminds readers of earlier in this passage when she mentions "there is no need to think of them grown old" (32). These men will be the war dead, but the conflation of past, present, and future in this passage mark them as having died long before arriving in France. Cultural insiders interpellated by the patriarchal machine, their path toward destruction began long ago in institutions that taught them to establish constitutive differences and insist upon the thresholds that distinguish insiders from outsiders. Thus, the narrator-outsider—a woman excluded but also protected from the institutions of man by her gender—explains that the atrocities of the Great War do not exist in a cultural vacuum, that the industrialization of death is a natural consequence of competition

and the construction of difference. *Jacob's Room*, therefore, elegizes the lives of Jacob and his friends, for the narrator, while she sympathizes with the men's deaths, laments the lives of discipline and illusion that led them inevitably toward their deaths. The patriarchal establishment defined these lives and initiated its own historical and cultural rupture when it sent them to war, and the narrator points out that this rupture also creates a space of potential in which these lives and the institutions that shape them can be examined. Therefore, when Mrs. Flanders holds "out a pair of Jacob's old shoes" at the end of the novel and asks "What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?" (143), it is not only a powerful image of a mother grieving for her son but also a reminder that Jacob's shoes, like the shoes of so many men in his class, are left unfilled after the war. Jacob is initiated into Cambridge by a church service in which "great boots march under the gowns" of the young men who move with "certainty" and "authority controlled by piety" (23); a few years and a war later a pair of old shoes is all that remains of Jacob and who will step into patriarchy's great boots is left uncertain.

Revealing "there is no need to think of [these men] grown old" and, thereby, deciding Jacob's fate as part of England's Lost Generation so early in the novel also creates a textual rupture that shifts the focus from *what* Jacob will become to *why* Jacob fulfills his fate, and this shift helps exploit the space of potential the narrator notes by introducing a new set of narrative conventions. Because readers now know Jacob's fate, they find themselves in the realm of Greek Tragedy as well as in that of the *Bildungsroman*, and this introduction of a new genre brings with it new narrative conventions and interpretive strategies that help hold open the textual rupture the narrator has created. The *Bildungsroman* is a genre of change and personal autonomy, a genre in which actions matter because they lead inevitably to the as yet unknown future emergence of the protagonist. In Greek Tragedy, however, ends are known and fates are sealed from the

beginning, so the genre promotes an interpretive strategy that is fundamentally retrospective as opposed to predictive inasmuch as readers start from an end point and trace backwards the actions that bring about this end. One genre celebrates fate, the other autonomy, and by blending the two with the assertions that “there will be no form [for Jacob] in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself” (26) but that “there is no need to think of [these men] grown old” (32), the narrator insists Jacob has the ability to autonomously change his future but reveals that his actions will inevitably lead him to the fate decided for him by the institutions and ideologies these actions support and realize. In this textual rupture between the self-actualization of the *Bildungsroman* and the inevitable catastrophe of Greek Tragedy, the narrative conventions of both are conflated so that Jacob is in a constant state of becoming one of the war dead.

Accordingly, the interpretive strategies for *Jacob's Room* cannot look wholly forward to predict Jacob's emergence, nor can they look wholly backward to retroactively discern what random actions led him to his fate. Readers are inextricably caught in the present where ideologies are realized through participation, and they are forced to confront the fact that with every performance Jacob pushes himself closer and closer toward his own death. The industrialized death of the Great War, the narrator reminds readers, is not an anomaly but rather the logical consequence of a patriarchal hegemony that, day-in and day-out, pushes men to compete and institutionalizes difference. However, if the patriarchy requires participation to legitimate itself and retain coherence, then refusing to participate denies the system this legitimation.

Of course, as an inheritor of Cambridge, Jacob never refuses to participate in protecting this institution, and his life becomes a series of performances that reiterate the subject position he assumes as a graduate of Cambridge and “a young man of substance” (26) who must protect culture and defend civilization. When a professor from Leeds University publishes an edition of

Wycherley with the “indecent phrases” removed, for example, Jacob pens an essay denouncing the professor, and he proclaims to his friends that the edition was “a breach of faith; sheer prudery; token of a lewd mind and a disgusting nature” (54). Amongst Jacob and his friends, to substantiate these claims, “Aristophanes and Shakespeare were cited. Modern life was repudiated. Great play was made with the professorial title, and Leeds as a seat of learning was laughed to scorn” (54). Although the narrator points out that the young men are correct in their assessment of the professor’s prudishness and notes no middle-class magazines would publish the essay due to their own prudishness, Jacob’s argument, like his objection to women at the church service, is based on the constitutive ideological differences he constructs to establish the threshold between insiders and outsiders. This time the threshold is predicated on the relative cultural capital conferred by Cambridge and Leeds, and Jacob’s simple dichotomy shows that he is still prone to the oppositional thinking that is foundational to the way knowledge is constructed at Cambridge. Jacob’s mission to save culture is also what takes him to the British Museum, where he goes to “Stuff [Mr. Masefield and Mr. Bennett] into the flame of Marlowe and burn them to cinders” (85). Such things must be done, according to Jacob, in order to protect culture, and he believes that “The flesh and blood of the future depends entirely upon six men [Jacob and his friends]” because the “Victorians, who disembowel, or the living, who are mere publicists,” cannot be trusted to save culture (85). What precisely Jacob means by the Victorians disembowelling and the living publicizing is unclear, but this ultimately doesn’t much matter because his argument is merely intended to position the canonical works of literature he has studied at Cambridge in opposition to contemporary literature in order to suggest it poses an existential threat to high culture. Jacob’s argument, then, employs the discourse of “the battle of the brows” to establish cultural boundaries that legitimate him and his friends as young men of

substance who refuse to “palter with the second rate” (85). But what comes of all this fiery, youthful revolt against those destroying highbrow culture is sadly predictable: when Jacob receives letters that his essay will not be published by any magazines, he throws them into a “black wooden box” and sees the “lid shut upon the truth” (54), and the sum of his research into Marlowe amounts to naught but the chance to “read incredibly dull essays upon Marlowe to [his] friends” (85). Jacob participates in these performances merely to impress his friends and prove himself a man of Cambridge, so, far from making a form for himself in the world, he further codifies the hegemony of a patriarchal machine that has moulded and shaped him into an ideal subject of the patriarchy ready to defend its institutions and embody its ideologies.

Just how ideal a subject Jacob has become is tested when he goes to Greece on his Grand Tour of Europe a few years after he graduates from Cambridge, for it is there that he recognizes his education has done little more than create an illusion that obscures, instead of enlightens, his understanding of the world. His trip marks Jacob’s first time away from England on his own and includes a trip to Rome “after doing Greece” (108), but he quickly discovers that the real Greece is nothing like the Greece he has been told about since he was a child. Jacob goes into the streets of Patras expecting to discover people with the passion of Greek tragic characters and the cultural sophistication of the ancient thinkers he has studied, but he instead finds a common twentieth-century city with trams clanking and chiming, “advertisements of corsets and of Maggi’s consommé,” and busy city streets that “[smell] of bad cheese” (109). This reality confounds Jacob, who, like so many men of his class, has been raised to think of Greece and Rome as the unchanging seat of Western civilization. Greece draws the “superfluous imagination” from a young age, Jacob thinks, for “it is the governesses who start the Greek myth” (109), but then “you read Xenophon; then Euripides” until “One day—that was an

occasion, by God—what people have said appears to have sense in it; the Greek spirit; the Greek this, that, and the other; though it is absurd, by the way, to say that any Greek comes near Shakespeare. The point is, however, that we have been brought up in an illusion” (110). This is Jacob’s second epiphany about the patriarchal machine, as he, like Stenhouse, begins to recognize that people like Sopwith, Huxtable, and Cowan have constructed a false reality he has used to shape his life rather than leading him toward enlightenment. This epiphany about illusions, enlightenment, and education is similar to the ideas explored in Plato’s allegory of the cave, in which he suggests that education is an orientation process meant to help people by turning their minds toward the truth until they become “capable of bearing the sight of real being and reality at its most bright” (245). The “lamp of learning” at Cambridge ostensibly operates with this goal in mind but is, in reality, an ideological apparatus that trains students’ minds to see things in a particular way that reinforces its own legitimacy. Thus, when Jacob is confronted with the realities of Greek life in Patras, he cannot help but feel like “The whole of civilization [is] being condemned” (110). Remarkably, therefore, it is not the illusion that Jacob ends up condemning, even if he does acknowledge it as an illusion, but modernity itself, as he blames the existential gloominess he feels on the trams that “clanked, chimed, rang, rang, rang imperiously to get the donkeys out of the way, and one old woman who refused to budge” (110). Modernity crowds ever further into Jacob’s illusion and begins to puncture its coherence, but rather than reassess this illusion he defends it just as he has done in the past. His essay on Wycherley, his burning of Bennett and Masfield in the fire of Marlowe: both are merely precursors to his reaction at this moment of existential doubt during which he, the inheritor of Western civilization and culture, feels alienated from a modern world that has disrupted his idyllic illusions of civilization.

While the trams and chaotic streets of Patras literally represent the speed of modernity in this passage, modernity's effect on the psyche of Jacob's generation is symbolized in this passage by the *Daily Mail*, which he returns to again and again in this passage as he works his way through his existential gloominess. The newspaper is the only aspect of modernity that Jacob feels he has any control over in this passage, so he crumples the *Daily Mail* in a symbolic act of destruction. This only leads Jacob to the further realization that his gloom is caused as much by a slide toward conventionality as it is by modernity. Founded in 1896, the *Daily Mail*, whose motto was "The Busy Man's Daily Journal," was marketed toward the middle-class as a cheaper and more fast-paced alternative to the *London Times*, and it featured "in its eight sober-looking pages a compact and effective overview of the morning news alongside lighter fare, all mixed with copious advertisements" (Brake and Demoor, 157). Ideologically, the paper was not so forward-thinking: it did not print the "long parliamentary speeches familiar in other dailies" and it "largely avoided partisan politics but was nationalistic and supportive of the imperialist project, becoming known as the 'Voice of the Empire in London journalism'" (157). Jacob seems to be aware of the *Daily Mail's* bias toward nationalism: he begins thinking about the "British Empire which was beginning to puzzle him" and whether or not he is "altogether in favour of giving Home Rule to Ireland," and he briefly wonders what the paper has to say about these things before reminding himself that the "the *Daily Mail* isn't to be trusted" (111). Jacob is never precise about why the *Daily Mail* is not to be trusted, but he does suggest that it plays a part in the angst he feels as part of a modern generation that "[does] not believe enough" (110). This lack of belief is a "modern invention" according to Jacob, who thinks that "Our fathers at any rate had something to demolish. So have we for the matter of that, thought Jacob, crumpling the *Daily Mail* in his hand" (110). Jacob has reached the point in his life when he feels the need

to make his mark—as he puts it, “he had grown to be a man, and was about to be immersed in things” (111)—but he faces the conundrum of what he can demolish in order to make this mark in a world that lacks belief. According to Jacob, there is no one epistemological framework that underpins his generation full of people with divergent goals, interests, and desires, so he chooses to demolish the *Daily Mail*, with its fast-paced and easily digested stories, because he sees it as symbolic of the ephemerality and impermanence of the modern age. Of course, to demolish something is not enough to truly make one’s mark; one must also rebuild something to stand in its place. Here, too, Jacob is lost because on the other side of his gloominess stands “something solid, immovable, and grotesque” in the tedious “evening parties where one has to dress” and in the “wretched slums at the back of Gray’s Inn” (110-111), where Jacob now lives as a barrister’s assistant. Stuck between the solid conventionalism of middle-class educated life he first revolted against at the Plumers’ luncheon, but towards which he now feels himself slipping, and a fast-paced modernity in which belief in any grand narratives has seemingly vanished, Jacob feels alienated from both and cannot understand or dispel his existential gloom. So, finally, the cause of Jacob’s existential gloominess is revealed: for the first time in his life he feels like an outsider, unwilling to embrace the speed and ethereality of modernity yet unable to accept his conventional life as a lawyer.

It is to help cope with the angst that comes with these feelings of marginalization that Jacob attempts to reassert the illusions of Greece that remind him of his youth and his Cambridge days when he felt comfortable as the inheritor of Western civilization. Jacob begins visiting the ruins of ancient Greece hoping they will reignite his belief in civilization and the Greek spirit, but the crowds and guides, at least according to Jacob, prevent him from feeling anything. In reality, what hampers his tourism is the same thing that hampers Jacob’s experience of Greece as

a whole: he finds it “highly exasperating that twenty-five people of your acquaintance should be able to say straight off something very much to the point about being in Greece, while for yourself there is a stopper upon all emotions whatsoever” (109). Jacob likely overestimates his friends in this lament, but his exasperation reveals that Jacob comes to Greece, in part, because he hopes the visit will reify the Greek character he has spent so many years pontificating about with his Cambridge friends. Then, he was a young man of substance valued and validated by peers who were all invested in the same illusion; now, he discovers it is difficult to reinvigorate this illusion alone. At the Parthenon, Jacob can only muster the observation that “the Greeks, like sensible men, never bothered to finish the backs of their statues” (119), so he turns to his Baedeker’s guide book to learn that the slight irregularities in the Parthenon’s steps demonstrate “the artistic sense of the Greeks preferred to mathematical accuracy” (119), a fact that, while “accurate and diligent,” leaves Jacob “profoundly morose” because he still has not felt the Greek spirit as he hoped he would (119). In desperation, Jacob writes a telegram to Bonamy asking him to come to Greece, but he never sends it because he feels certain that “this sort of thing,” the gloominess that Jacob can only define as an “uneasy, painful feeling, something like selfishness” (120), will eventually wear off. Jacob’s desire to have one of his friends with him once again points out the communal aspect of the Greek illusion and suggests it is a lie meant less to deceive these men about the Greek spirit than to create a foundational myth for their class that can be used to legitimate their status as the inheritors of Western culture and civilization. Thus, Sopwith’s nightly meetings with his students are important not because they teach the young men anything about Greek culture, but because they create the conditions in which this myth about the Greek spirit can flourish: a closed room, in a building closed to all but the students and faculty of Cambridge, in an institution closed to most members of the English public. What is in

fact behind Jacob's gloominess, therefore, is the lack of a space in which the identity he has fashioned for himself during his time at Cambridge can remain coherent. At Cambridge the honeyed words of Sopwith and the camaraderie Jacob shared with friends as they validated one another with performances of substance kept any existential angst at bay, but without this closed, self-legitimizing system Jacob feels the full intensity of his thoroughly conventional life.

Britain declares war on Germany shortly after Jacob returns to London from Greece, and on the day of the declaration, two processions—one in Whitehall made up of war supporters and one near the Royal Opera House made up of people waiting in carriages to attend the Opera—represent Jacob's political future and cultural past. On August 4, 1914, the Whitehall area of London, which contains most of the English government's administrative buildings, becomes a noisy, united throng of people in a parade through the streets calling for war with Germany. Narratively, this passage demonstrates the relationship between base and superstructure by moving from the ground up, for the call to war begins in the streets. In a "procession with banners," the people march down Whitehall "behind the gold letters of their creed" (138); passing Trafalgar square, "Nelson received the salute" of the crowd while the "wires of the Admiralty shivered with some far-away communication" (139); on a loudspeaker a "voice kept remarking that Prime Ministers and Viceroys spoke in the Reichstag" (139); clerks in government offices "listened, deciphered, wrote down" what the voice revealed (139); newspapers "accumulated, inscribed with the utterances of Kaisers, the statistics of rice-fields, the growling of hundreds of workpeople, plotting sedition in back streets, or gathering in the Calcutta bazaars" (139); and, finally, in a room in Whitehall "sixteen gentlemen, lifting their pens or turning perhaps rather wearily in their chairs, decreed that the course of history should shape itself in this way or that way, being manfully determined, as their faces showed, to impose

some coherency upon Rajahs and Kaisers and the muttering in bazaars” (139-40). The speed and efficiency of British imperialism becomes apparent in this short fragment that moves quickly from the people, to the administrative buildings and media that act as ideological state apparatuses, to the government members ultimately responsible for declaring war. Thusly the narrator never lets readers forget that this ideological machine functions neither entirely top-down nor entirely bottom-up, but reciprocally. It is the people’s willing participation in the performances of nationalism that materially realize the imperialist project that is decided upon in the offices above. Indeed, the narrator wonders if the sixteen men in the office envy the “immortal quiescence” of the busts of Pitt, Chatham, Burke, and Gladstone in the government halls, “the air being full of whistling and concussions, as the procession with its banners passed down Whitehall” (140). The men in bust have finished their service steering the course of history, but the sixteen in the office above must make their decisions amongst the din and chaos in the street as thousands of Londoners come together in a frightful unity that transforms the Whitehall area into a vast legitimating system in which overt performances of nationalism propagate war and normalize imperialism.

Jacob, in Hyde Park talking with Bonamy about his recent visit to Greece, does not attend the Whitehall parade. His discussion with Bonamy ends abruptly, however, when Jacob blushes to reveal he has fallen in love with a woman and Bonamy storms off, after which “Jacob rose from his chair in Hyde Park, tore his [chair rental] ticket to pieces, and walked away” (140). These are the last actions Jacob takes in the novel: he never speaks again in the novel and his movements are only described. Having recently been disillusioned in Greece and now seemingly abandoned by Bonamy, the person he most wanted with him in Greece to help him through his existential gloom, Jacob is cast out into a London currently under the hysteria of nationalism and

imperialism, and as he leaves Hyde Park is hailed by the loudspeaker: “‘The Kaiser,’ the far away voice remarked in Whitehall, ‘received me in audience’” (141). Jacob does not answer this hail immediately—war would not be declared officially until eleven o’clock on the night of August 4th, 1914—but he eventually does join the army, entering himself into yet another ideological state apparatus that promises his life meaning.

Walking east to Piccadilly near to the north entrance of Whitehall, Jacob is seen by Reverend Floyd, who, remembering that he gave Jacob the works of Byron, stops briefly but misses the opportunity to call to Jacob as they pass one another. Requesting Byron from Mr Floyd was Jacob’s first performative act as a fledgling entering the patriarchal machine, and this missed meeting serves as a fitting bookend for Jacob’s final journey in the novel, as Floyd describes Jacob as “so tall; so unconscious; such a fine young fellow” (141). Because this meeting takes place at sunset, several hours before war was declared that day, Floyd’s description of Jacob as “so unconscious” does not indicate that Jacob is walking with single-minded purpose toward an enlistment centre so much as it indicates that Jacob is walking absentmindedly after his recent existential crisis in Greece and fight with Bonamy. Continuing east and slightly north along Long Acre, Jacob enters the Covent Garden area of London and is spotted by Clara Durrant, who is waiting with her mother in “Another procession, without banners,” that contains “dowagers in amethyst and gentlemen spotted with carnations” and blocks the path of “jaded men in white waistcoats [...] on their way home to shrubberies and billiard-rooms in Putney and Wimbledon” (141). Jacob’s journey through London, therefore, takes him between the Whitehall hails of a political future that is uncertain but compels him since, in his own words, “he had grown to be a man [...] about to be immersed in things” (111), and the cultural past he inherited at Cambridge that has now been intersected by the conventions

of middle-class life lived in South London suburbs. While his path through London takes him away from the hails of nationalism and empire, the procession he sees in Covent Garden reminds him that his current trajectory leads toward the “bloody beastly” existence of people like the Plumers. The hail from Whitehall may be noisy and chaotic but the unity of its many voices offers camaraderie, and in this camaraderie, fortified by performances of national pride and sacrifice for one’s country, Jacob can find renewed meaning in a life that he is beginning to feel has slipped from his grasp.

It is from Mrs. Flanders, woken in the middle of the night by the sound of artillery in France, that we learn all three of her sons are off “fighting for their country” (143), and while it is not ever made clear whether Jacob enlists in the army or is conscripted, his growing concern with politics and sudden disillusionment with his life, as well as the disorganized state of his room, suggests that he has left hurriedly and likely enlisted shortly after war was declared. Indeed, Bonamy marvels that ““He left everything just as it was [...] Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn about for any one to read. What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?”” (143). To the rational literalist Bonamy, who knows nothing of Jacob’s existential crisis in Greece, the state of Jacob’s room indicates ill-founded idealism, but given the recent events in his life it more likely indicates that Jacob sees the war as an escape from a life of convention he never wanted and does not know how to change more productively. In addition, the ubiquitous calls to enlist and fight for one’s country following the declaration of war promise a renewed sense of purpose in a world from which Jacob feels increasingly marginalized.

Jacob, now interested in the political affairs of Britain and Europe, enlists hoping to find a renewed sense of purpose as he immerses himself into politics, but a passage that describes young men dying in war indicates that Jacob is merely entering another state apparatus that will

use him, and the millions like him, to embody their ideologies of nationalism and imperialism. The language used to describe the soldiers is remarkably similar to that used to describe the young men at Cambridge who perform the rituals of the Church with “sculptured faces” and movements guided by “certainty” and “authority controlled by piety” (23). On the field of battle, the soldiers on a destroyed ship “descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together” (125). Both choir boys and soldiers, statue-like in their discipline and regimental in their actions, have moulded their bodies into conduits for their respective ideologies. This embodiment lends their lives meaning by connecting them to the institutions and traditions they serve, but it also hollows them out as individuals because their value within the ideology is dependent entirely on their ability to faithfully perform its rituals. While the men are active participants in the military’s wars of nationalism and imperialism, therefore, their participation in these ideologies, with their notions of national sacrifice and dying with valour, make them impassive to the point of death. The soldiers on the land, “Like blocks of tin soldiers” (125), act with equal machine-like precision, all dying when and where they are told save the few that “still agitate up and down like fragments of broken matchstick” and can be seen “through field-glasses” by on-looking commanders (125). This change in perspective from the soldiers dying to the commanders watching marks the young men as mere objects in a game played by their commanders and England’s political class. Handley suggests that this objectification commodifies the young men ideologically so that they do little more than “serve as an exchange value for the status quo” (120), and that “the men in [political] cabinets have disembodied the human subject” (122). That the soldiers’ deaths are orchestrated by men that deem these deaths a reasonable price to pay for British nationalism and imperialism certainly makes the soldiers an

ideological commodity, but the clockwork precision with which the soldiers die also mark them as embodied participants in this orchestra. These men are not “the lost” or “the fallen”—those perverse euphemisms Paul Fussell points out were used during the Great War to justify the sacrifices of those who died (22)—but, Woolf’s narrator insists, willing participants in England’s nationalist imperialism. Yes, their deaths are part of an ideological transaction, but it is their lives that she begs us to look at. *Jacob’s Room* is an elegy for these soldiers’ unnatural decision to mechanically step toward death rather than an eulogy for the victims of the political class. This much is made clear when the narrator explains “These actions [of the soldiers], together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancelleries, and houses of business, are the strokes that oar the world forward, [men] say” (125). These large institutions may be steered by cabinet ministers, managers, and chief executive officers, but the strokes are made by “men as smoothly sculpted as the impassive policemen at Ludgate Circus” whose “face is stiff from force of will” and whose discipline ensures “not an ounce [of this force] is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions” (125). Far from being disembodied, this policeman is the very embodiment of the British empire, directing the traffic of London as England directs the traffic of the world through the sheer force of will and discipline of its men. Men like this policeman, like the soldiers, like the choir boys, like Sopwith, like Jacob are the products of England’s patriarchal machine, and for this the narrator has some sympathy, but she never lets us forget that their participation is integral to the machine’s success.

CHAPTER FOUR

“The greatest of Mankind”: Septimus Smith as Post-war Scapegoat in *Mrs Dalloway*

When Virginia Woolf wrote *Mrs Dalloway*, postwar English society was still learning how to go on living in the face of the industrialized death and barbarity of modern military conflict—products of the patriarchal machine that she analyzes through its effects on Jacob Flanders and his materialisation of its exclusionary ideology. For many this meant eulogizing and memorializing the war dead who had given their lives in service of their country, but Woolf uses her novel to explore further the social system that had led to the catastrophes of total war to begin with and that had been profoundly destabilized in its wake. In her diary entry on 19 June 1923, Woolf concisely expressed the overarching themes of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): “In the book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity; I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense” (*Diaries* 2, 248). The plot that acts as the vehicle for these themes could not be more simple, for the novel follows the lives of two people for a single day in London: Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for a dinner party and Septimus Smith as he struggles with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and ultimately commits suicide. Thus, Clarissa represents sanity and life while Septimus represents insanity and death, but the difficulty in *Mrs Dalloway* is the relationship between these themes. Generally considered as opposites connected with “or,” life/death and sanity/insanity are brought together by Woolf through the lives of Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith, who never meet and are of different genders and classes, but whose stories intersect to reveal how the lives of individuals are intertwined with social institutions.

