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Virginia Woolf and the persistent question of class: The protean nature of class and self

Mary C. Madden
University of South Florida

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Virginia Woolf and the Persistent
Question of Class: The Protean Nature of Class and Self

by

Mary C. Madden

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Elizabeth A. Hirsh, Ph.D.
William T. Ross, Ph.D.
Rita Ciresi, M.F.A.
Marilyn Myerson, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

For my daughter, Mary Kathleen, and for women everywhere

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Heartfelt thanks to my husband, Joseph, for material support and encouragement; to my son, Sean, and sister, Jane, who climbed the mountain before I did; to my daughter, Mary Kathleen, and son, Joey, who were unflagging in their faith that this project would be completed; to Lise and to Tony Z. for their cheerleading efforts; and to my expert Woolfian mentor and manuscript midwife, Dr. Elizabeth Hirsh.

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VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE PERSISTENT QUESTION OF CLASS: THE PROTEAN NATURE OF CLASS AND SELF

Mary C. Madden

ABSTRACT

From the beginning of her career, Virginia Woolf moves beyond the perspective of her inherited class position to challenge a damaging class system. She increasingly recognizes the extent of her own complicity in the creation and maintenance of class structures supporting patriarchy, war, and British imperialism. Highlighting ambiguities inherent in the very category of class, she acknowledges the limiting “boxes” of language itself in attempts to rethink class. For Woolf, class is not monolithic but internally differentiated by gender and race. Examining Woolf’s early work in relation to class theory shows that throughout her career Woolf interrogates the imbrication of gender and race in class politics. She finds class difference a fertile source of satire, and subjects her own class position to satirical scrutiny. At the same time, a certain psychology of class operates in Woolf: vulnerable to the dissolution of ego boundaries because of her mental illness, she at times shores up her sense of identity by reaffirming class boundaries that were otherwise repugnant to her. Thus Woolf vacillates between perceiving class as necessary to “civilization” and championing egalitarian views. Theoretical points of reference for this study include cultural materialism, feminist standpoint theory,

psychoanalysis, and theories of class advanced by Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Max Weber, Gary Day, David Cannadine, Beverly Skeggs, and Rosemary Hennessy.

CHAPTER ONE

“Now is life very solid, or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions.”—Virginia Woolf in *A Moment’s Liberty: The Shorter Diary*, Friday, Jan. 4, 1929, p. 257.

A “RATIONAL REBELLIOUSNESS”¹: THEORY AND CONTEXT FOR CLASS ISSUES IN WOOLF’S WRITING

Virginia Woolf’s epistemology could be characterized as tectonic, for to her life often appeared to alternate between the traditional solidity of family and class, and the shifting, seismic changes of the first half of the twentieth century. These destabilizing shifts also occurred for Woolf at an intimate psychological level during her bouts of mental illness. Some Woolf scholars, such as Pamela Caughie in *Virginia Woolf & Postmodernism* (1991), claim that Woolf substantially anticipates a fragmentary, postmodern and deconstructive view of reality. I suggest that Woolf, with one foot in the cradle of the nineteenth century and one in the streets of twentieth-century London, represents an unresolved contradiction or unsynthesized dialectic. In fact, Marianne DeKoven asserts in *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (1991) that the heart of the vast body of Modernist literature can be characterized by the *sous-rature* of Jacques Derrida and the “impossible dialectic” described by Julia Kristeva (4). To Derrida, word and thought are never unified. All signs involve a structure of difference and break apart. Though words are necessary, they are inherently inadequate; thus they should be thought of and written as *under erasure*. Kristeva questions the dichotomy of man/woman and the very notion of a stable identity, challenging definitions of what is feminine. To Kristeva, the semiotic knows no sexual difference, so as it becomes stronger, gender differences weaken. Thus I would argue that Woolf’s emphasis on the semiotic, particularly in works such as *The*

Waves (1931), weakens gender-related class divisions. DeKoven emphasizes the useful emblematic quality of the *sous-rature* concept in representing unresolved historical shifts in society's view of the world at large, and believes that deconstruction enacts in philosophy the same moment that modernist writing enacts in literature: the coexistence of two paradigms which contradict each other. Woolf consistently expresses the tug of nostalgia for the traditional at the same time that she races into the future with her experimental fiction and progressive views on gender and politics. Such ambivalence is also reflected, DeKoven observes, in most other prominent modernists—including T.S. Eliot, Picasso, E.M. Forster, and James Joyce (185-95). Woolf particularly exhibits this “impossible dialectic” in her positionality regarding class, gender, and race.

A CONSIDERED PERSPECTIVE ON WOOLF AND CLASS

“*[Society is] a nest of glass boxes . . .*” Virginia Woolf in “The Niece of an Earl” (CE1 219-23).

The question of class in Woolf should be contextualized, I believe, in terms of a psychology of class connected to Woolf's fear of dissolution of ego boundaries associated with social divisions and to her stake in her own class interest. It should also be contextualized in terms of a theory of class as internally differentiated by gender and as necessary to “civilization,” and in terms of class and literature. Furthermore, care should be taken to excavate the importance of class satire as self-critique and the significance of Woolf's championing of the common reader. These areas of concern can be perceived as intersecting circles on a Venn diagram, for they overlap and affect each other, as well as create particular concentrations of force in certain areas of Woolf's life

and work. They can also be envisioned as exerting additional circles of influence that operate much like ripples widening with the toss of a simple pebble upon a stream.

It is this contextualized approach that I employ in examining the issue of Woolf and class. I have chosen theorists of class and language who shed light on this particular mode of viewing Woolf. Certainly consideration of the Marxist view of class as exploitative--a view current in Woolf's lifetime--and an examination of the views of her contemporaries, such as Forster and Orwell, are appropriate in order to understand her thinking. I have also used the work of neo-modern Marxist theorists, such as Rosemary Hennessy, who define class as a set of social relations undergirding capitalism, and have examined the theories of another Woolf contemporary, Max Weber, because of his realization of the shifting nature of class divisions. I have employed twenty-first century theorists such as Gary Day, David Cannadine, and Beverly Skeggs for their particular insights into the development of class consciousness in Britain. Althusser's work on ideology has been utilized to discuss Woolf's gradual realization of her interpellation into a society that reproduces capitalist social relations without an apparatus of repression. I have applied the analyses of feminist critics such as Nancy Chodorow and Juliet Mitchell on the links between feminism and psychoanalysis. The work of Donna Haraway, Sandra Harding, and Nancy Hartsock has been brought to bear upon this study because of their groundbreaking work on feminist standpoint theory, which is helpful in excavating Woolf's developing stance on class. Last, I have incorporated the important thinking of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Michel Foucault on power, knowledge, and society, and the linguistic work of theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan

because of the multiple epistemological and political aspects of Woolf's reflections on class issues.

Do I offer a neatly boxed-up explanation for any inconsistencies in Woolf's thinking or practice? No, for Woolf herself would reject any such attempt. Living in the era of Post-Impressionism in art and literature, Woolf appears to have viewed any major conceptualization as an almost infinite process rather than a final synthesis, as art critic Roger Fry, her good friend, observes in his monograph on Cezanne:

For him [Cezanne], as I understood his work, the ultimate synthesis of a design was never revealed in a flash; rather he approached it with infinite precautions, stalking it, as it were, now from one point of view, now from another, and always in fear lest a premature definition might deprive it of something of its total complexity. For him the synthesis was an asymptote toward which he was forever approaching without ever quite reaching it; it was a reality, incapable of complete realization. (qtd. in Harvey)

Similarly, one can readily see that throughout her life Woolf resisted premature definitions and categorization—as, for example, she resisted the label of “feminism.” She stalked an understanding of the complexities of life, but she lived on the edge of reality in a sense, quite convinced that reality itself was comprised of mobile strata that forever cast kaleidoscopic new shadows, new light: the *sous-rature* of Modernism. However, we can, and must, continue to stalk and to analyze the shifting tectonics of Woolf's perspectives and correct some historical misapprehensions regarding her position on class.

CONTEXT: MARXIST THEORY AND OTHER DEFINITIONS OF CLASS

“Why is ‘class’ this sort of ‘lost continent’ in feminist theory?”
--Rosemary Hennessy in an essay entitled “Class” (p. 54).

Marxism profoundly affected intellectuals of Virginia Woolf’s time and their views on class, including Woolf’s politically-active husband, Leonard; it appears to have exerted some general influence upon Virginia as well. Marx and Engels plainly state in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (commonly known as *The Communist Manifesto*) that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (9). Classic Marxist theory predicts that eventually the capitalist class will be overthrown by the proletarian class in order to establish more humane labor and living conditions. Marx bases his assessment of class struggle upon a metaphysical point, for he asserts: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness” (*A Contribution* 11-13). Thus Marx seems to suggest that the practical manifestations of class appear critical to the development of an individual’s self-perception and very epistemology. George Orwell, a contemporary of Woolf’s, develops this concept in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), a text which will be discussed later in this study. This particular emphasis on consciousness resonates most strongly with Woolf, who over the course of her career becomes keenly aware of the extent to which her very thinking and existence are conditioned by her class environment. She increasingly engages in a more open dialectic on class issues, one which to some degree becomes impossible to resolve. Woolf stalks the answers in a manner similar to

Lily Briscoe's troublesome effort to complete her artistic depiction of reality, which does not occur until the final moments of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), but, unlike Lily, Woolf cannot arrive at a final synthesis and is perhaps closest to resolution only in *Three Guineas* (1938). In this extended essay, Woolf indicts an entire capitalist system based upon patriarchy and class, a system suffocating to women and one that not only invidiously pervades British society but many other societies as well. Nonetheless, later Woolf stories, essays, and diary comments periodically reveal classist remarks that illustrate the great difficulty Orwell identifies in dissociating oneself from the deep impact of early class conditioning.

In Marxism, "false consciousness" is seen as an effect of capitalist ideology that prevents the working class from recognizing and challenging the exploitation of capitalist social relations. For the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, ideology is a precondition of both human sociality and subjectivity itself, and operates by means of the category of the subject. Drawing on Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, Althusser explains the interpellation of individuals as subjects within specific ideologies, where they independently reproduce capitalist social relations without an apparatus of external, physical repression (qtd. in Weedon 114-15). This is why class is essential to Woolf's identity and to her psychosexual maturation. It is when she finally realizes her own internalized repressive functioning as an individual assimilated into the ideology of her patriarchal culture that she recognizes her own inevitable complicity in structures of oppression. That same recognition brings a mixture of hope and despair in later works, such as *Between the Acts* (1941). Woolf's grappling with class issues in her writing is not only a theoretical effort but also ultimately a practical effort in its implications; she

performs valuable work that is both epistemologically and politically engaged. Woolf's efforts illustrate Michel Foucault's contention that "the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them" ("Human Nature" 171). Woolf embarks upon a major process of consciousness raising for both herself and her patriarchal British society, starting with early, short works and her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), and culminating in *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*.

How does one define "class"? Post-Marxist views of class approach this question differently. Three especially relevant views are advanced by David Cannadine, Gary Day, and Max Weber. In *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (1998), David Cannadine defines "class" as "hierarchy," explaining that in Britain class consciousness has historically involved the awareness of different objective circumstances of status, power, and wealth—as well as a sense of oneself in time, as in a consciousness of ancestral paintings, ninety-nine-year leases and so forth (24). To illustrate the extent of the hierarchy, Cannadine quotes A. Arnold's claim that in the late 1870s only 7,000 families owned four-fifths of the land in Britain (9). Primogeniture dominated the gentry, and the position of the elite rested upon popular sanction, for to most people, an unequal division of resources was the natural and legitimate order of things (12-15). Interestingly, Cannadine spends an entire section of his book explaining his own "bias and intuition," providing in effect an instance of the standpoint theory for which American feminists such as Nancy Hartsock and Donna Harraway have become well-known. Cannadine

argues that one cannot understand history without first understanding the historian—a view with which Woolf surely would have agreed, and one that is superbly illustrated by Woolf’s contemporary, George Orwell, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In fact, Woolf’s increasing consciousness of and willingness to grapple with the implications of her class position, and its relation to the patriarchy and empire-building of her native land, constitutes one of her admirable achievements. Of course in Woolf’s time the primogeniture and land-basis for class development was changing, yielding somewhat to status-based class development not always, or not fully, based upon land-holding. British sociologist Gary Day traces this development in detail in his book entitled *Class* (2001).

GARY DAY’S DEFINITION OF CLASS

Although “class” refers in broad terms to divisions in society, Gary Day argues that it is notoriously difficult to define because it occurs across a range of disciplines (sociology, literary criticism, politics, cultural studies) that give it different weightings and meanings. “Class” first entered the English language in 1656 in Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia*, where it was defined as a navy, ship, order, or distribution. The word itself originates in the Latin *classis* (*classes* as its plural) as a variant of *colare*, which means to proclaim or call out or summon a religious assembly (*Class* 2-5).

In a nexus particularly relevant to Woolf and her writing, Day discusses Georg Lukács’ claim that literature, especially the novel, is able to penetrate society by identifying hidden connections and trends which could result in radical transformation. Although Woolf’s style of indirection and satire often masks her intent in *The Voyage Out*, she seems to have aimed for this result from the publication of even this first novel,

where Rachel begins to question the unsavory, hidden underpinnings of British patriarchy. Day demonstrates the merit of this claim in excavating the ideological function of the term “human nature” in the exchange relation of capitalism in Mrs. E. Gaskell’s 1855 novel, *North and South* (135-40). In *The Voyage Out*, and in her subsequent novel, *Night and Day* (1919), Woolf similarly examines the exchange relation of capitalism involved in marriage. Day also notes the contemporary influence of French Marxist Louis Althusser’s assertion that literature can make us conscious of the ideological nature of our ordinary conception of reality (2,199). Certainly this is a stance that Woolf supports tenaciously, especially in the later part of her career. Day’s focus is the relation between literature and exchange (the system of money, including its uses and meaning); in Marxist fashion, he argues that the growth of exchange represents the victory of bourgeois capitalism over aristocratic feudalism (1-2). In his study, Day distinguishes between culture and status: to him, culture enacts a “struggle between dominant and subordinate groups over the construction and meaning of social experience. In short, the concept of status is premised on social stability, that of culture on social conflict” (11).

Day also discusses the ramifications of German sociologist Max Weber’s much-earlier articulation of differences between class and status. Weber’s definition of class emphasizes not production, but the restrictions upon a person’s opportunities to earn a good income, to buy high-quality products, and to enjoy a good quality of life. Thus, for Weber, class is finally based upon market operation; status, however, is defined in terms of prestige and respect in one’s community—thus, for example, being a priest might carry high status but provide little income (10). Weber provides distinctions relevant to a

discussion of classism. For one, Woolf enjoyed high status in her society (social capital), particularly later in her career, but did not belong to the aristocracy, nor did she possess a great deal of material wealth. For another, Woolf also offers a gender-nuanced understanding of class which insists upon gender-equity in educational opportunities for women—and thus, theoretically at least, equal opportunities to engage in the professions, followed by an improved quality of life. These women she simultaneously urges to work toward a more peaceful world, free of world wars and other violent conflicts. These aims are encouraged in *Three Guineas* when the narrator states that she will donate her three guineas to these three related causes. Rather than viewing class as based upon production, Woolf exhibits Weber's conception of class as based upon a person's ability to advance in society by attaining the opportunity to earn a high income (with education strongly implied as the means to do so). This view of class is foundational to her championing of the common reader; it is also partly through offering her own writing to readers as a way of uncovering the dominant sexist, classist, and racist ideology of her time that Woolf promotes by her practice the critical reading and thinking which is the basis for self-education (as well as institutionalized education) for both genders. Furthermore, in her essays and formal talks—such as the discussion of highbrow and lowbrow on the BBC in the 1930s—she directly attempts to educate her readers and listeners on the vital importance of critical reading and thinking. Woolf also emphasizes habits of critical reading and thinking on the part of the common reader as essential for the maintenance of democracy and civilization in general. Melba Cuddy-Keane has superbly detailed Woolf's attempts to encourage readers and listeners to think for themselves in her recent book, *Virginia Woolf: The Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (2004).

Day develops an explanation of the development of class consciousness in Britain that helps us to understand not only the context of Woolf's thinking about class, but also some threads of contemporary thought regarding class that she seems to anticipate. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf identifies what Day articulates in his book in more postmodern terms: money determines "the very coordinates of culture—its structures of representation and means of evaluation" (204). Woolf later develops a nuanced critique of the coordinates of capitalism in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Day believes that some modernists emphasized cultural differences between human beings exactly because the new exchange relation, making all commodities equal because paper money and coins were now used to represent them, "threatened to confer a spurious equality on people" (156). Day cites the particularly provocative argument of Jean-Joseph Goux, who suggests that the style of modernism is directly related to new monetary concepts:

Was it purely by chance that the crisis of realism in the novel and in painting coincided with the end of gold money? Or that the birth of "abstract" art coincided with the shocking invention of inconvertible money signs? Can we not see in this double crisis of money and language the collapse of guarantees and frames of reference, a rupture between sign and thing, undermining representation and ushering in the age of the floating signifier? (Goux qtd. in Day 157)

Day offers a dramatic example from modernist writer D.H. Lawrence to illustrate the effect of this shift in the exchange relation, quoting Ursula's ranting in Lawrence's *The Rainbow*: "I hate it, that anybody is my equal who has the same amount of money as I have. I know I am better than all of them. I hate them. They are not my equals. I hate

equality on a money basis. It is the equality of dirt”(156). Woolf sometimes felt this way when she traveled in a crowded rail carriage; however, she pushed beyond her own inherited class envelope to examine her own classism, also joyously celebrating her rides on London’s omnibuses and the ebb and flow of London’s richly diverse classes even as she worked to improve life for at least that sub-strata of British class life which cut across other, more vertical class definitions: that of women from all walks of life, but particularly those disadvantaged and uneducated daughters of educated men.

The dislocation of class and culture is perceived by Day as representing a shift from two traditions in England: a Marxist tradition in which culture is connected to society’s economic base, and a humanistic English tradition which conceives of culture as the positive development of qualities characteristic of one’s humanity. Thus Marxist tradition sees culture as reflecting bourgeois capitalism, and the English tradition views it as a correction for a society overtaken by the profit motive. Day points out that the belief that “high” culture reflects values critical of capitalism is not one generally acceptable today; he notes also that, though popular culture may appear classless, it is in fact based on consumption and a fundamental appeal to individuals rather than to groups (202-03). I believe that a lack of understanding of the subversive nature of “high” culture (even as expressed and promoted in Clive Bell’s problematic book, *Civilization*) has contributed to the monolithic view some still hold of Woolf as a snob. The “high” culture promoted by Bell in his book, and by Woolf in her Bloomsbury circle, as well as in her writing, promotes the idea, for instance, that one should be satisfied with a modest amount of money sufficient for one’s needs and for the simple pleasures of books and a limited amount of travel. Sacrificing one’s soul to a money-making industrial machine in order to

gain great wealth was frowned upon—surely a value subversive to capitalism. In fact, both as a writer and in her personal life, Woolf promoted many values that were essentially revolutionary in terms of her patriarchal society, and she championed individual liberty against the accepted virtues of social conformity, all the while questioning the manner in which social class was constructed by means of patriarchal language and practice. To Woolf, patriarchy precedes class and is rooted in the family, as she argues in *Three Guineas*.

If one's identity is unstable—and, of course, identity is an important topic of examination in the modernist period—then being honest inevitably brings contradiction or the *sous-rature* of Kristeva and Derrida. In Orwell's words, "If you secretly think of yourself as a gentleman and as such the superior of the greengrocer's errand boy, it is far better to say so than to tell lies about it. Ultimately you have got to drop your snobbishness, but it is fatal to pretend to drop it before you are ready to do so" (*The Road* 200). Part of the reason that Woolf has been portrayed as a snob is that indeed she was born into the upper middle class and only gradually (and perhaps never fully) disencumbered herself of its stultifying and destructive views on class. E.M. Forster declared that she bravely stated the truth even when it was unpopular and that her snobbery was comprised less of arrogance than of bravery (Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf* 89).

MAX WEBER'S DEFINITION OF CLASS

The famed sociologist Max Weber, who was politically active in Germany prior to and during World War I and died prematurely during Woolf's lifetime, offers a definition of "class" as any group of persons occupying the same class status. "Class status" is

defined as the possession of three things: a) goods, b) external conditions of life, and c) subjective satisfaction or frustration. Types of classes are distinguished by a) property, b) acquisition (when class position is determined chiefly by chances to exploit services available), and c) social class. “Social class” is defined as comprised of “the plurality of class statuses between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generations is readily possible and typically observable” (Weber 424). I have chosen to use Weber’s theoretical articulation in thinking about class because he ultimately views class as a somewhat shifting category, and I believe that Woolf eventually recognizes the same unstable structure when she examines her own gender status in relation to conventional definitions of class. In fact, Weber states that “Transitions from one class status to another vary greatly in fluidity and in the ease with which an individual can enter the class. Hence the unity of ‘social’ classes is highly relative and variable” (425). In excavating class issues, Woolf similarly discovers that traditionally-perceived class unity is deceptive, but that class nonetheless functions as a powerful shaping force for an individual’s perception of self and behavior.

BOURDIEU, SKEGGS, HENNESSY, ORWELL

Other theories of class useful in understanding Woolf are those of Pierre Bourdieu, twentieth-century Marxist sociologist; Beverly Skeggs and Rosemary Hennessy, contemporary British sociologists; and the investigative insights of British political writer, novelist and journalist, George Orwell, who sheds the light of experience on the dilemma of class in Britain in the early twentieth century. Victor Gollancz, progressive English publisher and founder of the Left Book Club, suggests in his introduction to

Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, that Orwell felt compelled by conscience to be a socialist but also compelled to conform to the mental habits of his upper middle class (xvii-xviii). His dilemma is also, periodically at least, Woolf's dilemma. How does one escape the envelope of class into which one is born? Is Orwell both anti-snobbery and a snob himself? What about Woolf, who professed to dislike upward social climbers, yet declared that she would "plump for the prince" and put a coroneted letter on the top of the pile for guest to notice (Nicolson 137)?