The novel, therefore, is neither wholly Clarissa’s nor Septimus’s story, but combines the two lives to create a palimpsest that marks their textual and thematic interrelatedness in a social

system that moulds and shapes people's lives not just leading up to war but also as it stabilizes itself after the war. This social system functions most intensely in the relationship between Septimus and his doctors, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, the first of whom prescribes bodily discipline that prioritizes masculinity to alleviate Septimus's PTSD, while the second, Bradshaw, is more concerned with using Septimus to extend his discursive authority in postwar England than with helping cure his patient. Septimus's war trauma is in fact used by Holmes and Bradshaw to establish the norms that constituted the common man in interwar England, for against what they designate as the veteran's abnormal mental and physical state, they propose as treatment a reprioritization of his body to fit his new role as a husband and worker. It is Septimus's status as a common reader, however, that Woolf uses to critique the social and cultural institutions in which he is caught, and to emphasize, especially through his reading of Shakespeare, his position outside the educational and institutional power represented by Bradshaw in particular. The effects of Bradshaw's discursive authority are revealed to Clarissa in an epiphany during her dinner party when Bradshaw talks of Septimus's suicide. Clarissa sees Septimus's suicide as an act of "defiance" that allows him to retain "a thing" that has been "defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter" (156). Her frustratingly vague noun—"thing"—seemingly defers meaning at what should be the climax of the novel because precisely what "thing" Septimus has retained and she has let slip is made simultaneously immaterial and overwhelmingly important to *Mrs Dalloway*. As Simpson suggests, here as in so many of her other works, Woolf "considers that, although we are individuals and have a sense of our identity as separate from others, we are also in many ways part of one another" (*A Guide* 89). While the complicated negotiation between private selves and public selves is highlighted in the novel, the social system that shapes, orders, and inhibits this

negotiation is the entity on trial. In wanting to talk about life *and* death, sanity *and* insanity, Woolf draws attention to the connective tissue that shapes the ways these terms are conceptualized and applied in her society, and by refusing them the discursive oppositions in which they so often find conceptual refuge, Woolf asks her readers to consider the roles such terms and concepts play in the interrelated lives of her characters. One is asked not to consider only the life of Clarissa or the death of Septimus, or only Clarissa's sanity and Septimus's insanity, but to consider what each has to do with the other and with the rest of their society. What ultimately matters most in *Mrs Dalloway* is, therefore, not the content of Clarissa's epiphany but *how* she comes to her epiphany: that is, the social circumstances that make the epiphany possible, and the inequality of the power structure that makes the epiphany necessary.

Septimus's mad body becomes an important discursive battleground in England's postwar struggles to deal with a war that had significantly destabilized the governmental and patriarchal establishment's power when his doctors attempt to cure Septimus using different approaches. Dr Holmes wants to render Septimus's war experience illegible by reprioritizing his body for capitalist employment now it is no longer needed for military deployment. Dr Bradshaw wants to render it as all-too legible in order to make Septimus the centrepiece for a new government bill that will expand Bradshaw's powers as an establishment functionary in charge of hiding mental illness, especially shellshock, away in asylums from the public. Bradshaw plans to use Septimus as the scapegoat for a society trying desperately not to confront the realities of the war and return to normal, a fate Septimus seems to recognize while he sits on a park bench, his wife Rezia trying to make Septimus notice the world around him:

Look, the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord

who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness. (22)

Septimus's position as a social outsider, the first and most obvious characteristic of scapegoats, is revealed when he refers to Rezia as the unseen and, thereby, implies that he is "seen" as noticeably abnormal due to the physical manifestations (shaking, speaking to himself) of his mental illness. But his repeated insistence that as a scapegoat he renews society is more difficult to parse. As René Girard has pointed out, inasmuch as the scapegoat functions as that which is blamed for some negative circumstance that has befallen a community, it simultaneously reveals the power relationships that govern the social system and revitalizes the social system by continually providing the outsider needed to define its boundaries. Thus, Girard writes, the "transgressor restores and even establishes the order he has somehow transgressed in anticipation. The greatest of all delinquents is transformed into a pillar of society" (42). Put differently, scapegoats are chosen not because they have transgressed some socially-defined boundary of behaviour, but because they can serve as that which establishes the boundary in the first place. In a very real sense, then, scapegoats mark the thresholds of acceptance within social systems, but, more importantly, they ensure these social systems remain coherent by continually "offering" themselves as examples of that which is considered abnormal within a given community or society. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus is the scapegoat who marks the threshold of Bradshaw's Proportion, a notion of sanity that is based on a set of normalized bodily actions associated with what it means to be English, precisely because Bradshaw excepts him from society. Socially excluded from the social system by Bradshaw, Septimus is still very much included in the system

because his mad, abnormal body serves as a constant reminder how others must act in order to be considered sane and remain comfortably inside the social system. Septimus, therefore, exists at the nexus of a biopolitical discursive structure focused on the organization of bodies that reinforce the ideological goals of the nation.

When discussing Septimus, critics generally focus on his mind and the psychological trauma he suffered for one of two reasons, the first of which is to question his reliability as a narrator. Grandiosity is a common feature of Septimus's character and critics have tried to coherently connect his feeling of self-importance to the novel's content, but I argue that the nature of his illness is less important than what it reveals about the operation of the larger social system he finds himself stuck within. At various times Septimus is "the most exalted of mankind" and "the Lord who had gone from life to death" (82), and believes that "he, Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilization—Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself—was to be given whole to... 'To whom?' he asked aloud, 'To the Prime Minister,' [...] to the Cabinet" (57). Sir William Bradshaw, who notes that the belief one is Christ or Christ-like is "a common delusion" amongst the mad (84), dismisses such comments as mere symptoms of the mental trauma Septimus suffered during the war. Bradshaw's dismissal makes sense in a purely psychological sense because there is no doubt that Septimus is mad; what's at stake in Septimus's life, however, isn't whether readers can trust Septimus to accurately convey reality—given that he has visual and auditory hallucinations of his friend Evans, he clearly cannot—but the role that Septimus plays as a character within the constructed world of the novel. Interpretations based on the content of Septimus's madness tend to reinforce Bradshaw's psychological view of Septimus to argue that, "unable to conform to society's expectations

regarding gender and class, he [withdraws] into a world of megalomania and terror” (Henke 166), or that Septimus, rather than having a message, has become alienated due to the trauma he suffered and, ultimately, succumbs to the feeling that he belongs “more to the dead than to the living” (Herman 52). Such responses to Septimus’s madness tend to remove him from the text and shift focus from the troubling social system and power relations that *Mrs Dalloway* exposes using Septimus.

Other interpretations do acknowledge that the content of Septimus’s madness may indeed have some message to reveal to his society, but in trying to expose this message they often end up trying to piece together a fragmented consciousness that Woolf fractures beyond repair. These interpretations suggest that Septimus’s mind is capable of explaining something only madness can; thus Christine Froula argues that Septimus “tries to attest to the collective murder his civilization has commissioned from him, to offer a ‘truth’ on which to rebuild civilization more lastingly” (113), while Karen DeMeester suggests that Septimus’s trauma revealed to him a truth about society, but “left it fragmented, a stream of incongruous and disconnected images and bits of memory” (80). I agree that Septimus has a valuable message to convey, but I’m reluctant to try to understand his trauma, as Froula and DeMeester do, by attempting to piece his disrupted consciousness back together. In part, this reluctance comes because Woolf is careful not to tell the reader too much about Septimus’s primal scene of trauma. The closest readers ever come to hearing of Evans’s death is when a third-person narrator tells them that “when Evans was killed [...] Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (73). And from Septimus himself readers hear only fragments of Evans when he mistakes Peter Walsh for Evans in the park (59) and when he believes he hears or sees Evans at various moments in the novel

(for example, he hears Evans speak from behind a screen [79], and hears a mouse squeak and believes it to be Evans [123]). Such delusions are common when victims suffer from “traumatic memories” that remain unassimilated into normal or “narrative memory” according to Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, who advocate the victim’s need to assimilate trauma and appropriate it by transforming it into a narrative (163). Septimus, however, is never allowed to assimilate his traumatic memory, as his doctors, his inability to communicate, and then his death interrupt the process. In the search for meaning in Septimus’s madness, therefore, we should not attempt to exorcise Septimus’s traumatic demons—demons Woolf consciously leaves unknowable and locked away in Septimus’s consciousness—in order to make his story coherent by narrativizing his trauma for him. Instead, we should shift the critical focus to the more tangible aspects of Septimus’s madness such as the *bodily* treatments his doctors prescribe, for doing so emphasizes the incomprehensibility of Septimus’s symptoms and their resistance to the kind of narratives, linguistic structures, and medical discourses that represent the political system that caused the trauma in the first place and now hopes to use him as a scapegoat.

The authority wielded by the medical establishment is represented by two figures who possess different degrees of cultural capital in the novel, and the first, Dr. Holmes, is treated as an object of ridicule in *Mrs. Dalloway* because he adheres to a limited understanding of PTSD and one that reflects a common understanding of shellshock in the 1920s. Holmes “works as hard as any man in London,” sees many patients in a day, and has “forty years’ experience behind him” (78), yet his traditional perspective of mental illness leads him to drastically misdiagnose Septimus’s problem from the outset. Holmes insists there is “nothing whatever the matter” with Septimus (77), and his only suggestion for treatment is that Septimus “Throw [himself] into outside interests; take up some hobby,” a strategy that helps Holmes “switch off from his patients”

(78), and try not to think about himself. After all, in Holmes' opinion, "health is largely a matter in our own control" (78), so all Septimus need do to cure himself is discipline himself to think about other things than the trauma he suffered during the war. Holmes pushes Septimus's hobby—reading Shakespeare and Dante—aside and tells him to "do something" (78), an act that reveals both the corporeal nature of Holmes' treatment and how little he concerns himself with Septimus's mind. Such attempts to treat psychological illness through the retraining of the patient's body are what Michel Foucault, in *History of Madness*, refers to as "kind" psychiatry, which attempts to replace patient's mad bodily actions with reasonable actions in order to reintegrate them back into society. "Kind" psychiatry is ultimately repressive, Foucault argues, because it not only reconstructs the mad body to ensure it performs reasonably but also teaches the mad how to regulate their actions as if under the constant supervision of reason (xxviii). Holmes's stolid lack of comprehension—asking Septimus "'Talking nonsense to frighten your wife?'" and giving him something to sleep after a serious delusion (79)—is emphasized by Woolf through the Smiths themselves, who distrust Holmes's opinion and his own sense of socially contextualized authority: "if they were rich people, said Dr Holmes, looking ironically round the room, by all means let them go to Harley Street; if they had no confidence in him, said Dr Holmes, looking not so kind" (80). While this narrated scene takes place in the present, it occurs outside the depicted action of the novel—"off stage" as it were—and the narrator reveals only Holmes's third of the discussion. Limiting the involvement of Septimus and Rezia in the passage marginalizes them textually as well as socially, and thus signals the central role of Holmes and of the role Holmes's ego plays in his medical decisions. It is his pride that takes precedence over Septimus's mental health, which appears in the scene only as a tool for Holmes's self-aggrandizement. Holmes's narcissism and passive aggression in this scene are

comedic, but they also reveal that his psychiatric decisions are tinged with class biases and feelings of inadequacy that make competition with Bradshaw the primary concern in his diagnosis. The underlying seriousness of a medical authority predicated upon social position rather than patient welfare comes to the fore when Holmes shames Septimus for not behaving as a good Englishman should: “Didn’t [talking of suicide] give [Rezia] a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn’t one owe perhaps a duty to one’s wife? Wouldn’t it be better to do something instead of lying in bed?” (78). Questions in form only, Holmes’s suggestions are thinly veiled attacks on Septimus’s masculinity and are intended to imply that shell-shock is more a failure of masculine character than a mental disorder that requires serious psychiatric care and attention.

Holmes’s focus on Septimus’s body and masculinity rather than his psychological problems demonstrates the complexity of Septimus’s position within the military system and its view of mental illness. Shell-shock was a significant problem in England during World War I: “Between April 1915 and April 1916, 1,300 officers and 10,000 men from the other ranks had been admitted to special hospitals in Britain” (Reid 13). These special hospitals were not technically the same thing as asylums where other lunatics and pauper lunatics were housed, but were, instead, psychiatric hospitals specifically designated for victims of shell-shock. Such special hospitals were part of an effort spearheaded by military authorities and supported by soldier advocacy groups “to make a definite distinction between shell-shocked soldiers and lunatics,” a distinction, Fiona Reid argues, “clearly designed to preserve the dignity of male combatants and to ensure that shell shock did not undermine male authority” (21-2). Removing shell-shocked soldiers from regular asylums had the added bonus of preventing any comparison between England’s true lunatics and its traumatized soldiers, no doubt a boon to a war department trying as hard to win the propaganda war at home as the military conflict in France.

Just how effectively shell-shock was distinguished from lunacy as a result of these special hospitals is difficult to say. While there was certainly support for shell-shocked veterans in the forms of donations and newspaper coverage, many soldiers felt socially stigmatized as a result of common reactions to shell-shock. One soldier, for example, upon being admitted to a special hospital recorded hearing a young woman say “Let’s get off home. [...] There’s only some of the barmy ones here” (qtd. in Reid 23).

Shell-shock was also connected to class since what type of treatment facility a soldier was sent to and even what the disease was called depended a great deal on both social and military class, meaning that mental illness and its treatment became a way of reiterating existing social hierarchies. Predictably, commissioned officers—members of the higher social ranks—were taken to country estates that had been converted into special hospitals and given their own private room; non-commissioned officers, too, got their own rooms, but were typically not sent to country estates. In contrast, combatants of lower military rank “could be dispatched to filthy asylum-like conditions” that “may have been staffed by excellent and committed physicians, but the food was scarce, wards were dirty and the temporary huts that accommodated many men were ‘a disgrace’” (Reid 33). The language used in the diagnosis of shell-shock also differed, frequently according to social class. While the term neurasthenia was first used universally to describe shell-shock, it was quickly appropriated to define the affliction of upper-class combatants in opposition to lower-class hysterical shell-shock victims. Hysterical shell-shock, because it was associated with the lower classes, became associated with a lack of education and, more damagingly, with malingering or shirking one’s military and national duty as well as cowardice and idleness. Neurasthenia, on the other hand, became associated with “real” mental

illness and the anxiety of performing one's duty under duress: of feeling one's responsibility all too powerfully (Reid 17-8).

Given that cowardice, malingering, and anxiety were associated with a lack of masculinity, treatment was less focused on the mental trauma soldiers suffered than on the rehabilitation of proper performances of gender focused on exercises that promoted socio-economic success. In Britain, but also in Germany, this meant rehabilitation through activity and work. "If shell-shock victims had failed as men," writes Reid, "it was important not to mother them as boys, but rather to find some way of enabling them to demonstrate their adulthood and their manliness. So by completing honourable masculine work, shell-shocked men were recovering the masculinity that they may have lost when they initially became mentally ill" (154). This so-called active treatment was not just good for reinstalling masculinity, however; it also became closely associated with contemporary views of industry and the economy. In Germany, treatment of shell-shock victims became closely tied with "rationalization," a theory of industrialization that stressed efficiency and organization, and the "goal of active treatment, as categorically spelled out by military-medical protocols, was to transform idle patients into productive workers" (Lerner 126). These protocols weren't distinct from issues of morality either: idleness was considered "toxic" to proper masculine behaviour, and it was thought that such reintegration into the workforce would prevent men from thinking about themselves excessively and turn their attention to the nation as a collective (Lerner 127). In England, too, active treatment became a guard against "immorality" in general and, more specifically, against the immorality of malingering.

Given the physical bent of this discourse, is it perhaps not surprising that as the war came to an end, public sympathy for shell-shock victims became less certain as many people in Britain

were unable to understand why ex-servicemen still suffered from its effects. Subsequently, charges of malingering increased rapidly, some papers began running articles that cast shell-shock victims “as morally unsound, or even dangerous” (Reid 107), and one medical professional even suggested “strong links between shell shock and crime, alcohol and syphilis, and concluded that the majority of service patients would have become patients in mental hospitals whether there had been a war or not” (Reid 108). The recommended treatment for shell-shock, however, had not changed by the mid-1920s: the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into “Shell-shock,”* published in 1923, acknowledged that the rest cure may be necessary for shell-shocked veterans, but, noting the inherent conflict between self-preservation and duty in soldiers, recommended that “self-respect, duty, discipline, patriotism, and so forth” should be emphasized in treatment (qtd. in Thomas 55). Thus, the treatment of shell-shock closely aligned with the discourse that came to define it as a disease not of the mind but of the body, where lower-class “cowards” and “malingerers” saw their mad bodies first stigmatized then optimized through medical treatment to once again fulfill the requirements of a nation now in need of labourers who work rather than soldiers who kill.

Bodily discipline permeates Septimus’s relationship with both his doctors and his madness, and he frequently worries about what his actions signify while ever people can see him. Not only does Septimus imply he is “seen” while sitting in the park with Rezia, he also believes himself to be the centre of attention earlier in the novel when a car’s tire bursts in Bond Street and draws the attention of shoppers and passers-by. A moment of unity, like the “leaden circles” of Big Ben’s bell that “[dissolve] in the air” and unite the many lives of London as they chime with regularity throughout the novel (see 4, 41, 80, 158), the sound caused by the tire draws the attention of the people on Bond Street, but Septimus perceives this moment differently:

Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? (13)

Septimus's response seems to be yet another delusion of grandeur—a view that is ostensibly supported when it becomes clear that the people look at the car because the onlookers believe it is occupied by some royal figure or the prime minister (14)—but, in fact, Woolf describes the physical manifestations of Septimus's PTSD that cause him so frequently to believe he is the centre of attention in the first place. His mention of flames metonymically refers to the death of his friend Evans in an explosion, the primal scene of Septimus's trauma, and it also refers to the feeling of heat that one experiences when embarrassed or ashamed and to the heat of tears welling up in one's eyes as they begin to cry. The world waving and quivering in front of him, therefore, is as much a physical description of trying to view the world through teary eyes as it is a psychological description of a fragmented perception of reality, and the horror that comes to the surface is as much an unwanted physical response that he fears will draw gazes from the public as it is a description of his own personal mental trauma. While Septimus suffers from a mental illness that is triggered when the tire is punctured, he can only think of himself at this moment as a publicly observable object and so imagines that his reaction is meant to be seen, is meant to convey something to the people around him. Far from indicating an exaggerated sense

of purpose, however, Septimus's reaction to the physical manifestations of his mental illness indicates an existential dilemma, for, rather than being able to derive meaning from his own feelings and subjective existence, he derives meaning from his position as an object in a performance he feels unable to control.

Rezia's actions after the tire bursts also indicate that Septimus is in some kind of physical distress that she fears others may notice, for when she finally gets his attention, the narrator indicates that Septimus "jumped, started, and said, 'All right!' angrily, as if she had interrupted him" (13). While it is possible that all she interrupted him from was contemplation, the fact that she immediately wishes to get him away from the crowd suggests otherwise: "People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people [...] which she admired in a way; but they were 'people' now, because Septimus had said, 'I will kill myself'; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him?" (13). Already an immigrant trying to acclimatize herself to her new country, Rezia's troubles are compounded by Septimus's actions and force her also to constantly monitor her position as an object of others' gazes. The difference is that she is able to remove herself enough from the performance to seek shelter in Regent's Park while Septimus's physical reaction to the events mire him in place. That Rezia's decision to remove Septimus to Regent's Park is prudent seems to be confirmed later on by Maisie Johnson, who stops to ask Rezia and Septimus the way to the tube station. Johnson is given "quite a turn" by Rezia and Septimus, for the former "start[s] and jerk[s] her hands" when Johnson asks for directions while the latter seems very "queer," a word Johnson repeats a number of times (22). Whether or not Johnson would have noted Septimus's queerness without Rezia's reaction to her simple question is unclear, but the couple makes enough of an impression on her "that should she be very old she would still remember and make [the encounter] jangle

among her memories” (22). At the very least, therefore, Septimus’s actions, aided perhaps by Rezia who feels objectified by her husband’s actions and tries to take responsibility for them, are queer enough to remove Johnson from what Woolf, in *Moments of Being* (1972), calls the “nondescript cotton wool” in which so much of one’s life is lived, and he provides a “moment of being” she will remember for the rest of her life (70). Septimus, of course, is not meaningful only because his mad body allows others to experience moments of being or revelations, but Johnson’s response does suggest that the physical manifestations of Septimus’s mental trauma are severe enough to warrant his concern about hegemonic definitions of madness and his fear of appearing mad in public.

Sir William Bradshaw, who is more medically astute and authoritative than Holmes but who is still subject to similar class biases and feelings of inadequacy as his counterpart, represents the hegemonic power of the government establishment when it comes to treating shell shock in soldiers. Unlike Holmes, who sees many patients each day, Bradshaw gives “three-quarters of an hour” to all his patients and answers Rezia’s questions calmly after meeting with Septimus (84). Of general practitioners like Holmes, Bradshaw must take “half his time to undo their blunders” (81), and it is with little effort that he more correctly diagnoses Septimus’s shell-shock: “he was certain directly he saw the man; it was a case of extreme gravity. It was a case of complete breakdown—complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage, he ascertained in two or three minutes” (81). The treatments prescribed by each doctor differ, too. Instead of the activity that Holmes recommends, Bradshaw suggests “rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed” at a psychiatric facility (82). It is only when Bradshaw suggests this treatment plan to Septimus that the narrator reveals the doctor suffers from the same feelings of inadequacy and class biases as Holmes:

“We have been arranging that you should go into a home,” said Sir William.

“One of Holmes’s homes?” sneered Septimus.

The fellow made a distasteful impression. For there was in Sir William, whose father had been a tradesman, a natural respect for breeding and clothing, which shabbiness nettled; again, more profoundly, there was in Sir William, who had never had time for reading, a grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people who came into his room and intimated that doctors, whose profession is a constant strain upon all the higher faculties, are not educated men.

“One of *my* homes, Mr Warren Smith,” he said, “where we will teach you to rest.” (83)

Again Septimus’s healthcare is secondary to the ego of his doctor, who perceives the words of the man he has just diagnosed as “very seriously ill” (82) as a personal slight meant to question his ability as a doctor as well as his class. Furthermore, while a significant portion of Bradshaw’s diagnosis concerns Septimus’s language because his tendency of “attaching meanings to words of a symbolic kind” presents a “serious symptom to be noted on the card” (81), it is Bradshaw who attaches symbolic meaning to words in this passage: in “Holmes’s homes” and a sneer, Bradshaw hears a comparison to Holmes, whom he considers an inept general practitioner, and thus a challenge to his intelligence and an attack on his socioeconomic background. In this passage, therefore, Bradshaw fails according to his own standards that suggest “if in this exacting science [psychiatric diagnosis] which has nothing to do with what, after all, we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain—a doctor loses his sense of proportion, as a doctor he fails” (84). This passage not only notes the hypocrisy in Bradshaw’s diagnosis—the

subjective nature of psychiatric evaluation and the way personal biases can affect the process are well known—but also points out Bradshaw’s flaw in thinking about psychiatry as an “exacting science,” a view that limits his ability to treat patients effectively. The rigid structure that informs Bradshaw’s understanding inevitably diminishes the human complexity of mental health disorders such as PTSD that present with many different mental and physical manifestations. Thus, rather than recognizing that attaching symbolic meaning to language is a foundation of human knowledge and trying to understand what meaning Septimus attributes to “war” and why, Bradshaw focuses his energy on Septimus’s improperly assertive vocal gestures and disproportionate bodily actions and recommends a treatment that targets his body so that Septimus might at least act like a sane person.

In order to ensure that people perform a socially designated sanity, Bradshaw employs the twin goddesses of his exacting science Proportion and Conversion, both of which are troublingly connected to nationalism and what Bradshaw believes to be English values. Bradshaw is intimately invested in the nation and in notions of Englishness, for he “not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade children, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion—his, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw’s if they were women (she embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son)” (84). Quite literally an agent of the state, then, Bradshaw makes sure citizens are duly performing their part according to his own proportionate understanding of what it means to be English, and when people stray, he engages Conversion to remind them of their imperfect proportions. Conversion “feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace” (85). Thus, Woolf describes what Foucault calls a biopolitics of the human body—the

standardization, optimization, and prioritization of the body—with Bradshaw’s two goddesses, for each recognizes a power that functions by disciplining the body to ensure the appropriate performance of “good” subjects who act as the conduit through which the ideologies of a society’s superstructure are made into material reality. In terms of Bradshaw’s patients, they are hailed by a medical establishment that demands they act proportionately if they are to be reintegrated into society, and by answering this hail, they are interpellated and become subjects of England’s (via Bradshaw) concept of what constitutes normal behaviour. As Bradshaw recognizes, nation-states have much to gain by disciplining bodies to ensure they behave as the state wants them to, as military, economic, and political power depend on that ability to convince citizens to act on behalf of the state. The asylum as ideological state apparatus, along with the educational and military institutions of which Septimus is all too aware, relies on this dynamic of ideology (proportion) and punishment (conversion) to produce disciplined subjects who materialize ideology for the state. In the reciprocal relationship between state and subject, the subject both realizes (makes real) ideology and is realized (made into a subject) by the ideology, providing them a sense of identity that connects them to their fellow subjects. Whether the gendered subject, the national subject, or the sane subject, the subject is thus constituted by the actions of the body, rather than by any innate gender, nationality, or sense of reason.

Woolf’s portrayal of Septimus as a subject of such ideological enactment is represented also in the experiences and actions of other Londoners, particularly as they respond to patriotic moments. After the car tire explodes and affects Septimus so powerfully, a rumour begins to circulate that someone important, such as the Prime Minister or a member of the royalty, is in the car. The rumour, rather than Septimus’s actions, is the reason the people stop to look. The car causes “a slight ripple” as it travels down Bond Street, which seems “so trifling in single

instances that no mathematical instrument [...] could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire" (15). What makes nationalism so powerful, the narrator points out, is its ability to create feelings in groups of people; its ability to make one person in one car in a crowded London street an "enduring symbol of the state" (14) and cause all onlookers to think, however momentarily, of the same thing. This moment of unity is repeated as the car turns down St James's Street past White's, a gentlemen's club, on the way to Buckingham Palace: the men inside "stood even straighter" and "seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth, as their ancestors had done before them," an action of which "the little white tables in the background covered with copies of the *Tatler* and bottles of soda water seemed to approve" (16). While these actions are treated by Woolf with a certain amount of levity—the *Tatler*, a society gossip magazine, and soda bottles acting as much as a symbol of these upper-class men's lives as the patriotism they display when their Sovereign (possibly) passes by—the scene itself speaks to the potential power of nationalism. Patriotism is instilled so deeply that its slightest ripple commands actions up to and including death. The attachment of symbolic meaning to an image this time instead of to words is once again highlighted, but here the attachment unites the onlookers rather than marginalizing an individual, as is the case with Septimus. Imperative to symbolic recognition, it seems, is that the right symbolic meaning is attached to the right symbol, not so much that it takes place in general. Thinking of King and Empire, in other words, is the proportionate response to this moment in order that one be considered appropriately British.

A military procession witnessed by Peter Walsh later in the novel solicits the same response from the people watching, but this time the narrator uses the language of Proportion and

Conversion to describe the spectacle. The procession moves south down Whitehall, a street in Central London that runs from Trafalgar Square to the Houses of Parliament and that is flanked either side by government and military buildings such as the Old War Office Buildings, Old Admiralty Buildings, the Ministry of Defense, and the Offices of Wales and Scotland. Boys of sixteen wearing military uniforms are carrying a wreath toward the Cenotaph that memorializes those soldiers who died in The Great War. They march down Whitehall “as if one will worked legs and arms uniformly, and life, with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline” (44). Stripped of anything resembling individuality, these boys are little more than ideological conduits of the patriarchal militarism that is realized through their movements, their uniforms, and the very street they march down. Surrounded by the military and political traditions of England, the boys are simultaneously rendered visible and invisible by the uniforms that represent tradition. Their paradoxical position is highlighted by the fact that, rather than looking like “robust” figures who can carry the weight of England’s military culture and history, the boys look “weedy” and at odds with the uniforms designed to give them an identity and purpose within their society (43). Unlike the scene on Bond Street, there is neither lightness nor levity in this passage, for this procession is something more than a slight ripple. Taking place as it does and where it does, this is no momentary instance of nationalism but an orchestrated performance designed to instil in its viewers an even deeper response than has been felt by the shoppers on Bond Street and the gentlemen in White’s. If the Bond Street responses were brought about by a single note that has reverberated through the streets and brought people together momentarily before they have returned to their gloves, hats, and magazines, this march is designed specifically to hold people’s attention and ensure they remain fixated on this symbol of

England's patriarchal militarism. Indeed, even Peter Walsh, who tends to treat England's traditions with suspicion, succumbs at one point to the "regular thudding sound" of the march that "drum[s] his thoughts" and catches himself "beginning to keep step with them" (43). Peter, of course, regains his composure and does not continue in step with the boys, but the fact that this rebellious figure responds at all demonstrates how deeply ingrained are such feelings of nationalism. Other onlookers pay attention to the procession as Peter does, for the boys "had taken their vow. The traffic respected it; vans were stopped" (43). These marching boys, therefore, create a spectacle that, more than creating a momentary instance of unity, crystalizes unity around their disciplined bodies, which act as potent symbols of England.

Septimus is convinced, in part, to join the military by another potent symbol of England—William Shakespeare—but Shakespeare's symbolic meaning in Septimus's mind is different than the writer's common cultural significance during the war. As Jane de Gay has pointed out, series such as the British Academy Annual Shakespeare lectures worked to co-opt the playwright for the war effort and were directed specifically at gentlemen: the officer class (74). Not a member of the upper-class trained at Oxford or Cambridge, Septimus is a common reader who receives his only formal education from "Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road upon Shakespeare" (72), and while he does not have access to the same institutionally ingrained sense of patriotic duty as do the gentlemen of White's, he nonetheless learns a kind of patriotism from his education. When Pole teaches Septimus the beauty of Shakespeare's writing, he transfers this beauty onto her, falling in love with her to such an extent that he "went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isobel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (73). When the gentlemen of White's stand to attention as the Prime Minister or Royal personage passes by, they think of "the flowing corn

and the manor houses of England” (16); when Pole introduces Septimus to *Antony and Cleopatra*, on the other hand, she lights “in him such a fire as burns only once in a lifetime, without heat, flickering a red-gold flame infinitely ethereal and insubstantial over Miss Pole” (72). Where the gentlemen fight for a pastoral England their academic training and familial upbringing has taught them to mythologize, Septimus fights for his love of Pole, which he has connected to Shakespeare through their shared experiences of reading his works and through his correspondence with her. Neither is presented as a sane reason to go to war—Septimus’s love, after all, is as “ethereal” and “insubstantial” as the idyllic, pastoral England the gentlemen have imagined, and it never seems to be reciprocated by Pole, who ignores the subject of the love poems he writes her and comments upon them in red ink (72)—but the difference lies in Isobel Pole’s position. As a lecturer in a small college with a very limited ability to influence national narratives of English patriotism in any meaningful way, hers is a personal influence. Indeed, Septimus as a common reader is distanced from the institutions that play such an important role in the social system *Mrs Dalloway* exposes: rather than being taught, as Woolf will point out in *Three Guineas*, duty, honour, and patriotism through literature, he reads for pleasure and without a specific end in mind. As if proving the critical deficiency that Woolf argues is the primary characteristic of common readers, his reading of Shakespeare initially leads him to idealize Pole and go to war on her behalf, but, crucially, Septimus has not read *to* find patriotism in Shakespeare; rather, he has read Shakespeare *and* found patriotism. The end in this instance is the same, but Septimus’s path is personal rather than guided institutional instruction.

His lack of formal training is equally significant when Septimus finds a different meaning in Shakespeare’s plays after he returns from the war, for this change in interpretation represents the ever-changing reading epistemologies of Woolf’s ideal common reader rather than the

structured responses of institutional knowledge. Septimus's altered view of Shakespeare, who, Septimus believes, far from revealing beauty in his words, "loathed humanity" (75), is a reading that foregrounds Septimus's contempt for human nature. Precisely what Septimus means by "human nature" in *Mrs. Dalloway* is difficult to discern, but it is connected to his doctors, specifically Holmes: "Once you stumble, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard, human nature is on you. Holmes is on you" (78). DeMeester relates his view of human nature back to the secret message Septimus has learned through his trauma, arguing that, as "A prophetic witness to the aggression instinctive in human nature and ineradicable from European civilization, he brings the war home in his very person" (112). It may be true that Septimus witnessed the worst of human nature during the war, and this horror may be inscribed on his body in the form of his PTSD, but the human nature he ascribes to Holmes—indeed, that he emphatically describes Holmes a representative of—is not the same aggressive, inhumane, destructive human nature Septimus experiences in the trenches during the war. Rather than conflating human nature with the violence experienced at the front—or, as Froula suggests, seeing Septimus as revealing how "the brute, human nature, that frightens and excites us, is not restrained within our souls but called forth by the very institutions struggling to repress it" (84)—Woolf presents a Holmesian human nature as one that watches, that monitors. It is a human nature that demands the citizen do the opposite of what Septimus has been asked to do in the trenches, for if in the trenches Septimus "developed manliness" that allowed him to feel "very little and very reasonably" when Evans died (73), then it is now, at home, that he must learn a different kind of manliness that centers on being a caring husband. Once asked to take life, Septimus is now asked to foster not only his wife's life but also his own, which, to Septimus, inexplicably takes on more importance now that the war is over. Once cannon fodder

waiting to explode, like Evans, in service to King and country, Septimus must now serve by not dying—at least not by his own hand.

To Septimus, both his role as a soldier and his role as a husband are seen as performances he must maintain if he is not to become an outsider in his society, and it is this compulsion toward performance and the punishment of those who refuse to perform that he most despises in human beings. In his most coherent definition of human nature, Septimus thinks, “the truth is (let [Rezia] ignore it) that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen” (76). That human beings hunt does not seem to bother Septimus; what bothers him is that they hunt in packs or carefully organized groups that desert the fallen who don’t, won’t, or can’t fulfill their roles in the group’s coordinated actions. Septimus’s conception of human nature does not concern itself with the actions of humans during battle; rather, it centres on his sense that the slightest oddity, deviance from the script, or inappropriate action will bring down judgment. The human nature he experiences at the front, therefore, is the same human nature he experiences at home, for both demand his performance, first as a soldier and then as a husband, and both will punish any bodily actions deemed incongruous. All this becomes clear to Septimus after he returns from the war and reads Shakespeare: “That boy’s business of the intoxication of language—Antony and Cleopatra—had shriveled utterly. How Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly. This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of the words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. Dante the same. Aeschylus (translated) the same” (75). Once connected to his love for Miss Pole and the patriotism this love

inspired, Shakespeare is changed utterly for Septimus after his experiences at the front. The perceived beauty of Shakespeare's words merely hides the banality and brutality of the civilian life he is now expected to live. As was the case before the war, Septimus finds in Shakespeare something that confirms his current worldview, a result that may show his deficiency as a critic but one that is nonetheless a product of his own life and reading experiences rather than the rote knowledge of educational institutions that co-opt Shakespeare to inculcate patriotism in service to the nation. Septimus's common readerly practices, therefore, mark him as an outsider of the governing class that *Mrs Dalloway* critiques, and they reveal just how little access he has had to those institutions that shape future government officials to steer the nation.

Septimus's access to such institutions changes, of course, once he transgresses Bradshaw's sense of Proportion, and his entrance into Bradshaw's purview reveals both the great power Bradshaw holds in his society and the central role Septimus plays in establishing this social system's boundaries and ensuring its proper functioning. Because Septimus has talked of suicide, Bradshaw tells Rezia that his case is now a "question of law" and that there is "no alternative" to his confinement (82). Woolf makes clear that Bradshaw has worked with the law in other cases to confine patients in a home in Surrey where "unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control" (86), for when "family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career" are not enough to make the patient achieve Proportion, Bradshaw "had to support him police and the good of society" (86). Bradshaw's power to impose his will, therefore, is far reaching, but it becomes truly frightening in the case of suicidal patients because Bradshaw believes it is incumbent upon the government to intervene in such circumstances, with him as the arbiter of who must be confined. Referring specifically to suicidal patients, Bradshaw explains that they believe "this living or not living is an affair of our own.

But there they were mistaken” (86). His language reflects the doctor’s “power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death” (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 138). By controlling suicidal patients’ decisions to kill themselves, Bradshaw is simultaneously reforming their behaviour to make them proportionate subjects, and disallowing their lives to the point of death by confining them in asylums where they and, more importantly, their deaths cannot be seen by society. By secluding Septimus, Alex Zwerdling argues, law makers such as Bradshaw ensure the governing class’s ideology is propagated through acts of “covering up the stains and ignoring the major and minor tremors that threaten its existence” (125). As importantly, his overbearing presence in the novel demonstrates that “the complacency of the governing class is not a natural state but must be constantly defended by the strenuous activity of people like Sir William” (125). A state functionary in doctor’s clothing, Bradshaw manages the lives of people—at great expense to himself according to Lady Bradshaw, who says his life “is not his own but his patients” (86)—by limiting their access to society while at the same time limiting society’s access to lives deemed either too different to be accommodated by the governing class’s ideologies or too dangerous to their continued governance.

This interrelationship between Septimus’s body and the nation would have been treated very differently had he been one of the glorious dead killed during the war, for his body would have become an object to be eulogized rather than an object used by Bradshaw to increase his power. As Madelyn Detloff points out, “For Holmes and his ilk, had Septimus been killed in the war like his compatriot Evans, his death would have been glorified, patriotic” (158). Now, however, four years after the war, the most patriotic thing Septimus can do is remove himself from a society trying to return to peace. He is a remainder and reminder of war but does not memorialize it in the right way: no longer the stoic soldier who “congratulated himself upon

feeling very little and very reasonably” after Evans dies (Woolf 73), and instead a nervous, shaky man who suffers from delusions, Septimus’s traumatized existence and symbolic body are things to be hidden away and reformed so England may memorialize the war with cenotaphs that represent valour and honour. Septimus’s suicide can thus be regarded as a final effort to extricate himself from the nation and its representative, Bradshaw; but while Septimus physically succeeds in achieving this goal, his life and body live on as spectral political presences at Clarissa’s party. Predictably, they are renarrated by Bradshaw, who talks of Septimus’s suicide with Richard Dalloway in connection to a legal Bill, to which Bradshaw wishes to attach a provision concerning “the deferred effects of shell-shock” (155). Bradshaw, therefore, brings death to the party, but it is a certain death for a certain purpose: he plans to use Septimus’s corpse to further extend his legal power to seclude England’s lunatics. Septimus’s discursive body is to have no respite after all, for it will now be used to generate lasting legislation that will be used to confine people like him. Or, as Zwerdling suggests, “the living Septimus becomes a category, his life an ‘it’ to be considered by government committees drafting legislation” (128). Objectified in death as he believed himself to be in life, Septimus lives on as a symbol of madness that Bradshaw uses to further his own power.

It is his continued use for Bradshaw’s sense of Proportion that Septimus describes when he refers to himself as that which is “for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer” (22): Septimus functions as the exclusion Bradshaw needs to protect his definition of Proportion. Scapegoats are primarily useful within social systems because they are excluded from that social system: in this way, the scapegoat serves as a constant reminder of the threshold between inclusion and exclusion. More importantly, the scapegoat reveals the relationship between social institutions, such as the asylum, and the juridical and biopolitical

management of bodies. As Giorgio Agamben has argued, social institutions that focus on the discursive management of bodies cannot function legally without the relationship between two people: the sovereign and the exception. The laws that govern a community are established and, indeed, retain validity only because there are those who fall outside their parameters, but some sovereign (this can be a king, but it more generally refers to any figure with the authority to adjudicate whether a person must be excluded from society for transgressing laws or norms) must make an exception of them by marking them as outside the law:

The exception is a kind of exclusion. What is excluded from the general rule is an individual case. But the most proper characteristic of the exception is that what is excluded in it is not, on account of being excluded, absolutely without relation to the rule. On the contrary, what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule's suspension. *The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.* The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order but rather the situation that results from its suspension. (17-18)

Important, here, is what is created in the wake of the sovereign exception, for in suspending the law to exclude the exceptional action or person, the law legitimates its own validity. Law and order becomes the normal situation to which the exception, marked by his/her exclusion from the norm, stands in opposition. The exception, then, brings the law as norm into relief, so that "what is at issue in the sovereign exception is not so much the control or neutralization of an excess as the creation and definition of the very space in which juridico-political order can have validity" (19). The exception thus simultaneously establishes and guards the threshold of the law; it creates the norm through the exception's very exclusion. The "law," Agamben argues, is thus

“made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the *exception*” (27). In excluding the exception, that is to say, the sovereign defines a space in which his/her law is able to function, and all bodies caught within this space are then subject to the law, which is itself predicated on its own suspension in the figure of the sovereign exception.

Thus, Bradshaw, with his sovereign power to seclude England’s lunatics, can establish the threshold of what is considered reasonable behaviour in England and capture others inside the norms and laws he himself has determined, a situation Clarissa recognizes at the end of the party when she hears Bradshaw discussing Septimus. The exception Bradshaw uses to establish what constitutes reasonable behaviour is obviously Septimus, yet the biopolitical space this exception ends up creating extends much further and portends much more than Septimus’s private confinement in an asylum. Bradshaw’s proportionate man is precisely the “common man” held up as cultural arbiter in middlebrow conceptions of English culture, so his immense institutional power to diagnose proportion and enforce conversion, which he seeks to extend legally with the help of Richard Dalloway, reaches well past Septimus and into the lives of everyone in England. Clarissa recognizes the full extent of this power as a result of hearing about Septimus, but she always feels deeply uncomfortable around Bradshaw, who, even though “He looked what he was, a great doctor,” inspires fear in Clarissa because “what she felt was, one wouldn’t like Sir William to see one unhappy” (155). Clarissa’s language here reveals that she feels herself to be, as Septimus has felt himself to be, an object under the gaze of Bradshaw, especially when she switches from the more personal pronoun “she” to the impersonal pronoun “one” halfway through the sentence. All, she suggests, are subject to Bradshaw because of the immense power he wields, and one can almost feel how he oppresses her by demanding she appear at all times happy. Importantly, Clarissa then connects her feelings about Bradshaw to

Septimus, who she imagines may have had the passion of poets and thinkers before “Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power” (157). The word “impressed” carries with it a dual meaning that represents both of Bradshaw’s goddesses, for it signals the impressive figure Bradshaw cuts as a great doctor and the shining example of Proportion twinned with the moulding power of Conversion, which itself “feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress” (85). Clarissa’s near incommunicable revelation as she thinks about Septimus’s death, therefore—the “thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured, in her own life” but that “he had preserved” in death (156)—centres on the mechanism of power that his body’s final disproportionate action reveals to her. His death constitutes the defiant transgression of Bradshaw’s law of Proportion, which she, too, feels and describes as an “indescribable outrage—forcing your soul” (157).

This indescribable outrage is mirrored in Clarissa’s final outburst about the intolerability of men like Bradshaw, and while it seems Clarissa quickly forgets about her revelation because she goes back to her hosting duties, her parties are so important precisely because they create a space of potential in which epiphanies like her own can occur. Clarissa connects herself to Septimus when she explains that “She felt somehow very like him” and that she is glad he had “thrown [his life] away while they went on living,” but she then notes that “The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble” (158). Clarissa was not always such a dutiful host, however. Rebellious in her youth to the point that she and Sally Seton “meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out” (28-9), Clarissa becomes less rebellious through her decision to marry Richard Dalloway, and she looks back on her actions as a young woman as “very absurd” (29). But having taken her place in the governing class, Clarissa becomes, according to

Peter, “one of the most thorough-going sceptics he had ever met” inasmuch as she sees humanity as a “doomed race” and life as “a bad joke,” yet she believes that, if this is the case, we should “at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners” (66). There’s a sense of defeatism and determinism in Clarissa’s outlook, a sense that Conversion has stripped her of her revolutionary spirit and convinced her that life is merely something to be made the best of depending on one’s position within society. There is something much more powerful in Clarissa’s scepticism, however, which becomes clear when Peter explains that her acquiescence to the role she assumes when she marries Richard is based on the belief that “Those ruffians, the Gods, shan’t have it all their own way—her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives, were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady” (66). This seems like the mere capitulation of her individualism to what is expected of her as the wife of a Member of Parliament (MP), but it is actually a profound realization that her social position is an important determinant in what agency she has within the social system and how best to apply this agency. Behaving like a lady is less a total abnegation of her revolutionary youth than a realization that her skills and the benefits her social position provides can be put to better use than small revolts against her parents and the upper-class life into which she has been born. Clarissa, in other words, chooses to work within the confines of her governing class subject position to effect change where she can, rather than actively choosing a rebellious outsider position like Peter Walsh or Doris Kilman. The change Clarissa tries to effect comes in the moments she creates as a hostess, which Peter once again explains when he describes Clarissa’s “transcendental theory” that the influence others’ lives may have on one is often only discovered when a moment spent with a person makes such an impact that it initiates a revisioning process in oneself. As Peter explains with reference to his relationship with

Clarissa, “You were given a sharp, acute, uncomfortable grain—the actual meeting; horribly painful as often as not; yet in absence, in the most unlikely places, it would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding, after years of lying lost” (130). Clarissa’s theory suggests that layer after layer of revisions are added to the moments that constitute one’s relationships with others, a process that shapes both one and the other but that relies explicitly on the interpersonal relationship between the two. Where each abrasive moment is a grain of sand that has the potential to become a valuable pearl, her theory of personal interrelationship counters the more static power relations Bradshaw’s two goddesses build between people in reducing them to mere insiders and outsiders of the social system. Her own epiphany serves as an example of her theory, for it is Bradshaw’s decision to talk about death at her party that provides her with the moment she needs to forge a personal connection with Septimus that both transcends the class boundaries that separate the two and causes her to revise her view of Bradshaw, transforming him in her mind from a “great doctor” (155) into to a man who makes life “intolerable” (157).

Clarissa therefore uses her public life to supplement the private lives of those around her and indeed herself by providing moments that contain the potential to create epiphanies, and this is why she refers to her parties as a “gift” in the only passage in which Clarissa herself discusses her gatherings. Clarissa initially struggles to describe precisely why she gives her parties, saying that what she gets out of the parties is “simply life” (103), but as she tries to define her motivations more clearly they end up sounding very similar to the transcendental theory that Peter explains on her behalf. People she knows from around London—South Kensington, Bayswater, Mayfair—live in close proximity to one another, she explains, and she feels “quite continuously a sense of their existence” with one another even though they might never have met

(103). It seems a “waste” and a “pity” to Clarissa that such lives should never intersect, so she attempts to bring them together at her parties, which she considers “an offering; to combine, to create; but for whom?” (103). Clarissa is unable to answer this last question and decides her parties are an “offering for the sake of offering, perhaps,” finally settling on the idea that her parties are “her gift” because she has nothing else to offer of any value (103). Zwerdling argues that one should resist seeing too much positive potential in Clarissa’s offerings, for all the neighbourhoods Clarissa mentions are “upper-middle-class preserves” and indicate that “Clarissa’s integration is horizontal, not vertical” (127). While it may be true that most of the guests at Clarissa’s parties are of the same class, Woolf distinguishes between the individuals that Clarissa invites and the categories that Bradshaw uses to dehumanize or object his patients. The aim of Bradshaw’s social system is to neglect the private selves of individuals by reducing them to mere ideological subjects, but the social space Clarissa creates is something quite different and mirrors the textual spaces Woolf creates for common readers in essays like “Character in Fiction” and “Street Haunting,” where her focus on relationality leads readers to recognize their active role in cultural production.

Clarissa’s party does not take from people; it is a gift freely given to no clear end. The power relations Bradshaw creates serve a specific purpose—the aggrandizement of the nation—and hold only negative potential because they withdraw freedoms and demand proportionate performances, but the social relations Clarissa builds have the possibility of positive potential through the moments they may create or recall: moments like Clarissa’s kiss with Sally, “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” and one which is held onto by Clarissa as if “she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious” (30). Moments, also, like her epiphany about Bradshaw, which all

begins with the uncomfortable grain of Septimus's suicide and Bradshaw's decision to talk about it at the party. Clarissa's private self, therefore, might be likened to a string of pearls, the centre of each a moment—sometimes exquisite, other times uncomfortable—that has been revised and reshaped until it becomes something precious, something indispensable: the private self that must sometimes be obscured by her position as the wife of an MP. As Zwerdling notes, Clarissa's "reactions to Septimus [...] suggest that Clarissa's soul is far from dead, that she can resurrect the intense emotions of youth despite the pressure of a society determined to deny them quarter" (142). If *Mrs Dalloway* does examine the struggle between the private self and the public self as so many critics have suggested, then Clarissa's transcendental theory and parties represent a middle road between the two, a way to explain that the private self can supplement the public self rather than die in its service. Clarissa's ability to host is her only real private skill but it is simultaneously a performative act of her class and of her specific subject position as an MP's wife that she uses to provide her guests with moments of unity that may shape their lives. Clarissa creates spaces of potential for private change or growth, and while the potential of such spaces is not always positive, as Dr Bradshaw proves, Clarissa uses her public subject position and its vast institutional power and social network as a point of connection that gathers the intersecting lives of her London.