Orwell, who made a project of visiting members of the working class at the request of the Left Book Club in order to understand how lower-class people lived and worked, concludes in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that some working-class people are disgusting (like a certain Mrs. Brooker, who wipes her mouth on her blankets and then on strips of newspaper) but that these poor people are byproducts of the modern industrialist world, with the rich living out of their pockets (16-17). It is important to note that this book was written during the Depression. Watching miners work in hellish conditions causes doubts about one's own status as an intellectual superior, he says, for one can remain superior only because miners are sweating their guts out (34-35). One is reminded of Bernard's similar conclusion in Woolf's *The Waves* about the dependence of writers upon the work of servants in order to carve out the leisure necessary to write. Orwell's insight that, to many socialists, revolution means reforms that "we," the clever ones, will impose on the lower orders is an insight Woolf seems to have had as well, recognizing and rejecting the hypocrisy of some socialist do-gooders and their interminable meetings.

Orwell states directly his belief that, before one can decide his or her position on socialism, he or she must take up a definite attitude on the difficult issue of class. Thus,

Orwell says, he must discuss how his own attitude toward class was formed. In so explaining his class background and attitude, he provides some comment on the general state of the English class system, which he views as done with after the Great War (World War I). Many people no longer owned land but went into the military service or the professions. Gentility became theoretical in a sense; one kept up appearances, learning to ride even if one couldn't afford to keep a horse. To Orwell, this was the chief attraction of service in India (or elsewhere in the far reaches of empire), for there the upper middle-class could have cheap horses, black servants, and could play at gentility (*The Road* 153-56)--as Leonard Woolf, a Jew excluded from upper-class life in Britain, did in Ceylon.

The chief insight that Orwell brings to bear upon a discussion of Virginia Woolf and class is his conviction that to abolish class distinction is to abolish part of yourself, for class intimately and pervasively forms your tastes, habits, and life (*The Road* 193). I believe that Woolf recognized this complicated relation of identity to class early in her life. She may have been particularly sensitive to it because of her own difficulties with psychic boundaries and mental illness; eventually, she became keenly aware of how class forms one's world view and over-arching paradigm for living (particularly in the Britain of her period, with its relatively rigid class distinctions). For instance, as a philosophical matter, she wanted to follow Leonard's suggestion that they cut back on household expenditures, but she also wrote of the difficulty, for her, of such a move. In her introduction to *Life as We Have Known It* (1931), a collection of essays by working-class women edited by Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Woolf notes that she has not had experiences similar to those of contributors and admits that "If every reform they demand

was granted this very instant it would not touch one hair of my comfortable capitalistic head” (*Life* xix).

What other elements of class consciousness delineated by Orwell inform Woolf’s thinking and writing as her career progresses? Certainly in her early novels and stories, Woolf appears to take the existence of servants for granted--though one must remember that in her lifetime the employment of servants in Britain was customary for the middle class as well as the upper class. Woolf could be criticized for exhibiting class snobbery by virtue of her very failure to investigate their material lives and character to any large extent in her early writing. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, such as the portrait of Nurse Lugton in “Nurse Lugton’s Golden Thimble,” an early sketch.² Critics have frequently found the presence of servants or other working-class characters to be insubstantially developed, as an examination of *Night and Day* and other early writing reveals. Exceptions occur in a limited fashion in *The Voyage Out*. Later, however, Woolf openly states her realization that she simply cannot enter adequately into the consciousness of her lower-class characters *because* of her upper-middle-class upbringing; she finally recognizes that the class into which she was born is a liability for her as a novelist in this regard. She hesitated on occasion to even share her sketches of working-class characters, embarrassed at their inadequacy. I suggest that Woolf found herself betwixt and between in DeKoven’s modernist sense on this issue, for she had committed to a new type of novel in which she chose to focus on the inner life of her characters, the fluid consciousness of individuals not rendered fully in the bulk of previous writing. How could she render the inner consciousness of servants whose material lives she was not privy to and did not directly investigate? Woolf points out

herself in her essay, “The Niece of an Earl” (originally published in 1928), that literature of the past had relied upon a reader’s quick recognition of the character’s class by way of the writer’s description of clothing, mannerisms, and other external class markers. Such literature was not the kind she wished to write, yet frequently this may have seemed her only practical approach for articulating the lives of servants and members of the lower-class. However, in this essay Woolf clearly indicates the enormous difficulty of using fiction to provide insight into the lower classes, primarily because the working classes do not write about themselves; if they are educated enough to do so, then, in a strict sense, they cannot be called lower-class. She even predicts a classless society in a future, more democratic world.

Woolf repeatedly articulates her desire to be an outsider, yet she recognizes only later in her writing career that she always will also be an insider, and that her insider status results in complicity with certain problematic issues related to class. Nonetheless, as Alex Zwerdling observes, “She wrote about class and money with exceptional frankness at a time when these subjects were increasingly felt to be indecent. The democratic pressures of her culture encouraged many writers to suppress or minimize the signs of privilege in their own backgrounds” (*Virginia Woolf* 88).

Though she significantly redefined it, Woolf’s favorite genre was the novel. What other connections exist between class and the novel? Gary Day argues that postmodern thinking should not insist on the separation of “literature” and exchange, for the growth of exchange represents the triumph of bourgeois capitalism over aristocratic feudalism (2). Woolf herself seems sensitive to this nexus in her increasing concern with the economic and political effects of patriarchy (especially in *Three Guineas*), in her focus on

the common reader, and in her participation in the 1930s public discussion of differences between what is considered “highbrow” and “lowbrow.” Day discusses a number of social theorists who demonstrate relationships between class and the development of the novel—relationships which would have interested Woolf a great deal, for she also connected the two. Nancy Armstrong argues that the novel has been important for the construction of class identity for the nascent middle class. Fredric Jameson suggests that the appearance of the novel is a function of the separation of social and economic spheres, a move from a moral to a market economy (108-09). Georg Lukács claims that literature (and particularly the novel) is able to penetrate society, calling attention to hidden connections and underlying trends which could lead to revolutionary transformation. Day also calls attention to Louis Althusser’s assertion that “literature” can heighten our awareness of the ideological nature of our conventional idea of “reality” (1-2). Reading Woolf in the light of theorists of ideology such as these leads to a more sharply-defined portrait of Woolf, one which makes her appear revolutionary for her class and historical period despite her traditional inclinations in other respects.

In *Formations of Class and Gender*, British sociologist Beverly Skeggs states that “respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class” (1). Respectability involves judgments--of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Recognition of how one is positioned socially is vital to the subjective construction of the self. As someone writing about her own British society, Skeggs points out that respectability became central to the development of “Englishness” and a means by which moral authority was made public. Eventually it became a property of middle-class individuals defined against the masses, which were seen as needing control and as lacking in individuality (2-3). Skeggs notes

Finch's definition of the "classing gaze," a term denoting the Enlightenment project of constituting "reason" by classifying observable behavior—a project enabled by new technologies such as photography and ethnography. According to Skeggs, women were placed at the heart of the project on classifying behavior, and they were the ones primarily observed. In fact, Finch observes that the cult of domesticity was vital to the self-defining of the middle classes and to an imperialist nation (qtd. in Skeggs 4-5). Class is defined by Skeggs as ". . . a discursive, historically specific construction, a product of middle-class political consolidation, which includes elements of fantasy and projection. The historical generation of classed categorizations provide [sic] discursive frameworks which enable, legitimate, and map out material inequalities" (5). Further, she asserts that categories of class not only function as organizing principles which either limit or enable access to social movement and interactions but also are reproduced as "structures of feeling"—or, as Skeggs defines it, the feeling that one may not measure up to expectations (6).

I argue that Woolf may have feared a dissolution of identity, a further dissolution of rationality--which she certainly experienced during her bouts of mental illness--if she tried to "de-class" herself too extensively and to champion too overtly the claims of democratic equality (at least in her younger years). In the climate of anti-Semitism of Britain (traced by Bradshaw, Snaith, and others) she may have felt some sense of inferiority in having married a Jew. Because she had married an "other," an outcast of sorts, did she now in a sense belong to a lower class? In an article on *Flush* (2002), Anna Snaith delineates some of the anti-Semitism prevalent in areas like Whitechapel in the Woolfs' lifetime ("Of Fanciers"). Ethnic hatred and discrimination, particularly as

practiced in Britain during the 1930s, must have resulted in the Woolfs feeling at least partially marginalized.

As Kum-Kum Bhavnani and Meg Coulson observe, race is a factor which confronts feminism by forcing attention to difference, identity, and colonialism (78). It is well-known that Leonard Woolf served for years as a colonial administrator in Ceylon and was steeped in the experience of colonial racist practices. It is also common knowledge among Woolf scholars that Virginia accepted an inheritance from an aunt with imperialist connections in India and that she was concerned in major ways with issues of exclusion and marginality in her writing.³ Like most members of her class in the first decades of the century, she and Leonard employed servants. Detractors have pointed out the nebulous existence of servants in her fiction⁴; however, I will argue that despite Woolf's ironic marginalization of servants in some of her fiction, she gradually acknowledged the vital role servants played in real life—including the essential provision of services that enabled her to engage in a writing career. See, for example, Bernard's comments on the lady writing in the window in *The Waves*, where he notes that her activity is enabled by the servant sweeping below, and the characterization of Mabel (one of the Woolf servants) as the Queen in *Between the Acts*. Nonetheless, Woolf became ever more acutely conscious that she was not privy to the inner lives of servants or other members of the working class and that she thus could not portray them realistically in her fiction. Two of the last short stories she is known to have worked on before she died, "The Ladies Lavatory" and "The Watering Place" (unpublished), reveal the results of Woolf's eavesdropping on details of the lives of lower-class women using a lavatory. Heather Levy discusses Woolf's references to the origins of these stories in Woolf's visit to a Brighton teashop. For Levy,

Woolf's use of the final month of her life to work on questions of representation of the bodies of working-class women indicates that Woolf felt this was an unresolved issue and that lower-class women remained "ghost figures" not well understood by an upper-middle-class woman observer—a substantial, lingering gap between women of different social classes ("These Ghost Figures" 34-5, 37).

Pierre Bourdieu suggests a model of class based on "capital." To Bourdieu, class is an arbitrary definition with real social effects. He identifies four types of class, citing groups with economic capital; cultural capital (including education); social capital (involving a variety of social relationships); and symbolic capital (respect, authority, position in one's culture linked to linguistic power). Access, resources, and legitimation (social recognition) are all factors in class formation. Class positions are institutionalized, offering labor market rewards; they are not simply relative social relations. In Bourdieu's terms, Woolf attempted to increase her symbolic capital (restricted as a woman judged by the values of men) by developing a career as a writer. It was necessary for her to stay on good terms with middle- and upper-class fellow writers, and she undoubtedly felt the need to stay connected to the literary establishment which would print her essays and stories and comment upon her work. In plain terms, she needed a receptive, critical audience—both the common reader and the highbrow, if you will—in order to continue to publish and sell her novels, stories, and essays. She had the advantage of assets, such as the inheritance from her aunt and the more intangible but equally important literary tradition inherited from her father—as well as the later asset (though not always profitable) of the Hogarth Press. She also possessed the advantage of space, beginning with the "outsider" space of Bloomsbury shared with her siblings and friends, and later

the figurative (and literal) “room of one’s own” she carved out of her marriage to Leonard, in the sense of negotiating an independent, private writing life and the physical writing space in which to pursue it.

PSYCHOANALYTICAL AND FEMINIST THEORIES OF CLASS

Beverly Skeggs notes that, according to Foucault, subjectivity can only be constructed from inside social structures and relations (12). Subject positions are different from social positions, which are founded upon categories such as class, race, and gender. Subjectivity is a result of being “subject to” knowledge, discourse, and regulation—and constructing subjectivity in the process. Examples are women’s experiences of what it is to *be* through categorization as “woman,” “heterosexual,” or “feminine.” Identifying oneself with a particular subject and social position is the means by which coherence in identity is achieved. Class is central to a woman’s construction of a subject position, relying upon a judgmental, dialogic “other” and operating at a personal, emotional level (Skeggs 12-13). I would argue that, in terms of Skeggs’ definition, Woolf’s subject position was thus hardly as advantageous as her general membership in the upper middle class. She experienced diminished economic capital as a single woman dependent upon father, family, and later—as a married woman—upon her husband (mitigated, of course, by her symbolic capital as a writer). She suffered a gap in cultural capital because of her lack of a university education, and perhaps because of not producing any children. She did maintain social capital in relationships with many friends and acquaintances as she matured, but not as a young and awkward single person sitting out dances as George Duckworth tried to introduce her to “society.” She lacked symbolic capital until she

finally gained recognition as a writer. Interestingly, at this point she worked hard to connect with the common reader, who was becoming a serious cultural force.

Rosemary Hennessy offers further overview and analysis of class theory that is useful in interpreting what Woolf hints at but articulates only partially and obliquely. To Hennessy, class is often under-conceptualized—perhaps another reason for Woolf’s lack of directness at times in analyzing it-- for class is referred to as an empirical reality but not fully discussed as a critical concept. She points out that some radical feminists understand classism as a social system which is a byproduct of patriarchal oppression of women. As such, it is a cultural system, a set of status distinctions. She notes that Max Weber sees class as one component of social stratification; thus class is viewed as an interaction with economic, legal, and cultural structures--which is different from the Marxist historical materialist definition of class as an exploitative social phenomenon. To Weber, “class” refers to any group of individuals who share a common market situation in terms of properties or goods they own. Another approach to class is that of the post-Marxist, postmodern cultural materialist analysis, where the premise is that culture is not related in any determinate manner to social relations which are not cultural. Some holding this view believe that there are no objective class relations outside of language, that meanings are unstable, and that power operates through diffuse sources rather than exclusively by means of hierarchy. Thus class relations possess no reality apart from their discursive formation (qtd. in Hennessy 59-60).

To Hennessy, attending to class as a set of social relations that undergird capitalism, rather than simply as a marker of cultural status, has enormous transformative implications for international politics. It energizes a network of related concepts helpful

for understanding social relations, for learning from the past, and for identifying structures of power which are often hidden but which form the foundations of our experience ((70-71). Woolf gradually came to see these broader implications of class and eventually investigated them in her later works, yet she was also conscious of a personal and Modernist dilemma in dealing with categorical statements: how could she criticize a system which had produced her own father, Leslie Stephen, and his *oeuvre*? Her brothers, Thoby and Adrian? Her nephew, Julian? Her husband, Leonard? In the end we often see Woolf inhabiting a *sous rature* or double space, a schizophrenic view reminiscent of Septimus, the mentally ill victim of war in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf wishes to be bold, she wishes to make a difference, she wishes to uncover the true deleterious undergirding of her society; nonetheless, casting such labels of aspersion implicates her, as well as her own family members (though she often made fun of them as well, particularly male family members), and reminds her of the very shifting space of language itself.

I argue that Woolf eventually developed a standpoint on class (as well as on other issues), one often in opposition to the androcentric din around her, and that standpoint theory can help to understand the evolution of her thought and writing. Nancy C.M. Hartsock, in *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*, defines “standpoint” as an interested, engaged position which contends that there are some perspectives in society from which the real relations of human beings with the natural world and with each other are not visible. Feminist standpoint theory is an epistemological tool developed on a methodological base provided by Marxist theory, though it differs from Marxist meta-theory by claiming that women’s lives differ structurally from those of men. In the same way that Marx’s idea of class consciousness--looking at the world from

the historically-constructed viewpoint of the proletariat--made it possible to expose bourgeois ideology, feminist standpoint theory assists in comprehending how patriarchal institutions and ideologies pervert humane social relationships (106-07). As Marx pointed out, material life structures understanding. Power is exercised through control of ideological production by the ruling group (qtd. in Hartsock 109-110).

Hartsock also cites Chodorow's study of the psychological development of females, one which demonstrates that, because of female parenting, girls are less differentiated from others than are boys, and are differently oriented to the inner object world as well. As a result, women experience and define themselves relationally in a way that men do not. Hartsock notes that the construction of the self for males in relation to one who phantasmatically threatens one's being (as the mother does, in the psychoanalytic view), and from whom one must separate, results in a hierarchical dualism, including the construction both of a masculinist world view and class society. To Hartsock, dualism is a hallmark of phallogentric society and social theory and has influenced the manner in which class society has been organized since Plato (78-80). In fact, Hartsock concludes that capitalism and class society may be the results of patriarchy (86).

Juliet Mitchell claims that the fact that men exchange women (rather than vice versa) explains the *patriarchal* nature of society. Some assert that what the father symbolizes in this exchange represents the power of the symbolic order to name things for what they are (qtd. in Tong 153). Woolf eventually drew many of the same conclusions as Chodorow, Hartsock, and Mitchell. Though her insights and arguments are expressed covertly and tenuously, often under cover of satire, they interrogate gender/class relations with regard to the social arrangement of marriage as a means to perpetuate patriarchy. In

The Voyage Out, Woolf chooses actual death for her heroine, Rachel, rather than the irony of “death” to her individual talent and personhood should she agree to the convention of marriage. Woolf demonstrates in this novel that the illness of an oppressive society has infected a healthy, young girl and caused her to succumb to death because of its invidious sexism and classism. In *Night and Day*, she explores an alternative in the focus upon the mutually satisfying relationship between the soon-to-be married Katharine Hilbery and the single suffragist, Mary Datchett: intense female bonding, with possible lesbian overtones. However, Woolf is not yet ready to launch her much more extensive and overt attack upon the very system which has produced a critical need for such alternatives. Theorists such as Alison Jaggar have noted the continuing alienation of women from themselves intellectually, fearing especially to argue their ideas in a public space (qtd. in Tong 127). The careful reader cannot fail to notice Woolf’s frequent fears of possible disapproval by (especially) male friends, relatives, and critics. Woolf was particularly self-conscious about her lack of formal education. However, in *Three Guineas*, she finally evolves to the point of relatively confident, direct expression of outrage against what she perceives as the interconnected web of patriarchy, empire, and war.

One might note other reasons for Woolf’s ego-boundary problems: possibly her intense attachment to Vanessa and Violet Dickinson as maternal substitutes after the death of her mother; the influence of early sexual trauma; her history of mental illness. Whatever the mix of factors, her sense of the fluidity of given categories influences her thinking on class, gender, and other issues, and makes her a prime example of DeKoven’s identification of the “impossible dialectic” as a characteristic of Modernism. *The Waves*,

in addition to other works, demonstrates the intense interplay of the psyches of six characters that epitomize this dialectic. Similarly, *Three Guineas* reveals a brilliant analysis of the manner in which class, gender, capitalism, patriarchy, war, and imperialism are linked.

Woolf was conscious of the dark fin beneath surface reality from a relatively early age. The fin beneath the waves was perhaps an allusion to some indeterminate, destructive sea creature but also apparently her metaphor for death/entropy/war/other destructive elements--a reference variously interpreted by Woolf scholars⁵ and an image useful for a discussion of the relationship between her psyche and class/gender identification issues. Having to repress her real feelings amid the emotional and economic tyranny created by Leslie Stephen after the death of her mother is perhaps the most dramatic of these early indications of difficulty in dealing with the practical, everyday ideological implications of patriarchy. As Woolf has famously said, her writing career would not have existed had her father not died when he did.

I believe that gender-inflected class positioning affected Woolf's mental health. Of course, there were psycho-biological factors and some family history of mental illness; however, Woolf's increasing recognition of the manner in which material differences in the lived experience of women were connected to structures of patriarchy created at times an unbearable tension, and helped to push her toward breakdown. In a study of sexuality and social relations, Rosalind Coward points out that psychoanalysis reveals how precarious individuality is, forcing a person to maintain coherence by fiercely clinging to fixed, socially-defined roles. Sexual subjectivity is constructed only by means of entry into a culture which is anatomically bifurcated (266-67). Freud's infamous "anatomy as

destiny” theories of female sexuality—particularly the need for women’s painful cultural adaptation in sexual terms and the belief in compensation for lack--would have been familiar to Woolf, since the Hogarth Press was Freud’s first publisher in England. Woolf also met Freud. Her brother, Adrian, underwent psychoanalysis and became an analyst. Woolf clearly eventually asked the question asked by Foucault: how do we come to believe that we are oppressed? Her answer was embedded in issues of class which were embedded in structures of patriarchy. Consciousness-raising without power to effect change produces individuals who become even more deeply frustrated. After initial examinations of the imbrication of the structure of marriage in the fabric of both class and patriarchy, she later also confronted issues of aging and childlessness in the same manner—particularly in *Mrs. Dalloway*. She recognized that, as Gayatri Spivak says, “The uterine norm of womanhood supports the phallic norm of capitalism” (*In Other Worlds* 153).

An individual is interpellated into an ideology as subject by means of language. To Freud, language is motivated by a desire for power, but the ego is often not unified or in control because it is a product of repression which is continuously subject to the disruptions of the unconscious. According to Lacan, subjectivity is divided and involves a sense of unity based upon mirror misrecognition. The subject’s inability to control meaning motivates language. Yet, the speaker is never the author of the language in which he or she takes a position. The “I” which is an effect of language illustrates where the individual is inserted into the patriarchal symbolic order (qtd. in Weedon 119-21). Woolf was constantly in conflict over her culture’s preoccupation with the tyranny of the “I.” Ironically, she was also often worried that her writing might reflect too much

preoccupation with her own “I.” Post-Lacanian feminists, like Julia Kristeva, view the unconscious as the site of the repressed feminine, with roots in the *semiotic* or pre-Oedipal relations with the mother. To Kristeva, the subject is always in process because it is constituted by language, which is always in the process of change. For the female subject to speak is to inhabit the discourse permitted by the patriarchal symbolic order. Luce Irigaray agrees, claiming that reason, the subject, and language have all been constructed as male; to be heard within the symbolic, women are forced to speak like men, and thus much of what is female is not represented. The key to change is to develop a female imaginary (qtd. in Weedon 122-23).

I believe that Woolf developed her own similar, rather postmodern epistemology along these same lines, realizing as early as *A Room of One's Own* (based on her 1928 lectures at Cambridge) that one of the biggest influences upon the real lives of women was the very manner in which they were *thought* of (and then spoken about and treated) by men. Subjectivity thus is an effect of language. Note, for example, Woolf's description of the bubble of male thinking about women with which she is surrounded as she tries to read in the British Library, a scene described with Horatian irony in *A Room of One's Own*. These images produce material effects in the dominant (usually male) discourse which constructs power relationships, as Foucault has pointed out so clearly. Woolf addresses the need for female language, particularly for a new female syntax or sentence structure to accommodate female differences. Early on, she realizes the paramount influence of language upon gender-inflected class issues—including the key issue of epistemological structure and its influence upon perception. The material linguistic and thought practices of her patriarchal culture resulted in real and deleterious

effects. Furthermore, in novels such as *Orlando* (1928), Woolf begins to iterate a theory of performativity relevant to gender (and class) identity which resembles that of the postmodern theorist Judith Butler. Woolf might even be viewed as anticipating Jacques Derrida in his emphasis upon meaning as a vortex of unfixity and plurality.

Politics comes into play for Woolf as well. Maroula Joannou's *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History* (1999) calls attention to the deeply politicized literary culture of women writers of the period—one obscured when reading conventional critical commentaries of the time simply because women were marginalized or left out of such commentary. Many middle-class female intellectuals reacted with shame at the contrast between their lives of comfort and the poverty-stricken lives of others, as British writers of the 1930s shifted to the left in recognizing the centrality of culture in the struggle for power. Tensions were sometimes evident between authors who placed more value upon artistic change than upon social change and vice versa (2-5). Though much writing of the 30s was still strongly conservative, many also began to see that relationships of domination and oppression were determined not just by gender but by a constellation of race, class, age, history, religion, and politics. As Joannou observes, gender is now seen as always experienced in identifiable and specific historical situations. Women in the 30s were the first in British history to believe in large numbers that the struggle for equality as citizens had been won (all women over 21 could vote in Britain as of 1928). Nonetheless, some women working toward change in mixed organizations were worried over identification with feminism because they feared it augured separation between the sexes. The Duchess of Atholl, for instance, is said to have expressed a fear that approaching politics exclusively from a woman's point of view

might lead to a sex antagonism worse than that between party or class (Joannou 7-10). Remembering this concern of fellow writers, perhaps some might better understand Woolf's dislike of being labeled a "feminist"—though there were also other reasons for her dislike of that label. This particular dislike, confusing for some impressed by her work on behalf of women, points up her aversion to preachy, confining categories of exclusion and marks her as part of the "rich and strange" mixture of contradictions now labeled "modernism."

In fact, I contend that one key to understanding Woolf's complex and evolving thinking and practices regarding class issues has to do with her very keen realization of the polymorphous nature of not only words and linguistic structures, but, by extension, also of the female (and male) subject as socially constructed. Woolf wrote frequently about not wanting to be or feel "this" or "that." She despised either/or definitions and syntax and preachiness that aimed to impose a restrictive set of standards on anyone. At times this resistance was a life or death matter to her. In a number of episodes in her life, for example, she perched on the precipice of "normal" versus "mad" and was keenly aware that the difference often depended upon perception by others who crafted the outlines of these categorical terms (a situation famously satirized in *Mrs. Dalloway*)—in particular, her doctors, such as Sir George Savage and Dr. T. B. Hyslop. Hyslop, for example, has been quoted as stating that the new breed of women was draining ancient energies, that women who did mental work such as writing would produce unhealthy children and that a mad woman who had children would undermine the Empire by tainting the purity of English blood (qtd. in Poole 122-23).

Woolf also lived on the cusp of change in terms of dwindling religious belief, surprising new findings in psychology by Freud and others, startling discoveries and theories of evolution by Darwin, the shock of World War I and its effect on the class system in Britain and elsewhere. Negotiating terms between the comfort of the older Victorian world and the excitement, yet discomfort, of the new seems to have produced a deep sensation of unsettling change: a swirling cosmos of the rich and strange. How could an intelligent woman (or man) then be just “this” or “that” in such a place? Woolf’s great sensitivity to fine distinctions in terms and to the elasticity of language is evident in her essay-letter entitled “Middlebrow”; here she essentially deconstructs the term to locate her own evanescent position in the context of debates in 1930s Britain about the changing nature of the reading public in relation to class and culture. In *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (2003), Melba Cuddy-Keane analyzes this essay in detail and presents the fascinating context of British discussion of the categories of “highbrow” and “lowbrow” during this period, pointing out ways in which Woolf subverts binaries in discourse on this topic.

Surely Woolf suffered, as many authors have, from what Harold Bloom has identified as the “anxiety of influence.” She was guided in her education in the literature of famous men by her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, an important late-Victorian man of letters. Steeped in the classics, Woolf worried about measuring up, and she also quickly realized that she had relatively few female literary predecessors. In an article entitled “A Map for Rereading; or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts,” Annette Kolodny cites Bloom’s contention in *Kabbalah and Criticism* that reading a text is always of necessity the reading of an entire system of texts and that meaning “wanders around between

texts.” Though admitting the usefulness of this observation, Kolodny discusses the limitations of Bloom’s view, noting that interpretive strategies of reading are learned, historically-determined, and (as a result) gender-inflected. Essential to Bloom’s paradigm of both reading and literary influence is the sense of a shared, cohesive, and canonical literary tradition. Kolodny also discusses Woolf’s awareness of the effect of a lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer, which communicates itself to and may respond to her readers’ sense of being excluded from highbrow culture in *A Room of One’s Own*. Perhaps Woolf’s common reader educated her as well, as she played to the common reader’s likely desire for a more egalitarian society.

Was Woolf pulled toward a different attitude toward class issues partly because she choose the *novel* (or “new”) form in which to experiment with different ways of seeing and writing? In “The Niece of an Earl,” Woolf wrote about the techniques of literature of the past, which often relied upon the reader’s quick recognition of a character’s class by means of detailed, realistic description of dress, mannerisms, the character’s home, and so on. Woolf was after something more: the gaps not addressed in much previous fiction, particularly the gaps where women should have been glimpsed. These gaps included insight into “moments of being,” to use Woolf’s famous phrasing, which stood out from the “cotton wool” of daily life. Toward this end, some of her more experimental fiction--such as *The Waves* and *Jacob’s Room* (1922)--demonstrates the defamiliarization technique of the Russian formalists in which readers are forced to look anew at familiar things presented in unfamiliar ways. Eventually Woolf seems to have been pulled more and more toward presenting a new and unfamiliar view of classlessness to her readers—particularly in *The Waves*, where she presents only voices, which represent general

characteristics of the human species (though class issues are evident here as well). However, the tug of self-identification by means of social strata never entirely lost its grip upon Woolf.

Annette Kolodny discusses several American women writers of the period (Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman) in her aforementioned work and suggests that the reason for their initially cool reception was that their writing was foreign in terms of accepted norms and expectations. Woolf often faced similar problems with critical reception, especially after publication of more experimental works, such as *Jacob's Room*, *The Waves* and *Three Guineas*. She was forging a new tradition that at times radically challenged the old. Not everyone was pleased. Her friend, E.M. Forster, for instance, was unhappy with the “cantankerousness” of *Three Guineas*. Woolf was perceived more negatively by friends, family, and literary critics when she employed feminist arguments (i.e. when she changed her language regarding class) in a more assertive manner than was deemed suitable for a woman of her class and stature. As a mature writer, she was, after all, providing a massive critique of not only war-mongering, but the entire patriarchal structure upon which militarism and patriotism depend. She was able only gradually to reveal her true colors as her reputation and publication credits grew.

Scholarship by critics such as Naomi Black and Merry Pawlowski has developed a much more detailed picture of the extent of Woolf's concern with social criticism—particularly that connected with patriarchy and war. Black's recent book, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (2004), claims Woolf's *Three Guineas* as a major feminist document which argues that women's experience—particularly in the women's movement—can be the

foundation for transformative change in society. Black also traces the development of Woolf's book from a 1931 lecture and the manner in which illustrations and the very form of the book represent a feminist subversion of models of male scholarship. Merry Pawlowski's *Virginia Woolf and Fascism* (2004) lauds Woolf's anti-fascist vision, particularly in *Three Guineas*. Pawlowski emphasizes Woolf's engagement with the world outside the artist's narrow room. She also observes that in *Three Guineas* Woolf anticipates contemporary studies on the fascist unconscious, studies which reveal that fascism is based upon an archetype of the male soldier characterized by hostility toward and fear of women. Thus fascism can be viewed as inherently opposed to women as the ultimate enemy. As Deleuze and Guattari have pointed out, fascism dwells in the unconscious, too, and the unconscious itself functions as a political force (qtd. in Sarup 93).

WOOLF'S SOCIAL CLASS & DEVELOPMENT OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Woolf inherited substantial connections with the literary meritocracy, if not the actual landed British aristocracy. Leslie Stephen was a prominent late-Victorian man of letters, editor of the massive *Dictionary of National Biography*, and author of numerous critical essays and books. He is said to be "one of the first Englishmen to argue that the character and demands of the reading public influenced literary expression" (Annan 317). He studied divinity in his early years and was ordained in 1859, later abandoning his faith to write books and essays on agnosticism and on English literary history. Julia Stephen was a beauty photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron and others, a woman engaged in practical philanthropy, and the mother of eight children (three by Herbert Duckworth, her

first husband, and four by Leslie Stephen—as well as stepmother to Laura, Leslie’s mentally handicapped child by Minny Thackeray). Julia herself wrote stories and essays in a minor vein, most of them unpublished. Such was the literary and philosophical cradle into which Virginia was born. Hyde Park Gate, the Stephen home, became the upper-middle-class social womb for Virginia Woolf’s “impossible dialectic” of modernism.

Woolf describes herself in *A Sketch of the Past* as born not rich but well-to-do; in works such as *Three Guineas*, she characterizes herself as an “outsider” who does not even owe allegiance to her country. She engaged in women’s suffrage activities and promoted public awareness of the lives of women and their struggles. She railed against the patriarchal underpinnings of war in *Three Guineas* and in *The Years* (1937), yet she complained about being forced to share a third class railway carriage with lower-class undesirables. She declared in her “Middlebrow” essay that she certainly was neither a highbrow nor a middlebrow but an admirer of the lowbrow as a source of great vitality, yet she wrote novels where the essential web of servants supporting her lifestyle as a writer remains a shadowy structure primarily relegated to minor characters and occasional references.

As indicated earlier, during her lifetime Woolf experienced the upheaval of British class structure which resulted from forces such as Marxism and the cataclysm of the Great War, a war in which even members of the aristocracy lost their fine young men. She also wrote under the growing influence of the eugenics movement, of Charles Darwin and his theories of evolution, of Sigmund Freud (published by the Woolfs’ own Hogarth Press) and his new emphasis on the Unconscious, and under the influence of the

Women's Suffrage Movement. Marx, Hegel, Darwin, and Freud challenged the individual's very perception of the self—which was inevitably class-bound.

George Orwell makes the class-self bond abundantly clear in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, where he discusses in detail the unrealistic attitude most people hold towards the class question:

The fact that has got to be faced is that to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself. Here am I, a typical member of the middle class. It is easy for me to say that I want to get rid of class-distinctions. All my notions—notions of good and evil, of pleasant and unpleasant, of funny and serious, of ugly and beautiful—are essentially *middle-class* notions; my taste in books and food and clothes, my sense of honour, my table manners, my turns of speech, my accent, even the characteristic movements of my body, are the products of a special kind of upbringing, and a special niche about half-way up the social hierarchy.

[. . .]

For to get outside the class-racket I have got to suppress not merely my private snobbishness, but most of my other tastes and prejudices as well. I have got to alter myself so completely that at the end I should hardly be recognizable as the same person. What is involved is not merely the amelioration of working-class conditions, nor an avoidance of the more stupid forms of snobbery, but a complete abandonment of the upper-class and middle-class attitude to life. (193-94)

I believe that Woolf began to recognize the complicated relation of identity to class positionality very early in life. She may have been particularly sensitive to this component of her identity because of her difficulties with psychic boundaries and with mental illness. Her sense of diffuse psychic boundaries, well-explained in Thomas Carramagno's *The Flight of the Mind* (1992), may have caused her to cling periodically to class distinctions simply in order to maintain a coherent sense of self; on the other hand, that very sensitivity made her more keenly aware of the process by which class position forms everyone's world view—in the radical sense of providing essential paradigms for living in the real world—and certainly strengthened the perceptiveness of her class critique. Orwell declares in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that “I am a degenerate modern semi-intellectual who would die if I did not get my early morning cup of tea and my *New Statesman* every Friday” (242). Similarly, Virginia Woolf was honest enough to admit the middle-class pleasures she enjoyed and the difficulty of doing without them; such admission does not detract from her attempts to use her pen to promote better conditions for women as a class--though Woolf was also conscious of class distinctions and problems in conceptualizing women as a class.

Relatives became concerned about the relative shabbiness of the housing and environs of the bohemian Bloombury area where Virginia, Vanessa, and Adrian moved after the death of their parents, but clearly Virginia, her siblings, and their friends were more concerned with questioning social mores and taboos than with social appearances. Lytton Strachey, for example, is famously said to have inquired whether or not a spot on Vanessa's dress was semen at one of their gatherings—a shocking matter of which to talk in public for this time period (Woolf, V. in MOB 195-96). Of course, Virginia Stephen

also broke with class tradition in marrying a Jew, Leonard Woolf—a gesture treated as a bombshell bit of news in notes to her old friends.⁶ In fact, Nigel Nicolson emphasizes that Virginia inherited somewhat of an anti-Semitic prejudice from her father (evident in her letters) but eventually boasts of Leonard’s Jewishness. Nicolson agrees with Hermione Lee that anti-Semitism in upper-class England was still prevalent well into the period between the wars and that Virginia Woolf depicts this social attitude in her novel, *The Years* (49-50). He also quotes Virginia’s 1930 letter to Ethel Smyth: “How I hated marrying a Jew—how I hated their nasal voices, and their oriental jewellery, and their noses, and their wattles—what a snob I was, for they have immense vitality” (49). Comments such as these are troublesome, yet here at least Woolf engages (in a private letter) in truthful recognition and admission of her bias—also identified as a prior one of which she is not proud. David Bradshaw and several other critics have recently attempted to rectify an unfair broad characterization of Woolf by some as a snobbish racist. She did make derogatory remarks, such as the one above, but she did so in the climate of 1930s Britain where anti-Semitism could almost be characterized as “politically correct.” Without condoning the harmful effects of such behavior or refusing to link it to the horror of the Holocaust, we must still distinguish between the casual and the causal, especially because Woolf sometimes engaged in negative remarks for the sake of a witticism. She hardly stands alone in this regard. We would do well to remember another relevant fact: she married a Jewish man with whom she appears to have had a loving and long-term, stable relationship. Furthermore, she changed in her anti-Semitic views as she matured, taking enormous care to provide a detailed critique of Britain’s treatment of Jews in works such as *The Years*.

CLASS AND WOOLF'S SATIRIC VISION

Woolf began employing her seemingly natural satiric vision while living at Hyde Gate Park as a child, where she wrote for *The Hyde Park Gate News*, a production of the Stephen family. "A Cockney's Farming Adventure," a story written at age ten, illustrates a rather intriguing nexus of gender and class—one which shall be examined in detail later. Her efforts at publication of her writing, which could be viewed partly as a vehicle for creating and solidifying--yet also interrogating--her class status, continued throughout her life. The operation of the Hogarth Press itself, a press founded by Virginia and Leonard Woolf after they were married, surely also could be characterized as an example of class-related power over logos, the word of the Father—an ironic and fitting power for the daughter of the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Woolf's satiric vision is both "organic"-- a "natural" outgrowth of her particular personality/family/position in society--and strategic, for her sharp pen often seems wielded for ideological purposes of hiding or revealing, or as a survival tactic (e.g. to avoid being immediately pilloried upon publication of *Three Guineas* and *The Years*). She is frequently tart-tongued in diaries, letters, and conversations, as though she were attempting to show off her intellect and perceptiveness in such a way as to camouflage her own inadequacies and gain acceptance as a member of the Bloomsbury literati or the general "class" of literary writers and thinkers. The technique seems protective and pervasive.

This veil of satire could well be related to her early sexual trauma, a situation examined in detail by Louise DeSalvo in *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood*

Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work (1989)--as well as by others. At times, the veil functions as an essential tactic to avoid the embarrassment of expressing too much emotion. It is also connected to her eventual stance on war and what she viewed as “unconscious Hitlerism” in her own country’s familial and national and international affairs. She feared being laughed at by her own social class-- particularly by specific literary colleagues, family, and friends-- for expressing strong views. These she expressed forcibly but satirically in *Three Guineas*, for example; one might also note the substantial changes she made in her nascent writing career, such as the differences between early drafts of *The Voyage Out* and its final version. She generally feared not being taken seriously, though her confidence increased as her literary reputation flourished. On many other occasions, she found class distinctions an immensely fertile soil for satire and late in life both welcomed and lamented the eroding of class distinctions after the war, partly because these very distinctions had afforded her such a rich lode of character and circumstance to mine for her writing. Satire exploits contradiction, and ideology covers over contradiction; Woolf understood this nexus early on. She employed the tool of satire, in both its Horatian and Juvenalian forms, in many of her novels, short stories, and essays. She wielded this tool to interrogate class as a category, the class structures of British society of her period, and her own positionality with regard to class.

A BORDER CASE

As is well-known, Woolf suffered from recurrent bouts of mental illness. Despite the fact that she commented upon the artistic value of these periods for her writing, they

cannot have been pleasant to endure, and we know that she also felt stigmatized by these episodes. One example is her difficulty with the servants who were present during some of her bouts of madness. She, of course, draws famously upon these experiences in her characterization of Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway* and also here strongly criticizes some of the standard treatments for and misconceptions about mental illness which she herself endured. I suggest that Virginia Woolf saw herself as set apart in this respect, as relegated to the category of the mentally ill, which knows no economic boundaries, with its attendant dangers as well as literary advantages. This effort at self-identification is shown as Woolf struggles in depicting figures like Septimus, where she clarifies what is really involved in such illness and strongly suggests better ways to treat the condition; it is part and parcel of her identity from the early stages of her first breakdown after the death of her mother. For instance, she describes herself as having a desire to laugh and feeling no emotion upon her mother's death--disturbing signs of depression and disassociation--though she cried later (Lee 130). Irene Coates suggests in *Who's Afraid of Leonard Woolf?* that Leonard was also a depressed person who hoped that marriage with Virginia might mask his own problems—which included a physical tic involving nervous, constant shaking of his hand--for she already had a reputation for a combination of genius and madness. Together they would challenge gender, ethnic, and class barriers, as well as the barriers of mental illness. Coates asserts that Leonard's caretaking of Virginia, while it also encouraged her to write and protected her genius, allowed him the control which enabled him to deny his own problems.

Woolf found herself “betwixt and between” with regard to many issues involving class and identity. She found herself *sous-rature* in her own culture simply because of her

gender--a situation hardly conducive to mental health, particularly for a person with literary aspirations in a world controlled by patriarchy. I suggest that she felt early on a keen sense of the need to remain in a dialectic between an autobiographical “I” and a cultural “I” as articulated by Luce Irigaray (Hirsh and Olson 103). The concept of something “other” always appears important to Woolf in constructing identity. She especially is both part of her class and “other” or outside of it—a situation very well expressed in her later work, *Three Guineas*, where she claims that (because of the intricate web of patriarchy, gender, and war) women actually possess no country to claim allegiance to, and that in certain ways they constitute a class of their own outside of whatever traditional British class structure they may have been born or married into. In *Three Guineas*, “class” refers specifically to inheritance, the possibility of property ownership, and educational opportunity, but it also refers in a broader sense to the desirability of maintaining outsider status with regard to the entire war machine of British society. It is in this work that Woolf appears most stridently feminist, always wanting to inhabit the Kristevan “impossible dialectic” and always wanting to consider alternatives.

Woolf displays a sense of diffuse and shifting boundaries, blending at times rather closely with Vanessa, her adored older sister. Her incorporation of the genre of painting into her writing--along with her interest in Post-Impressionism, with its own techniques of depicting permeable, shifting boundaries--is undoubtedly influenced by Vanessa’s profession. Such blending can be seen in her short stories, such as “Blue and Green,” “Monday or Tuesday,” and “Kew Gardens,” as well as in portions of her novels. Woolf’s close relationships with other women, such as Violet Dickinson in her early life, also

point to a sense of diffuse boundaries and a profound need to find a substitute for her mother, Julia, who died so early in Woolf's life. This sense of diffuse boundaries seems to have caused Woolf periodically to cling to class distinctions in Orwell's sense of a pervasive envelope surrounding one's life. Since these class markers served to define the very structure of her ego, they were not easy to discard or even to bring to full consciousness.

Vita Sackville-West, with whom Woolf had a brief affair and lengthier friendship, is an important connection of Woolf's with the upper class. Woolf's novel, *Orlando*, of course, is a tribute to Vita and a protest against Vita's inability to inherit Knole simply because of discrimination against her female gender in British law. Ethel Smyth, the radical and outgoing composer who befriended Woolf in later years, is one of Woolf's connections to the working classes. It was Smyth who pushed Woolf toward the confidence she needed in order to speak out so strongly against the nexus between patriarchy, class and war reflected *Three Guineas*. I believe Vita Sackville-West influenced Virginia Woolf toward the aesthetic and Ethel Smyth influenced her toward the political; both close friends influenced her experience as a "boundary rider" in her thinking about class.