CHAPTER FIVE

“It is worse perhaps to be locked in”: Positioning Oneself in *A Room of One’s Own*

There are few phrases in English literature more famous than “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (3), the statement that begins Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). Woolf’s thesis has reached near mythological levels in the academy, especially in the fields of Women’s and Gender Studies and Feminist Theory, due to its sharp theorization of the psychological imperative that underpins patriarchal hegemony and its exploration of women’s educational, legal, economic, domestic, and literary history. As Brenda Silver has noted, “by the early 1970s, the emerging women’s movement had made Woolf’s words—‘a room of one’s own,’ for instance—into public slogans and her face, emblazoned on T-shirts, into a public sight” (9). Ever since, Woolf’s cultural value has been an accurate barometer of feminism’s evolution. So much so, indeed, that Jane Goldman notes *A Room of One’s Own* “is cited as the *locus classicus* for a number of important modern feminist debates concerning gender, sexuality, materialism, education, patriarchy, androgyny, subjectivity, the feminine sentence, the notion of ‘Shakespeare’s sister’, the canon, the body, race, class, and so on” (97). That such varied interpretations can be made of one text is remarkable, and if, as Woolf writes in one of the most oft-quoted passages in *A Room of One’s Own*, “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (69), then one can say with confidence that Woolf is, and will likely continue to be, a mother to women’s movements, women’s writing, and feminist theory for some time to come.

A Room of One’s Own has also caused its fair share of controversy amongst feminists, most of which surrounds difficulties integrating its secondary argument about the androgynous mind, which ends the essay and Woolf’s argument as a whole. The difficulty comes because the

theory of the androgynous mind seems to countermand much of the rest of the essay in its status as gynocriticism. As the narrator writes of Mary Carmichael, she has “mastered the first great lesson; she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself” (84). The narrator later argues “It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman” (94). Ellen Bayuk Rosenman sums up the disturbance these passages of *A Room of One’s Own* create amongst feminist thinkers when she wonders what value Woolf’s essay ultimately has in the face of such statements given that “So much of its purpose is to clarify women’s consciousness of their sex and undo repression” (104). All the time spent detailing how women’s consciousnesses have been shaped by social institutions, education, history, and literature seems for naught in the face of an androgynous mind that espouses a form of gender neutrality, which meant for Woolf, as Michèle Barrett writes, “an aesthetic creed in which feminist political anger, and indeed any sex consciousness, should be subordinated to the general vision and narrative of the work” (xxii). This subordination of anger would shape interpretations of *A Room of One’s Own* for some time, and it was the sticking point in a now famous critical discussion that reveals how difficult it is to reconcile these two halves of Woolf’s essay. Elaine Showalter famously used a modified version of Woolf’s title, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), for her landmark essentialist feminist study of women’s literature, despite the fact that she roundly criticized Woolf’s theory of the androgynous mind as “a response to the dilemma of a woman writer embarrassed and alarmed by feelings too hot to handle without risking real rejection by her family, her audience, and her class” (286). Showalter was not alone in her argument that Woolf’s call to gender neutrality constitutes a flight from the body into androgyny: Adrienne Rich, too,

writes that she is “astonished at the sense of effort, of pains taken, of dogged tentativeness” in *A Room of One’s Own* and recognizes in it “the tone of a woman almost in touch with her anger” (37). Finally, Jane Marcus argues that Woolf’s primary creative force is anger but that she felt “the need to sublimate some of that anger in order to survive” (125). In response to these readings Toril Moi presents a poststructuralist perspective of female identity informed by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva to argue that *A Room of One’s Own* challenges essentialist readings in its rejection of “the fundamental need for the individual to adopt a unified, integrated, self-identity” (8). Moi asserts “the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity” (14). The problem here, and also likely the reason *A Room of One’s Own* has enjoyed such longevity, is that neither Showalter nor Moi, despite arguing two contradictory viewpoints, is entirely wrong. At times Woolf speaks glowingly of Jane Austen’s masterpieces because she abandoned the ill-adapted tools of men’s sentences and “devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use and never departed from it” (70); at other times, however, she insists that “anything written with that conscious [sex] bias is doomed to death” (94).

This chapter examines this contradiction in *A Room of One’s Own*, but it does so less by trying to explain the content of Woolf’s arguments than by examining the argument structurally and formally to explore the narrator’s lecture to a group of students at a women’s college. The anxiety concerning how individual subjects fit themselves into groups and institutions is a theme common to many of Woolf’s fictional characters and to her conception of common readers brought together through critical deficiencies that mark differences and initiate self-reflection of one’s subject positionality, and my intention for *A Room of One’s Own* is to draw out the narrator’s discomfort with the lecture she’s been asked to present in order to explore how she

uses her subject position as a lecturer to challenge the women's college audience to consider the limitations of thinking in terms of gender rather than with an androgynous mind that foregrounds gender neutrality. The narrator is uncomfortable with her topic and position as lecturer for different, but interrelated, reasons. The topic, "Women and Fiction," makes her think in terms of her gender when she has spent time and money on a room that has given her the "freedom to think of things in themselves" rather than focusing on the anger, fear, and bitterness she feels toward men (35). Her position as a lecturer implies that the narrator shares, at least in part, the views of the women's college students that make up her audience—after all, the mere fact that they have come to be lectured to instantiates her as a part of their institution—and requires her to determine how she will fit into this collective and their institution as an individual subject. I argue that the narrator presents her first, very visible thesis—that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (3)—as a way to unite herself symbolically with the gendered collective and institution she lectures before, but that this thesis is also used throughout the text to substantiate her theory of the androgynous mind that maintains her autonomy and prevents the narrator from falling into uniformity with her audience and topic. The theory of the androgynous mind, therefore, is thus quite literal throughout Woolf's essay. At the beginning of the essay, the narrator is fishing for ideas near a river at Oxbridge when she catches a tiny idea that I contend is her theory of the androgynous mind, and she uses her thesis about money and a room to fatten this idea by providing the context needed to explain a theory of gender neutrality that questions the views of the group of women and institution to whom she lectures. Structurally, as a lecture, *A Room of One's Own* carefully negotiates a topic and position that compels its narrator toward an uneasy unity with the female college students that make up her audience and the institution they represent. However, formally, her primary

argument builds toward a theory of the androgynous mind that resists uniformity with her audience while still acknowledging that women are united in many ways and by many things.

The anxiety between individuals and the way they fit into groups is also crucial to Woolf's conceptualization of the common reader because the autonomy of the individual within the literary marketplace is asserted to counter the pressures of institutionalized reading practices and cultural values. These institutions, systems, and traditions, as we've seen are encapsulated by her representations of the patriarchy in works like *Jacob's Room*, where men become statues moulded by the institutions in which they find themselves from the time they are very young. Thus, the boys in the church service at Cambridge have "sculptured faces" that demonstrate the "certainty, authority controlled by piety" (23) that serves as the foundation of their identity. Likewise, in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Peter Walsh encounters that military procession of young men marching in London, he compares them to statues "drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline" (44), and the dons and students at Oxbridge in *A Room of One's Own* seem "creased and crushed into shapes so singular that one was reminded of those giant crabs and crayfish who heave with difficulty across the sand of the aquarium" (8). Such conceptions of bodies and the role performance and participation plays in ideology and power become the foundation for the political praxis that Woolf promotes in her writing shortly before her death. In *The Years* (1937), North feels as though he doesn't "fit in anywhere" (300) in his own culture, and he wonders what kind of political action is open to a man of his generation who has seen the rise of fascist ideologues in "black shirts, green shirts, red shirts—always posing in the public eye" as they speak to herds of followers through "reverberating megaphones" (300). It is this marginal position, of course, that Woolf uses in *Three Guineas* when she theorizes her Society of Outsiders as those who will refuse to participate in the ideological rituals that promote war. Like

the common reader, the Society of Outsiders will “experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private” (239), and by choosing not to act, “show that to be passive is to be active” because “By making their absence felt their presence becomes desirable” (245)—particularly in the context of war work. Woolf’s pacifism in later life is built on the idea of remaining aware how one’s body can be used to further the political ends of states and institutions. Such awareness is perhaps most palpable in Woolf’s final novel, the posthumously published *Between the Acts* (1941), in which Miss La Trobe stages a pageant play at a private house that culminates with her audience, united by the shared history presented on the stage, being reduced to “*orts, scraps, and fragments*” when the players enter with mirrors to reveal the audience to itself (127). La Trobe’s play breaks the unity of the audience and a gramophone loudly repeats “*Dispersed are we; who have come together. But [...] let us retain whatever made that harmony*” (133) as the audience leaves. *Between the Acts* is frustratingly unclear about “whatever” it is that makes the harmony between its audience members, though several things, including the pastoral private home where the pageant is staged, Reverend G. W. Streatfield, and military aircraft flying overhead, do offer symbols of the gentry, the church, and the nation as possible answers. Group power relations and the tendency for individuals to become subsumed by the groups they exist within, willingly or not, are themes that run through much of Woolf’s work, but her anxiety about these things increases throughout the interwar period.

While it is difficult to precisely sketch the narrator in *A Room of One’s Own* because Woolf does all she can to deconstruct her character, the narrator does reveal certain things about her identity that can help readers position her as a subject. Firstly and most importantly, the narrator is not Woolf. In a letter to Ethyl Smith, Woolf wrote that if she’d been more forthright in her criticism that she was unable to be educated because her brothers had been given the bulk of

the family's education funds, people would have said "she has an axe to grind [...] though I agree I should have had many more of the wrong kind of reader" that would merely seek, using her text, to "prove once more how vain, how personal, so they will say, rubbing their hands with glee, women always are" (*Letters* 5 195). Here, the "wrong kind of reader" refers to readers who want only fodder for their own attacks against Woolf, against feminists, or against women in general. One foot in the wrong direction, Woolf believed, would see her work thrown into others' discursive dustbins as they jeered at Woolf the feminist, Woolf the angry daughter, or Woolf the dilettante academic of the Bloomsbury coterie. Therefore, Woolf tells Smith that, even though "I didn't write 'A Room' without considerable feeling [...] I forced myself to keep my own figure fictitious; legendary" (195). Woolf does this from the outset of *A Room of One's Own* not only by employing a narrator—something most essayists don't do—but also by having the narrator insist on her own fictitiousness early in the text by stating "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody with no real being" (4). The reader knows immediately, therefore, that this "I" is not a stable "I" like that of the noted author Mr. A, whose masculine "I," "hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding," creates a shadow across the pages of his works in which "all is shapeless as mist" (90). The narrator's "I" in *A Room of One's Own* is unstable and slippery, a riposte to the stable, transcendental masculine "I" that has constructed itself as superior over the long history of patriarchy explored in the text. Unstable and slippery though her identity may be, however, readers do know that the narrator is a writer, since she plans on "making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist" (4) in her argument, and that she is an uneducated woman who has "no more right [...] in Fernham than in Trinity or Somerville or Girton or Newnham or Christchurch" (16) to present her argument to such an audience. Finally, she is independent owing to an aunt who has "left [her] five hundred pounds a

year for ever” (34). Thus, the narrator may not actually be Woolf, but it is safe to assume that she fits roughly within the group Woolf defines more clearly in *Three Guineas* as the “daughters of educated men,” and these intersectional identity coordinates, particular as regards class, education, gender, and profession, can be used to interrogate the narrator’s argument.

And readers should interrogate her argument, if for no other reason than she asks them to directly by explicitly connecting herself and her reader to the common reading tradition she theorized in *The Common Reader* (1925). As we’ve seen, Woolf’s common reader, “is guided by an instinct to create for himself [...] a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing” (1), and, due to this instinct, is “Hasty, inaccurate, and superficial, snatching now this poem, now that scrap of old furniture, without caring where he finds it or of what nature it may be so long as it serves his purpose and rounds his structure” (1). The ephemeral nature of the common reader’s critical framework, Woolf argues, means that his “deficiencies as a critic are too obvious to be pointed out” (1), and that one must take into account his biases, beliefs, and argumentative goals. There could be no better description for how the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own* positions herself and how she asks readers to position themselves in relation to her: “Lies will flow from my lips,” she explains, “but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping” (4). Lies are not traditionally what one looks for in an academic essay or lecture, but the narrator’s deficiencies in this case should not be looked down upon because, by asking readers directly to question her, they promote an active construction of knowledge between lecturer/narrator and listener/reader. The narrator’s are not ideas that will come fully formed and ready for consumption, but ideas in the midst of being constructed so that her argument is in the act of becoming even as it is presented to her audience. This focus on construction makes *A*

Room of One's Own more playful and less assertive than most essays, but it also helps reveal what Randi Saloman calls the “counterfactual potentiality” of the essay form (81). There is, Saloman argues, little reason for readers to imagine what might have been in novels since the plot and character development are set from the beginning, but “the essay’s interactive status suggests the possibility of change or progress—that the future might be significantly affected by one’s present reflections” (81). This change and progress does not happen in the text itself, of course, but in the effects the text has on the reading subject, and an important aspect of uncovering this counterfactual potentiality in the essay form is acknowledging the positionality of the reading subject and the writing subject. Readers/listeners should not passively consume the ideas in essays, Woolf’s narrator explains, for their active participation is what provides the essay its potential for change as they evaluate the deficiencies of the narrator’s argument.

With this critical framework in place, let us turn to the first sentence of *A Room of One's Own*, for it is here that the narrator begins challenging her topic “Women and Fiction” by presenting the thesis of her essay while simultaneously subverting the expectations of her audience. Her opening line questions the way knowledge is typically constructed in university lectures by abandoning the power dynamic created between lecturer and audience in lieu of a form that carefully positions herself in relation to her audience: “But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what has that got to do with a room of one’s own?” (3). Starting the essay *in media res* with the word “but” is jarring both in terms of form and content because, as Judith Allen points out, it creates ambiguity. Grammatically, “but” is a coordinating conjunction that “functions as a connective, as a way of continuing and extending,” but in terms of meaning, the word “resists that continuity, cuts things off, and most importantly, negates what was said before its appearance” (58). What’s being negated in this instance isn’t some previous

statement, however, but the very discursive relationship between speaker and listener, writer and reader, essayist and essay. The sentence departs from what is expected of the essayist, Kathryn Simpson argues, by reversing the typical structure of an essay and beginning “with the narrator’s conclusion on the topic,” a simple but effective way of ensuring that “the reader’s experience is not focused on reaching the conclusion but on enjoying and actively engaging in the process of exploring the issues” (*A Guide* 74). Offering her conclusion at the beginning disrupts the logical progression one typically finds in essays, for since the argumentative end (the content of the essay) is known immediately, readers may more readily focus on the means used (the form of the essay) to bring about this argumentative end.

A Room of One’s Own, that is to say, does not shy away from its own construction but, verily, leans into it by employing a structure in its first sentence, in particular through the shifting pronouns, to insist on the firm distinction between the narrator/lecturer and reader/audience while simultaneously connecting them to one another for, at the very least, the length of the lecture. The first “you” is ambiguous grammatically as it could refer to singular audience members or the audience as a whole, but in both cases the reader is confronted immediately with questions about who is being addressed and what constitutes this group. Next, this ambiguous “you” is replaced with the singular “you,” referring specifically to the narrator/lecturer and positioned in relation to the plural “we” as the audience is now clearly referred to as a collective of *women* who listen to the *woman* whom they’ve asked to lecture. Questions about how the individual interacts with and integrates herself within a collective are raised immediately by these shifting pronouns, but, more than this, expectations about what this group wants and what the individual will provide to the group are challenged and redrawn. The boundaries created in this sentence remind the reader/audience that positionality—even within a group one may for the

most part align with politically and in terms of identity—is important because it prevents facile political agreement and limits the possibility of becoming subsumed by the ideologies of the group. The narrator here is hailed by and responds to the group and the institution they represent, but she is quick to remind them that she is also an individual who insists on carefully positioning herself within their group and the institution they now both represent.

The narrator goes on to refuse the authority usually provided college and university lecturers in order to indicate that she will also be challenging the expectations of the institution she's been asked to address. She refuses this authority by flatly stating that "I should never be able to fulfil [*sic.*] what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer—to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever" (3). The narrator removes herself from the responsibilities of the university lecturer here, promising from the off that she has no intention of providing what is traditionally expected of someone in that position, and indeed positions herself as an outsider with the words "I understand." Her responsibilities as a lecturer are not technically shirked in this instance because, as an uneducated daughter of an educated man, she is under no obligation to perform the college's rituals as expected. There is significant leeway in how she may perform her role as lecturer, especially since she is not attempting to gain employment through her talk or become a student at the college, so the narrator makes the position work for her. On one hand, as Simpson has pointed out, her independence from the monetary economies that govern the university allows the narrator to refuse her audience a "nugget of pure truth" and offer "words about women and fiction [that] cannot be readily absorbed into a monetary economy" (*Gifts* 33). It is a refusal that "offers her ideas in the hope of their ongoing circulation and transformation in the lives of her female audience/readers, seeking a relationship of mutual co-operation and

reciprocation” (33). On the other hand, her refusal to provide a “nugget of pure truth” also tells her audience/reader that she will be actively constructing knowledge before them, for she explains “I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money. I am going to develop in your presence as fully and freely as I can the train of thought which led me to think this” (4). It is, of course, true that all university lecturers are constructing knowledge when they lecture since they are participating in an intellectual tradition that never sees its work as finished, but few are as upfront about the fact as the narrator. All that glitters is not gold, the narrator informs her reader, so even if one does receive a nugget of pure truth from her lecture, its value must still be assayed in accordance with one’s own critical position.

All this subversion and positioning explains how the narrator wishes to situate herself in relation to the collectives and institutions that intersect during the seemingly simple act of delivering a lecture, but her personal response to lecturing at the college and to her topic is also revealed in her introduction. That she is uneasy with the topic of her lecture becomes clear when the narrator says her intention is “to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here—how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life” (4). The fact that she must labour on the subject in her daily life implies this is a topic she generally does not think about, but it also indicates she has done so because the college has asked her for a lecture on the subject. Once again, the narrator acknowledges her connection with the collective in this instance while also maintaining her distance, suggesting a willingness to participate in their ritual as long as she gets to perform her part as she chooses. She refers again to feeling burdened by the subject in the next paragraph, saying “That collar I have spoken of, women and fiction, the need of coming to some

conclusion on a subject that raises all sorts of prejudices and passions, bowed my head to the ground” (4). Collars weigh the wearer down as the narrator suggests, but, more importantly in this instance, they are also disciplinary implements used to train the wearer, which in this case constitutes forcing the narrator’s head and eyes toward the ground to make her focus myopically on her topic. This is also the third of three times “prejudices” are mentioned in the introduction, as again and again the narrator notes that her topic cannot help but raise strong feelings in those who discuss it. As much is plainly stated when she points out that “when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth” (4); the best she can do as a lecturer, consequently, is “give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker” (4). This appears to be another instance of the narrator asking her readers to interrogate her closely, yet one must also ask what effect this subject that raises and exposes the narrator’s prejudices has on her as an individual. To track this, one need only turn to the explanation of her own room’s importance in her life and development as a thinker. She notes that her room has been integral to releasing the emotions and prejudices gender creates between the sexes, for after realizing that men’s anger toward women is a symptom of patriarchal institutions that ask him to continuously reiterate his superiority in order to be legitimated within those institutions, “by degrees [my own] fear and bitterness modified themselves into pity and toleration; and then in a year or two, pity and toleration went, and the greatest release of all came, which is the freedom to think of things in themselves” (35). The topic “Women and Fiction” dredges up prejudices the narrator has spent many years releasing, but more than this it asks her to employ a gendered epistemology that necessarily limits what can be thought or argued as no matter what she provides at the lecture must be made to work within the confines of this topic. To be clear, the narrator is not

saying discussions of gender are unimportant to women and fiction, and should not be studied at women's colleges. Indeed, she asks at various times for the students of Newnham and Girton to supply a thorough history of women's domestic lives (41), to discover why the world has such hostility for women's writing (48), to explore men's opposition to women's suffrage (51), and to examine chastity and its value in women's lives (58). But she is saying that discussions of gender are not her work as a writer of fiction. Her work, the work of an uneducated woman writer with inherited wealth enough to afford a room of her own, is to "think of things in themselves" and her topic limits her ability to do so (35).

The introduction to *A Room of One's Own* also raises the question of whether or not the narrator's primary conclusion about a room and money is, in fact, the argument she sets out to make when she begins thinking about her topic, for she vaguely mentions another idea at the beginning of the text that seemingly gets left behind in the experiences she has at Oxbridge. The reader is told they will hear the story of the two days prior to the narrator giving her lecture, but the narrator begins with a brief description of her "sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought" (4). As she sits contemplating the topic she's been given, the narrator compares what she's doing to fishing: "Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream" until a "sudden conglomeration of an idea" formed itself on the end of her line and she hauls in her small and insignificant prize (5). What precise idea she catches is not clear, as the narrator explains "I will not trouble you with that thought now, though if you look carefully you may find it for yourselves in the course of what I am going to say" (5), but it is clearly not her conclusion about rooms and money since she has already explicitly introduced that idea so one needs hardly look for it carefully. It is on her way to the Oxbridge library to research this thought that the narrator is reprimanded, first by a

Beadle for walking on the grass and second by a library employee telling her that women are not allowed in the library. She loses track of the thought, explaining that “they had sent my little fish into hiding” by reminding her she does not belong in Oxbridge (5). When first caught, this idea is “small” and “insignificant,” “the sort of fish that a good fisherman puts back into the water so that it may grow fatter and be one day worth cooking and eating” (5). The narrator’s argument regarding women writers and rooms is the discussion that helps her theory of androgyny grow until it is ready for presentation to her readers. I say this in part because the narrator uses the image of a river, this time referring to a city street in London along which numerous people walk and she sees a man and woman entering a taxi, to introduce her theory of androgyny, which returns to her “the unity of the mind” (87) that she has lost due to her topic “Women and Fiction.” More importantly, however, her theory of the androgynous mind ends an argument that has been marked by her anxious attempts to make her own personal need for a room that allows her to “think of things in themselves” (35) work within the collective of women she lectures before. For, in the end, what Woolf’s narrator proves through her examination of women’s rooms is not that all women need a room in order to think of things in themselves, but that women have used their rooms for many things throughout the history of women’s writing. Rooms have been, for women, spaces of respite, seclusion, and liberation, as well as a foundation for their own distinctly feminine voice, but while rooms may unite the lives of women in the narrator’s argument they do not create uniformity between women’s lives. In the end, the theory of the androgynous mind is a specific argument that explains what value the narrator’s own room has to her as a woman writer, and to substantiate this argument, to grow her own little fish into something more valuable, she provides a thesis about the importance of rooms in all women’s lives.

If the theory of the androgynous mind is indeed the thought the narrator catches at the river, then the inspiration for the narrator's argument about rooms seems to come as she is going to research this thought. It is during this trip that the narrator wanders onto the grass in the Oxbridge quad: "Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. [...] His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. Such thoughts were the work of a moment" (5). Such thoughts, as revealed by the simple, oppositional sentence structure in this passage, are also not very open to interpretation or exploration. Gone are the long, subordinate clause-laden sentences used to describe the narrator's contemplations at the river, replaced with the terse dichotomies of gender that stifle thought and inspire disciplined compliance. Gender, she suggests, is felt, and her work of a moment is the physical manifestation of power relations made instinctual through the performative reiteration of masculinity and femininity. Being a woman, that is to say, is something women understand simply by virtue of existing as a woman in a patriarchal world according to the narrator. It is this instinctual understanding that will help form her argument about rooms because her experience with the Beadle makes her focus on the way space and institutions affect gender. After all, she has now entered Oxbridge, a giant room of men's own, only to be immediately reminded that she is an outsider in this space and does not share the same privileges as male students.

The Beadle's reminder also draws attention to the narrator's physical movement through various rooms in the text, allowing readers to focus on these spaces as she moves through them. In the university quad, the patriarchal history of Oxbridge stands behind the Beadle, and the narrator reveals that universities, far from being ahistorical and apolitical institutions solely

concerned with the education of their students, play an important role in the patriarchal machine by ensuring men receive the bulk of the country's educational resources, both familial and governmental. Oxbridge becomes a monument to education thanks to "An unending stream of gold and silver" (8) from the moneyed classes of England—the nobility to begin with and the mercantile class more recently—and her descriptions of Oxbridge's luncheon and Fernham's dinner reveal how important money is to education. The pomp and circumstance of the Oxbridge luncheon signifies the permanence of the institution and its intellectual traditions.

Undergraduates sit enjoying their meals and talking with one another, "[a]nd thus by degrees was lit, half-way down the spine, which is the seat of the soul, not that hard little electric light which we call brilliance, as it pops in and out upon our lips, but the more profound, subtle and subterranean glow which is the rich yellow flame of rational intercourse. No need to hurry. No need to sparkle. No need to be anybody but oneself" (10). The comparison between the electric light of brilliance and yellow flame of rational discourse points out that the bulk of human knowledge does not owe itself to the genius of a few extraordinary men but to the slow construction of knowledge over centuries of luncheons like this one at Oxbridge. Time allows ideas to develop not in the vacuum of one mind but through a discourse that allows presuppositions to be challenged and ideas refined. When the women at Fernham are done their dinner, however, they hastily retreat back to their dorms and the hall is "emptied of every sign of food and made ready no doubt for breakfast the next morning" (16). In part, this occurs because "The lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes" (16), but the history of women's colleges also necessitates strict scheduling and careful spending. Time, the real luxury at the Oxbridge luncheon, is something Fernham simply cannot afford.

What effect these economic and institutional imbalances have had on men is revealed when the narrator goes to the British Museum, a space also marked by men and the knowledge they have created amongst themselves, and discovers that economic, historical, psychological, legal, and ecumenical discourses all presume and maintain patriarchal hegemony by excluding women's voices and insisting on the inferiority of women. There exists, she argues, a psychological imperative amongst men to construct their own superiority by presenting women as inferior, which she explores through a fictional work, *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*. The book's author, Professor von X, writes of women "as if he were killing some noxious insect as he wrote" (28) and displays an anger that initially confuses the narrator. He is, or men very like him are, proprietor, editor, Foreign Secretary, judge, cricketer, and company director; "he left millions to charities and colleges that were ruled by himself"; he was the scientist who, looking over a murder scene, would "decide if the hair on the meat axe was human"; and he was the judge and jury who would "acquit or convict the murderer, and hang him, or let him go free" (30-31). Professor von X's rage seems strange given that England's institutions recognize his individual autonomy and rights to an extent far exceeding that of women. The more she explores his anger, though, the more she comes to understand that its goal is less about explaining women's actual inferiority than about defining men's superiority using women as "looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (32). Across all of England's institutional discourses, man's superiority comes at women's expense, for as an object of discourse she appears as his opposite, his inferior. "Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe?" (24), the narrator asks women as she recounts going to the British Museum and reading book after book about women—some written by biologists, doctors,

schoolmasters, and clergymen, others by novelists, poets, and graduate students, but all by “men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women” (24). All the supposed virtuous characteristics of men take shape because women are defined in legal, political, philosophical, economic, medicinal, and psychological terms as the natural opposite of these virtues: men are strong, rational, analytical, civic, and women weak, emotional, intuitive, domestic.

The institutions that fill men like Jacob Flanders with the confidence to believe in the superiority of their gender here, not surprisingly, have the opposite effect on the narrator who feels enervated by her day at Oxbridge and Fernham. But she also has little trouble sloughing off her experiences once she leaves the campus and returns to her room at an inn. She uses “I” throughout the passage to signify how her entire day has been shaped by her gendered body, and how she has been forced into the acceptance of a gender identity. It is not until she gets to her room that she is able to shed this gender identity, signaled when she switches to the gender neutral pronoun “one”:

So *I* went back to my inn, and as *I* walked back through the dark streets *I* pondered this and that, as one does at the end of the day’s work. *I* pondered why it was that Mrs Seton had no money to leave us; and what effect poverty has on the mind; and what effect wealth has on the mind; and *I* thought of the queer old gentlemen *I* had seen that morning with tufts of fur upon their shoulders; and *I* remembered how if one whistled one of them ran; and *I* thought of the organ booming in the chapel and of the shut doors of the library; and *I* thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and *I* thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and the poverty

and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer, *I* thought at last that it was time to roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and its impressions and its angers and its laughter, and cast it into the hedge. A thousand stars were flashing across the blue wastes of the sky. *One* seemed alone with an inscrutable society. All human beings were laid asleep—prone, horizontal, dumb. Nobody seemed stirring in the streets of Oxbridge. Even the door of the hotel sprang open at the touch of an invisible hand—not a boots was sitting up to light me to bed, it was so late. (21-22 emphasis added)

It is telling that what allows the narrator to finally crumple up the skin of the day—a skin that has defined and limited her since she left the river that morning—is a populace prone, horizontal, and dumb. Only in a city lying asleep can she find the solitude she needs to be anything other than a woman, a subtle reminder that gender power relations extend far past the walls and quads of Oxbridge University, and a not-so-subtle reminder that women can achieve freedom only when their society is unconscious. Her ‘I’, which to the narrator is nothing more than “a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (4), is forced into embodied reality on campus because the university insists on, even constitutes, her gender in the classes it teaches, the books it writes, the libraries it restricts, and the turf it protects. The long sentence in the middle of this passage with its seemingly interminable “ands” demonstrates the narrator’s inability to conclude and implement what she has learned at Oxbridge about women and fiction; she provides, instead, a relisting of all that has happened to her on her search for truth, forcing her readers to experience, just as she had to, the endless reiteration of becoming a woman (or a man) on campus. What is it like to be a woman at Oxbridge, her list asks, before answering itself

with a repetitive structure that reveals one becomes a man or a woman on the Oxbridge campus not based on anything essentially masculine or feminine but through being allowed to walk on the grass (or not), being allowed to enter the library (or not), and receiving the full and unbridled economic, political, educational, and legal support of the country's institutions (or not).

In the next chapter, the narrator begins her search for information with renewed vigour as she walks through London, where the crowded city streets allow her to move with more freedom amongst other Londoners who do not monitor her as closely as the Oxbridge Beadle. London is presented very differently than Oxbridge: gone is the exclusivity of Oxbridge and in its place rises a city that is inclusive if only because one can find anonymity amongst the many lives that intersect on London's busy streets. Still, all these individual lives in London make amongst themselves something that approximates a unity, for, the narrator says, "London was like a workshop. London was like a machine. We were all being shot backwards and forwards on this plain foundation to make some pattern" (24). Here, London is compared to a loom that produces a pattern from the many individual lives that cross and intersect with one another each day, so when the narrator returns home that night, she says that "the great machine after laboring all day had made with our help a few yards of something very exciting and beautiful—a fiery fabric flashing with red eyes, a tawny monster roaring with hot breath" (35). Culture is both democratized and made temporal in this comparison, which explains that the people, simply by living their lives each day, produce the culture of their cities, their nations, and their people—an aspect of culture oft forgot by Oxbridge Beadles and Dons who believe themselves the gatekeepers of culture. If universities are generally considered the institutions responsible for establishing, exploring, and defending the culture of a people, it is their authority that is challenged when the narrator reveals culture belongs to all the lives who make it each day.

Despite the cultural egalitarianism expressed in this comparison between London and a loom, the narrator has a little more trouble forgetting her gender after visiting the British Museum, for all her contemplation of the way men rank their superiority in relation to women has altered her perceptions. The British Museum plays its own role in the cultural tapestry of England inasmuch as it is “another department of the factory” that is London life (24), but it, too, provides little information about her topic. The pronouns she chooses when describing the process of finding books in the museum confirm the narrator is thinking little about gender as she enters the museum: “One went to the counter; one took a slip of paper; one opened a volume of the catalogue, and the five dots here indicate five separate minutes of stupefaction, wonder and bewilderment. Have you any notion how many books are written about women in the course of one year?” (24). Almost immediately, the narrator is brought back to the realities of her topic, her gender, and the revelations about male psychology in Professor von X’s book on the myriad inferiorities of women. Another entire day, therefore, is spent parsing the divisions of the genders before the narrator returns to her street where “domesticity prevailed” amongst the workaday lives of painters, nursemaids, coal-heavers, and green-grocers (36). But the narrator is much less able to crumple up the gendered skin of this day and throw it in the hedge than she was when she left Oxbridge:

so engrossed was I with the problem you have laid upon my shoulders that I could not see even these usual sights without referring them to one centre. I thought how much harder it is now than it must have been even a century ago to say which of these employments is the higher, the more necessary. Is it better to be a coal-heaver or a nursemaid; is the charwoman who has brought up eight children

of less value to the world than the barrister who has made a hundred thousand pounds? (36)

Once again the narrator complains of the topic she has been given because it forces her to bring everything back to gender, back to a centre that her room and her money usually allow her to ignore when she writes. Beyond simply reducing everything to gender, though, the narrator's time with her topic has begun to change her perception of the world so that she now examines people's worth using Oxbridge's most enduring educational product: comparative value. The exams, papers, degrees, and designations of Oxbridge create an intellectual reliance on classification and comparison that pervades the lives and worldview of Oxbridge men, sometimes with dire consequences. The narrator explains that Professor von X's "education had been in some ways as faulty as [her] own" since it has bred in him and all men sent through patriarchal institutions "the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives them to desire other people's fields and goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas; to offer up their own lives and their children's lives" (35). While the narrator's education is faulty because she has not been provided the same access to England's educational institutions as men, her exclusion from such places has protected her from the compulsion to understand the world in terms of dichotomies that simplify existence by establishing thresholds between things and that are relied upon to constitute character and capacity. And yet gauging and weighing the differences between people is precisely the result of the narrator's time spent in the rooms of men. In the morning, the narrator had viewed London as a vast factory where every person played his or her part in the production of a few yards of fabric as lives crossed and intersected with one another. This view changes utterly at night: individual is pitted against individual as the value of each person is weighed to discern who plays the most significant role

in the process of manufacturing English culture. This worldview centered on incessant comparisons and definitions could be crumpled up and thrown away with ease on the first day because Oxbridge is so obviously a room of men's own that the narrator is never allowed to feel like anything other than an outsider, but after this second day, spent in a place she believed was filled with minds seeking essential truths, the compulsion toward rank and exclusivity has begun to influence her perception. This influence diminishes quickly when the narrator reminds herself that "the comparative values of charwomen and lawyers rise and fall from decade to decade" and that "we have no rods with which to measure them even as they are at the moment" (36), but her realization comes only when she thinks about how "foolish" she has been to ask professors "to furnish [her] with 'indisputable proofs'" (36) about something like gender. As she has told readers at the beginning of her essay, questions about gender make plain "the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker" (36), so any argument made about gender must necessarily be conditional and temporally dependent, never possibly ascending to the stature of indisputable proof.

The beginning of Chapter 3 in *A Room of One's Own* marks an important shift in the essay because the narrator moves from the rooms of men into a room of her own until she emerges back into the London streets in the last chapter, and it is in this room that she begins for the first time to discuss women writers. In terms of providing immediate relief from the binary mode of thought she has fallen into at Oxbridge and the British Museum, the narrator's room serves as a reprieve from "seeking for the truth," which has led only to finding the biased and self-legitimizing opinions of men, while also allowing her to "draw the curtains" and "shut out distractions" as she searches histories for facts about women (38). Here again, she encounters a problem, though, for the narrator explains that women have very little existence historically

because virtually “nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century” (42): their lives are not written of except in their letters and diaries; their exclusion from social institutions largely erases them from the histories of science, philosophy, literature, politics, religion, business, and military combat; and their roles in the lives of men, the only place they might find mention in most of these histories, is downplayed beyond the care they provide in the nursery. In fiction, however, women are often either idealized beyond recognition or vilified beyond redemption, so that juxtaposing the real and the literary figures of women, according to narrator, births something quite paradoxical:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (40)

Here, the narrator uses the oppositional forms foundational to Oxbridge’s weighing and comparing people against itself to reveal what an “odd monster” is “made up by reading the historians first and the poets afterwards” discussing women (40). Whether in literature where they have worked well as foils for men’s ambitions, served admirably as objects that guide a hero’s progress, and been moral compasses as often as immoral temptresses, or in reality where they have been completely omitted from the history books or judged against the fictional representations of women created by men, women have rarely ever been autonomous beings capable of existing outside their relationships to men. Thus, women always exist between

fictional and historical discourses as deformed or twisted beings, their monstrosity revealing the limitations of the very systems men use to weigh and define women.

The tension between historical and literary representations thus reveals the double bind women find themselves in when it comes to negotiating their identities and their agency at the intersection of two such varied discourses, as bettering their material realities often places women at odds with the feminine ideals represented in literature. The concept of chastity, for example, reveals how the historical conditions and literary representations of women work hand-in-hand to twist and deform them, especially with regards to its effects on women writers. Chastity, the narrator argues, is a “fetish invented by certain societies” (45) and literature has played no small part in this invention from its Medieval Romances and Renaissance sonnets to its Romantic and Victorian fallen women. But there is no doubt that “Chastity had [in the 1600s], it has even now, a religious importance in a woman’s life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest” (45). Like the instinct that aids the narrator when the Oxbridge Beadle reprimands her for walking on the grass, chastity—in particular its ideals of humility and being seen rather than heard—has become natural through performative reiteration to the point that discerning its rules is the work of mere moments. Importantly, however, early women writers would become monstrous whether or not they chose to be chaste. To participate in chastity meant, on one hand, to discipline herself according to nigh unachievable ideals of restraint, comportment, and grace until she became a twisted version of herself; to use her gift for writing in order to better her material reality, on the other hand, meant abandoning her chastity to seek public recognition and adulation and being cast out of society as a deformed woman “crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to” (45). Thus, Judith Shakespeare’s “gift for poetry,” the narrator imagines,

“would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty” (45). Speak or not speak, Judith would have found herself deformed and twisted by her decision, her fate representing the fate of all gifted women who either lacked the opportunity to write or could not summon that courage of the rarest needed to choose social exile so she could write.

The world’s indifference to works of genius as well as the relational value of masterpieces also helped to ensure women were unlikely to write prior to the 18th Century according to the narrator. Completing a work of genius, she notes, constitutes a miraculous achievement for men inasmuch as it overcomes “the world’s notorious indifference” (47), for in a world that “does not ask people to write poems and novels and histories” and “does not care whether Flaubert finds the right word or whether Carlyle scrupulously verifies this or that fact” (47), works of genius force readers to care about these things. They compel the world, in other words, to pay attention in spite of itself, for if the world “will not pay for what it does not want” (47), then the work of genius gives the world what it needs to understand itself. Works of genius, that is to say, gain value because they reveal the world to itself, and when the narrator explains “masterpieces are not single and solitary births” but “the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice” (59-60), she means this quite literally. Handholds in a world constantly moving forward while ever looking backward to define and explain itself culturally, masterpieces mark the world’s cultural progression by representing the people and, however momentarily, asking them to stop and view themselves using the words Flaubert has found or the scrupulous facts Carlyle has discovered.

How big a role women can play in this “body of the people” is severely limited, though, because they have had limited access to the public sphere for so much of their existence. The narrator points out that where William Shakespeare, in London, “lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practicing his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the street, and even getting access to the palace of the queen” (43), his sister Judith, having “had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil” (43), and having snuck out one night to escape a marriage that “was hateful to her” (43), made it to London only to find “Men laughed in her face” at the thought of her becoming an actress until she became pregnant out of wedlock with the one man who “took pity on her” and “killed herself one winter’s night” (44). For one, London opens itself entirely, its institutions offering him places to explore, ideas to discover, and relationships to create so that he, returning the favour, could breathe life into its world; for the other, London shrouds itself in mystery and its institutions, barring her from public life entirely, become an eventual mausoleum that obscures the corpse of a life smothered from its beginning. Thus, the narrator suggests, where the world is merely “notoriously indifferent” to men’s attempts to write a work of genius, it is openly hostile to women’s attempts, for “The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What’s the good of your writing?” (48). It is here that we finally arrive at the Gordian knot at the centre of why, before the 18th Century, few women wrote literature: naught but a work of rarest genius, a masterpiece, could possibly have overcome the world’s hostility to women writers, but a masterpiece is precisely what a woman could never write because her place in the world made it impossible to speak for “the body of the people.” So when the narrator agrees with the bishop that “it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of

Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare” (42), it is not because she believes women incapable of writing a work of genius but because she believes women lacked access enough to the world to make a masterpiece possible. Had she with rarest courage broken her chastity to write and become, in the eyes of the world, a twisted and deformed monstrosity; had she, despite all domestic distractions, managed to write a work of genius; had she made the world, in spite of its open hostility, stop to look at this work of genius; had she done all this, she still could not have written a masterpiece that represented the single voice of the masses because she had always existed outside the public sphere and its institutions.

While the double bind created between chastity and monstrosity prevented most women from writing, there were some who braved monstrosity to write before the eighteenth century, but the rooms of these women, the narrator argues, tended to become sites of confinement rather than of liberation because they allowed women writers to escape the world but not their gender. Lady Winchilsea and Duchess Margaret (Cavendish) of Newcastle were both noble by birth, married to kind noblemen, and childless, and each used her “comparative freedom and comfort to publish something with her name to it and risk being thought a monster” (53). All their advantages in life, however, could not prevent Winchilsea and Cavendish from being “disturbed by alien emotions like fear and hatred” (53) in a world that thought them monstrous simply for daring to write, and each woman used her room to escape the world physically while still being unable to escape it mentally and psychologically. Winchilsea’s room, in particular, became a war room, according to the narrator, for she viewed men as “the ‘opposing faction’” (54) and was “forced to anger and bitterness” to the point that she “must have shut herself up in a room in the country to write, and been torn asunder by bitterness and scruples perhaps, though her husband was of the kindest, and their married life perfection. She ‘must have’, I say, because when one

comes to seek out the facts about Lady Winchilsea, one finds, as usual, that almost nothing is known about her” (55). Certainly, the pieces of Winchilsea’s poetry the narrator supplies seem to suggest an anger toward men, but we should note the similarities between the narrator’s description and criticism of Winchilsea and the narrator’s own biography. Indeed, she uses almost the exact same words to describe her own relationship to her room when she writes, “fear and bitterness modified themselves into pity and toleration; and then in a year or two, pity and toleration went, and the greatest release of all came, which is the freedom to think of things in themselves” (35). In and of themselves, these similarities don’t seem particularly important; after all, the narrator tells us at the beginning of the essay that she will lie to the reader. One must wonder, though, if Woolf, who has done so much formally to remove herself from *A Room of One’s Own*, isn’t having a little fun with readers in making her narrator’s argument so obviously biographical. What readers are presented with, after all, is a narrator who invents Winchilsea’s biography based on the narrator’s own invented autobiography, making plain that this argument is operating on a metafictional level that ties various stories to one another specifically to draw attention to the constructedness of the argument. As Pamela Caughie has noted, in *A Room of One’s Own* it “is not the mind’s method we explore but the storyteller’s” (42), and the “I” that represents the narrator in the text “is implicated in its own stories” because “as both narrator and character, the ‘I’ is a construction of its own fictions” (42). The intersecting stories of the narrator and Winchilsea draw attention to the fact that the narrator is making her history up as she goes by filling the gaps in other women’s stories with her own perceptions as a woman, and, moreover, she does this in a way that elides time, class, and culture. Mere pages before this passage the narrator reminded readers that “the comparative values of charwomen and lawyers rise and fall from decade to decade” and that “we have no rods with which to measure them even

as they are at the moment” (36), yet here she is using her own experience as the daughter of an educated man to create an argument about rooms, writing, and a noblewoman who lived more than 200 years in the past.

This is not to cynically suggest that readers view Woolf’s narrator as an unreliable manipulator of the truth who adjusts facts to fit her argument, but to point out that the history she invents—and invent she must in the absence of any historical information about Winchilsea—is contingent. There is no critical sleight of hand happening here, and if there is, the intent is less to deceive readers than it is to draw further attention to the distinctions between the narrator and the topic *Women and Fiction* by revealing how she “made [the subject] work in and out of [her] daily life” (4). Newnham has asked the narrator to speak about *Women and Fiction*, and, common reader that she is, she “is guided by an instinct to create for [her]self, out of whatever odds and ends [she] can come by, some kind of a whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing” (*Common Reader* 1). Perhaps Winchilsea did not shut herself up in a room where she was “torn asunder by bitterness” (55), and perhaps she did not take the world into her room with her and transform it into a place to ruminate endlessly about her lot in the patriarchal hegemony, but two things in the narrator’s portrait of Winchilsea are incontrovertible: first, men controlled the means of production and so had “the power to bar her way to what she want[ed] to do—which [was] to write” (54); and second, the anger and bitterness the narrator feels as she visits Oxbridge and the British Museum existed for Winchilsea also, but in a form unmitigated by later social and political advances that gave women the opportunity to vote as well as access to education and the professions. The narrator’s story is connected to Winchilsea’s as a way to unite women across the generations through their anger and bitterness, and the room as well remains an important constant in the lives of both women. But the text resists creating a

uniformity between the two women because it marks the historical and contextual distinctions in the lives of the narrator and Winchilsea. Much of Winchilsea's considerable talent as a writer goes into work that focuses closely on the injustices of women, which, to the narrator, only reinforces her position as a woman and prevents her from thinking beyond gender. However, comparing the story of a twentieth-century narrator with access to a literary marketplace, the ability to own property, the ability to earn money, the ability to seek education, and the ability to vote, to that of a seventeenth-century Countess, who did not have access to any of these things, asks readers to consider the historical differences that play an important role in the narrator's ability to use her room to "think of things in themselves." After all, as Alex Zwerdling has pointed out, the narrator may argue that "the direct expression of anger is fatal to art" in the case of Winchilsea, but "she also quotes them at length, thus simultaneously denying the 'soundness' of their approach and incorporating their angry voices into her own text" (253). Winchilsea is thereby honoured in the text while still being questioned, and the anger that unites her with the narrator also generates the differences between the two women writers and the uses they find for their rooms.

The narrator argues that Cavendish also used her rooms to lock herself away, but her intention was to escape a world that refused to train her prodigious intellect, a decision that led to her eventually becoming a misunderstood curiosity used to warn other women of the dangers of thinking and writing. Like Winchilsea, Cavendish was prone to "outburst[s] of rage" (56) at the men who refused to let her expand her intelligence until, finally, "She shut herself up at Welbeck alone" (56). She had a knack for learning and "should have had a microscope put in her hand" or "been taught to look at the stars and reason scientifically" (56) according the narrator, but because she wasn't allowed access to such training, her intelligence "poured itself out, higgledy-

piggledy, in torrents of rhyme and prose, and poetry, and philosophy” (56) until, eventually, Cavendish’s “wits were turned with solitude and freedom” (56). About this intellect, the narrator asks, “what could bind, tame or civilize for human use that wild, generous, untutored intelligence?” (56). The disciplinary language used here is remarkable given the narrator’s previous discussions about men’s institutions and the way they have instilled in men the desire to colonize the earth, build implements of war, and give their lives for false unities like nationalism, but it is also remarkable given her emphasis on common readers and their instinct to create for themselves. Indeed, of all the discussions of women writers in *A Room of One’s Own*, this one about Cavendish is the most prejudicial. Welbeck is an escape from the world, but it is also, according to the narrator, a place that does not allow Cavendish to reach her true potential as a thinker because her mind, although prodigious, runs free until its thoughts are lost in eccentricities that make her an object of amusement and wonder. Like Judith Shakespeare, Cavendish is never given the opportunity to interact with England’s institutions and, so, her gifts go unclaimed by the society that not only mocks and jeers her but also uses her as a “bogey to frighten clever girls with” (56). The rooms at Welbeck that were, to her, a sanctuary which allowed her to think what and as she pleased were, to the world, an asylum usefully hiding from view the ideas of the mad Duchess of Newcastle. It should not be forgotten that the narrator, like Cavendish, is also uneducated and that what prevents the products of her untutored intelligence—products the reader is in the midst of reading—from being used as a “bogey to frighten clever girls with” are the social and political advances that have made it possible for the products of her room to become something more than a mausoleum for her own hastily constructed ideas. Here, again, the stories of the narrator and her historical subject overlap as the narrator, worn down by the weight of her subject and angry after her experiences at Oxbridge

and the British Museum, seeks refuge in her room that locks her away from the world so she can begin building her sketch of women and fiction. For the middle section of this text, the narrator is very much like Cavendish: having tried to bind and tame her thoughts through study and finding little by way of facts or truths to help her formulate an argument about women and fiction, she enters her room to begin inventing a history of her own that centres on the importance of rooms in women's lives. Rooms, according to her, have been the one thing that unites women writers, but it becomes clear that rooms are not uniformly meaningful to all women. Time and again, the narrator's argument that a room of one's own allows one to "think of things in themselves" fails to make sense in the lives of the women writers she discusses, for though they may experience similar feelings of anger, bitterness, and ostracism, their lives are simply too different to be bound into a unity using any one symbol or metaphor. It is the narrator, after all, who explains on her way home from the British Museum that, "Even if one could state the value of any one gift at a moment, those values will change; in a century's time very possibly they will have changed completely" (36). She is talking about personal gifts and characteristics in the passage, but the sentiment applies equally to her discussion of rooms in the history of women writers.