Woolf did not subscribe to any formal and unitary religious view. Leslie Stephen was trained as a minister but became an agnostic and remained one for the rest of his life, undoubtedly transmitting some of his aversion to orthodoxy to his daughter. Though Woolf felt consistently that life flashed glimpses of "something more," she existed in only a quasi-religious borderland. Agnosticism, in fact, constitutes an ultimate borderland. I argue, however, that later she, along with other members of the Bloombury

group and practitioners of modernism as a philosophical stance, developed a belief in the efficacy of art to substitute for the consolation of traditional religion. In doing so, she and others questioned a linchpin in traditional British class structure, for it indeed rested upon God and country. The portrait of the minister in *Between the Acts* reveals just how much Woolf still feels committed to skewering figures of religious hypocrisy who invoke themselves and their God as support structures for “civilization.”

Language itself was also increasingly being interrogated as an unstable entity as the twentieth century wore on. If Woolf felt that neither her very self, nor the language she used, was unitary, how could her conception of class be unified? Class structures are inevitably enmeshed in language. One widely known and striking twentieth century example is the transformation of a cockney “guttersnipe” into a lady in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, a transformation achieved largely by altering her language.

A keen sense of gender discrimination was the key which led Virginia Woolf to question class structures from an early age. Leslie Stephen’s moaning and excessive demands upon Stella, Vanessa and Virginia after Julia’s death were an early trigger for understanding the damaging effects of patriarchy and its connection to social class. Early novels, such as *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, definitely reflect great concern with such matters. *A Room of One’s Own* is also an example of Woolf’s growing realization that gender, language, class and patriarchy are all one interconnected web. She exhibits concern in the latter work for the need for a “woman’s sentence,” for example. She insists also upon the economic base essential for a woman writer: 300 pounds a year and a room of one’s own. Unless one receives sufficient inheritance, one needs to engage in a remunerative profession. What professions are open to women, particularly the

uneducated daughters of educated men? The possibility of earning a living of one's own, resulting in economic independence, and thus the ability to think and speak with greater freedom than those completely dependent on others, was important to Woolf; for her, this possibility was closely connected to the opportunity for an education. She resented her parents for providing a university education for her brothers, but not for her. Such gender discrimination was, of course, typical in her lifetime. Woolf's understanding of class was strongly affected by this experience. As she points out in *Three Guineas*, the uneducated daughters of educated men are possibly worse off than the daughters of lower-class men. Woolf seems to view herself and other women in the former group as part of a sub-class, particularly because of the resulting economic and emotional dependence upon fathers or brothers. Naomi Black, one of the few recent scholars who comments upon this particular understanding of class in *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, observes that socialist feminists are bothered by Woolf's unconventional interpretation of class itself as linked closely to education and also subsequently to professional occupation. Furthermore, Black notes that Woolf's "Introductory Letter" to *Life as We Have Known It* emphasizes even more clearly that she strongly believed class should be defined more by educational possibilities than by material possessions (187-88). Woolf's class consciousness eventually evolved to the point where she became convinced that the interconnected web was dependent upon an ideology which covered over differences and one which desperately needed to be revealed, which she does with relish in the satiric volleys launched in *Three Guineas*.

Class structures are also forcefully questioned in *Jacob's Room*, an experimental novel which broke with the traditions of her literary ancestors. Her interrogation and

satire of class in *The Years* (1937) is more subdued but pervasive and forceful in a different way. Several of her short stories--such as "Moments of Being: Slater's Pins Have No Points" (1928) and "Lappin and Lapinova," (published in 1939 but written around 1919)--and her speeches and essays, also reflect upon class issues. Consider "Am I a Snob?," her paper read to the Memoir Club in 1936, as another instance of her fearless interrogation of an uncomfortable issue (she decides she is not). Her examination of class issues in her radical novel, *The Waves*, also provides an example of her "boundary riding" with respect to genre, for the novel reads more like a prose poem and suggests Eastern influences.

Patrick McGee has written persuasively about class in this novel, suggesting that Woolf is "framed by the text she frames" and saluting both her recognition of her complicity in maintaining traditional class structures (an example is the realization that the lady writing in the novel is enabled by the servant sweeping outside) and her attempts to break down those barriers. However, though often servants in her novels are shadowy figures who hardly seem to have lives of their own, in other novels (such as *To the Lighthouse*), important servant figures like Mrs. McNab are viewed as figures of strength and vitality essential to a healthy society. Alex Zwerdling discusses Woolf's many conflicts with Nelly Boxall and Lottie Hope, two important servants in her household, and notes that Woolf believed that servant problems were the fault of the class system and not of individual personalities. Woolf's mother, Julia, had no such problems, believing firmly in the hierarchical advantage one should employ in dealing with live-in servants. Zwerdling believes that Woolf experienced middle-class guilt over the very institution of servanthood itself (*Virginia Woolf* 98). In *The Waves* Woolf seems to

recognize the important function of servants in providing the foundation of leisure needed for the writing life which she herself led and at this point exhibits a sharper awareness of her own complicity in maintaining class structures, despite her work toward a more egalitarian society.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, authors of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972, trans.1977) speak of the limitations of concrete descriptors and clichéd categories. They are opposed to generalizations about class, believing that it is through small-group collective action and through fighting fascism in people's heads that societies will improve. To Deleuze and Guattari, who are anti-Freudian, the family is the source of hierarchy and taboos. In their view the unconscious produces desire and must be repressed by psychoanalysis, the watchdog of the state. Furthermore, they believe that all humans are fragmented, and they are similar to Lacan in emphasizing the notion of a decentered subject. Woolf was similarly concerned with the limitations of binaries and of compartmentalization (though not as anti-Freudian--despite her mocking comments--and appreciative of some of the insights of psychoanalysis). Yet she was also keenly aware of the historical moment in which she lived and of the traditions, particularly literary, upon which she had been nourished (especially by Leslie Stephen, as the family member designated by him to follow his career path of writer). A quote from her diary of Friday, January 4, 1929, succinctly states her "impossible dialectic": "Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted by the two contradictions" (*A Writer's Diary*). Virginia Woolf was driven by her nature and experiences to consider these alternating visions of reality and to situate herself from different perspectives at different moments in her writing. I propose that Woolf, in the context also of theoretical debate

during her lifetime upon the question of scientific objectivity, developed a writing practice which exhibits, as Holly Henry describes it, the “positive social and political possibilities for partial knowledges which might demystify the hegemonic claims of a scientific or artistic objectivity” (unpublished paper, 1998). Henry points out that, through Woolf’s publication in *The Athenaeum* and her association with Cambridge luminaries, she interacted with Britain’s leading mathematicians and popularizers of science and used some of these ideas in her aesthetic practices to demonstrate perspectives that show the situated nature of every narrator, artist, or observer. We might add the concept of the situated nature of every reader as well.

In her essay “The Leaning Tower” (1940), Woolf plays upon this very situatedness or “angle of vision” in discussing the bent of prominent writers from the 30s toward revolutionary writing, pointing out that their vision constitutes a class vision. These are writers who are reacting to their own febrile upper-class upbringing; they are ultimately ineffective because they do not interrogate the operation and influence of their own class perspective upon what they write. Always sensitive about her own lack of a university education because of the restrictions of patriarchy with regard to gender, Woolf understood well that politics of any sort was concerned with issues of power vitally connected with class status. This early deprivation provided a site for questioning the unitary nature of class, for was she not relegated to a lesser status within her social class simply because she was a woman? Certainly she felt keenly the lack of intellectual stimulation and learning she had missed by being schooled almost exclusively at home, and she resented the university education available to her brothers, Thoby and Adrian.

VIRGINIA AND LEONARD: A SHARED IDEOLOGY?

In a study of Leonard and Virginia's political influence on each other (1983), Selma Meyerowitz asserts that there are many consistent parallels in their thinking and writing about social and political matters. She believes that Virginia would have readily agreed with Leonard's view (stated in his autobiography of the years 1939-69) that "one of the greatest of social evils has always been class subjection and class domination" (qtd. in Meyerowitz, "Leonard and Virginia" 4). They both examine the class system and its influence on individual psychology and interpersonal relations, national values, and international politics. Virginia also examines the manner in which class position influences the writer's vision of life, as well as the writer's craft. She is keenly aware that social and economic conditions shape both the artist and his or her art (Meyerowitz, "Leonard and Virginia" 4).

In a more recent class-related article (1998), Patricia Laurence discusses the couple's polemical writing of the thirties (Leonard's *Quack, Quack!* [1935] and Virginia's *Three Guineas* [1938]) in order to show "how in this marriage of minds, domains of meaning are contingent upon one another" ("A Writing Couple" 125). Laurence asserts that in the thirties Virginia and Leonard share an ideology which rejects Nazis and fascists—as well as the British intellectuals and politicians who support them. In addition, Laurence asserts that both exhibit a satiric angle of vision, as well as a prophetic tone, and that Virginia Woolf herself engages in more than an attack upon patriarchy; she and Leonard adopt a larger, shared stance of concern about fascism, lack of reason in public and private life, and the ability to maintain civilized life (126). Laurence describes her essay as revealing "the shared ideology of Leonard and Virginia Woolf as a reflection of class, gender and

cultural classifications and transformations,” particularly with regard to oscillating terms such as “barbarism” and “civilization” (“A Writing Couple” 126-30).

Despite the worthiness of Leonard’s writing and working on social and political agendas, Irene Coates suggests a darker picture of Leonard, alleging that he pursued Virginia because of class. He needed a position in society and the money to which Virginia had access (though the amount was not large) in order not to have to go back to work in Ceylon; Virginia’s literary connections were also helpful because he wanted to be a novelist (92). Few current Woolf scholars have been willing to explore the possibility of ascribing darker motives to Leonard, who is generally especially admired for his meticulous caretaking of Virginia during her periods of mental breakdown (though both Coates and Louise DeSalvo represent this caretaking as overly controlling and repressive). What about Virginia’s darker motives? Did she at some level desire the marital union because she knew that her writing career as a married woman would be less threatened by a Jewish outsider like Leonard? Did she also believe that, because of her intermittent mental health problems, she could not maintain an independent life without the social benefit of marriage? Natania Rosenfeld paints a brighter picture of their relationship in *Outsiders Together: Virginia and Leonard Woolf* (2000), arguing that the outsider connection initiated a useful dialog between the two which ultimately enriched their engagement with larger sociopolitical concerns--though Virginia’s commitment to politics was *through* an aesthetic practice rather than by means of direct political action. Rosenfeld emphasizes Leonard’s own divided feeling about his class and ethnic identity as a Jew, alternating between pride in his background and rejection of it, as revealed partly in his attraction for Virginia Stephen and Bloomsbury (*Outsiders* 3-6). Rosenfeld

notes that the two were opposed in ways that complemented each other: Virginia “privileged by her background, but excluded from centers by her gender, he privileged by gender and marginalized through background” (*Outsiders* 4).

In her 1983 article, Selma Meyerowitz notes that both Leonard and Virginia examine the class issue at a theoretical level, including the influence of economic and societal factors upon individual psychology, interpersonal relations, international politics, and national value standards. Leonard argues that societal institutions modify individual and communal psychology and that changes in communal psychology change the structure of society. Virginia identifies the way in which class position affects a writer’s vision of life and his or her writing practice, noting that changes in society must result in changes in art (“Leonard and Virginia” 3-4). It is particularly in Woolf’s “The Leaning Tower” essay that she discusses how the nineteenth century was characterized by people being herded into different classes and writers who wrote only of the class from which they had sprung, though they believed they were looking at the whole of life. She points out that the Great War caused a great change in class structure and predicted that all classes would likely eventually converge into one class. Later I will examine this important essay in more detail.

Leonard was impressed with the work of the Women’s Guild in Britain and states in “What is Democracy?” that the emancipation of women could be one of the greatest social revolutions in history (16). In this essay, Leonard notes that the most important changes in a society take place inside people’s heads, in their changing political and social ideas (15-16). One of these important ideas, espoused strongly by Leonard, is the concept of classless politics in a democracy, which values each individual as an equal

political unit (27). Leonard worked for many years for the Co-operative Movement and for many other political causes. He and Virginia also became quite involved in the intense political and social activism of Beatrice and Sidney Webb. In fact, three essays by Beatrice Webb, under the general heading of “Diseases of Organized Society,” appear in the same volume (*The Modern State*) as Leonard’s essay mentioned above (along with four others by him). In one of Webb’s essays, she states that the magic of political democracy for any race is the enlargement of human personality and the loss of any sense of inferiority because of democracy’s belief in equality between all persons (“Drawbacks” 184). Note the emphasis on equality of races here, an emphasis which Virginia Woolf also brings to bear more strongly in *Three Guineas* as she enlarges her view of the relationship between race and class. Hermoine Lee’s *Virginia Woolf* (1998) provides further details on connections between the Woolfs and the Webbs.

Virginia for a time conducted monthly meetings of the Working Women’s Guild of the Co-operative Movement and also wrote an introduction for a collection of essays by the Guildswomen entitled *Life As We Have Known It*. In this introduction she admits to feeling alienated from the Guildswomen because of class differences, but states her belief that together they are working for vital legal and societal reforms. Leonard in *Quack! Quack!* and in *Barbarians Within and Without* reveals his view that man’s acceptance of authoritarian rule in society is like reverting to barbarism. In *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939 to 1969*, Leonard states that “one of the greatest social evils has always been class subjection and class domination” (75). In “Thoughts about Peace during an Air Raid” (1940), Virginia writes about the deleterious effects of a patriarchal class system which creates “subconscious Hitlerism” (210). Both

Virginia and Leonard eventually fought fascism in two areas--the private and the public--for they felt the two were deeply interconnected. Others connected in important ways to the Stephen family, such as Margaret Llewelyn Davies, also engaged in socialist activities and undoubtedly had their influence upon Virginia as well as Leonard.

In "What I Believe," E.M. Forster, who was also Woolf's good friend, proposes the definition of a different kind of aristocracy, one which I believe also influenced Woolf's conception of class. He states that he believes in aristocracy, but with this qualification :

Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate, and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. (67)

Though Woolf might have snorted at Forster's so-called aristocracy of the sensitive, she also may well have felt an attraction to the concept of an artistic "class" which transcended the ordinary socio-economic categories in the Britain of her time; such a class would not even be limited to artists but open to anyone possessing the characteristics of which Forster speaks. Again, the "impossible dialectic" of aristocracy coexisting with egalitarian democracy. The attraction to this "über-class" concept is related, I believe, to concerns of the period with the possible disintegration of civilization as it had been known, particularly after the experience of the Great War and in the context of the stirrings of World War II. Woolf's brother-in-law, Clive Bell, articulated his views in an essay entitled "Civilization," which was given to Virginia Woolf in

advance of its publication. I propose that Woolf conceived of protecting and advancing the cause of civilization (much as Leonard did in working endlessly against the barbarism of fascism) partly in terms of privileging an overarching literary/artistic class that would preserve the aesthetic and moral values essential to civilized life. Such a class was somewhat, but not exclusively, linked to enough economic privilege to afford the leisure necessary to reflect and to create out of the best part of human nature. Thus, for Woolf to become a writer was to become a high priestess of sorts for this elite class, which nonetheless would strive to better the lot of the lower classes. This elite group was not linked in any way to orthodoxy, but rather valued (ironically) the challenging of the status quo; in particular, this “class” advocated personal liberty, independent thought, close personal relationships, and the pluckiness of which Forster speaks. These were qualities nurtured by the loosely-allied Bloomsbury group to which Virginia Woolf, her sister Vanessa, and their friends belonged. The Bloomsbury group disdained the formality, social hypocrisy, and focus upon material wealth that were part of the striving, upper middle class into which most of them had been born.

A recent speech by Virginia Nicholson, the great-niece of Virginia Woolf, at the Hay Festival in Britain (2004) comments effusively upon the aims of the Bloomsbury group to reject the corset of stratified British society, to focus upon the flowering of the individual without the rigid rules of class, to choose partners freely, to go hatless! Mrs. Nicholson, who has also recently written *Among the Bohemians*, a book on Bloomsbury and Bohemianism, on this occasion stated quite pointedly that “ ‘We’re all Bohemians now’ ” (qtd. in Ezard). In other words, Woolf and her Bloomsbury associates profoundly influenced the breakdown of stultifying class divisions in Britain and elsewhere.

Woolf was trained to become a member of this literary/artistic level of society by her own father, for whom she felt deeply conflicting emotions. Katherine C. Hill and others have documented well the influence of Leslie upon Virginia. Hill notes that Leslie tyrannized Virginia, Vanessa, and Stella, driving Woolf to exclaim in her diary many years later that if her father had lived longer, “his life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books;--inconceivable” (qtd. in Hill 351).⁷ Yet, Virginia Woolf also wrote that she felt “soothed, stimulated, full of love for this unworldly, very distinguished, lonely man” (qtd. in Hill 351)⁸ and she recognized that her father wanted her to write and perhaps to become his literary successor. He provided a solid foundation for her career by tutoring her himself in English literature, history, and biography. She was his favorite child, as is evident in his letters to Julia, and she favored him in both appearance and temperament. Virginia in fact herself stated to Vanessa that overall she preferred her father to her mother as a parent (Hill 351-52).⁹

Leslie Stephen also shaped Virginia Woolf’s theories about the development of literary genres and her perspectives on literary criticism. Katherine C. Hill analyzes this influence (one acknowledged by Woolf herself) in considerable detail and connects this analysis to Woolf’s theory of class. She notes that the common assumptions of father and daughter are distilled in Leslie Stephen’s “The Study of English Literature” and in Virginia Woolf’s “How Should One Read a Book?” (Hill 354-55).

Yet their strongest similarity is perhaps their theory of how literary genres develop and evolve: both believe that shifting class structures result in a dominant, unique

historical consciousness that expresses itself in an appropriate technical form. Thus critics of necessity should be sympathetic toward experimental literature. Leslie Stephen became a firm Darwinian and also embraced the idea that human society was evolving towards moral, as well as physical, perfection. In *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Stephen identifies the rising middle class as the most morally vigorous and declares that it needs a distinctive genre to articulate its world vision: a democratic one, using the plain vernacular. Stephen was the first English critic to emphasize the sociological study of literature (as influenced by Hippolyte Taine); he is the only late-Victorian critic who explains the manner in which shifting social classes, evolving forward, are agents of genre development. Though there are some differences (Woolf, for example, does not view the most vigorous social class as necessarily also the most fully developed in morals), Hill claims that the complete corpus of Woolf's critical works promotes the same values (355-57).

WOOLF AS SOCIAL CRITIC IN HER ESSAYS AND FICTION

In "The Niece of an Earl," Woolf explains the manner in which social class has always been a foundation for the novel. Class distinctions, she says, are an important background of the novel for the reader and shape its plot. When Meredith describes someone as "the niece of an earl," she says, his audience understands not only her social type but also the manner in which she will react to other characters. In examining this essay, Hill notes how class-bound this vision of the middle class is and points to Woolf's argument that the novel may change or even vanish as class distinctions disappear (357). How can one argue that Woolf is simply self-indulgently absorbed in the advantages of

her class position when she takes such care to reflect upon and engage in not only written but verbal discussions of class issues? Hill believes that Woolf later identifies those rising classes (particularly working women as a social subclass) that will radically change the twentieth century in “The Leaning Tower” and in “Memories of a Working Women’s Guild”:

And nothing perhaps exasperated us more at the Congress . . . than the thought that this force of theirs, this smouldering heat which broke the crust now and then and licked the surface with a hot and fearless flame, is about to break through and melt us together so that life will be richer and books more complex, and society will pool its possessions instead of segregating them . . . but only when we are dead. (“Memories of a Working Women’s Guild” qtd. in Hill 358)

Hill fittingly observes that Woolf here rescues the obscure, just as her father had, to some degree, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and as she also does in her 1929 essay, “Women in Fiction” (Hill 367, footnote 12).

Woolf’s classless society, predicted in “The Leaning Tower,” an essay also discussed by Hill, is one which may require a genre other than the novel:

There will be no more upper classes; middle classes; lower classes. All classes will be merged in one class. How will that change affect the writer who sits at his desk looking at human life? It will not be divided by hedges any more. Very likely, that will be the end of the novel as we know it.
(Collected Essays II, 179)

In this essay, Woolf criticizes wealthy young men with expensive educations who have been raised upon the tower of their middle-class birth and who have controlled literary production. Woolf claims that the tower of this privileged class (here she actually names members of this group, such as T.S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey, E.M. Forster, and Aldous Huxley) is leaning because the vision of this social class no longer matches the consciousness of the twentieth century. She suggests that workers will come to prominence as the old class system fades away. The new world will be a democratic and inclusive one. Woolf's use of the masculine in reference to the writer in the passage quoted above may reflect more than the common linguistic practice of her time; her choice may also reflect her sense that the rising class of women—be they working class or eventually all merged into one class—will be the ones to celebrate and to mow down the hedges separating them from the privileged classes as the writer sits at “his” desk.

Hill observes that, in “The Narrow Bridge of Art” (1927), Woolf declares that prose—though prose with a new poetic intensity—must be the medium for a new genre: “Therefore it [the new genre] will clasp to its breast the precious prerogatives of the democratic art of prose; its freedom; its fearlessness; its flexibility. For prose is so humble that it can go anywhere” (*Collected Essays II* qtd. in Hill 359). Woolf thus could state in a letter to Hugh Walpole that the books she wrote were not novels and that she was very, very uncomfortable with conventional terminology for genres, calling some of her forms “play poems” or “essay-novels” (qtd. in Hill 359). Once again, Woolf inhabits an in-between space.