The narrator's final historical case study of women writers before the eighteenth century is of Aphra Behn, whom the narrator relates more closely to the discovery of writing as a profession than to any room. Behn was roughly a contemporary of Winchilsea and Cavendish, and, while, like them, she did not have any children, Behn was a middle-class woman who was forced to make a living for herself due to the death of her husband and some unpaid debts. She lived rather differently than most women at the time, having worked as a spy in the Netherlands for King Charles II and, upon her return to England, having become a friend to, if not member

of, a Restoration coterie of libertine poets and playwrights, including John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, that was well-known for their carousing and lewd behaviour (Todd 195). For the narrator, Behn is particularly important because with her “We leave behind, shut up in their parks among their folios, those solitary great ladies who wrote without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone. We come to town and rub shoulders with ordinary people in the streets” (58). Behn proved there could be an audience for women’s writing for the first time, and the fact that “She made, by working very hard, enough to live on” (58) taught women that “Money dignifies what is frivolous if unpaid for” (59). Behn’s discovery that a woman could survive as a writer was monumental because it transformed writing into a profession for women at a time when they had little access to other professions. However, the narrator presents women’s entrance into the literary marketplace as a double-edged sword for the history of women’s fiction. Women writers had, for the first time in their history, left the confines of their private rooms to enter the world at large to write, but when women discovered the “practical importance” of writing, the narrator argues, “Hundreds of women began as the eighteenth century drew on to add to their pin money, or to come to the rescue of their families by making translations or writing the innumerable bad novels which have ceased to be recorded even in text-books, but are to be picked up in the fourpenny boxes in the Charing Cross Road” (59). With a steadily expanding literary marketplace and a dearth of works to fill the needs of a rapidly expanding English readership, early women writers wrote for the market rather than what they wanted according to the narrator, filling every nook and cranny of free market space with works that might serve the “practical importance” of making an income but served very little literary importance. This dismissiveness of early women writers for taking advantage of the expanding literary marketplace to generate income is objectively snobbish and belies the narrator’s

privileged position as an inheritor of money, but she does admit that when “The middle-class woman began to write” she initiated an historical event “of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses” (59). This statement finally makes it plain that the narrator’s thesis about money and a room is contingent upon contextual and historical distinctions, and it reveals that what initially seems to be a universal thesis—“woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (3)—should be treated more as a conditional statement that applies best to our singular narrator’s subject position. By the narrator’s own admission, it was women with no rooms of their own and little money who transformed women’s writing.

The next part of the narrator’s history of women’s writing discusses the emergence of the first great works by the middle-class women novelists like Jane Austen, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot, and the narrator argues these women succeeded in writing the first masterpieces of women’s writing not because they had rooms of their own but because they insisted upon and revealed the importance of women’s rooms in their novels. Austen, the Brontës, and Eliot were all middle-class women who had no rooms of their own but wrote from the domestic rooms they operated as wives, mothers, and daughters, and it was this world, according to the narrator, that was central to their fiction. The world of these middle-class women, because they had been excluded from all the social institutions of England, was constituted differently than the world of men: where men’s lives were ruled by institutions that taught them how to compete with one another and determine thresholds of difference, these women’s lives were shaped by the rooms of private houses. A middle-class woman’s skill as a writer, the narrator argues, was in “the observation of character” that came with having been “educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room” where “People’s feelings were impressed upon her; personal relations were always before her eyes” (61). If men

understood the world by categorizing and organizing people, then women—for centuries the hostesses of parties that brought people together—understood the world by observing the interactions between people. The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century women writers had the courage to begin expressing the fundamentally different experiences that separated the lives of women from the lives of men, a difficult task given “it is the masculine values that prevail” in society and in the literary marketplace (67). Thus, the narrator argues the courage these women showed in writing the lives of women reveals their authorial integrity, which the narrator defines as the element in books that “holds them together in [...] rare instances of survival” (65) and that indicates the author’s ability to convince her readers that she has represented reality accurately even if they “have never known people behaving like that” (65). Integrity produces longevity, and it is the women writer’s willingness to write the worlds of their rooms into existence that saved them from the fourpenny boxes. But even though the narrator never mentions it, one wonders what role the “innumerable bad novels” of women writers before the eighteenth century played in later women novelists’ ability to write about their world with the integrity needed to create their masterpieces. No matter how many reams of paper were written by early women writers only to be forgotten to time, this work helped generate the critical mass of women’s literature that allowed the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women novelists to begin writing the first masterpieces of women’s literature. A foundation had been laid that women could build upon, and if “the experience of the mass is behind the single voice” (59-60) that creates a masterpiece and forces the world to pay attention to it as a work of genius, then what comes before, no matter how bad and how innumerable, must play some part in establishing a world that requires a genius to gain the attention of readers in the first place. Out of this

foundation stepped into the world, for the first time, a literature that represented the world of women, not the world of men.

Rooms might have been important to the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women novelists' writing, but only Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, the narrator argues, were truly able to write about women's rooms and worlds with complete integrity because only they were able to eschew the forms of men entirely and invent a distinct women's writing style. Charlotte Brontë "had more genius in her than Austen," but, like Lady Winchilsea, her work is "deformed and twisted" by angers and grievances until "at war with her lot" she could not "help but die young, cramped and thwarted" (63). And George Eliot, like Cavendish, squirreled herself away in "a secluded villa in St John's Wood" and "settled down in the shadow of the world's disapproval" (64), all because she was "living in sin with a married man and might not the sight of her damage the chastity of Mrs. Smith or whoever it might be that chanced to call" (64). Austen and Emily Brontë were able to avoid the fates of their contemporaries because "They wrote as women write, not as men write" (68). They were, that is to say, formal pioneers who recognized "we think back through our mothers if we are women," and they taught women it is "useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure" (69). The narrator continues a page later that "The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully. The ape is too distant to be sedulous. Perhaps the first thing she would find, setting pen to paper, was that there was no common sentence ready for her use" (69). For Austen and Emily Brontë, therefore, the room becomes less a physical space they retreat to or find salvation in than a literary form that in and of itself contains and reveals their genius and allows them to express the world of sitting-rooms and its characters from the ground up. They need no longer rely on the ill-fitting forms and

sentences of men because they created forms suited to their purposes as women writers, transforming women's writing from something that merely emulates men's sentences and forms into something that creates for itself. With Austen and Emily Brontë, the physical room that Behn proved women could attain through writing for "practical importance" finally becomes a space that represents women's writing, not merely a place that allows women to vent their anger or hide themselves from sight.

It is not until the narrator gets to modern women's literature and imagines a fictional author, Mary Carmichael, that readers are introduced to a writer who, like the narrator, uses her room to "think of things in themselves," and Carmichael's disinterest in gender as a construction of discourse indicates, once and for all, that *A Room of One's Own* has been leading always to the theory of the androgynous mind rather than to the conclusion about rooms and money that begins the essay. Carmichael removes women from the discourses that have previously defined them using the simple phrase "Chloe liked Olivia" (74), which connects two women to one another outside any relationship to a man and helps rescue her from "the peculiar nature of women in fiction; the astonishing extremes of her beauty; the alterations between heavenly goodness and hellish depravity" (75). This refers back to the narrator's discussion of woman's liminal position between the discourses of literature (where woman is of the utmost importance as the foil to men's heroism, the object of affection that initiates men's heroism, the moral paragon that guides men's actions, and the immoral temptress that leads men to folly) and history (where they are absent from both historical records and biography) that renders women monstrous. When Carmichael frees Chloe and Olivia from this liminal position, she begins to imagine other possibilities for women that extend beyond their relation to men, but more importantly she creates a new discourse in which gender can be recast as, if not inconsequential,

less consequential to Chloe and Olivia's relationship. Carmichael lacks "the love of Nature, the fiery imagination, the wild poetry, the brilliant wit, the brooding wisdom of her great predecessors" (83), but she has "certain advantages which women [...] lacked even a half century ago. Men were no longer to her 'the opposing faction'; she need not spend her time railing against them; she need not climb on to the roof and ruin her peace of mind longing for travel, experience and knowledge of the world and character that were denied her" (83). This condensed history that touches once more upon all those mentioned in her history of women writers reveals an evolution of women's writing that is attached to their rooms throughout, but this space that unites them also marks the historical and contextual distinctions between them and ends, not coincidentally, with a writer in Carmichael who uses her room with an intent that matches the narrator's. For the narrator writes that "she had—I began to think—mastered the first great lesson; she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself" (84). Christine Froula notes that thinking of sex in this way marks "a disinterestedness that does not obliterate sex" (196) so that "sex 'unconscious of itself' signifies a living body and mind unburdened by grievances that bespeak 'interest' and compromise freedom" (197). Until Mary, the narrator implies, women have always conceptualized themselves using discourses that focus on their gender as the primary indicator of their identity—either as the Countess barred from publication by men, or the Duchess unable to study in men's institutions, or as the middle-class hostesses who brought people together in their rooms. As Froula suggests, then, Carmichael's writing treats "sex as a pure fact of nature, apart from social law" (197), which would be impossible but for her own room that allows her to escape the discursive relations and signifying economies of gender in places like Oxbridge and the British

Museum. If both the narrator's arguments in *A Room of One's Own* work together, it is because the former serves the necessary function of feeding the latter and letting it grow until the narrator is ready to reveal that tiny fish she caught at the river at the beginning of the text. Her topic "Women and Fiction" specifically asks her to present an argument interested in gender, but everything in her argument—her exposition of how the rooms of men shape their identities toward competition and war, her presentation of women writers so often confined in or by their rooms, her being trapped in her own room and made to think of gender—leads to the androgynous mind that presents a disinterested view of gender.

Rivers bookend *A Room of One's Own*, and the river that ends the essay also ends the narrator's confinement in the various rooms she visits in the text, for as she gets ready to leave her own room and stop thinking about "Women and Fiction," she presents her theory of the androgynous mind, now fattened by her discussion of rooms and women's lives, to an audience she hopes will see the value of gender neutrality. The narrator looks out from her room's window onto a busy London street, and, leaving no doubt readers are meant to compare the end of the text with its beginning, she compares the street to a river "that took people and eddied them along, as the stream at Oxbridge had taken the undergraduate in his boat and the dead leaves" (87). While she caught a thought in the river at Oxbridge that she refuses to trouble the reader with at the time, what captures the reader's attention this time is a young man and woman meeting to catch a taxi. The sight produces one final argument about her topic: "Perhaps, to think, as I had been thinking these two days, of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind. Now that effort had ceased and that unity had been restored" (87). This is the first time in the text the narrator mentions unity, and it is to call for a unity of mind, born of prioritizing neither one sex nor the other, rather than any unity among

women or women writers because, for the narrator, unity based on sex consciousness leads to terrible consequences. She suggests that the Suffragette movement “roused in men an extraordinary desire for self-assertion” and “made them lay an emphasis upon their own sex and its characteristics which they would not have troubled to think about had they not been challenged” (89). What comes of men’s “extraordinary desire for self-assertion,” the narrator points out, is the “self-assertive virility” and “unmitigated masculinity” of Italian and German fascism (92), and she proclaims “All who have brought about the state of sex-consciousness are to blame, and it is they who drive me, when I want to stretch my faculties on a book, to seek that happy age, before Miss Davies and Miss Clough were born, when the writer used both sides of his mind equally” (93). Miss Davies is Emily Davies, a suffragette and the founder of Girton College, and Miss Clough is Anne Clough, a suffragette and the first principal of Newnham College. The comment from the narrator is thus doubly biting given that the essay is ostensibly delivered as an address to students at a women’s college. However far into hyperbole the narrator strays in this portion of her argument—and I would suggest it’s a considerable distance given that the narrator previously offered the students of Girton and Newnham possible topics to explore concerning the history of women—the correlation she implies between European fascism and the Suffragette movement reveals just how troubled the narrator is about the potential to lose one’s autonomy in collectives. The narrator’s specific subject position also plays a part in this argument: as an uneducated woman writer with inherited wealth, she doesn’t particularly need the civil rights the Suffragette movement fought for to improve her life—between her inherited money and the vote, she muses, the money seems “infinitely the more important” (34)—and her job as writer is to represent reality with integrity rather than to fight on behalf of one institution, nation, or sex. Indeed, if anything, her position benefits by maintaining

distance from collectives if her goal is the “freedom to think of things in themselves” (35): she need never worry about serving the interests of a collective if she maintains a distance that allows her to maintain a critical disinterest. Thus, the very last thing she does before leaving her room is explain that “the very first sentence that I would write here, I said, crossing over to the writing-table and taking up the page headed Women and Fiction, is that it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex” (94). This final argument, the ultimate end of her theory of the androgynous mind, is also her first sentence, the essay having come full circle to present a thesis that challenges unity only after it has united women using the room that not only connects the narrator to her sex but also separates her from it. Hers is a self-confident, but also self-aware “I,” cognizant of the power structures of the literary market into which her work and words will exist and engaging with the institutions and professions from which she is excluded, but asserting agency and autonomy in a dialogue that moves speaker and audience towards common cultural ground.

CHAPTER SIX

“Those also serve who remain outside”: The Society of Outsiders and Disruptive Politics in

Three Guineas

While *A Room of One's Own* uses a slippery and intersectional narrative position to resist unification with the collective and institution the narrator lectures before, ultimately presenting a position of gender neutrality in the theory of the androgynous mind, *Three Guineas* (1938) appears almost a decade later and takes quite a different approach to the topics of patriarchal hegemony and women's political praxis. Rather than challenging and subtly subverting the social discourses men use to construct their superiority and women's inferiority—the dynamic behind the institutionalization of exclusionary knowledge depicted in its effects on a generation of dead soldiers in *Jacob's Room*, and the system behind the political import of medical authority against which Clarissa's epiphany and assemblages operate in *Mrs Dalloway*—Woolf's narrator mediates her world for an educated man. This mediation is an exchange that foregrounds both parties' critical deficiencies, thus representing a textual space in which both parties exercise agency as readers not merely of text or of the debates surrounding the literary marketplace, but also of the institutional forces that play upon the subject as a body and mind located in historical, socio-economic, personal and cultural context. Given her main reader's positioning, as well as her own, the narrator in Woolf's *The Guineas* emphasizes the gap between them even as both are on the brink of facing another war. In response to a letter from an educated man requesting money to aid in the prevention of war, Woolf's narrator marvels at the singular nature of the question “How in your opinion are we to prevent war?” (117), before demonstrating conclusively that women, specifically the “daughters of educated men” like herself, have little power to prevent war because they have been denied access to and still struggle for a foothold in the

institutions that govern England. Using evidence collected from sources including literature, histories, biographies, social science research, newspapers, and official documents over the six years prior to her writing *Three Guineas*, Woolf produces, as she never tires of stating in the essay, a fact-based argument—supported by numerous direct quotations in the body of the essay and over one hundred endnotes—that links military aggression and dictatorship to the patriarchal imperative that pervades England’s social institutions. A systematic dressing down of these numerous institutions, among which she includes the government, the professions, the academy, the church, the media, and the family, what emerges in the essay is as much an exploration of English culture’s pervasive gender inequalities as it is a pacifist political manifesto written in the face of the ever-increasing likelihood of a second European conflict in the first half of the twentieth-century.

To link her social and political critiques, Woolf focuses on the “daughters of educated men,” a term that in and of itself marks this group’s marginalization within England’s patriarchal institutions. Woolf notes how profoundly women lack the “two prime characteristics of the bourgeoisie—capital and environment” (274)—the men of her class possess, and in what constitutes the thesis of the essay, Woolf explains that men have many weapons, including taking up arms, ready access to the business world, influence over the government through diplomatic service, and the ability to preach sermons, at their disposal to aid in the prevention of war before discussing educated men’s daughter’s access to such things: “both the Army and the Navy are closed to our sex. We are not allowed to fight. Nor again are we allowed to be members of the Stock Exchange. [...] We cannot preach sermons or negotiate treaties. Then again although it is true that we can write articles or send letters to the Press, the control of the Press – the decision what to print – is entirely in the hands of your sex” (127). The entire institutional superstructure

of England, that is to say, is under the control of men, and is passed down from generation to generation by the social institutions that support men's lives, goals, values, and traditions. Outsiders to this tradition, women necessarily see and experience the world differently. As one example, Woolf explains that women, who have seen the money for their education endlessly syphoned from them into Arthur's Education Fund, view Oxbridge not as their old schools but as a symbol of oft-ignored educations that frequently consist of "a schoolroom table; an omnibus going to class; a little woman with a red nose who is not well educated herself but has an invalid mother to support" (119). Woolf thus postulates that "Any help we can give you [in the prevention of war] must be different from that you can give yourselves, and perhaps the value of that help may lie in the fact of that difference" (133). The end of Woolf's argument is that women participate in what she calls "The Society of Outsiders," which is a society only in the loosest sense of the word and does not prescribe political actions, or hold meetings, or seek funds but, rather, refuses to act or speak in any way that supports the patriarchal tradition that perpetuates war. Woolf's political call to action, therefore, is essentially a politics of everyday life that focus on private actions that are temporally and spatially specific depending on one's relation to institutions and their discourses of power, as it calls for careful consideration of both subject positionality and performative participation in the public sphere. Much like the kind of discriminate buying Woolf advocates for the common reader in the literary marketplace in "Street Haunting," the political action she calls for from her "Society of Outsiders" focuses on steering politics using subversive participation or non-participation intended to make one's absence known rather than making one's presence felt by joining a mass movement or instigating a revolution.

In terms of form, however, *Three Guineas* is a failure, and is so quite deliberately. At the beginning of the essay Woolf points out facetiously that “one does not like to leave so remarkable a letter as yours – a letter perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented? – unanswered” before writing more seriously “Therefore let us make the attempt; even though it is doomed to failure” (117). What dooms the essay to failure is the difference between men’s and women’s experiences and perceptions of the world, which Woolf makes the centerpiece of women’s political praxis. This difference hinders communication between the letter writer (the daughter of an educated man) and receiver (an educated man) throughout the essay, an impediment that is signalled formally by argumentative repetitions, gaps, and incessant definitions and refinements of words, as well as by the text’s mixing of genres. Written in epistolary form, the essay is a series of letters drafted to different recipients: three complete letters are written to the organizations to which the narrator donates money, five more letters that have been sent to the narrator are referred to, and parts of four letters are drafted and put to the side. *Three Guineas* is, therefore, both a public and a private document inasmuch as it is an essay meant for public distribution that deals with current cultural events and issues, and yet it is written to resemble the private correspondence between two people. The text, that is to say, straddles two different literary genres, each with their own traditions. Given that Woolf’s argument ends with the assertion “that public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (270), it is not surprising that she chooses to mix these forms and their audiences, but the fact that she chooses to do so requires the reader to consider how each form is used by Woolf and for what purpose.

Three Guineas is unlike most of Woolf's essays because it seems to abandon many of the essay writing techniques she'd spent years refining and instead emulates the academic argumentative essay tradition; for, more than any other Woolf essay, *Three Guineas* utilizes—indeed, continually points out its insistence upon—facts to present its argument. This reliance on facts and the attendant narrative voice stands in distinction from the playful and slippery narrators of *A Room of One's Own* and “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown,” who use shifting pronouns and complex positioning to allow readers to interject and position themselves within Woolf's textual spaces. They are replaced by a narrator who positions herself statically as the daughter of an educated man and delivers an argument much less congenial to her reader's agency. Indeed, the word “polemic” is one rarely seen in Woolf scholarship outside discussions of *Three Guineas*. If Woolf was worried readers of *A Room of One's Own* might think she had an “axe to grind” and so worked to make the essay's argument stylistically subversive, she holds readers' noses to the grindstone in *Three Guineas*, not only in terms of the forcefulness of her message but also in terms of the work required to parse the essay. Characterized by repetition and gaps that disrupt the argumentative flow, *Three Guineas* comes to a point, but slowly and circuitously rather than following a clearly defined progression of ideas that is the hallmark of the academic argumentative essay tradition. The essay presents facts to support its thesis, but it does so in a form that highlights the interpersonal context of an epistolary correspondence between an educated man and woman, so that while *Three Guineas* presents a reasonable argument, it does so by fracturing the argumentative essay form and blurring the boundaries between the personal and the public. Literally written by a common reader rather than the type of professional reader forged in the patriarchal institutions of England, *Three Guineas* subverts the traditional essay form by participating in the essay tradition on its own terms, choosing what it takes from the

form, a reliance on facts and the meticulous documentation, while countering the impersonality of academic writing with a highly personal epistolary form.

Three Guineas achieves this fracturing of the argumentative essay form through its use of the epistolary form, which Woolf had long considered a form not only associated with the private sphere but also with fluid subjectivities and temporal specificity. Letters had long been associated with women, especially the middle- to upper-class daughters of educated men who, before their relatively recent acceptance into the world of literature, had found in letters their only real means of written communication. Thus, as Jane Marcus points out, Woolf employing the voice of a “‘daughter of an educated man’ responding by letter to requests for donations to Good Causes is itself a radical reflection of women’s powerlessness” (110). More than this, however, letters represent for Woolf an attempt at personal communication that is ephemeral and meant to perish as quickly as it is read, for what is revealed in letters are the words of one person, at one moment, on one day to another person who is imagined by the sender at the same moment on the same day. Scraps, orts, and fragments of oneself, letters are the clearest indicator for Woolf of the fleeting existence of subjectivity. The letter’s evanescence therefore creates a natural counter to the argumentative essay’s supposed timelessness, and it is used by Woolf to represent the ever-changing political strategy she presents in *Three Guineas*. Put most simply, both *Three Guineas* and the *Society of Outsiders* are about disruption—disruption of the language and symbolism used to promote war, disruption of the patriarchal traditions that perpetuate war, and disruption of the state by refusing to use one’s body to reify its nationalist ideologies—and so Woolf gives her common reader a text in which one form literally and consistently disrupts the other. The argumentative essay form is interrupted and subverted by an epistolary form that eschews timeless tradition and values timely political actions. The

institutions—the academy, the government, the media—used to legitimate the reasonableness of war are thus asked to account for their actions in *Three Guineas*, and Woolf advocates a politics of the body that aims to disrupt the material reification of the ideologies espoused by so many of England's patriarchal public institutions: Jacob's Cambridge, Britain's military, Bradshaw's medical practice.

For Woolf, the epistolary tradition was one of capturing not just moments but identities that vanished as quickly as they appeared, for as private correspondence between two people, letters reveal the relationship between the sender and receiver at any given time. In *Jacob's Room*, letters are referred to as “speech attempted” by a “phantom of ourselves, lying on the table” (73), for throughout time “Masters of language, poets of long ages, have turned from the sheet that endures to the sheet that perishes...and addressed themselves to the task of reaching, touching, penetrating the individual heart” (73-4). Unabashedly personal, letters live in stark contrast to the impersonal texts of academia, the latter presenting themselves as objectively as possible in an attempt to avoid claims of bias as well as make themselves accessible to all who read them, while with the former one knows one's reader and tailors one's words to that reader. Indeed, in *Three Guineas* Woolf begins by drawing “what all letter-writers instinctively draw, a sketch of the person to whom the letter is addressed,” for “Without someone warm and breathing on the other side of the page, letters are worthless” (117). Such a personal form makes a strange bedfellow for a modernist such as Woolf, for this sketch-drawing—inasmuch as the sender writes as one temporally-determinate individual to another, imagined temporally-determinate individual—sets the subject positions of both sender and receiver before the letter begins. Using the epistolary form for an essay, therefore, seems to limit the flexibility of the narrator, which had become a staple of Woolf's essays by the time she wrote *Three Guineas*. But what the

narrator loses in flexibility she more than makes up for in the multiplicity created by the ephemerality of her subjectivity. As S.P. Rosenbaum points out, letters are a “transitive form” because they begin with “an objectified reader inside” (64), and thus allow for great variance in subjectivity depending upon circumstance. The same person may be formal in a letter to her lawyer, authoritative in a letter to her disrespectful child, and romantic in a letter to her lover, as the tone of each letter changes in accordance with the person who is imagined on the other side of the page; the epistolary form, therefore, demonstrates the type of intersectional identity Woolf established for herself as a writer, publisher, and thinker in the literary marketplace in addition to being a form that represents her common readers’ critical ephemerality based on their subject positions. Letters, that is to say, are of a time and place: they capture their correspondents and reveal momentary subjectivities, which, paradoxically, stabilizes the two communicants temporally while leaving the message conveyed ephemeral precisely because it represents only the subjectivities of one time and space.

Woolf’s main letter in *Three Guineas*, therefore, establishes the subject positions of each participant in the text’s discussion and, unlike many of her essays, does not allow much room for the reader to intervene in the discussion. This closing off of the text did not go unnoticed by readers at the time. Q.D. Leavis believed *Three Guineas* was too limited in perspective for its suggestions concerning political praxis to be broadly applicable, writing that “almost the first thing we notice is that the author of *Three Guineas* is quite insulated by class” (409), for Woolf “has personally received considerably more in the way of economic ease than she is humanly entitled to” and “cannot be supposed to have suffered any worse injury from mankind than a rare unfavourable review” (410). Predictably hyperbolic, Leavis’s argument is one personal attack amongst many exchanged with Woolf, who in many of her works, not the least of which *Three*

Guineas, questioned the usefulness of the educational institutions Leavis worked so hard to establish herself within and the debates over cultural value in which demographics were scrutinized so closely. Yet, Leavis points to the static narrative viewpoint in *Three Guineas*, which appears to be a text written by the daughter of an educated woman only for other daughters of educated men and for educated men like the one to whom the letter is addressed. It seems, at best, to neglect the perspectives of other readers and, at worst, to actively exclude them.

The feeling of exclusion some readers felt is perhaps best explained in a letter Woolf received from Agnes Smith, an unemployed textile worker from Holmfirth, Yorkshire. Smith writes to Woolf that “You say glibly that the working woman could refuse to nurse and to make munitions and so stop the war. A working woman who refuses work will starve – and there is nothing like stark hunger for blasting ideals” (99). She also offers to “write a similar [book] from the working woman’s point of view” as an alternative to Woolf’s glib argument before again challenging Woolf’s privilege by pointing out that “if I had your access to books, the stimulus which you can obtain from conversation, and living, with people who know how to follow a line of thought, and work out its implications – and if, in addition, I had economic freedom I might do so” (99). Smith then insists that “the lumping of individuals into classes is odious” (102), and she ends the letter by writing, “I resent the fact of any ‘educated woman’ inferring that working women are of different clay to the ‘daughters of educated men’ and felt 6666 [*sic*] impelled to say so – though it is doubtful if you will so much as read it” (103). Woolf did read the letter; she also responded to Smith—as she did to many of the letter writers who inquired about *Three Guineas*—and the two women became regular correspondents until Woolf’s death in 1941. None of Woolf’s letters to Smith exist, but it is clear that Woolf encouraged her to write about her

experiences because Smith had enclosed some critical writings, for which she had earned £30, in a later letter. It is also known that Woolf at some point suggested to Smith that she publish her autobiography with the Hogarth Press, and the book Smith suggested from the working woman's perspective was later published by Hillcroft Studies in 1944 under the title *A Worker's View of the Wool Textile Industry* (Snaith 103).

What's most interesting about Smith is that she represents a common reader since she is presumably uneducated and outside the institutions that help determine worldviews like those of Jacob or of the students at the women's college. Instead of professional training, or a rejection of "high culture" in favour of an embrace of a mass or common identity, she exercises her agency and creates a space in which the author's—and ultimately the reader's—deficiencies enable a conversation. Striking is the fact that Woolf uses that conversation carried out in the correspondence to demonstrate the intersectionality that characterizes her cultural position. As author, publisher, and letter-writer, she engages in different modes of subjectivity, and thus engages as a writer to enable the reader to be both subject and object too. What emerges is a corresponding shift in Smith's positioning. Her first letter thoroughly evidences Woolf's suggestion that letters capture people at a specific moment of time and reveal how the sender imagines the recipient. Full of anger and indignation in her first letter, Smith is calmer in her second letter to Woolf, explaining that she now agreed with Woolf's decision to write from a point of view "of which [she has] first hand knowledge" and commiserating that she knows from personal experience that writing is difficult (105). As the relationship between the women changes, therefore, the tone of the letters also changes, so that what one sees in Smith's letters is an ever-shifting subjectivity as she consciously chooses a subject position she believes best represents her current relationship with Woolf. Smith's letters also reveal that the letter form,

perhaps more effectively than other written forms, can be used to communicate topics that are difficult to discuss in person, for, as Naomi Black suggests, letters can “provide a way in which to speak bluntly, as one might not face to face, to someone who may be hostile but still possibly persuadable” (75). Letters are so effective in broaching difficult subjects because, unlike in-person communications, they inherently contain spaces of time between writing, delivery, reading, and response during which correspondents may consider their replies. The fact that the writer has the mental space to imagine the reader as an object to whom she addresses herself also plays a role in airing grievances and broaching difficult subjects. Smith’s insulting tone in her first letter, which she uses to explain Woolf’s privilege to her, is bolstered by the fact that, as the correspondent currently in control of their communication, Smith is able to imagine Woolf as a snobbish highbrow unlikely to read her letter, let alone respond to its argument. Woolf’s objectification provides Smith with an oppositional figure, against which she can position her own subjectivity and make her argument rhetorically, if not necessarily logically, stronger.

The objectification of the face on the other side of the page is a characteristic of letter writing that Woolf takes advantage of a number of times throughout *Three Guineas*, and the adjustments she makes to her recipients signal shifts in her argumentative position and create textual disruptions that demonstrate Woolf’s argument is temporally dependent and, thereby, fluid. Such a readjustment occurs when Woolf’s narrator begins to draft a response letter to the treasurer of a women’s college who asks for donations to the college. The narrator begins the letter by promising a guinea if certain conditions are met that distinguish women’s colleges from men’s colleges. She associates the “subtle distinctions of hats and hoods, of purples and crimsons, of velvet and cloth, of cap and gown” (142) in men’s colleges with competition, and suggests these complex symbolic economies teach “the arts of dominating other people” (155)

that result in naught but jealousy. In contrast, Woolf's narrator argues that women's colleges should represent a new academy "in which learning is sought for itself; where advertisement is abolished; and there are no degrees; and lectures are not given, and sermons are not preached, and the old poisoned vanities and parades which breed competition and jealousy... The letter broke off there" (156). This is just one ellipsis of many in *Three Guineas*, and these breaks in the text are usually either viewed as places for readers to interject in the argument—thereby representing the kind of textual freedom explored previously in Woolf's other essays—or as places in which silence interjects to represent women's marginalization from the public sphere. For Patricia Laurence, the ellipses in *Three Guineas* invite "the reader to be open to the fugitive wanderings of his own mind as well as the author's" (108). While the ellipsis may create an argumentative and visual break in the letter, there is little sense that this break offers the kind of readerly freedom one usually finds in Woolf's essay, in large part because the narrator's authority in *Three Guineas* is never questioned in the same way it is in her other essays that employ slippery narrators. No sooner does the narrator give up her previous polemical argument based on who she imagines on the other side of the page than she moves onto another polemical argument based on who she now sees across from her. As the narrator explains, this disruption is not caused by a "lack of things to say" but "because the face on the other side of the page" no longer matches the face she had previously imagined she was speaking to (156). In other words, Woolf is performatively presenting her argument in *Three Guineas* to an audience she herself has constructed since she is the letter writer imagining the reader to whom she is writing. In this instance the dynamism of the common reader, whose "deficiencies as a critic are too obvious to be pointed out" (2), is staged by Woolf herself, who self-reflexively adjusts her argument every time the reader's face she imagines on the other side of the letter slips out of focus. While there

may be a slippage in her argument, this slippage reflects not the narrator's lack of authority but rather the shifting status of the objectified letter readers for whom she writes. There is no loss of narrative control that invites the reader into the textual space in *Three Guineas*—as was the case in essays like “Character in Fiction” and *A Room of One's Own* that employed more slippery narrators who asked openly to be questioned. Instead, this narrator acknowledges her deficiencies in real-time, shifting with alacrity from one argument to another and always remaining in control of the argument because she has imagined the reader she is writing to herself. *Three Guineas* is a much more closed text than something like *A Room of One's Own*, therefore, but its mixed form also demonstrates the political praxis Woolf argues for in the text, for whenever she feels the essay's factual argument begin to falter, she realigns it with an adjustment of the reader she imagines writing to as a letter writer. The public form of the institutionalized academic essay, then, is righted by the personal interventions of a careful narrator ever-vigilant of how her essay performatively conveys its politics of everyday life argument.

That the ellipses in *Three Guineas* create silences representing women's marginalization from public discourse and public institutions becomes clear in the rapid argumentative shifts that follow the use of the ellipsis in this passage. After the elliptical break, the three people involved in the discussion—the narrator, the educated gentlemen reader *Three Guineas* addresses throughout, and the women's college treasurer to whom the current letter draft is being addressed—become much more distinct, and the narrator begins to change her argument concerning the women's college depending on whom she is addressing. Woolf's narrator previously imagines very little difference between the treasurer and the educated man. Both being educated readers, she treats them similarly and makes her idealistic argument about a

women's college unburdened by the jealousies that infect the men's college. After the elliptical break, however, the face of the treasurer turns melancholy in Woolf's narrator's mind as she considers the reality that, in order to ensure their students may obtain valuable employment, and in order for them to remain viable as educational institutions, women's colleges have to follow the lead of men's colleges. Their obligation to do so is shown through the repetition of the modal verb "must" when Woolf shifts her argument in relation to the newly imagined letter recipient.

The realities of women's access to education and employment mean the women's colleges

must also make Research produce practical results which will induce bequests and donations from rich men; it must encourage competition; it must accept degrees and coloured hoods; it must accumulate great wealth, and, therefore, in 500 years or so, that college, too, must ask the same question that you, Sir, are asking now: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" (157)

While "must" does not actually constitute an imperative command, it does suggest that men's colleges and the role they've played in creating the traditions of England present women's colleges with an obligation to continue in their pedagogical footsteps. So entrenched is the idea that education must create distinctions by acting as the entrance point to exclusive communities like the professoriate, the government, and the professions that women's colleges have little choice but to work within this system.

The price daughters of educated women will pay if women's colleges deviate from this tradition is made clear shortly after, where a series of conditional statements present the realities these women face when they enter the academy and the workplace:

We [the narrator and the educated male reader] have said that the only influence which the daughters of educated men can at present exert against war is the disinterested

influence that they possess through earning a living. If there were no means of training them to earn their livings, there would be an end of that influence. They could not obtain appointments. If they could not obtain appointments they would again be dependent upon their father and brothers; and if they were again dependent upon their fathers and brothers they would again be consciously and unconsciously in favour of war. (157)

This passage contains precious little of the choice usually associated with conditional statements, and, instead, seems to reveal the illusion of the options for women who want to enter public institutions. All these conditional statements point back to the power of the patriarchal hegemony within the academy—represented in this passage by one half of the “We” with which it begins—for it is the men’s college, not the women’s, that controls how women’s colleges must function. There are rules and expectations that must be followed in order to access cultural and economic capital, and these rules and expectations are created by patriarchal institutions with the express purpose of reinforcing their values and marginalizing those who refuse to follow them. A self-legitimizing, closed system of education, governance, and employment, the patriarchal institutions of England maintain their discursive power and structural integrity by demanding the replication of their academic forms, their governmental procedures, and their employment requirements. If this system of legitimation seems rather tautological, it should: closed systems function effectively because their means reproduce their ends. All speech acts and physical actions undertaken within a closed system are deemed legitimate only if they support the ends of that closed system; any speeches or acts that do not support these ends are deemed illegitimate *a priori* and marginalized by the system. Thus, as Jean-François Lyotard writes, closed systems “define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they

do” (23). Put differently, one must speak and act using patriarchally approved forms in order to be legitimated by, and gain agency within, patriarchal institutions. The headmaster’s tools, it seems, must be used in the seemingly inevitable replication of his house.

Another, similar interruption in Woolf’s argument occurs as she imagines herself writing to the honorary treasurer of a society committed to helping the daughters of educated men enter the professions, for, once again, the face of her recipient changes while Woolf’s narrator is in the middle of a peroration about the failure of the women’s movement. Despite having been able to enter the professions for some twenty years and having been able to vote, she claims, for some ten years, women, Woolf’s narrator laments, have neither “ended war” nor “resisted the practical obliteration of [their] freedom by Fascists or Nazis” (166). Shortly afterward, Woolf’s narrator interrupts herself once more with an ellipsis, and using almost the same language as before explains that the face on the other side of the page had “an expression, of boredom was it, or was it of fatigue?” (166). Whatever the emotion, the face changes because, as has been the case with the women’s college treasurer, reality intervenes. What follows are myriad examples—government pay scales according to gender, one of Prime Minister Baldwin’s speeches, and two newspaper articles—of how wage inequality between men and women and gender stereotypes divest women of power in the professions. Moreover, these examples reveal how men have attempted to limit the role women are able to play in the professions by either prioritizing men’s work or by actively trying to marginalize women from the professions. Particularly troubling is the effect marriage has on employment, for the narrator explains that “the word ‘Miss,’ however delicious its scent in the private house, has a certain odour to it in Whitehall which is disagreeable to the noses on the other side of the partition,” and “so rank does [the word ‘Mrs’] stink in the nostrils of Whitehall, that Whitehall excludes it entirely” (174). Still reduced in the

professions to the prefixes that signify her relationship to men, a woman's risk of exclusion from Whitehall increases with her decision to marry: married or unmarried, it is her status in the private sphere rather than her value to the public sphere that most determines her cultural capital. Marriage transforms the woman into the angel in the house and transfers her responsibility to the husband and family; further, the wage disparity between the sexes is designed to promote this "choice" by making marriage a more economically stable option than professional labour. The professions, therefore, are technically open to women, but their patriarchal structure does all it can to ensure that women do not gain too much agency through public careers.

Thus, the professions, like the academy, establish the patriarchal public space which remains coherent by excluding women, thereby making women a foundational pillar of patriarchal power: as in *A Room of One's Own*, where the turf is defined by the gravel. If in *Jacob's Room* the difference between women and students in the church at Cambridge establishes the threshold of privilege in Jacob's view of his position; if in *Mrs Dalloway* the exclusion of Septimus Smith establishes the threshold of sanity in Bradshaw's theory of Proportion, women play the same role for patriarchal England in *Three Guineas*. As Froula argues, the text "decodes women's function as the scapegoat whose expulsion establishes bonds between men—thereby exposing women's crucial (and sacralized) structural role in the founding and perpetuation of a masculinized public sphere that dominates a feminized private house" (264-5). The mutually definitional binary of masculinized public sphere and feminized private sphere is signaled a number of times throughout *Three Guineas*, and especially when the narrator imagines herself standing on a bridge. For Froula, Woolf's narrator uses this bridge imagery to represent women's movement from the private sphere to the public. In actively exposing women's role in structuring the patriarchal institutions of England, she "moves out of the

scapegoat's role and into autonomous public speech" so as "to advance humanity from tyranny and war toward peace and freedom" (265). In this reading, *Three Guineas* represents a seminal text in Bloomsbury's attempt to confront cultural barbarity by carrying on the Enlightenment struggle for human rights and democratic self-governance, and the bridge is a connective device between the public sphere that propagates barbarity and the private lives that either support or challenge these barbarities. Certainly, Woolf believed the private and public spheres must work together to prevent war, for near the end of *Three Guineas* she argues that mutual ruin will be the result "if you, in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world" (271). Woolf counsels unity, then, but significantly, she resists any notion of collective political action: though there is a connection between the private and the public, men and women have different roles to play in preventing war and must continue to base political praxis on these differences in order to achieve their mutual goal. Indeed, the first time Woolf mentions the bridge in *Three Guineas*, she refers to the narrator's position in a "moment of transition on the bridge" (133). Suspended between the private spaces of the West End and the public spaces of Westminster, the bridge is not only a connective device but a liminal and temporary space betwixt and between the private and the public. Neither wholly in one sphere nor the other, the bridge marks a span of time that enables decision-making, such as how to transition between the private homes of the West End and the public buildings of Westminster. For the first time in English history, women have a direct route between the spheres; what Woolf argues that women should consider what it means to move from one to the other, and under what conditions they should follow the procession of fathers and brothers who cross the bridge every day to rule England.

In prompting such considerations, Woolf challenges the integrity of public institutional traditions, not just in terms of women's participation in the procession, but also in terms of her argument itself. Woolf exposes the drawbacks of the closed system that is the argumentative essay through such breaks and considerations of a shifting and multiple audience. Subverting the formal limitations of the argumentative essay, as well as its illusory coherence, she splices her essay with letters that allow her to converse with multiple imagined readers at the same time and express multiple arguments about the same topic, thereby staging the dynamic she established for her agential common readers who build ramshackle theories and refine them by comparing their own critical deficiencies with those of other common readers. Where argumentative essays address one topic and make one coherent argument, Woolf's essay addresses two people and creates a dialectic in which more than one argument can be made and discussed. Thus, between the realistic passages that explain what women's colleges "must" do and what will happen "if" they don't, Woolf's narrator becomes idealistic once more to explain that "No guinea of earned money should go to rebuilding the college on the old plan; just as certainly none could be spent upon building a college upon a new plan; therefore the guinea should be earmarked 'Rags. Petrol. Matches'" and be used to burn the old colleges and their traditions to the ground (157). Woolf claims that this idea is "not empty rhetoric" (157), crediting a former master of Eton and current Dean of Durham University with having made a similar argument, but this claim is clearly disingenuous given its location between two passages describing the real obligations of women's colleges. Still, the rhetorical positioning of the narrator's idealism is far from empty, for it creates an important disruption in both her argument's progression and the institutional realities she describes before and after. Thus, while Zwerdling argues that Woolf "gripped her teeth, determined to beat the enemy at his own game" by using a logical, well-evidenced

argumentative essay (257), she deliberately undermines this form in such passages to show how its rigidity limits expressions that do not support its ends. The supposedly obvious realities of educational institutions and the way they function are thus challenged, so that the seemingly necessary progression from institutional education, to exclusion, to jealousy, to war becomes a little less predetermined. More than one outcome for educational institutions is offered in this passage, as the narrator's argument frequently counteracts itself depending on whether she's addressing the educated gentleman or the women's college treasurer, and relating to how she imagines their responses at different moments within the text.

While Woolf's use of the epistolary tradition is the primary disruptor in *Three Guineas*, she also engages the reader in reflection by repeating phrases, images, and, at times, entire passages so as to break the flow of her arguments and insist on contemplation. In part, these repetitions further confound the argumentative essay form Woolf chooses in order to represent the patriarchal hegemony of public intellectual discourse, for, as Kathryn Simpson points out, these repetitions ensure "Woolf's argument moves forwards by looking back, by recalling earlier points, and this creates a sense of indirection at odds with generic expectations of a teleological drive and a logical line of reasoning" (*A Guide* 72). Thus, when Woolf repeats the list of conditional "if" statements that foreground the obligations of women's colleges just one page after its first appearance (158), she does so not only to reiterate the power of patriarchal traditions in the academy but also to demonstrate that her attempts to counter these traditions fail when they are confronted with the realities of women's education and employment. Coming back to the list reminds readers of the limitations of Woolf's argument, whose pauses repeat a current inevitability that she finds problematic but that she also hopes will be rectifiable at some point. If there is any hope for change in the academy, it is contained in the fact that, no matter

how rigidly they define the obligations of educational institutions, these conditional statements contain the possibility for change built inherently into their structure. They argue that the reader—the common reader—can ask if these conditions are the conditions under which women should live and be granted economic independence and intellectual freedom, and their repetition argues that the reader can stop and consider whether or not these conditions are worth supporting.

In drawing upon the reader's potential resistance to or participation in such systems, Woolf extends the critique presented in texts such as *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, and links patriarchal social institutions and the discourses they promote to the bodily actions that reify their common status. Repeated passages feature her narrator standing on the bridge watching a procession of men go to work. In the first passage, the narrator notes the “colossal size” and “majestic masonry” of the governmental, legal, and religious buildings in Westminster and explains, “There [...] our father and brothers have spent their lives. All these hundred of years they have been mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, money-making, administering justice” (133). The grandeur of the buildings, however, soon vanishes and is “broken up into a myriad points of amazement mixed with interrogation” as the narrator begins to focus on the clothing worn in a procession: “Not only are whole bodies of men dressed alike summer and winter [...] but every button, rosette and stripe seem to have some symbolic meaning” (134). The exclusivity of patriarchal social institutions becomes much more than an abstract concept when the narrator indicates that what constitutes the power of these institutions is not the grand, symbolic architecture but the numerous tiny details of the men's clothing, which signify their inclusion and place within these systems of power. Quite literally messengers of the institutions' ideologies, each man carries with him the traditions that

have shaped him and that he, in turn, gives shape to as he assumes his position within the buildings of Westminster. Institutional power is thus presented as cyclical and exclusive, and is predicated as much on the bodies that reiterate its rituals and wear its baubles as on the discourses that serve as its foundation.

The argument is made in concrete form through the photographs Woolf includes with her essay. Photographs, Woolf suggests when she describes pictures of Spanish Civil War dead, “are not arguments addressed to the reason; they are simply statements of fact addressed to the eye” (125). The photographs of the dead, she argues, bring the narrator and the educated man together because they objectively demonstrate the barbarity of war. Of course, the facts of the photographs actually included in *Three Guineas* are anything but simple, and they push the two correspondents apart and represent what Elena Gualtieri calls “a mid-way position between the two poles of objective statement and rhetorical construct” (174). One of the photographs, for example, depicts an old man in formal military dress, his chest covered in the medals that signify his achievements and the conflicts in which he has participated. Like the “weedy” boys who march by Peter Walsh in *Mrs Dalloway*, this man carries England’s military traditions with him, yet, also like the boys, it is an incongruous image. His smiling, wrinkled face is at odds with the military actions and patriotic grandeur his clothing denotes. He, too, lacks the “robustness” one usually associates with soldiers and looks encumbered by the medals, which, due to their sheer size and number, have overtaken his uniform and make him look dishevelled. Objectively just a picture of a man in uniform, this photograph signifies the construction of social status, especially where it points to the narrator’s exclusion from the military traditions of England. It serves as a reminder of the role bodies play in the iteration and reproduction of patriarchal power, and it provides a physical space in which her reader can consider how a change in perspective based on

a difference in gender can disrupt this process and create the time needed to contemplate what it means to participate in the rituals that realize this power.

Woolf's narrator watches the procession again later in the essay, and after re-presenting the scene of men climbing the steps of buildings in Westminster, she once more examines the bodies of the men, this time paying particular attention to the ones who deviate from the procession. "Great-grandfathers, grandfathers, fathers, uncles," the narrator says, all walk in the group, and while, like Peter Walsh, some of them "left the procession and were last heard of doing nothing in Tasmania" or "rather shabbily dressed, selling newspapers in Charing Cross," most "kept in step, walked according to rule" and "made enough to keep the family house [...] supplied with beef and mutton for all, and with education for Arthur" (183). Much more than a mere procession toward Westminster, therefore, this is a procession through time that cycles endlessly as sons become fathers and fathers beget sons. This inevitability, born of the discipline patriarchal institutions demand and borne through time by the disciplined bodies the narrator watches, reveals the confinement that is a necessary consequence of their insider's privilege. Beginning at birth and ending at death, the men's lives are predetermined as they are taken into the "great patriarchal machine" (152) that Woolf describes in *Moments of Being* and are ground down—edges smoothed, corners rounded—to emerge as the perfectly formed figure of an English gentleman. The limitations imposed on the individual by this seemingly endless cycle remind one of Woolf's question in *A Room of One's Own* concerning whether it is "worse perhaps to be locked in" patriarchal institutions than it is to be excluded from them (21), and it is this question she reiterates in *Three Guineas* as she imagines the procession of men for the second time. For twenty years, she writes, the procession has been something "at which [women] can look with merely an aesthetic appreciation" (184), but they have now been asked to join the

group moving toward Westminster. While crossing the bridge, that symbol of transition, she asks women to consider three questions: “do we wish to join that procession? On what terms shall we join that procession? Above all, where is this leading us, the procession of educated men?” (184). Woolf’s implied argument is that to fall in line, to enter this procession without first contemplating what it means to do so, will be merely to continue a cycle that ends in war, for Judith L. Johnston points out that *Three Guineas* “envisions contemporary violence not as an interval in the progress of civilization, but as a part of a continuous history of repressive personal and political relationships, rooted in a patriarchal culture” (255). The narrator’s questions disrupt women’s easy adherence to this patriarchal culture and resist an easy conflation between inclusion and social progress. If women accept the expectations of men’s colleges as their own, if women join the professions yet remain dedicated to racing round the “Mulberry Tree” of property and capitalism (190), then their ability to aid the march from the cultural barbarity of war toward Enlightenment liberalism becomes an increasingly dubious prospect.