In an early discussion of Woolf and class (1977), Alex Zwerdling opens his article with Woolf's statement of intention in writing *Mrs. Dalloway*: “I want to criticize the

social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense” (“*Mrs. Dalloway* and the Social System” 69).¹⁰ In Zwerdling’s view, Woolf is focused as intently upon society as upon individual consciousness. All of her novels are based in realistic settings and most of them in exact historical time periods. She is deeply concerned with how individuals are formed or deformed by historical forces, class, sex, and economic status. Zwerdling observes that Woolf was not usually recognized as a social critic because of her deep aversion to propaganda in art. She expresses social criticism indirectly in the language of observation rather than with direct commentary. She also often regularly satirizes social reformers. Her models are social observers such as Chaucer and Chekhov; she believes that her role is to observe, describe, and provide material for the reader to put together in judging social issues (69). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she attacks the rigidity and moral obtuseness of a ruling class that worships tradition and cannot accommodate change. She also exposes a tradition of social service that masks the need to dominate. Zwerdling notes that, during the composition of this novel, Woolf writes in essays and in her diary about realizing that her class isolation has a negative effect on her work, yet also that she feels a contradictory sense of being an outsider in relation to the fashionable upper class (72-74). Furthermore, Woolf sometimes moves from traditional social satire to what she calls “The Russian Point of View,” a phrase she uses as the title of her essay published in *The Common Reader* in 1925--the latter volume title also revealing her emerging views on class. Here she points out that Dostoevsky reveals indifference to social identity and class barriers. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa adopts this position when she crosses class lines in her imagination and senses a strong kinship with Septimus (81).

Woolf's increasing concern with the common reader and with creating simply voices in *The Waves*, instead of characters with obvious class attributes, is another example of her attempt to move beyond the traditional English class system. In *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (1984), Lyndall Gordon states her belief that in *The Waves* Woolf fuses the six voices or characters as "one ideal human specimen," providing an even number of men and women separated from social context--such as detail regarding family, formal education, occupation, status, and class (221-22). I argue that Woolf eventually smashes not only class barriers in her own mind and milieu (though simultaneously acknowledging the effects of their ineradicable residue in the best *sous-rature* tradition of Jacques Derrida), but most importantly in the very definition of the term "class" itself, forcing us to acknowledge that words are always at least partially inadequate and ill-fitting when we employ them to colonize (as we must) the vast mystery of life itself. To Woolf, "class" is a gender-inflected term deeply connected to a person's psychological and social development, to literature, to the developing common reader, and to concerns about maintaining civilization itself. She deconstructs in order to re-invent. The wave which breaks upon the shore is similar to those before it, but also always new, flinging fresh diffractions upon innumerable grains of sand.

CHAPTER TWO

“Perhaps I shall put my case more cogently, human nature being what it is, if I state that I have exchanged a husband and a family and a house in which I may grow old for certain fragments of yellow parchment; which only a few people can read and still fewer would care to read if they could.”—Miss Rosamond Merridew in Virginia Woolf’s “[The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn],” written in 1906.

“CIVILIZATION,” FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY, AND A PSYCHOLOGY OF CLASS IN WOOLF’S EARLY LIFE AND WORK

Curiously, two childhood pieces of Woolf’s are laced with precocious interest not only in class structures, but in the enmeshing of gender roles within these structures. I will examine these and a number of other relatively neglected short stories and sketches in order to contrast her early views on class with later, more nuanced treatments. I want to demonstrate that Woolf’s early writing reveals an understanding of the manner in which women, in the very psychology of their femininity, bear witness—as Juliet Mitchell describes it—to a patriarchal definition of human society. I also want to show how Woolf’s knowledge of Clive Bell’s *Civilization* may have influenced her early work. Further, I will illustrate how Woolf examines marriage in relation to patriarchy and empire in her sketches on *Carlyle’s House*, while simultaneously betraying questionable attitudes toward race.

In her introduction to Woolf’s *A Cockney’s Farming Experiences* (and its incomplete sequel, *The Experiences of a Pater-familias*), Suzanne Henig notes that in these childhood stories (1892) Woolf presents a complete reversal of what is generally represented as her parents’ typical Victorian marriage: a domineering father and submissive mother. These stories depict a stereotypic shrew and a docile husband, a role reversal which Henig claims occurs nowhere else in Woolf’s fiction. They also depict

overt expressions of affection between males and females only among members of the servant class (11). The fact that the young couple must deal with various economic difficulties probably does reflect Woolf's own experience in growing up. Henig asks, "[how] could the child who interested herself in the honeymoon of a servant or the milking of a cow or who manifested such tenderness to Lick, the dog, have matured into the woman who was concerned only with her own class?" (13). Though I do not believe that readers should attach huge significance to Woolf's class analysis developed at age ten, it is useful nonetheless to examine these early pieces for what they reveal of Woolf's psychological identity and the family problems that resurface throughout her life.

Woolf scholar Louise DeSalvo in *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse upon Her Life and Work* (1989) argues that these stories offer an impressive analysis of class issues and suggests that they reveal much about Woolf's early family situation, including a subtext of sexual assault. DeSalvo argues that the young Virginia embedded her own story of sexual abuse at age six by her half-brother, George Duckworth, within a larger story of marital conflict, paternal abuse, and abandonment. Woolf also wrote the story at the exact age when she claims that she first became really conscious of herself and started disliking herself. To DeSalvo, the second story unmasks not only a disturbingly cruel paterfamilias, but an inconsistent mother who is unable to protect the small child from a household full of violent men. She also believes that the story reveals the young Woolf's fears of being treated like her half-sister, Laura (139-47).

Eventually sent away to be cared for apart from the family, Laura was the daughter of Leslie Stephen by his first wife, Minny Thackeray. She represents an intriguing absence in Woolf's writing, for Woolf maintains an almost absolute silence regarding her, even in

her own extensive diary. In a broad sense Laura could be seen as Woolf's first (and likely fearful) experience of a sub-class or category within her own upper-middle-class family, for Laura was both female and possibly mentally ill, as well as mentally retarded and difficult to manage. She was obviously "less than" other family members, especially because she seemed relatively uneducable, a condition Hermoine Lee points out was abhorrent to Leslie (100). Laura seems eventually to have been relegated to the category of the "abnormal": the mentally retarded / mentally ill / physically deformed.

Discrimination against these persons may have been encouraged by the eugenics movement that flourished in Woolf's lifetime. Lee believes that Laura matters to Woolf scholars as the abnormal daughter who was sent away; how readers interpret her treatment by the Stephen family affects their reading of Virginia's mental illness and treatment. Some readers link the mad little girl in the attic with the brilliant, though suicidal, Virginia as victims of the oppression of patriarchy (Lee 101-02).

Woolf chronicles her own bouts with mental illness in her diaries and depicts the mentally-ill character of Septimus most empathetically in her novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Here she certainly discusses treatment of the mentally ill as a sub-category of human beings and heavily critiques their demeaning treatment, both by society in general and by their specific medical care providers. Later I will discuss this novel and the character of Septimus with regard to class issues in Woolf. At this juncture, however, I want to highlight a notorious comment of Woolf's after coming into contact with a group of mentally retarded children, a statement found in her *Diary* (9 Jan 1915): "They should certainly be killed." This remark has been misconstrued as viciously elitist and possibly classist. Interestingly, this comment has been the topic of very recent discussion (summer

2005) among top Woolf scholars on the Virginia Woolf list-serv operated by the International Virginia Woolf Society. The discussion itself provides a snapshot of the intricacies of unraveling Woolf's attitude toward mental illness and class-related issues.

Woolf's shocking remark is her apparent reaction to catching sight of a group of mentally-retarded people. Hermoine Lee says that the comment seems to endorse the language of the eugenics movement that was active in Woolf's lifetime. Various scholars on the list-serv have weighed in on possible interpretations. Stuart Clarke says the date of this remark is significant because Woolf at this time was between severe mental breakdowns and either may not have been fully sane at the time or may have feared imminent descent into insanity (13 July 2005). Melba Cuddy-Keane argues that Woolf, with her sense of shame about her own body and periodic fear that people were laughing at her behind her back, may have reiterated the severe agenda of the eugenicists but, in doing so, might be turning these very views (They should be killed and so should I)upon herself (14 Jul 2005). Susan Crawford believes that Woolf likely felt fear about her own fate, as someone with recurrent mental illness, at the hands of the eugenicists. Eugenics was extensively promulgated in Woolf's lifetime. Crawford notes that a disturbing film of adults with Downs Syndrome was shot in the 1930s for Hitler's propaganda machine and distributed widely throughout Europe. She also cites Woolf's family connection with Laura as possible explanation for the shocking remark (15 Jul 2005). Cheryl Hindrichs presents an excellent explanation of what I believe is an underestimated strategy in Woolf's diaries: that of writing down some attitude or thought that she suddenly recognizes in herself and regards as unacceptable and then unflinchingly examining the distasteful impulse as something to change and grow from. Hindrichs cites Woolf's

recognition of her own snobbery and her attitude toward male homosexuality as examples. Hindrichs uses a powerful analogous example of a documentary on director George Stevens, who filmed the American forces liberating the German concentration camps and admitted to feeling repulsion toward the starved prisoners who grabbed at him. His primary horror was not so much in the abjection of the prisoners as in his recognition of the Nazi in himself, which, I might point out, is most reminiscent of Woolf's reference to the "Hitler within" in *Three Guineas* (1938). Hindrichs notes that Stevens took a very large risk of being labeled a Nazi in admitting his revulsion; similarly, she believes that Woolf consistently tries to figure out the othering mechanism which is at the heart of human depravity (15 Jul 2005). Melba Cuddy-Keane agrees, expressing admiration for Woolf's constant effort to be honest and noting an essay by one of her own students on Woolf's *The Years* (1937) as being about the dangers of avoidance and repression—both in one's personal life, (as in young Rose's not being able to talk about the strange man in *The Years* who exposed himself to her) and in terms of destructive aspects of British life (15 Jul 2005). Mark Hussey finds Woolf's remark deeply ironic but also characteristic of a particular class in Britain. To him, it is the kind of comment one might make with full consciousness simply because of the frisson created by daring to write it down (15 Jul 2005). I agree with Crawford, Keane, and Hindrichs but also believe that Woolf felt conflicted about major issues such as this one, and sometimes exhibits ambivalent attitudes in her private and public writing that suggest the well-known "colonization" syndrome familiar to students of postcolonialism: she has internalized the predominantly male British establishment's view of women, and specifically in this case, the prevailing view of mental illness and how it should be

treated. As Althusser has pointed out, successful interpellation into a dominant ideology operates without the subject's awareness. This is the case with Woolf in her early period; however, she also reveals irruptions of dissent and a growing consciousness of her ideological entrapment.

The issue of mental illness is related, I believe, to Woolf's early experience of sexual trauma.¹¹ In these early pieces and in other writing there is a splitting and diffusing of her psychosexual identity that ultimately affects discussions of Woolf and class. Her personality boundaries become overly permeable, and at times she exhibits a seeming fusion with female figures in particular--Vanessa, her sister; Stella, her half-sister; and Violet Dickinson, a friend of Stella's with whom Virginia became very close and with whom she stayed after her first breakdown. Was Woolf also frightened of identification with her recalcitrant and minimally educated half-sister, Laura? This psychology of class, involving a fear of dissolution of ego boundaries, leads Woolf to periodically indulge in and even to encourage retention of aspects of the upper middle class into which she was born. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell delineates the prescriptive conventions imposed by class (involving level of speech, manner of dress and so on) which serve as ego boundaries. These demarcations provide a script for behavior that cannot easily be discarded by one who is also dealing with real mental illness. Nonetheless, Woolf moves forward over the course of her career to a position that recognizes her own complicity (both conscious and unwitting) in perpetuating deleterious class structures, while she simultaneously works toward a classless democracy that empowers everyone, but particularly the "uneducated daughters of educated men."

Various critics have examined the psychodynamics of Woolf's sexual trauma and history of mental illness. Woolf scholar Thomas Caramagno, who has studied Woolf's history of mental breakdowns, points out that the significance of early trauma in Woolf must be examined in the light of a multigenerational family tendency toward depression and mania ("The Lure of Reductionism" 320-21). Though they do not specifically analyze Woolf, other psychoanalytic thinkers, such as Juliet Mitchell and Nancy Choderow, provide valuable insight into her psychological struggles and efforts to achieve liberation for women and the elimination of class differences. Juliet Mitchell claims that oppression is lodged deep within the psyche of women and that it is produced by the castration and Oedipus complex rooted in patriarchal society. Though critical of Freud's description of the functioning of the Oedipus complex for a woman, she does agree that, as a consequence of this functioning, a woman may be more bisexual than a man. Instead of internalizing the law in the development of a superego, a girl must accept her pre-Oedipal identification with her mother and become a nurturing person. She is not an heir to the law and therefore must take her place in patriarchal culture as one who insures that mankind reproduces itself. Thus men enter into the structure of a history demarcated by class, and women retain their definition within the kinship patterns of society (403-06). As Mitchell describes it, women reveal undeniable similarity in social positioning: "Differences of class, historical epoch, specific social situations alter the expression of femininity; but in relation to the law of the father, women's position across the board is a comparable one" (406). Thus identity is inherently problematic for women, marriage represents an age-old exchange system related to the development of kinship,

and women share a similar position within patriarchal culture. These characteristics are almost the markers of a subclass. In addition, women may retain a bisexual tendency.

Woolf recognized all of these aspects of her situation and that of other women in her society, and she chose to expose these structures of discrimination. Though she chose marriage, Woolf rejected the typical reproductive role of a mother, though she may have been unduly pressured by doctors treating her for mental illness, and by Leonard's and Vanessa's views that children would be too much for her to handle. She also actively resisted the "Angel in the House" syndrome expected of a woman in her mother's era, and wrote on several occasions about the enormous difficulty in killing off this angel so that she would write. Woolf would likely have agreed with Mitchell that "It is not only in the ideology of their roles as mothers and procreators but above all in the very psychology of femininity that women bear witness to the patriarchal definition of human society" (413). Woolf presents a similar view in a story written in 1906 but not published until 1979. In ["The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn"], which uses a medieval setting, young Joan is trained by her mother for very traditionally feminine roles. Ironically, Joan dies young, like Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out* (1915). Only later do Woolf's heroines discover a way to escape from the colonized internalization of their own inferiority and repressed anger. In plainly identifying Septimus as Clarissa's *Döppelgänger* in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf presents a veiled argument for connections between a psychology of femininity, class, war, and mental illness. A descent from the mental problems of depression into physical illness for Rachel in *The Voyage Out* also suggests this nexus, though the ominous hints of war and battleships are a more muted backdrop in this novel. Rachel realizes all too keenly that she belongs to the class of the

“uneducated daughters of educated men.” I suggest that Rachel becomes ill because the identity offered to her as a female subject interpellated into patriarchy is limited enough to trigger a real mental and physical breakdown.

In a landmark text, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Nancy Choderow examined the female’s “prolonged symbiosis” with the mother, since the daughter and mother are both female. Choderow famously concludes that females will maintain their strongest connections with other women because of this gender continuity. She also notes that women exhibit more permeable ego boundaries than males, largely because they are socialized to connect their self-interest with others, rather than with characteristically solitary male pursuits (145-46). Woolf’s early novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* (1919), demonstrate particular concern with the relation of these psychosexual issues to the institution of marriage, and these novels will be examined more closely later.

“[The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn]”¹² presents a fictional narrator named Miss Rosamond Merridew, aged forty-five, who has gained fame in her profession for research into the system of land tenure in medieval England. Again, Woolf shows concern with class-based issues linked to property, inheritance, and gender. In Mistress Joan’s journal, featured within the short story, Woolf displays a consciousness of class as David Cannadine defines it: as hierarchy, as a sense of different objective circumstances of power, status, and money, a sense of one’s place in time and history. In the story, Miss Merridew, for her research, seeks out the Martyn family, whose nobility of birth has not prevailed against the poverty of the land, for they have *descended* in social class in later generations. Their remaining partial treasure consists of the pictures and documents of

their ancestors. Miss Merridew is offered the ancient manuscript of Mr. Martyn's grandmother, Joan Martyn. This fictional medieval journal provides a fascinating glimpse of Woolf's interest in the land-based system of patriarchy and class in England. She was beginning to connect her sense of alienation as a young, unmarried woman struggling to become a writer with the backdrop of English national imperialism and the family imperialism represented by her famous father, Leslie Stephen (who had died two years earlier in 1904). Woolf's choice of persona here, that of an older, unmarried and childless female academic, anticipates both her own later personal circumstances (though she was never an academic) and her later critique in *Three Guineas* of patriarchy and war in England as based upon a complex and capitalistic, land-based system. Of course, a certain irony resides in the fact that Miss Merridew's profession remains dependent upon the very system she subtly criticizes.

The young Joan in the supposedly medieval¹³ journal is raised by a strong mother whose husband is constantly absent on business. Interestingly, Joan says that she is the only one who can read. The chief topic of discussion in the family is the finding of a suitable mate for Joan's marriage, a mode of life her mother refers to as both "a great honour and a great burden" (*The Complete Shorter Fiction* 50).¹⁴ Joan protests: "O how blessed it would be never to marry, or grow old; but to spend one's life innocently and indifferently among the trees and rivers which alone can keep one cool and childlike in the midst of the troubles of the world! Marriage or any other great joy would confuse the clear vision which is still mine" (*CSF* 52). Note that Joan acknowledges the positive possibilities of marriage at the same time that she laments its drawbacks. Woolf intensifies her critical examination of marriage beginning from around this period in her

twenties, and actually continues her reflection upon this institution for the rest of her life. As Woolf starts to experience the full effects of interpellation into the dominant ideology of a society, she appears to recognize that her positioning as a female in a patriarchal society will cause a devolution into a lower-class status *within* either middle-class or upper-class society: a subgroup, a class within a class constituted by gender. In the story, Joan also realizes her gender constraints despite her “advantageous” marriage, but Joan is far more passive than Woolf in accepting the identity prescribed by her society.

In [“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”], Joan displays anticipation and acceptance of the strong maternal role modeled by her mother. In fact, though not the stereotypic role reversal of *A Cockney’s Farming Experiences*, this strong mother figure is among the first in a line which extends through *Night and Day* and *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and suggests Woolf’s impression of power and strength in her own mother’s character. In [“Mistress Joan”] the shrew of the cockney story seems to shed her unpleasant extremes to reveal only admirable characteristics in Joan’s mother. In fact, Joan says of her mother that “She rules us all,” including the priest, Sir John Sandys (*CSF* 46). Of course, this power exists in the vacuum of the very frequent absence of Joan’s father; however, to speak of “ruling” even a member of the church during the medieval period of Catholic dominance is saying a great deal. After a remarkable moment of complete adoration and submission before the statue of the Madonna at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, Joan prepares further for her impending marriage to the satirically-named Sir Amyas Bigod by helping with management of her family’s house and lands, and by listening to her mother’s theory of ownership. The Madonna scene is oddly reminiscent of other ecstatic scenes in Woolf’s fiction, generally connected with relationships hinted at as

lesbian; examples are Fanny's fantasies in "Moments of Being" and the Sally Seton kiss in *Mrs. Dalloway*. These scenes are connected to Woolf's developing psychology of femininity and suggest an early consciousness of lesbianism as a choice opposed to heterosexual marriage.

Joan's mother's theory of ownership in ["The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn"] involves the metaphor of a person as the ruler of a small island surrounded by churning waters. The ruler plants, cultivates, and secures the island from the tides until one day it is established as a firm plot of ground. Her mother adds that she hopes England will someday become this solidly-established island, a concept Joan concedes may have merit, but one which she ultimately rejects, saying, "Yet what it is that I want, I cannot tell, although I crave for it, and in some secret way, expect it" (*CSF* 60). Does Joan crave a life for which there is a no vocabulary in the Middle Ages, the life of a woman who manages without the restrictions of marriage (while at the same time recognizing its advantages)? She is, after all, a writer, the diary genre being one of the few available to her, and her father admires her writing. She fears marriage will mean losing the clear vision needed to record her observations as a writer.

The Rosamond Merridew of this story appears closely related to a character with the same name in "Phyllis and Rosamond," a short story also written by Woolf in 1906. "Phyllis and Rosamond" analyzes the situation of two "daughters at home" who must "work" the drawing room scene in order to attract the right kind of people, and, in particular, the right kind of husband. Many later Woolf themes emerge in this story as well: daughters being educated only to marry well; the need to escape from the "slavery" of family to a "house of one's own"; class-based treatment of people as categories; the

feeling of not fitting into the worlds presented as options; and pleasure in discovering that “the world was full of solid things” independent of one’s existence. Jan VanStavern argues that “Phyllis and Rosamond” and [“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”] reveal Rosamond in her twenties and forties respectively and that both stories show connections Woolf makes between “women, war, the marketplace, and colonialism.” VanStavern notes subversive slippages via rhyming metaphors in the introductory section of the story, subversion that begins with the narrator’s comment that the two girls appear to have “never trod a rougher earth than the Turkey carpet” and conclude with the statement that comparisons between colonized subjects and the colonizers are unfair (253). I would add that the subtle satire here of Woolf’s early writing proves a slippery slope for some readers: the way Woolf structures the metaphor subverts the very claim to injustice when the narrator says, “But it would be as unjust as it would be easy to press this metaphor till it suggested that the comparison was appropriate and complete in all its parts. It fails; but where it fails and why it fails it will take some time and attention to discover” (*CSF* 18). In other words, dear reader, the comparison may be completely apt! However, at this stage in her career Woolf is less confident and prone to indirection rather than unequivocal statements. Her satire functions as a veil covering what is too problematic to reveal clearly to all but the most astute of her readers. At this point she has too much at stake in terms of class to radically question its underpinnings.

VanStavern argues that, through Rosamond and Joan Martyn, Woolf creates a kind of postcolonial text that insists on both a new way of reading and new texts--those of oppressed subjects--to be read. Furthermore, VanStavern finds Rosamond searching for herself in the ruins and perhaps also for lost female subjectivity, for the story is also one

of disinherited *grandmothers*. She believes that the mixed-up dates in the story do not reflect Woolf's errors but rather suggest that men are not able to accurately remember or record women's place in history—a position I accept, for Woolf is given to this type of nuanced, almost buried satire in her early writing. I also accept VanStavern's conclusion that the land becomes a metaphor for the female body in this story and that the land furthermore provides "a literal figure of colonial 'possession'" even as Lady Martyn, Joan's mother, assures her daughter's independence by virtue of obedience (254-57).