The movement of Woolf’s argument through repetition resists that sense of patriarchal duplication, for it is a literary intervention that is more about recasting an argument in multiple forms for multiple recipients. In working as a letter-writer within the form of the argumentative essay, and in working to suggest the alternative perspective that could prevent further war, she must, however, remember her audience. Woolf apologizes at the end of *Three Guineas* to the educated man, whom she knows is “pressed for time,” for the “length of this letter,” “the smallness of the contribution,” and “for writing at all” (272). The last two apologies are not-so-subtle jabs at the fact that, as a woman, she has never before been asked to contribute to questions of politics and war. Apologizing for the length of letter, after subjecting the reader to a long, repetitive argument of nearly two hundred pages, is thus highly ironic on Woolf’s part and

is meant to suggest that preventing war requires much more than donating money to or joining societies for the prevention of war. More specifically, preventing war requires time to question the performative responses to certain symbols that discipline attempts to build: time to decide, like the gentlemen of White's must decide, whether to forgo the *Tatler* in order to stand and make ready to go "to the cannon's mouth" for a passing car that may contain the King or Prime Minister (*Mrs Dalloway* 16); time to decide, like Peter Walsh must decide, whether or not to keep step with the "regular thudding sound" of a passing group of soldiers (*Mrs Dalloway* 43); time to decide, as women must decide, under what circumstances to follow the procession of men going to Westminster (*Three Guineas* 184). Woolf "trifles with time, which is such a precious commodity in this busy commercial society and which is of the utmost importance in this society on the brink of war" (Caughie 118), by repeating and shifting her narration so as to make the reader spend as much time with the text as possible.

In a society on the brink of war or in the midst of a war, time is particularly important given the immediate emotional responses prompted by the ubiquitous symbols of patriotism. Woolf discusses the performative dimension of such nationalism in a 1915 diary entry about a concert she attended at Queen's Hall, writing, "I think patriotism is a base emotion. By this I mean [...] that they played a national Anthem & a Hymn, & all I could feel was the entire absence of emotion in myself & everyone else" (*Diaries* 1, 5). These symbols, meant to fill the listener with pride of one's country, evoke only a profound absence for Woolf because they rely on the disciplined actions of solemnly acknowledging the flag rather than on any real emotional attachment to the nation. In the time between this diary entry and the publication of *Three Guineas*, Woolf had still not discovered any strong feelings toward patriotism, and she again

points out the differences between her narrator and the educated man through the connection between patriarchy and patriotism:

if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or “our” country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. “For,” the outsider will say, “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.” (234)

With this statement, Woolf reiterates her argument: the shifts in pronoun use that begin the passage point out women’s exclusion from the public institutions that rule English education, law, government, and media, and her decision to remove herself from patriotism’s symbolic economy by insisting that men do not consider her an object worthy of dying for implores men to contemplate their own justifications for war. By doing so, she intervenes in any hardwired performative response the man may have that would use her as a justification for war, insisting he spend the time to find another reason to go to the cannon’s mouth. Moreover, in refusing a country she refuses the nationalistic divisions that ignited many of the wars in Imperial Europe and proposes a global citizenship that will never again require the words *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*.

In place of nationalist divisions and patriotic competitions, Woolf proposes the Outsiders’ Society. Its imagined structure emphasizes the importance of personal political action by insisting that men’s and women’s different experiences of the private and public spheres must be the centerpiece of political life. Woolf leaves the rules of her Outsiders’ Society purposefully vague, but the overarching principle is that outsiders use the difference in perspective they gain

through their exclusion from or limited inclusion within social institutions to interrogate the political and cultural ends of these institutions. Indeed, Woolf is reluctant even to call the loose community of outsiders a society because that word has become so associated with “conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us [daughters of educated men] have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male” empowered by ceremonies in which “daubed red and gold, decorated like a savage with feathers he goes through mystic rites and enjoys the dubious pleasures of power and dominion” (230-1). Exclusive societies are connected to cultural barbarity in this passage—through an unfortunate and deeply racist comparison to non-European peoples’ cultural dress—that reiterates Woolf’s focus on the roles that clothing, bodies, and the rituals play in solidifying ideology. But the passage also outlines the fact that societies prescribe political actions that strip their members of individuality, an argument Woolf makes more forcefully when she refuses to join the educated gentleman’s society: “by so doing,” she writes, “we should merge our identity in yours; follow and repeat and score still deeper the old worn ruts in which society, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is grinding out with intolerable unanimity ‘Three hundred millions spent upon arms’” (231). This image, of course, refers back to the cyclical nature of the Mulberry Tree of capitalism and property, but this time it serves as an apt reminder that political praxis can become stagnant if all voices are forced to speak together rather than being allowed to speak of their own accord. What Woolf fears in joining the gentleman’s society is a conflation of the private and public spheres that results in what Hannah Arendt calls the social sphere, a space in which the necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing, etc.—become the stuff of politics rather than of the household. Because the social sphere blurs the line between the private and public sphere, Arendt adds, “we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of

by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping” (28). The birth of the social sphere is the foundation of mid-nineteenth century fascism, inasmuch as fascism seeks to install its dictators as the head of the family to look after the needs of the nation’s citizens. So *Three Guineas* argues that there is no fundamental difference between European fascist dictators and any English patriarch “who believes that he has the right whether given by God, Nature, sex or race is immaterial, to dictate to other human beings how they shall live; what they shall do” (175). England’s patriarchy may enact its power more diffusely through the use of social institutions, but this power, Woolf argues, can be resisted by refusing to offer institutions the bodies that are required to reify their power. Thus while the gentleman seeks to amplify the group’s voice so as to be heard more clearly in the public sphere, Woolf seeks to challenge the public sphere by refusing to participate in actions that support war.

Woolf’s conceptualization of political praxis, therefore, is predicated on the active refusal to take part in any of the rituals or performances that support nationalism and patriotism, an idea that transforms the body from a political tool used by patriarchal social institutions into a political weapon used to disrupt the smooth performance these institutions rely upon to promote and maintain power. In terms of preventing war through refusal, Woolf suggests outsiders can refuse to “fight with arms,” “refuse in the event of war to make munitions or nurse the wounded,” and refuse “to incite their brothers to fight, or to dissuade them, but to maintain an attitude of complete indifference” (232). The first two suggestions are obvious attempts to disrupt war by not actively participating in the war machine, but the final suggestion demands a little more self-awareness from women and suggests a politics that is dependent on reasoned responses to individual situations. The narrator uses the example of a small boy marching in the streets mimicking the actions of soldiers, and she suggests that women should react by doing

nothing because if one “implore him to stop; he goes on; say nothing; he stops” (235). Woolf’s is a politics of timeliness rather than of timelessness, as political praxis is founded on assessing a situation and responding rather than reacting to situations with patterned and practiced responses. Thus political action can be based on “reason” rather than “instinct,” for patterned, practiced performances rely on emotional response whereas she suggests women take time, disrupt any instinctual responses to shows of patriotism, and act in a way that does not further the goals of the patriarchy (233). Rather than promoting war with their actions, women must “train themselves in peace” Woolf argues in order to ensure they stand firmly against any ritual associated with war (235), and, in doing so, they will use their new-found agency within the public sphere to change, however slightly, the structural problems in England’s patriarchal culture. Woolf mentions other examples of outsider behaviour as well, noting that a women’s football league refused to offer a cup or award to winning teams (242) and that, in what Woolf calls an “experiment of passivity” (243), a sudden decrease in the attendance of educated men’s daughters at church services concerned the church, suggesting that “to be passive is to be active; those also serve who remain outside” (245). These examples, Woolf suggests, show that the body may be used to create political change in a public sphere that functions by disciplining bodies, for, as Foucault explains, “Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter attack in the same body” (56). To not perform as expected interrupts institutional power, refusing nationalism, patriotism, capitalism, patriarchy, according to the body that ideology requires as a conduit.

Thus, the Outsiders that resist the disciplining power of institutions, of hegemonic norms, of behaviour, and especially of thought, use their bodies to disrupt moments in which habitual participation materially realizes institutional ideology, and this disruption creates the potential

for a different social vision that recognizes the intersectionality of the subject-citizen. What culminates with Woolf's *Society of Outsiders*, then, is in fact the theory of political praxis that she had worked on throughout her career as a novelist, essayist, and publisher and that found its first conceptualization in her common reader, that figure whose agency she insisted must stand, however lonely and marginalized, against the professionalism of other highbrows and the middlebrow's homogenous common man. For, at its core, Woolf's outsider politics is little more than a politics of everyday life built upon the foundation of a careful and considered approach to how one interacts against, within, and through institutional discourses of power. If the body had become the nexus of political power and institutional discipline, then, Woolf revealed throughout her writing career, there must also be power in refusing to participate as one was expected.

CONCLUSION

My first encounter with Woolf's theorization of outsiders came in a graduate seminar discussion of *Three Guineas* during which the professor asked the students if they considered themselves outsiders, and their answers helped crystalize the spatial and temporal components of Woolf's outsider politics in my mind. There weren't many students in the class, maybe 6 or 7, but what I remember most was how each student staked their claim to an outsider position in some way. The son of two working-class parents, just the second male member of my extended family to pursue a post-secondary education, and a former oilrig worker, my claim was there to be staked as well. After all, less than a year before this discussion took place I'd been on an oilrig talking about "fuck-sticks," "donkey cocks," and "nippling-up" (all equipment or procedures on an oilrig), while more recently I'd been discussing essentialism, social constructivism, gender performativity, and signifying economies. I thought momentarily about how the latter discourse might query the former's strange attachment to phallic and infantile suckling euphemisms as a subconscious symptom of an existing Oedipal Complex and oral fixation amongst oilrig workers. I then began to smile thinking about how these same workers would describe our conversation about Woolf and *Three Guineas*, but believing some words should remain outside, I won't offer an approximation here. When it came time for me to answer the professor's question, I let the fact that we were sitting in an air-conditioned room on the upper floor of a university building discussing Virginia Woolf answer for me. "No," I said, "at this moment, in this place, I'm not sure any of us are really outsiders."

I mention this discussion, now nearly a decade old, because it captures the key aspect of Woolf's outsider politics explained and explored in this work. When she argues in *Three Guineas* that a politics of the outside is undertaken by people with the assumption that "By

making their absence felt their presence becomes desirable” (245), Woolf is arguing for a politics that is primarily temporal and spatial in its conception and execution. Hers is a politics that does not choose a static point of resistance, but claims a temporary outsider position of one’s own and makes it effective inasmuch as it subverts using quick, timely strikes that challenge and expose discursive power relations. It is a politics of performance and of the change potential performances can bring about rather than a politics that focuses on changing political policy or sparking revolutions. Sustained political pressure from an outsider position is certainly possible and the various civil rights movements of the last two hundred years prove their effectiveness, but such actions are made in unison as one accepts a political identity that amplifies the voices of many to speak as one. It is a mode of politics Woolf was deeply skeptical of because she feared prolonged uniformity could override the will of individuals within the group. Unity rather than uniformity is the foundation of Woolf’s politics—the contingent unity of a moment, of voices, of lives brought together by something or someone.

Between the Acts (1941), Woolf’s posthumously published final novel explores this potentiality of time, space, and temporary unities. The events in the novel take place at a summer pageant performed at Pointz Hall, a fictional private country home, in June, 1939, some three months before the start of the Second World War on 3 September 1939. England’s countryside is the setting of the novel, but any pastoral mythology evoked by this setting is destroyed by the two great military acts evoked in the novel’s title. The pageant director Miss La Trobe presents a history of England broken into four short vignettes that include an Elizabethan romance, a Restoration comedy of manners, a parody of Victorian social problem plays, and a final piece entitled “Present time. Ourselves” (158). While the first three scenes employ common tropes and dramatic genres to narrate England for the audience, keeping them at a relatively comfortable

historical and artistic distance from themselves, the final act breaks the dramatic fourth wall and invites the audience to contemplate themselves as the players enter their space with myriad shiny objects, including “tin cans,” “candlesticks,” “the cheval glass from the Rectory,” and mirrors (165), that reflect the audience to itself. La Trobe unites the audience by forcing it to recognize its participatory role in cultural production, but she avoids creating any sense of uniformity in the collective by having the audience watch itself making culture using fragmented reflective surfaces that prevent the individual audience members from seeing themselves in whole, let alone as a whole. What emerges in the La Trobe’s final act, therefore, is an acknowledgement that cultural production does not belong solely to the dramatist, or poet, or novelist, who are but mere collectors of impressions, but is instead created daily by the people of a nation as they move thorough their workaday lives. More than this, her final act shows that a unity born of a moment in time and space creates a potential for change that exists in spite of the social institutions that attempt to discipline bodies and their actions, for in those brief moments of unity something beyond mere subjection becomes possible if one chooses something beyond uniformity.

That the people in La Trobe’s audience believe themselves to be mere passive consumers of culture is apparent in their discomfort and apprehension as they await how she means to reveal “Present day. Ourselves.” Positioned where they are as viewers of a theatrical performance, the audience feels distanced from the history of English culture being presented on the stage, so they spend the time between La Trobe’s third act and final act wondering “what could she know about ourselves? The Elizabethans yes; the Victorians, perhaps; but ourselves; sitting here on a June day in 1939—it was ridiculous” (160). This reaction exposes the extent to which cultural narratives are generally considered retroactive constructions that require many years to know—

note that the crowd seems comfortable after four hundred years that they know the Elizabethans but not so comfortable as to suggest they know the Victorians nearly forty years after Queen Victoria's death, as Mrs Lynn Jones demonstrates (156)—but it also reveals that the audience believes their engagement with culture, even with a mode so timely as drama, is fundamentally passive. Moreover, La Trobe's play and program forces the audience to think of the cascading assemblages of which they, as individual subjects, are a part: all at once, each individual in the audience is a part of the audience, a part of the church that will receive the proceeds of the pageant, a part of the community in which the church is located, a part of England as a nation, and part of Present time as related to the Elizabethans and Victorians they've seen in the pageant. And this does not mention assemblages based on things like class, gender, and education. Any attempt to know ourselves in the present may well be ridiculous, therefore, for one person could never create a coherent representation of all the individuals assembled in the audience, let alone in England, let alone in the Elizabethan era or the Victorian.

But La Trobe's final act does show that there can be moments of unity amongst disparate individuals, and in these moments of unity one discovers, for better or for worse, what it means to be a part of an assemblage, to be in this audience, to be English, to live in the present time. For the most part, the audience is led toward moments of unity by songs, a useful medium for the purpose because sound blankets a group simultaneously in noise and is not as dependent on individual perspective as are images. The nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence" leads the audience from the break but is quickly replaced with a flowing waltz, which in turn is replaced with Jazz as the players get ready to enter the crowd (162-164). The comfortable unity that brings the audience together under the common nursery rhyme and easy waltz is dispersed by La

Trobe using the Jazz, but there is still a unity between them, however broken and uncomfortable its rhythms may be:

The tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged. [...] What a cackle, in a cacophony!
Nothing ended. So abrupt. And corrupt. Such an outrage; such an insult; And not plain. Very up to date, all the same. What is her game? To disrupt? Jog and trot? Jerk and smirk. Put a finger to the nose? Squint and pry? Peak and Spy? O the irreverence of the generation which is only momentarily—thanks be—‘the young’. The young, who can’t make, but only break; shiver into splinters the old vision; smash to atoms what was whole. (164)

Woolf is obviously trying to mimic the brokenness of jazz music linguistically in this passage, but through all the fragments and wreckage, the rhyming words in the passage cobble it together to make it whole. Individual clauses compete with one another visually, but read aloud the passage becomes almost spoken word poetry, its pieces ragged enough to mark the individual thoughts that make up the narrative yet connected enough to remind us these are the thoughts of an audience brought together.

Woolf’s early writings on modernist fiction are also recalled in this passage: in particular, the suggestion that the young “can’t make, but only break” looks back to her call for readers to tolerate “the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary” in “Character in Fiction” (436), and the charge that the young “smash to atoms what was the whole” is similar to her idea in “Modern Novels” that life is best represented not by the materialist literature of the Edwardians but by the “incessant shower of innumerable atoms” Georgians attempt to capture in their psychological literature (177). These metafictional references to Woolf and high modernism connect La Trobe to an aesthetic tradition of the new that is comfortable with breakage and the idea of failure if it

reveals the inner life they strive to represent. Given the pageant is being performed in 1939, however, these references also ask if La Trobe's formal experimentation with breakage is very useful with England hurtling toward another war. 1922, which saw the publication of *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and *Jacob's Room*, had been literary high modernism's banner year, but those works had emerged into a post-Great War world where the class, governmental, and cultural traditions that held Europe together had been fractured by the atrocities of total war, and public trust in social institutions continued to erode. W.B. Yeats captures this cultural rift most succinctly in "The Second Coming" when he describes the "widening gyre" (1) of post-war Europe and warns readers of what might emerge from "*Spiritus Mundi*" (12) in the chaos of modernity. Then, when it seemed like Europe had learned its lesson and would never revisit the horrors of total war, the literary high modernists could take their time writing massive novels that track the motions and thoughts of one man on an ordinary day in Dublin, poems layered with references to past literature meant to coalesce a fragmented and sterile modern culture around a past cultural tradition, a faulty *Bildungsroman* that displaces its subject to reveal his mediocrity using the impressions of the women he encounters during his war-shortened life. In the hangover of war, form, difficulty, and innovation could prevail as the order of the day, but in 1939 its value seems rather more dubious. After all, the poets of the thirties, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Cecil Day-Lewis, and novelists like George Orwell had long since moved to more overtly political and less formally innovative writing styles, which they believed better suited to countering the rise of nationalism, fascism, and communism.

The mirror scene that comes immediately after the jazz music also seems to suggest La Trobe's aesthetics of breakage is not particularly useful, for while it unites the audience in self-consciousness and discomfort as intended, their disarray is ultimately brought to an end by

religious and national authorities that symbolize a uniform togetherness rather than actually representing a unity between the people. As the players in the pageant enter the audience with mirrors, pots, and candlesticks, the people see themselves reflected in their shiny surfaces and become increasingly uncomfortable as they recognize that La Trobe's "little game" is to "show [them] up, as [they] are, here and now" until each "evaded or shaded themselves" (167). Only Mrs. Manresa—who is rumoured to be a colonial and who is certainly "vulgar [...] in her gestures" and "over-sexed, over-dressed for a picnic" (37)—"preserved unashamed her identity" with the players in the crowd and, using the various reflective surfaces they hold, "powdered her nose; and moved one curl, disturbed by the breeze, to its place" (167). Manresa already understands that life is a series of performances, so she carries on unperturbed while the others search for meaning in La Trobe's little game as a megaphonic voice comes from the bushes to proclaim, "*Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall [on stage]; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?*" (169). This crescendo to La Trobe's pageant crashes onto the audience: all their assemblages—this audience, their Englishness, and the cultural historicity of the Elizabethans or Victorians—are simultaneously constructed and deconstructed as the individuals in the audience are reminded that they, at this moment and in this space, have become the meaning making system by and through which theatrical convention, national identity, and cultural tradition are realized and given material existence. Civilization, La Trobe forces her audience to recognize, is messy in that it is made up of individuals with different goals, dreams, and interests, but this messiness simultaneously reveals the active role each person already plays in civilization and acknowledges that self-conscious and careful participation can actively change civilization.

Unfortunately, the audience is almost immediately brought back into order by a number of symbols that seem to limit the effectiveness of La Trobe's final scene by providing the audience members narratives to ease their discomfort. First, Rev. G. W. Streatfield, who is described as "an intolerable constriction, contraction, and reduction to simplified absurdity" (170), stands before them as "their representative spokesman; their symbol; themselves; a butt, a clod, laughed at by the looking-glasses" (171). A representative of the Christian Church, Streatfield is a symbol for the people to gather round, but in doing so they return to passive consumers of their culture and forgo the active role La Trobe has just demarcated for them, even going so far as to "[fold] their hands in the traditional manner as if they were seated in church" listening to a sermon as Streatfield couches the pageant's final scene in the Christian message that "We act different parts; but are the same" (173). A familiar narrative the members of the audience seem comfortable adopting to explain what they've just seen, Christianity brings the people together in a timeless uniformity rather than the time-specific unity constructed on this June day at this pageant about themselves. Streatfield himself is interrupted by an even more potent symbol of uniformity when "Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck [comes] overhead" and severs his speech in two (174). A symbol of both the nation and their historical present, these military planes make the audience into one once again, completely replacing the pageant that has drawn them together under the auspices of a practically compulsory nationalistic uniformity in the lead-up to war. Even La Trobe herself seems to accept her final act has failed: as the audience finally decides the pageant is at an end and looks to thank its director, she plays "God save the King," upon which the audience "all rose to their feet" (175), in unison to recognize the nation once more. La Trobe leaves the gramophone playing "*Dispersed are we; who have come together. But [...] let us retain whatever made that harmony*"

(176-77) as the people leave the pageant, but after Streatfield, the military planes, and the king have made their symbolic presence felt, any sense of self-conscious reflection in the audience members seems to have largely disappeared.

To what extent should we thus agree with La Trobe that her play, in her own words, is “A failure” (188)? She does not, after all, seem to have changed anyone’s perspective, and the audience members, if anything, have left her pageant more confused than when they arrived. Unmitigated, then, seems to be the right adjective, since La Trobe’s pageant has apparently failed to communicate anything to her audience that they may take home with them. Her artistic legacy, at least in this instance, seems to be merely communication attempted. Perhaps the attempt is all that really matters, though. Alain Badiou has argued that what really matters in art is the artistic “event.” For Badiou the event “is something that brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable. An event is not by itself the creation of a reality; it is the creation of a possibility, it opens up a possibility” (9). I can’t think of a better way to begin describing Virginia Woolf’s artistic legacy. Whether it be a narrator asking us to question her authority in *A Room of One’s Own*, an upper-class wife of a member of parliament hosting a party in *Mrs Dalloway*, or a middle-aged artist showing a pageant audience to themselves, Woolf’s attempts to pull “moments of being” from the “nondescript cotton wool” of everyday life (*Moments of Being* 70) provide the possibility to see and to think differently.

To this notion of possibility, I have tried to add the notion of potential because whenever Woolf’s writing opens a possibility, it then drags us into the space created to show us the cultural, political, historical, educational, economic, potential of thinking, acting, speaking, and writing from that outside space. La Trobe, too, believes herself to be “an outcast” in that “Nature had somehow set her apart from her kind” (190), and she too uses this position to create artistic

events for her audience. And La Trobe's event does not go entirely to waste, for Isa, though she sees it "drifting away to join the other clouds" and remembers "not the play but the audience dispersing" (192), recognizes that she and Giles must have it out after a long day of marital strife that has seen her admitting to herself that she loves Mr. Haines, and that has featured Giles petulantly flirting with Manresa: "Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight" (197). In this, the smallest of assemblages in the play, there is unity and dispersion as well, but from its moments of unity new life can grow, one more ort, scrap, or fragment for the wall of civilization. In the end, therefore, we are left with the hope that unity will return, though the last lines of the novel remind us of the battle that must first cause dispersion, and of the role we all play in bringing unity back round: "Then the curtain rose. They spoke" (197).

In what sounds like an elegy to artists, Miss La Trobe laments after the pageant is over that "She could say to the world, You have taken my gift! Glory possessed her—for one moment. But what had she given? A cloud that melted into the other clouds on the horizon. It was in the giving that the triumph was. And the triumph faded. Her gift meant nothing. If they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts [...] it would have been a better gift. Now it had gone to join the others" (188). Woolf, of course, would be dead before her public read these words in *Between the Acts*, but they would join the others she had gifted it in the past. She spent her artistic life asking readers to recognize their part in cultural production, and she did so not by catering to their whims or teaching them what to read, but by taking them, gently if possible but forcefully if necessary, to see what the other side means. She was an unapologetic outsider, especially at the end of her life, because she believed that only by visiting the outside

could we begin to trace the contours of the inside. And contouring the inside was not only beneficial but necessary politically in a state that subjected bodies and disciplined them to the point of total war and genocide. In an inter-war period marked by oppositional dialectics and the rise of authoritarian ideologies, Virginia Woolf attempted to show readers what was possible outside the institutions that governed their lives through discipline, optimization, and prioritization by revealing that however bad it was to be excluded it was perhaps worse to be included.

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