In psychodynamic terms, one may wonder if Woolf is here recognizing not only a desire for more than the usual marriage and family, but also a desire to *be* that overarching figure of the writer who observes, reflects, records, and shapes reality for others in the telling. At the conclusion of the tale, Mistress Joan's proud father, a figure akin to Leslie Stephen, tells her that she must keep her writing, or that he must keep it for her, for then their descendants shall have cause to respect one of them at least. Writing is valued highly in this story of the land-based class structures of early England, which distantly reflects the England of Woolf's late Victorian childhood as well. Joan could have become Miss Merridew in a different century, a Miss Merridew who does not appear to regret her choice. In the story, John Martyn points out that Joan never did marry and died at the age of thirty. One wonders if Miss Merridew was secretly pleased Joan here may be joining a list of Woolf's early heroines who essentially choose death rather than marriage. Their "deaths" may be either psychical or physical, as in *The Voyage Out*, or institutional, as in Katharine Hilbery's decision to embark upon conventional marriage. Yet, other major characters in Woolf's fiction from the same period suggest the possibility of happiness as single women, despite stereotypic views of

them as lonely and unfulfilled. Examples are Miss Julia Craye in “Moments of Being: Slater’s Pins Have No Points” and Miss Merridew herself. Rosamond Merridew’s signature is the kind of crippling anger that Woolf generally warned women writers not to indulge in, but as VanStavern reminds us, Rosamond “avoids colonization by divorcing, not dying” (258).

Gender issues are markedly connected to class issues in this story. Although Mistress Joan is the daughter of a man who keeps servants and owns a castle and surrounding lands, her prospects for the future depend upon marriage to an older man who possesses land bordering that of Joan’s family. Marriage is an iffy affair; only if the marriage proves suitable can she become an honorable and authoritative woman like her mother, one who “rules” the manor in her husband’s absence. Joan’s mother is a strong woman with a keen domestic bent, knitting prodigiously much like Mrs. Ramsay and Woolf’s own mother. There is even an echo of Julia’s philanthropic social work in the concern of Joan’s mother (who remains nameless) for the lower classes which she and her daughter visit in the cottages of the manor. Woolf is at this point beginning to see the manner in which gender inflects class.¹⁵

This story betrays contradictions that Alex Zwerdling has referred to as a general “ideological impurity” in Woolf’s work, though the term seems unnecessarily disparaging (*Virginia Woolf* 242). As discussed in my Introduction, I would call it the *sous-rature* of modernism identified by Marianne DeKoven, the impossible dialectic that Woolf so often wrestled with. Here a decision to marry is recognized as affecting one’s entire life, including a career path, because of class structures closely linked to the traditional pattern of a woman moving from the “guidance” of a father to that of a

husband. Losing the right to live (and think) independently matters in this short story; even though Joan, a product of a largely Catholic medieval period, has little real choice in the matter, Miss Merridew clearly represents an evolutionary possibility where a woman's maternal feelings can be transferred to the "shrivelled and colourless little gnomes" of yellowed parchment about which she writes (*CSF* 33). Miss Merridew could be viewed as a representation of three of Pierre Bourdieu's types of class, since Merridew possesses *economic* capital by virtue of her profession, *cultural* capital because of her education, and *symbolic* capital because of her standing as a professional in her society. Ironically, it is only Joan Martyn and her mother who appear to represent substantial social capital in the form of relationships, particularly the relationship of marriage. Woolf does not yet suggest that subjectivity is constructed within social structures and relations and that subject positions are different from social position. It is only as she matures that she begins to see more clearly that the entire notion of femininity is a male construction.

Alex Zwerdling observes that Woolf possessed an acute sense of how class and money shape an individual. He argues that realistically accepting one's own social identity was not common in Woolf's day. Individuals often downplayed any signs of privilege and idealized traditional hierarchical connections between artists and aristocratic patrons. To Zwerdling, Woolf does not flaunt her privilege, but rather asserts that class differences are real and cannot be ignored. Woolf's corpus as a whole provides evidence of her understanding of this central point. In particular, Woolf seems convinced that a nuanced sense of class identity is vital for a novelist. Zwerdling notes that in "Women and Fiction" (*CE* II 147) Woolf writes that future women will write not simply about clashing emotions, but about the clashing of classes and races. He points out that in "The Niece of

an Earl” (*CE* I 219) she writes that British fiction is steeped in the rise and fall of social rankings. He also observes that certain major figures of Woolf’s era, notably Gaetano Mosca and T.S. Eliot, championed the concept of an aristocracy of birth and the importance of the family in the transmission of culture (*Virginia Woolf* 88-92). Another prime example of someone who championed such concepts quite strongly is Vita Sackville-West’s husband, Harold Nicolson. Woolf worked against these currents, influenced by them but striving to shore up her own independent thought.

Class and money are also connected to both Woolf’s own “servant problems” and the absence of well-drawn, lower-class characters in her fiction. Many critics have remarked upon the shadowy depiction of servants in Woolf. To Zwerdling, this absence betrays middle-class guilt. Woolf could not “handle” servants as Julia did: Julia even wrote an essay about the proper techniques for doing so. Woolf had difficulty with her servants, Nelly Boxall and Lottie Hope; she believed that this difficulty was the result of the entire class system (96-98). Perhaps this is to Woolf’s credit. She recognized that servants were essential to her lifestyle, providing time for writing; her discomfort may have resided primarily in recognizing that she was dependent upon and therefore complicitous in maintaining one of the support systems of empire whose moral underpinnings she had begun to question. She also later realized that she was constricted as a novelist because she simply did not have enough experience with real lower-class life and could not pretend to portray it realistically.

In [“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”] Woolf depicts Joan as reflecting in great detail upon her mother’s “theory of ownership.” This phrase defines her mother’s vision of managing not only her large, medieval household (which included numerous servants),

but also her vision for and work to cultivate the island called England, an effort for which Joan decides she should thank her mother and other women like her (*CSF* 59-60). This interesting image, redolent of the image of Julia calming the turbulent waters of the Stephen household so that civilized life could reign, is one which also captures the gist of a book that likely influenced Woolf at a fairly early stage in her writing and thinking: Clive Bell's *Civilization*. It is around the figure of Mistress Joan's mother that important issues of class coalesce: a sense of the importance of respectability--which British sociologist Beverly Skeggs has emphasized as vital to the development of "Englishness"—and its relationship to moral authority, and a sense of the middle class as defined against the masses, which were seen as needing control and lacking individuality.

Though Vanessa's husband and Virginia's good friend, Clive Bell, dedicated his *Civilization* to "Dearest Virginia" in 1927, Woolf had seen the book in manuscript form much earlier and knew its general outline long before it was published. Brian Shaffer notes that Woolf mentions Bell's plans for a book on civilization as early as 1906 in her diary (76). Sustaining the finest values of a civilized society was certainly an ideal to which Woolf aspired. To her, civilization was related to education and to class, though she also believed in the possibility of self-education for the common reader who might belong to a lower class. However, she appears quickly to have realized the snobbery of Bell's work. Bell defines civilization as "artificial" and disparages things which are "natural," for even the "brutes" are natural. To him, civilization is primarily the result of a liberal education that produces a desirable self-consciousness and a critical spirit. From these two elements flow a sense of values and the enthronement of reason. This liberal education appears to be defined as a university education grounded in the classics. To

Woolf, who lacked the benefits of the university education afforded Bell—as well as her brothers and their other male friends--reading the praises of a liberal education must have rung a bit hollow. Did she herself not then belong to some lower, less civilized class? Would she be able to join an essentially male conversation? Woolf was beginning to see, as later feminists demonstrated, that reason, the subject, and language were all constructed as male. She was also beginning to recognize that much which is female was not represented in her society and that at times even the vocabulary to express the experiences of women was nonexistent.

Other elements of Bell's argument in *Civilization* must have resonated positively with Woolf. She agreed with Bell that a civilized individual must assert himself or herself against the "flock instinct." Bell emphasizes the tolerance of difference as an attribute of any civilized person and of the English people, though he believes that the English remain largely in a state of philistinism and barbarism, overly influenced by the "gospel of work." Woolf also exhibits a keen sense of the need to be an independent thinker, often going against the grain of the rest of society. Bell points out England's proud tradition of tolerating the eccentric individual, and both Bell and Woolf display passionate belief in individual expression. This tradition explains some of Woolf's intense dislike of being labeled "feminist" or of being labeled at all. She generally resisted the herd instinct, though she sometimes gave in to convention during her early years out of fear of severe criticism by family or friends or those who might not then publish her work. Her toning down of a more assertive heroine in an earlier version of *The Voyage Out* is one example. Bell also argues that the sensitive, intelligent English man or woman is almost forced to become alienated and isolated because of England's

philistine lack of civilized culture. Certainly Woolf often felt herself to be an outsider in this sense, though she also came to relish this useful observer status and even glorifies it in *Three Guineas*.

Woolf likely agreed also with Bell's delineation of the manner in which the "grip of patriotism" is unbound by civilization. For Bell, this occurs simply because truly civilized people begin to realize that they share much more with civilized people of other countries and races than with their own uncivilized countrymen and women. Woolf makes excellent use of this very point in her outsider's battle cry for women in *Three Guineas*: "as a woman, I have no country" (109). Ultimately the entire idea of "civilization" is irredeemably tainted by its association with the ideological work of empire. In this important later work of Woolf's, she clearly disagrees with Bell's claim in *Civilization* that a civilized artist will not be drawn into "wasteful protest." Like many in her lifetime, Bell did not approve of Woolf's "feminism," especially as depicted in *Three Guineas*. To Bell, artists who asserted themselves and "interfered" with accepted societal norms were "deformed and deficient" (189-90). Once again, it was a criticism of Woolf as an artist, one which relegated her to second-class status. Additionally, she likely was stung by Bell's comment that "thoughtless philanthropists" think democracy and justice are ends in themselves; on the other hand, she found certain merits in his argument, having little patience with long-winded suffragette meetings and the relatively ineffectual, though well-intended, philanthropy of even her own mother. She seems to have agreed with Bell's assertion that civilization depends upon material security, though it is hard to imagine her not bristling at Bell's insistence that a civilized leisure class requires "slaves" even in modern times and that inequality of classes is essential to the development of

civilization. Woolf certainly must have laughed at Clive's depiction of the "profession" of *hetaerae* in the ancient Athenian society. Should she become one of these intelligent women who eschewed marriage and motherhood in order to cultivate their more "civilized" side?

Bell argues for a definition of civilization not as a nation state, but as a state of mind among a group of individuals, like the Bloomsbury group, who are strong enough to create a nucleus which becomes a civilizing power in society. Evidence can be found to show that Woolf agrees with Bell on this point. Note Woolf's argument for the importance of such individuals in *A Room of One's Own* and even in very early stories, such as "[The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn]," where Joan's mother seems to suggest just such a vision of a civilized England emerging from the turbulent waters of chaos to coalesce beneath her feet. Brian Shaffer also notes the influence upon Woolf of Bell's related book, *On British Freedom*, and suggests that *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* both echo and critique Bell's theories, especially in characters such as Jacob Flanders (who considers writing an essay on civilization), Miss Kilman (the quintessential, censorious, spinster do-gooder described by Bell as having no heart for individuals), Septimus, Lady Bruton (a philistine corrupted by too much leisure and wealth), Peter Walsh (seen as modeled upon Clive), and Clarissa herself (76-82).¹⁶

Woolf's comments on *Civilization* in her letters and diaries respectively are divergent, reflecting her private criticism of Bell's thinking and writing.¹⁷ In an essay on the socio-political vision in Woolf's novels, David Bradshaw rightly asserts that Woolf was extremely sensitive to the demeaning nature of Bell's rhetoric about the need for civilization to be sustained by "slaves." To Bradshaw, she inscribes her opposing views

in novels like *To the Lighthouse*, where she criticizes the leisured classes for their ineffectual Victorian philanthropy, and embraces a vision (by means of artist Lily Briscoe in particular) where civilization can be constructed not simply on the basis of the works of “great men,” but on the valorization of the work of average human beings (“Socio-political” 199-203).¹⁸ Woolf felt understandably constrained about openly criticizing those close to her and those who might reject her attempts at publication; therefore, her public statements in particular must be viewed in the larger context of her work. After all, Clive Bell was married to Vanessa, her sister, and he was a person she saw frequently, not to mention someone who encouraged her writing and with whom she had had a serious flirtation. Lyndall Gordon also believes, perhaps arguably, that it was Woolf’s fiction in particular that was the repository of her soul, not the letters and not always even the diaries--though there are methodological links between the diaries and the novels, and the diaries certainly recorded many observations used as raw material for the novels (174-77). Fiction offered a veil or alternate persona. The fictive cloak could provide protection when needed, allowing the possibility of denying direct relation to real life. Fiction allowed an ironic and often metaphoric or allegorical baring of what one saw as truth under the cover of a genre supposedly dedicated to untruth. It was a perfect vehicle for a woman raised in a drawing room where Gordon notes that a little bell was rung during tea time to signal the need to detour from undesirably controversial topics (59).

While reading Carlyle under Leslie’s tutelage at age fifteen, Virginia was taken by her father to see Carlyle’s house in Chelsea (Gordon 75). In 1909, after two years of struggling with her first novel, after accepting and then rejecting Lytton Strachey’s marriage proposal at age 27, and after having her first submission of fiction to a national

magazine rejected, Woolf returned to the house--perhaps psychically also to the roots of her love for literature in her father. This visit produced a sketch, "Carlyle's House," which was recently discovered in a 1909 notebook, edited by David Bradshaw, and published in 2003. This edition is a collection of the 1909 notebook sketches, including "Divorce Courts" and the now somewhat infamous "Jews." Doris Lessing, who wrote the foreword to this new volume, states that "The snobbery of Woolf and her friends now seems not merely laughable, but damaging, a narrowing ignorance" (viii) and that it is indeed "... a pity she was such a wasp, such a snob" (xii). Lessing's broad-brush painting of Woolf's life and work in a stereotypic and monolithic manner is surprising. Perhaps it should not be, for it is part and parcel of a continuing general public misperception of the developing nature of Woolf's attitudes, practical efforts, and writing about class, and likely reflects Lessing's acknowledged Marxist working class sympathies as well. However, a number of Woolf scholars, notably Melba Cuddy-Keane and Naomi Black, have recently countered such views. David Bradshaw's introduction to the collection is also more balanced, arguing that Woolf's unhappy state of mind at the time of authorship contributed to a general tendency to find fault in the sketches, with a particularly offensive acerbity in "Jews" (xv). Bradshaw also points out Woolf's insistence in her greatest novels that no one is simply anything, be it anti-Semitic or stridently feminist, and that in the 1930s Woolf closely scrutinized her own bigotry and wrote a "philo-Semitic novel" entitled *The Years* (xv-xxii). Of course, Woolf also married and came to love deeply a Jewish man—a vital fact which ought to balance her relatively few anti-Semitic comments at a time in Britain when anti-Semitism was common among the upper middle class (45).

Woolf has a number of things to say about class in “Carlyle’s House,” particularly with regard to marriage as patriarchy. This sketch is short and keeps its prime focus upon the relationship between Carlyle and his wife. Woolf is critical of Mrs. Carlyle’s unhappy face in her portraits, and both spouses are distanced; not a single first name is used. This distancing beads to a head in the penultimate paragraph, where Woolf suddenly asks, “Did one always feel a coldness between them? The only connection the flash of the intellect. I imagine so” (4). She concludes in the next paragraph: “The most natural thing was the garden, with its flags, and the stump of a tree” (4). A chilling assessment indeed of the marital landscape. Bradshaw notes many connections between the Carlyle and Stephen families, suggesting that Woolf likely visited the house as preparation for her review of the Carlyle love letters, and that Woolf’s review is a continuation of Woolf’s dialog with Lytton Strachey about marriage. Woolf writes admiringly in the review of the Carlyles’ intellectual relationship with each other and seems to value this kind of union highly (27-8). Did she also fear the turbulent reputation of the Carlyle marriage?

“Great Men’s Houses,” one of six articles published between 1931-32 in *Good Housekeeping*,¹⁹ continues Woolf’s fascination with the Carlyle house and the Carlyle marriage and provides additional insight into Woolf’s view of class. In “Great Men’s Houses,” Woolf takes pains to discuss in detail the material deprivations which caused suffering for the Carlyles, primarily for the “one unfortunate maid” and for the coughing Mrs. Carlyle, who had to worry about recovering the horsehair couch, cleaning the drawing-room wallpaper, and making sure that the maid had heated water for Mr. Carlyle’s shaving. The solitary maid, Helen, whose name at least is registered, was responsible for pumping, boiling, and then carrying all hot water needed up three flights

of stairs from the basement. As Woolf puts it, “Every drop that the Carlyles used—and they were Scots, fanatical in their cleanliness—had to be pumped by hand from a well in the kitchen” (23). It is impressive to note Woolf empathizes both with the physical drudgery of the maid and the taxing mental and physical work of Mrs. Carlyle: the juxtaposition and many details conflate the work of the two in the service of Mr. Carlyle’s purely intellectual efforts upstairs in his study. As Woolf expresses it, Number 5 Cheyne Row was not so much a dwelling-place as a battlefield or struggle with the practical realities of a life of Victorian life. Mrs. Carlyle’s moments in fine silk next to a blazing fire, as depicted in a painting, were won at great cost, and the painting reveals her hollowed cheeks and half-tortured eyes. Woolf further muses that half their conflicts might have been avoided had they possessed hot and cold water, a bath, and gas fires in the bedrooms, for “what can genius and love avail against bugs and tin baths and pumps in the basement?” (26). The Carlyle segment demonstrates several key points concerning Woolf’s view of class. These include a recognition of the enormous influence of material means upon the actual lives of individuals; an acknowledgement of the “servanthood” of many wives, and a suggestion that their class standing is not equal to that of their husbands; a lack of recognition of the influence of ethnic stereotypes even upon herself (the Scots ancestry of the Carlyles); a concern with practical aspects of the institution of marriage; and a conviction of the vital importance of seemingly unimportant detail in revealing character and situation. Here she famously claims that an hour spent in the houses of great men will yield more information about them and their lives than all the biographies—a view she asserts throughout most of her life. Also, though the piece is

titled “Great *Men’s* Houses,” the Carlyle section concentrates upon the *women* of the house and the manner in which their efforts create the “voice” of the house.

In “Miss Reeves,” the sketch which follows, Woolf describes the real-life Amber Reeves as having something of the snake in her (one might observe that Woolf herself was a bit of a snake to use Miss Reeves’ real name in this portrait) and says, “I imagine that her taste and insight are not fine; when she described people she ran into stock phrases, and took rather a cheap view. She seemed determined to be human also; to like people, even though they were stupid” (*Carlyle’s House* 5). These are certainly unpleasant, elitist remarks by Woolf. Yet, the depiction illustrates both Woolf’s seemingly uncritical classism *and* her insistence on getting to the truth underneath the surface.

It gets worse. In “Jews,” another sketch from this collection, she refers to Mrs. Loeb (again, using the woman’s real name) as a fat Jewess fawning and flattering them, and states that “Her food, of course, swam in oil and was nasty” (*Carlyle’s House* 14). It’s perhaps the condescending “of course” which is most offensive. One must admit that Woolf could certainly be acidic and unpleasant, but she is young at this stage and the notebook sketches were not meant for publication. David Bradshaw, though also expressing distaste for this sketch, brings forth additional context for these sketches. He notes that Mr. Loeb was a photographer whom Woolf felt had dogged her for years, that anti-Semitic comments were “endemic” among the English upper middle class at the time, that three years later she married a Jew, and that in the 1930s she challenged her own prejudice—particularly in *The Years*, where she deplored the anti-Semitism of the

British Union of Fascists and stressed the manner in which Jews contributed to England's culture (43-45).

"Divorce Courts" is a sketch from the 1909 notebook that is based upon Woolf's attendance at a famous court case where a woman with six children petitioned for a separation from her husband on the grounds of cruelty. Bradshaw notes that the woman, Alice Mary Fearnley-Whittingstall, later took up with a certain Miss Lewis, who was reported to be a lesbian. He observes that Woolf is fairly balanced and hesitant to place categorical blame on anyone. However, she seems to side more with the husband in the end and is surprisingly hard on the lesbian Miss Lewis. As Bradshaw puts it, "In 1909 . . . the grasp of class still held Woolf very tightly indeed" (45-49). Yet, in examining the sketch closely, I find a fairly neutral point of view overall. All parties are criticized in various ways, including Reverend Fearnley-Whittingstall, who is called "perhaps, a selfish man." In fact, the sketch appears to be more of a reflection not only upon marriage, but (to paraphrase Woolf's first line in the sketch) a reflection upon bringing religion into contact with private life.

In her early life and work, Woolf attempts to understand a feminine psychology of class, particularly in relation to marriage as patriarchy and "empire," and in relation to the question of education for women. As she develops a gender-inflected understanding of class, she simultaneously begins to engage issues of mental illness as possibly related to eugenics and to a psychology of class for women. She also demonstrates a concern with issues of class connected to the maintenance and support of "civilization." Her relative insensitivity to race issues at this time will change as she matures.

CHAPTER THREE

"I'm not like Hirst . . . I don't see circles of chalk between people's feet. I sometimes wish I did. It seems to me so tremendously complicated and confused. One can't come to any decision at all; one's less and less capable of making judgments. D'you find that? And then one never knows what anyone feels. We're all in the dark." Terence to Rachel in *The Voyage Out* (205-6).

"DREAMS AND REALITIES"²⁰: *THE VOYAGE OUT* AND THE POLITICS OF EMPIRE

In 1915 Woolf finally succeeded in getting her first novel published. She had submitted her manuscript of *The Voyage Out* (originally titled *Melymbrosia*) to Gerald Duckworth, her half-brother, in 1913, but subsequently suffered a nervous breakdown and attempted suicide in the same year. The *Times Literary Supplement* review of the novel remarked that "never was a book more feminine, more recklessly feminine" (qtd. in Majumdar 49), but generally the book received mixed reviews. Mitchell Leaska in 1977 refers to it as remaining "a strange, difficult, and still unpopular book" (12). Critics of the 1960s and 1970s view it in mythic terms of initiation and quest. Some see it as a Bildungsroman. Lucio Ruotolo believes the novel depicts "a heroine who will not grow into the world as it is constituted" (*Interrupted* 21), and Christine Froula views it as the initiation of a female artist into the difficult choices offered in Woolf's late Victorian era ("Out of" 136). Susan Stanford Friedman argues that Rachel is presented as a "model reader" able to balance how to read "both books and life" (113). The interpretation of Rachel's death in relation to the novel's meaning as a whole has been deliberated as a central point by many critics--Alex Zwerdling, Mitchell Leaska, Hermione Lee, Roger Poole, Thomas Caramagno, and others. Some view the novel as a precursor to *The*

Waves because of its pessimism and dream-like sequences. Patricia Laurence and Mark Hussey examine Woolf's use of and commentary upon silence in the text. Herbert Marder was one of the few to notice elements of a feminist social critique in *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf* (1968), but only in the 1990s do Mark Hussey, Helen Wussow, Kathy Phillips, and several others discuss the *The Voyage Out* in terms of social critique. Though these studies begin to point out connections between Woolf's social critique and war, they do not precisely and extensively explore the novel through the lens of class as I do in this chapter. Since David Bradshaw is one of the few recently to engage class directly in relation to this novel (2000), I will also discuss his treatment in arguing my own interpretation of this novel

In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf demonstrates how a psychology of femininity is connected to class in Rachel's exploration of her subject position. Here, also, Woolf shows the links between gender, class, and education. Set in about 1905, the novel revolves around twenty-four-year-old Rachel Vinrace, brought up by aunts in Richmond after her mother died when Rachel was eleven. Rachel sets forth on a voyage from London to South America, sailing on a ship owned by her father, Willoughby Vinrace. The voyage is also a metaphor for Rachel's inner journey of discovery. This trope is eminently appropriate for Woolf, whose poetic incorporates the sea and its waves in such important ways. It is also fitting her first novel has Rachel embarking upon a voyage enabled by her father, for it was Leslie Stephen who strongly encouraged and enabled his daughter to set forth on the voyage of becoming a writer.

After a frightening and unexpected kiss from Richard Dalloway, who joins the passengers with his wife, Clarissa, at Lisbon, Rachel experiences recurring nightmares.

She is persuaded to stay at Santa Marina, a South American island where her Aunt Helen and Uncle Ridley Ambrose have been loaned a villa. Helen hopes to save Rachel from the fate of becoming a hostess for her widowed father. While on the island, Rachel falls in love with Terence Hewet, who is visiting with his friend, St. John Hirst. After becoming engaged to Terence on a trip up a river to see a native village, she falls ill and dies. Simple as the novel sounds in its basic outline, it has been seen by some critics as containing all of Woolf's main themes, as well as many of her habits of style. It has been viewed as both social critique (including a critique of marriage) and as a story full of mythic ambiguity and individual emotion. I will examine the novel's critiques of gender and class in relation to patriarchy, empire, and power issues. Subsequently I will focus upon Woolf's next novel, *Night and Day*, to show how its strong marriage theme is connected with these same issues. *Night and Day* is also one of Woolf's least-examined novels.

Only relatively recently has Woolf's ideological aim of expanding our political and ethical horizons has been recognized. Although many of Woolf's novels are concerned with changing the status quo, often in a radical manner, her method of investigating these concerns is subtle enough to mask the full import of her critiques. Examples of her social critique can be found in almost any novel, but particularly in *Jacob's Room*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Years*, *Night and Day*, *Flush* (though political elements in the latter two novels are not adequately recognized even today) and *The Voyage Out*.²¹ Woolf essentially stakes out a standpoint position similar to that of contemporary feminists Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding, who ask: how different would society look if one were to examine *everything* from the standpoint of a woman instead of a man? This is

also the situated knowledge of which Donna Haraway speaks. Yet Woolf is never blatantly polemical, especially in her novels, for she hated didacticism in art, feared censure from friends and influential associates, and believed that subtle provocation and satire were more effective than strident polemics. As a result, her social critique is sometimes missed by the less-than-astute reader. She also only gradually came to fully develop her standpoint position and to recognize her own complicity in perpetuating empire.

Chapter One of *The Voyage Out* begins in melancholy fashion, with Helen and Ridley Ambrose making their way eastward across the slums of London to the place where they will row out to meet their ship, the *Euphrosyne*, for their vacation voyage to Santa Marina. Helen weeps as they depart; she weeps for the children her husband is forcing her to leave behind temporarily, for the teeming masses of the poor they encounter on the way to the ship, and perhaps simply in sympathy with the rain and fog attendant upon their leaving England. It is Helen who first articulates a major image in the novel used to describe social problems in industrial Britain: “When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath” (*TVO* 5). The skeleton image is used by Helen as she contemplates the social classes of London: the rich, the “bigoted workers,” the poor, the neglected old men and women. All is not well in Culver City, and Helen feels at this moment that she has little love for London. It is a maternal response reminiscent of Julia Stephen and her work among the poor, and also the response of one who recognizes an ugly truth submerged beneath the bright façade of social life. Soon Rachel Vinrace arrives at a similar recognition, reflecting upon images even more literally submerged: those of black ribs of wrecked ships and smooth, green-sided

monsters. Both women sense a reality beneath the surface that evokes Woolf's frequent use of the fin image.

Some of the dark elements of society are mentioned only as passing thoughts in the minds of characters. For example, Helen says of Willoughby Vinrace, Rachel's father: "She had always suspected him of nameless atrocities with regard to his daughter, as indeed she had always suspected him of bullying his wife" (*TVO* 17). What are readers to make of such a comment? Are we to wonder whether Louise DeSalvo's suspicions about the sexual and emotional abuse endured by Woolf are justified? Helen does comment in Chapter Two on Rachel's seeming immaturity and inability to "think, feel, laugh, or express herself"(18). Is Rachel a victim of emotional trauma?

In an Introduction to *Melymbrosia*, Woolf's earlier version of *The Voyage Out*--edited by DeSalvo and published in 1982--DeSalvo comments incisively upon Woolf's apparent aims at raising awareness of social problems in Britain, particularly for its female citizens. Though critics generally agree that in the earlier version Woolf's social critique is more overt and that Rachel is depicted as a significantly more vocal feminist, many of DeSalvo's observations also apply to the version published in Woolf's lifetime as *The Voyage Out*. DeSalvo states, for instance, that "The setting aboard ship, the enigmatic conversations, the symbolic quality of the characters, the sense of mystery and magic—all suggest that Woolf was writing a female version of the *Odyssey*, a female version of the initiation and voyage archetype" (Intro. xxxiii). DeSalvo also asserts that the earlier novel version was drawn partially from real-life observations made on Woolf's two trips to Italy around the time of writing the manuscript. She believes that this version became "a work of social criticism with mythic overtones" which reveals Woolf as involved in

many specific issues of British society in her day; it does not support the notion that she was an isolated dreamer weaving personal fantasies when she was not mentally ill (xxxiv-xxxvii). To DeSalvo, Rachel's death (which occurs in both versions) reveals that as a woman she is a disposable commodity in the economic structure of her society. Her death can be traced to the mercantile activities of Willoughby Vinrace, who does not hesitate to take his daughter to a potentially dangerous foreign land but has never allowed her to take a walk by herself in London. Furthermore, Woolf parodies the odyssey tradition by frustrating the conventional expectations of self-discovery: Rachel dies because she cannot return alive to an England in which negative attitudes toward women are so prevalent that they have taken on the status of myth. Simply put, Rachel cannot overcome the fact that she is a woman; DeSalvo believes that Woolf also suggests that women of the future must kill the conception of themselves as powerless (xxxviii-xl).

Chapter One alludes repeatedly to the various class expectations that are addressed to "ladies" like Helen Ambrose or Rachel Vinrace. Helen observes the training ladies receive "after the fashion of their sex" in promoting men's talk without listening to it, and Rachel reflects that "as her father's daughter, she must be in some sort prepared to entertain" the Ambroses. Rachel then receives a second-hand admonition from her Aunt Bessie not to practice the piano too much, for fear of developing arm muscles that will spoil her chances of marrying (*TVO* 7-13). Chapter Two presents Rachel reflecting upon the highly haphazard nature of education for the majority of well-to-do girls in the last part of the nineteenth century. This critique resounds throughout Woolf's works and is a major ingredient in Woolf's view of class, for she regards upper-class women as belonging to a sub-class because of an education that severely limits their ability to

develop independence. For Naomi Black, the degree to which Woolf's definition of class is linked to education has not been fully recognized (187-89). Rachel is one of the "uneducated daughters of educated men." The image of womanhood promoted to the young Rachel is passive and typically Victorian, positioning women as secondary to men and as unquestioningly expected to enter the marriage market. What Rachel begins to recognize as the novel progresses is that the marriage market is intimately connected to maintaining the British Empire. In fact, she begins to see class, in Hennessy's terms, as a set of social relations that undergird capitalism. In Chapter Two, Rachel muses upon the image of a ship as bride: "a virgin unknown of men; in her vigor and purity she might be likened to all beautiful things, for as a ship she had a life of her own" (*TVO* 25). The last phrase is reminiscent of Woolf's later *A Room of One's Own*, which urges social reform so that women can obtain the economic independence to sustain intellectual integrity. Rachel clearly identifies with the bridal ship image and with the idea of voyaging forth to discover herself and the larger world. The Dalloways who board the ship, bringing goods back to Britain, embody the intersection of politics with business. However, Woolf's recognition of the braiding of class, gender, capitalism and patriarchy is relatively submerged in this early novel.

An old family servant on board, Mrs. Chailey, is instantly recognizable as a member of the "lower orders" by her discreet manner of moving and her "sober black dress"; later Woolf would criticize the use of class markers, as in her essay, "The Niece of an Earl," for easy character recognition by novelists of the past. In her early work especially, Woolf retains a solid footing in the past and exhibits the influence of her reading of Greek and Roman literature, as well as canonical British literature. Here Mrs. Chailey,

who treasures a picture of her former mistress, is criticized roundly for daring to request a room further away from the ship's noisy boiler room, an incident followed by Helen's bursting in to demand assistance and referring to Mrs. Chailey simply by her last name (*TVO* 21-23). The portrait of Mrs. Chailey is empathetic and well-developed, contradicting accusations that all of Woolf's servants in her fiction are shadowy. Nonetheless, both Helen and Mrs. Chailey are satirized, as is the functioning of servants within the class system. Mark Hussey calls attention to Woolf's claim that satire was easy for the English because of strict class divisions, but different for Dostoevsky and other Russians because they lacked a strong a sense of class and so displayed more empathy for characters (244-45). Woolf is a brilliant satirist and the full import of her generally Horatian style has yet to be recognized. However, it is the nature of satire to boomerang, so there are times when Woolf is catapulted backward by her own attack. Only later does she recognize the dual action of her own technique. Woolf uses satire in her fiction to demonstrate that a strict sense of class constricts the development of the individual, hampers communication, and causes alienation; still, her very demonstration sometimes reveals her own weaknesses as well.

On many occasions in the novel Rachel reflects upon the importance of silence and the mysteries it contains, and her musing suggests the predicament of women who are unrepresented in the dominant male discourse. At one point Terence, Rachel's would-be lover and possible future husband, famously declares his desire to write a novel about nothing but silence. What is underscored by this theme is at once the difficulty of representing female reality in male language and the difficulty of representing any reality in words which cannot fully contain its mystery. Rachel and Terence engage in a

philosophical discussion of the nature of language which, for a contemporary reader, may evoke Lacan's work. But theirs is not always a direct discussion; there are hints from Rachel about the inadequacy of language, not all of which are comprehended by Terence, despite his love for Rachel. He, in fact, berates her later in the novel (Chapter 22) for having no respect for the facts or the truth, for she is "essentially feminine" (*TVO* 278). Much like society in general at this time, Terence continues to essentialize women as an undifferentiated class, and to relegate them to a lower intellectual realm. Class affects one's language and perception of the world; to Terence and to all the males in *The Voyage Out*, women actually use a different kind language, one which is vague and flimsy compared to that of men. Rachel concludes that neither she nor her sisters will ever be able to communicate fully the truth of their lives. In Chapter Two, Rachel, musing on her life growing up with her aunts in Richmond, overhears one aunt speaking to another about a servant being expected to brush the stairs at half past ten in the morning: "suddenly as her aunt spoke the whole system in which they lived had appeared before her eyes as something quite unfamiliar and inexplicable" (*TVO* 28). Woolf does not allow Rachel to directly criticize the entire British system of class-inflected patriarchy. At this point Woolf was still dependent upon even family members (ironically, her Duckworth half-brother) in order to get her manuscript of this novel published. She may not have felt that she could afford to be harshly critical of a system she hoped to use in hopes of reforming it. She addresses these matters obliquely and under the guise of a naïve, uneducated, and mild-mannered heroine who can be excused for certain "misinterpretations." Is Rachel a reliable narrator of her own experience? The matter is more complicated when one looks closely at the gaps and silences in the novel.

Linden Peach suggests that an important issue in Woolf studies is the type of critical approach required by her techniques, particularly because she omits or treats many major historical events indirectly. Peach asserts that readers must adopt a cryptanalytical mode to focus upon what is hidden or almost hidden in a Woolf text: “Her fiction explores how the distorted and distorting social narratives that impinge on and determine individual lives are embedded in, and legitimated by, the codified nature of the social and cultural environment” (193). To Peach, Woolf anticipates Foucault in questioning the “already said” and what is allowed to be said in dominant social discourse. In Foucault’s idea of discursive formation, only certain statements are granted legitimacy because of the intimate connections between discourse and power. Like Foucault, Woolf recognizes that discursive formation is related to wider systems of power. Woolf’s fiction exhibits two of Foucault’s ideas about the “archive,” or statement domain, comprising British culture: 1) it cannot be completely excavated, and 2) it erupts at different levels and only in a fragmentary manner (Peach 193-95).²² To Peach, Woolf was ahead of her time in this regard, and critics have yet to appreciate and adequately analyze her approach. Peach’s application of Foucault to Woolf’s 1930s texts is also relevant to her early fiction, which presents more embedded fragments and a less sophisticated articulation of discursive formations that Woolf was just starting to examine more closely.

David Bradshaw calls attention to the profusion of both circular imagery and a related series of references to Piccadilly Circle and prostitutes in connection with genteel women in the novel, suggesting that Woolf connects this imagery with the “oppressive noose of patriarchy” which encircles *all* British women (“The Socio-Political” 193). The imagery of circles meshes with an idea I mentioned earlier about Woolf’s conception of class as

similar to Venn diagrams that intersect and overlap with each other. The core shared element in this Venn structure is the simple fact of being a woman and thus affected in similar, important ways by the dominant system of discourse. Other notable examples of circularity not elaborated by Bradshaw in *The Voyage Out* are the stirring of the tea round and round to symbolize the union of two minds in the novel (48), papers flying in circles just before Richard Dalloway unexpectedly kisses Rachel (65), the Piccadilly Circle prostitutes (72), the circle of female hens discussed by Terence Hewet and St John Hirst (97), the concept of bubbles or round auras that people cannot see around each other (98), ladies physically circling in vague fashion in the Santa Marina hotel (101): all of these images and more reinforce the idea that Rachel and other women in the novel are unable to escape the ideological discourse that surrounds them and shapes their future. There is good reason for Rachel to feel dizzy as she spins in a social and cultural environment so codified and embedded that she is only beginning to recognize its systemic nature. That, perhaps, is the most important insight she gains in this voyage of discovery. Like London, which often conceals its grim industrial underbelly, this bridal ship sails upon a sea covering over skeletal ruins of shipwrecked vessels in an Empire that glorifies one male-dominated “class” at the expense of others.

The issue of class comes to the fore in one of Rachel’s first conversations with politician Richard Dalloway, who explains that his ideal for the world is ““Unity of aim, of dominion, of progress. The dispersion of the best ideas over the greatest area””(55). A vast British colonizing plan would be another way of summing up Dalloway’s lofty-sounding goal. Of course, it quickly becomes clear to Rachel that the people who decide what the best ideas are happen to be men. Richard Dalloway, in fact, does not permit his

wife to discuss politics, for he believes that one cannot both fight in the world of politics and maintain one's ideals. He is proud to say that he has bettered working conditions for thousands of girls in Lancashire because of reforms in factories. Rachel owns up to never having set foot inside a factory and indeed realizes that she knows nothing about the "real world." Richard suggests that she conceive of the world as a giant whole where every citizen is part of the machine:

‘I can conceive no more exalted aim—to be the citizen of the Empire. Look at it in this way, Miss Vinrace; conceive the state as a complicated machine; we citizens are parts of that machine; some fulfil more important duties; others (perhaps I am one of them) serve only to connect some obscure parts of the mechanism, concealed from the public eye. Yet if the meanest screw fails in its task, the proper working of the whole is imperiled.’

It was impossible to combine the image of a lean black widow, gazing out of her window, and longing for some one to talk to, with the image of a vast machine, such as one sees at South Kensington, thumping, thumping, thumping. The attempt at communication had been a failure. (*TVO* 57)

Rachel says she cannot see a personal connection between real people like the widow and the large, impersonal mechanisms of industrialized society. She therefore states that she and Richard do not understand one another, whereupon Richard angers her with another statement: "Well, then; no woman has what I may call the political instinct" (*TVO* 58). Woolf herself reveals a keen political instinct in presenting this seemingly innocuous scene of a pompous, public man and an uneducated girl inquiring about the relationship

between Britain's thriving empire and the sad lot and labor of the poor. Again, Woolf places damning social criticism in the mouth of a naïve young girl.

Richard then makes a startling statement as he discusses his early childhood: "It's a fallacy to think that children are happy. They're not; they're unhappy. I've never suffered so much as I did when I was a child" (59). Ironically, Richard's revelation precedes by moments a shocking experience about to occur for Rachel, one which Richard initiates.

Shortly after the discussion of politics, Rachel and Richard literally bump into each other near her cabin room during a storm. When Richard Dalloway rhapsodizes about how vast and wonderful the modern world is, he asks why it is that human beings have only one life to live instead of ten and asks about Rachel's life plans. Rachel simply replies, "You see, I'm a woman" (66), for she knows that she has many fewer choices than Richard and most other men. Richard replies that as a woman she has "inestimable power--for good or for evil" and she has beauty (*TVO* 66). As the ship suddenly lurches, a pivotal scene of the novel follows:

Rachel fell slightly forward. Richard took her in his arms and kissed her. Holding her tight, he kissed her passionately, so that she felt the hardness of his body and the roughness of his cheek imprinted upon hers. She fell back in her chair, with tremendous beats of the heart, each of which sent black waves across her eyes. He clasped his forehead in his hands.

'You tempt me,' he said. The tone of his voice was terrifying. He seemed choked in fight. They were both trembling. Rachel stood up and went. Her head was cold, her knees shaking, and the physical pain of the emotion was so great that she could only keep herself moving above the great leaps of her heart. She leant upon the rail

of the ship, and gradually ceased to feel, for a chill of body and mind crept over her. Far out between the waves little black and white seabirds were riding. Rising and falling with smooth and graceful movements in the hollows of the waves they seemed singularly detached and unconcerned. (*TVO* 66-67)

Richard's actions represent an uninvited and abrupt bodily colonization of Rachel which provokes intense, frightening emotions in her. In contrast, the objective world of nature seems admirable to Rachel in its detachment from her waves of emotional experience. Nonetheless she later recalls feeling "a strange exultation" (*TVO* 67), as if something wonderful had happened. Some Woolf critics seem to forget the exultation Rachel expresses, for they concentrate chiefly upon what a frightening experience this was for Rachel. Perhaps this is because Rachel soon after experiences her famous dream of walking down a long tunnel to a vault where she is trapped "with a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails. His face was pitted and like the face of an animal" (68). She then feels compelled to lock her cabin door because she feels pursued by a moaning voice and desiring eyes, as "All night long barbarian men harassed the ship; they came scuffling down the passages, and stopped to snuffle at her door" (68). The word "snuffle" suggests the pig imagery sometimes used by Vanessa and Virginia in connection with the unwanted advances of their half-brothers, Gerald and George Duckworth.

In the dream of the gibbering old man, is Woolf drawing upon her own fears as she suffers mental breakdown during the course of writing this first novel? Rachel reveals characteristics of a trauma victim: trepidation, spaciness, frequent moments of silent withdrawal. Or is Woolf, reflecting her era's interest in eugenics, using this image in

Rachel's dream to evoke the mentally ill in general as primitives who deserve to be locked away or even euthanized (like Laura, Virginia's institutionalized half-sister)? The dream will be repeated in this novel and in various forms in other works of Woolf's, suggesting its psychic importance to her. One example is Rose's dream as a child in *The Years* of a pock-marked man shuffling in the hall, with his hand on the door as she lies in bed in the night nursery, and with a face "hanging close to her as if it dangled with a bit of string" (*The Years* 39-40). Rose has previously been traumatized by a strange man making mewling noises and sucking his lips in and out as he unbuttons his clothes when she is alone on her way home at night. She rushed home, making noise in hopes that someone would talk with her, but "nobody heard her. The hall was empty" (*The Years* 29). Woolf's own experience of sexual trauma is evident in little episodes and scenes in many of her novels; often these scenes involve some primal, surreal sub-category of human being.

Is Woolf also suggesting that a physical relationship with a man is both wonderful and terrifying? Rachel's fright does not seem to reside heavily in the fact that Richard is married and a man old enough to be her father; rather, it seems to derive from the very fact of the physical and unexpected intensity of the kiss and embrace. A naïve girl untutored in the ways of the world, perhaps Rachel is simply shocked at her first close encounter with male sexuality. She has become a virgin ship embraced by the sea and all of its mystery and ambiguity. Yet as Louise DeSalvo reminds us, Woolf's first version of Rachel as Cynthia depicts a somewhat stronger Everywoman figure—though one who nonetheless also dies because of her society's misogyny (xxxix, xxxix-xl). Perhaps Woolf is also covertly satirizing the entire stereotype of a vacuous, uneducated, young Victorian

woman in *The Voyage Out* more extensively than might appear on a cursory reading. On the surface, Rachel's story of "coming out" to the ways of the world seems innocent enough. At this early stage in her career, and as an unpublished novelist, Woolf could not afford to become the "hyena in petticoats" that Mary Wollstonecraft was called after the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Unequivocal criticism of the English social system is also evident, but it is generally articulated by male characters. The difference is in the tone and extent of the satire. Later, in *Three Guineas* Woolf joins the ranks of social critics like Wollstonecraft; however, in *The Voyage Out* she often disguises calls for radical reform in a veil of politeness, modesty, and humor. The donkey/ass wordplay at the picnic on Monte Rosa and the many hilariously critical descriptions of the money-obsessed guests (such as the pig-like woman described by Helen and St John Hirst at the dance) make Woolf's point indirectly. Clearly the preoccupation with acquiring wealth is severely questioned in this novel, especially by Cambridge intellectuals like St John Hirst.

The background violence of World War I rears its head in the background on occasion, as when Clarissa Dalloway spots two foreboding warships looking like eyeless beasts of prey. Clarissa's response is a patriotic "'Aren't you glad to be English!'" (60); however, Helen Ambrose offers a pacifist view as the chapter concludes, stating that it seems as much a mistake to keep soldiers as to keep a zoo, and that people must stop praising the courage of those who die on the battlefield. Helen's remarks are shocking, but they are presented in an offhand way and reported indirectly, not as dialog. No other characters respond except the marginal Mr. Pepper with his brief remark that people should stop writing bad poetry about courage in war. The rhetoric Woolf employs here

seems deliberately to veil her radical criticism. The reader is almost forced to re-read to verify what seems remarkable. What kind of society goes to war and what are its true aims? The violence of war could also be connected with the violence of men toward prostitutes, as evoked in Rachel's and Helen's discussion about Richard Dalloway's kiss in the context of an exchange about the Piccadilly Square prostitutes. Helen advises Rachel that women must expect risks if they wish to develop friendships with men, at which point Rachel suddenly experiences an epiphany, recognizing for the first time why she was never allowed to walk alone in London: "Because men are brutes! I hate men!" (72). However, Rachel's outburst is followed by "I liked him, and I liked being kissed" (73). Rachel's ambivalent feelings here suggest that she might be as afraid of her own strong passions as of the brutish men who engage prostitutes. Ironically, these prostitutes earn their own living and may be economically independent. Varying levels of class, and their different power options, are apparent here in Rachel's increasing understanding of British society. She perhaps feels rage that she, uneducated as she is, does not even have the economic clout of a prostitute.

When Helen Ambrose writes a long letter home from Santa Marina a few months later, her tone is condescending as she contrasts Santa Marina with the now-cold island of England, and she wonders why the English scream about politics but scoff at people trying to do good things. "When have you ever encouraged a living artist? Or bought his best work? Why are you all so ugly and so servile? Here the servants are human beings. They talk to one another as if they were equals. As far as I can tell there are no aristocrats," Helen writes (86). This radical early commentary of Woolf's is once again veiled, put into the mouth of a character less likely to be identified with Woolf herself

than Rachel is and also presented in the less-active form of a letter to which we see no response. Again, some readers might need to look twice to be sure they have read correctly. Helen continues with additional criticism of the English system for non-education of girls, noting that it is “not merely foolish but criminal” to bring up young girls with no knowledge of either sexuality or reproduction (86). To her, the proper education of women would make them equal to men, while retaining their differences. Though placed in the mind and voice of Helen Ambrose, these are all views that resonate strongly with Woolf’s own, as we know from her diaries and sketches. Helen is an intriguing mentor for Rachel who deserves further study.

Ridley refuses to join Helen and Rachel for an evening jaunt into town because he thinks Rachel vacuous, so Helen takes Rachel out to “see life,” as she calls it. Young women with red flowers behind their ears flirt with young men and engage in amorous exchanges. Helen notes approvingly that various people in shabby clothes seem very natural and comfortable with themselves, and she notices that Rachel is starting to tan and demonstrating more self-confidence. She then muses upon the fact that this very night there might be a Court in chilly England²³ with wretched shop girls, men selling postcards, and various aristocrats displaying the number of footmen they are allowed to have according to the status of their social class. This section of the novel is quite damning of the entire English social system. In effect, Helen recognizes the interpellation of individuals into the ideology of a social system in such a thoroughgoing manner that they do not even recognize the system’s complete control of their lives. They have completely internalized their society’s expectations and believe that they are acting independently when, in fact, they are marionettes. However, once again the critique is

placed in the mouth of Helen, a woman who has deliberately placed herself somewhat outside the social mainstream. Only one who does so can recognize the invidious nature of the British class system.

A sub-class of women is represented by the figure of Miss Allan, a “square figure in its manly coat” who repeatedly leaves a social gathering in order to “work.” This announcement elicits sympathy from Mrs. Elliot, and from Mrs. Thornbury, who believes that unmarried women earning their livings have the hardest life of all. They discuss the fact that such a life is certainly *not* what women want, for surely having children is the “crown” of a woman’s life (though poor Mrs. Elliot has never been able to bear children), but Mrs. Thornbury reminds Mrs. Elliot that women now outnumber men in Britain and that the navy is having trouble finding male recruits. She then states, ““And I have heard young women talk quite openly of--”” only to break off completely and leave the statement provocatively unfinished. Perhaps the young women are talking of birth control or of having sex with men outside of marriage. Or is Mrs. Thornbury suggesting that young women are considering lesbian relationships, or only living their lives as single, working women who will likely remain childless? The possible lesbian interpretation is supported by an easy-to-overlook comment on the very next page, where Mrs. Paley, another hotel guest, laughingly remarks upon a tall woman wearing makeup who is “always attended by a shabby female follower”: ““I shouldn’t like to say what *she* is!”” (106). This interpretation is supported by the response of Mrs. Paley’s niece, Susan, who “blushed, and wondered why her aunt said such things” (107). Throughout this first novel, Woolf indirectly scrutinizes the entire English social system in gender-inflected class terms, particularly its effect upon the lives of the typically uneducated daughters of

educated men. By means of Rachel's voyage and the social critique embedded in the letters, dialog, and thoughts of Helen and other characters, Woolf examines her own options at this point in her young adulthood. Should she marry? Have children? Remain single and have a career? And, God forbid, should she consider living the shameful life of a lesbian?

Terence, Rachel's suitor, contemplates the stream of respectable upper-middle-class English tourists flowing past him at the Santa Marina hotel and decides that they are mediocre and capable of cruelty. Yet they are the very class with money and "to them rather than to others was given the management of the world" (123). He becomes depressed, for these people are the ones who do not appreciate artists who care for life or beauty. Ironically, the indictment is sweeping and elitist in its own way, for Terence the novelist and Rachel the musician hold themselves above these philistines in a rather supercilious manner, an attitude even more strongly marked in their friend, St John Hirst. Evelyn M., questioning the gender restrictions of her middle-class lot, exclaims that she wishes she were a man who could raise troops and conquer territory. Mr. Perrott is spoken of as "not quite a gentleman," for he is the son of a Leeds grocer. Irruptions of gendered class difference puncture this section of the novel. Several references are made to Hirst's concept of invisible chalk marks drawn around everyone. Hirst mocks Rachel's limited reading experience, shocked that at age twenty-four she has not yet read Gibbon's six-volume *History of the Decline and Fall of Rome*. He openly insults her when he demands, "Have you got a mind or are you like the rest of your sex?"(141). Amazingly, Rachel does not respond until he leaves and she is alone, whereupon, "having acquired some of Helen's words," she exclaims "Damn that man!" (141). Surprisingly, Terence

repeats the insult much later in the novel when he accuses her and all women of having little respect for facts. One of Woolf's chief criticisms of British society and classism in this novel, articulated in much more detail in her later writing, is not only the very limited education given to the daughters of educated men, but also the sense of intellectual and social inferiority that develops as a result of stunted intellectual and emotional growth. Rachel is presented as keenly aware of her shortcomings as a woman, so much so that she stammers, withdraws in silence (though clearly angry), and feels particularly in the first part of the novel that she must belong to some sub-class of human beings.

As Helen's mentoring begins to influence her, however, Rachel grows in self-confidence and emotional health. She begins to voice her independent thought with more assertiveness, only to realize in the end that it will be quashed by a society which demands a wifely, maternal role. Ironically, Helen asks Hirst to teach Rachel how to be authentic, how to express her real feelings rather than hiding them, and Hirst then pontificates upon his belief that books really matter in changing one's view and that at the present time nothing matters more than the education of women, for "almost everything was due to education" (150). Some of Woolf's personal views may have been placed in the mouth of Hirst. They must not be underestimated, for this entire novel is about the re-education of a young woman. It is a point whose nuances, as Naomi Black has observed, have been insufficiently emphasized by some scholars. Woolf redefines class more substantially in terms of education or, to some degree, by the potential for and openness to it. I believe she means a kind of openness to learning about life and beauty that Terence discusses in the novel, an openness missing in the complacent English middle class. That is why in her essay entitled "Middlebrow" she excoriates the smug

middle class and favors the lower classes; she does the same in her essay “Am I a Snob?” She believes that the lower class might actually be better able to think independently—though they are swayed in some ways, too--than those men and women who are more firmly entrenched in the classism of the English system.

Of course the novel is also about love and silence and the things one cannot say. Real love demands authenticity, a quality Rachel believes cannot be found in the codified behavior of British society. How can one learn the truth when one cannot even say what one really feels and believes? To Susan Warrington, the solution to her friends’ problems is for all of them to marry at once when they reach England. Marriage is the end-all and be-all, “the right thing, the only thing” (164). Various characters opine about marriage and the mutual attraction of males to females. Hirst--who sometimes appears to represent pure, disembodied, abstract thought--exclaims that what he abhors most is the female breast. Strangely, Hewet does not reply to his outburst, for he is absorbed in his own introspection regarding how one figures out how one really feels. He secretly walks to Rachel’s villa at night, shouting poetry and delighting in the sounds of words themselves, murmuring the phrase “dreams and realities” over and over.

Curiously, “dreams and realities” was one of the titles Woolf considered for her subsequent novel, *Night and Day*. The phrase itself is an important one for Woolf in this early period, for she seems obsessed with getting beneath the surface of conventional talk and behavior to discern the reality of what people really feel and think. Both Rachel and Katharine, the heroines of Woolf’s first two novels, live partially in an unreal dream world and must make an effort to connect with reality. The expected ritual of polite teatime talk--an occupational hazard for the upper middle class, particularly for women—

is frequently depicted in these novels as obscuring truth; such also was Woolf's view as a young woman. In fact, the pretense involved in such social patterns is satirized in the ridiculous, hypocritical gossip of various characters over tea in *The Voyage Out*. On one occasion at least it is not confined to women, for Mr. Elliot shares juicy details with Mr. Pepper over a game of chess. They are then joined by Mrs. Elliot, who cruelly observes that old Lady Barborough's infrequent bathing habits are not noted by many because she insists on wearing puce velvet even in the heat of August. Immediately after, Mr. Flushing looks at the handicrafts of natives of the island displayed in a case for visitors and pronounces them all a "sham." The reader is tempted to apply this term instead to the un-Christian and hypocritical English tourists.

When Evelyn M. asks Terence Hewet's advice about her relationship with Alfred Perrott, a conversation ensues about Perrott's lower-class upbringing and delivery of groceries; however, Evelyn is quick to add that it doesn't matter how you're born if you've got the right stuff in you. Class is obviously of prime importance in this novel when two people consider marriage. Evelyn M. is presented as a modern woman who longs for experience of the wider world, who views marriage as confining, and who plans to start a weekly club with clever people in Bloomsbury in order to solve the world's problems. I believe Evelyn M. represents one aspect of Woolf's possible future—a character probably partially based on Vanessa—in her quest to decide upon her life's vocation. Unlike Rachel, Evelyn M. is also quite outspoken, yet Terence Hewet ends up feeling dissatisfied nonetheless with the fragmentary nature of their attempts to have an honest discussion of her difficulty in choosing between two suitors.

A larger critique of British class and racial superiority is woven into the novel at various points. Helen receives a letter from her brother-in-law, Rachel's father, in which he mentions wrangling with "wretched little natives who went on strike and refused to load his ships, until he roared English oaths at them" (180). Mrs. Thornbury admires the beautiful things which the collector, Mr. Flushing, with the colonialist remark: "I had no notion that the peasants were so artistic" (181). Mrs. Flushing's large orange hat plume is another possible colonial marker, for often plumage was obtained for the upper classes from British colonies. At another point Mrs. Thornbury parries Hirst's attack upon people who do not read the classics with a defense of country folk: "These are the people, I feel, among whom Shakespeare will be born if he is ever born again" (185). Shortly after, St John Hirst exclaims, "I do adore the aristocracy!" and "They're so amazingly unscrupulous" (187). He is referring to Mrs. Flushing's outrageous behavior in smoking, crossing her legs, and boldly proclaiming that she dislikes anything more than twenty years old. Obviously Woolf is poking fun at a variety of social conventions and attitudes.

When Rachel and Terence discuss the "curious silent unrepresented life" of women, it is Terence who observes that the man's view always prevails, and who asserts that one knows nothing about the real lives of women. In fact, he says, "Think of a railway train: fifteen carriages for men who want to smoke. Doesn't it make your blood boil? If I were a woman I'd blow some one's brains out" (201). Hewet's analysis of gender differences results in Rachel's questioning her own acquiescence to her father's belief in his superiority. She reflects that she was actually more influenced in growing up by her aunts than by her father, for they were the ones who created the solid backdrop for family life

with their regular meals, servant work schedules, and punctuality. Here Rachel waxes nostalgic for the very world of regularity, convention, and class she has raged against.

Terence plans to write a novel entitled *Silence*, a book about what people (including women) do not say; it is ironic, of course, that as a male he should propose to represent the real feelings of women as well as men! Terence fears that, like Evelyn M., Rachel may never be able to love only one man. Rachel, on the other hand, fears that Terence may love only his writing. Terence has an idea for another novel as well, about a man pushed into telling lies because he is obsessed with the idea of being a gentleman, which in fact is a level of class he never attains. Terence says, however, that he does not see people as having lines of chalk around them, as St John does, but rather as mysteries that defy our ability to judge them with complete accuracy. Both Terence and Rachel express a strong desire to discover the pattern of truth behind people and their feelings, Rachel by way of her music and Terence in writing his novel. They believe this pattern of truth is obscured by the fakery of the English system. Religion is an area of pretense explored extensively in one section of this novel. Sunday observances are satirized in a lengthy scene (Hirst even reads Sappho during the service), and Rachel finds herself critical of religion for the first time in her life. She is enraged that people only pretend to feel what they display as piety. This moment of recognition is crucial, for religion is part of the ideology undergirding class distinctions and empire in this novel.

Marriage itself continues to be questioned by Terence Hewet in particular. He says that single people are more active than married ones and that the married often become smug, their individuality compromised. Evelyn M. extends the gender conversation when she drags Rachel up to her hotel room to finish talking, declaring that women are finer

than men and that the finest men are like women. She invites Rachel to join her Saturday Club in Bloomsbury, where like-minded clever people with some sense of social justice could take action, instead of simply talking, and stop evils such as the Piccadilly prostitution. When Rachel looks down at the bushes in the garden below, musing that the spot is where she and Terence spent time together, Evelyn points out an unsavory connection: ““They kill hens down there” and “They cut their heads off with a knife—disgusting!”” The inclusion of this scene may seem odd until the reader remembers the earlier references to hens and women and Rachel’s later delusions when she refers to a woman with a knife who is chopping heads off. Rachel seems to fear that society will figuratively chop her head off and castrate her—i.e. punish her intellectual activity and independence of mind in declaring unconventional views, such as her new lack of belief in God. Evelyn M. also voices unconventional views and seems poised to lead the single life of an adventurer rather than to marry, but Rachel does not possess Evelyn’s forceful, outgoing personality or stamina. Rachel “accidentally” wanders to the kitchen, “the wrong side of hotel life,” and witnesses a very old woman killing and plucking chickens. Fascinated by the blood, the struggle, and this glimpse of life among the lower orders, Rachel suddenly finds Miss Allan at her side, the pitied spinster who has to work to support herself, and accepts her invitation to go up to her room to talk. It is ironic to see Rachel embarking upon a series of visits to the hotel rooms of women of different states of life in her journey of self-discovery, for the visits are almost like hypothetical Cambridge tutorials on single versus married life.

Miss Allan’s room is different from Evelyn’s—free of hairpins, scent-bottles, or silk petticoats; instead, the room is very neat, featuring library books and a writing table piled

high with manuscripts. Miss Allan represents yet another model for Rachel, that of the single woman who is also a scholar and a teacher, one who supports herself and can therefore be largely independent in thought and speech. She is attracted to the scholarly, writing lifestyle and person of Miss Allan, who quietly encourages her to try new things, like tasting ginger and twenty-six-year-old crème de menthe. During this visit Rachel declares her anger toward her own class for its impostors—people like Richard Dalloway, Mr. Bax, the minister, and old Mrs. Paley.

An historical connection to early Elizabethan exploration exposes a nexus of class, race, and empire as backdrop for the specific events that follow. The group beginning the trip down the wild river consists of Mr. and Mrs. Flushing, Rachel, Terence, St John, and Helen. As one of a family of thirteen children, the irreverent Mrs. Flushing suggests a class-related Darwinian survival of the fittest. She dares to assert that she hates Shakespeare, and Mr. Flushing states that his wife senses the “essential superiority of the peasant” (261). Again, Woolf presents an alternative to the prevailing view held by British colonizers. The natives met by the group at a village along the river are glorified by the narrator: one native’s fit body makes “the Englishman’s body appear ugly and unnatural” (269), and the group is described as “treading cumbrously like tight-coated soldiers among these soft, instinctive people” (269). Everywhere the metaphor of the English as stiff, conquering soldiers, formal, full of pretense, and alienated from the body is presented against the backdrop of intense natural beauty and instinctive, relaxed humanity. However, nature is also presented as full of real danger and even as a threat to one’s life. St John expresses his belief that the trees themselves could make one go mad (260). Rachel and Terence have gone off alone and declared their love. Subsequently

they feel a prevailing, confusing sense of unreality and yet also a sense of meaning.

Terence feels this is a pattern for life that he finally grasps (282). Rachel strikingly voices the sense of unreality they both feel when she asks, “Are we on the deck of a steamer on a river in South America? Am I Rachel, are you Terence?” (273). Where are the solid objects in the midst of the cloud of their refreshingly silent love? Rachel, in particular, seems to lose her sense of a discrete self and associates her strong feelings with the churning of the river and the corresponding dangers and uncertainties of nature.

The connection between language and the ability to connect with another human being is interrogated in the interaction between the lovers. Words suddenly seem “either too trivial or too large” (265). Rachel becomes keenly aware of a certain element of pain that is part of their happiness and later reflects that even lovers are separate, never able to know each other’s complete thoughts, for instance. She continues also to be aware of the gap between her feelings and the blank sheet of paper on her writing desk; she asks in a fit of existential angst: ““Would there ever be a time when the world was one and indivisible?”” (279). She connects all of these feelings to another question: ““Why don’t people write about the things they do feel?”” (281). It is at least partially the pretense and hypocrisy of the upper middle class to which she belongs that Rachel is criticizing. The native villagers just encountered on the trip, radically different in race and class, seem more authentic as human beings.

Rachel privileges the “lower-class” natives as more genuine but preserves a radical sense of the Other as also representing the unknown and inhabiting a “natural” space which contains its own dangers. Yet supposedly the civilized world represented by London (which Terence rhapsodizes about in his musing upon their future life) can be

deadly as well. Rachel asks if women still die there with “bugs crawling across their faces” (284). In other words, do terrible economic class divisions in London still dictate this manner of death for the poor? Shortly thereafter, St John reports having received a letter from his mother regarding the suicide of Susan Jane, her parlor maid. St John shrugs his shoulders as he and Helen ponder why people kill themselves, and Hirst then clearly appears to say (though quotation marks are missing around these two lines, a possible but perhaps telling error on Woolf’s part): “Why do the lower orders do any of the things they do do? Nobody knows”(289). Hirst’s comment appears both shamefully dismissive and perhaps a simple admission of the huge lack of understanding of the real lives of the lower classes by the upper and middle classes.

Again and again in the novel, the lives of servants erupt into the text: Mrs. Chailey, Susan Jane, the very old woman killing chickens. This lower-class subtext appears stronger in some ways in *The Voyage Out* than it does in later novels. A sharper criticism of the social system is implied in a discussion at the hotel about rumors of old Mrs. Paley torturing her maid in private. Discrimination is evident when the prostitute, Lola Mendoza, is sniffed out by old Mr. Thornbury and told to vacate the premises within twenty-four hours. Helen cannot contain her anger any longer at this news and declares: ““It’s monstrous. The hypocritical smugness of the English makes my blood boil. A man who’s made a fortune in trade as Mr. Thornbury has is bound to be twice as bad as any prostitute”” (290). The novel pays minute attention to the English class system and its effects upon individual happiness and the happiness of the human race as a whole. In particular, the smug, money-hungry and philistine middle class is roundly trounced.

Evelyn M. might be seen as a model for the single woman in this novel. She is bored with the contentment she sees in the proposed marriages of Rachel and Terence, and of Susan and Arthur, for she sees many more exciting things to do in the world as a free, single person. Evelyn is not portrayed simplistically, however, for she is also depicted as overly romantic in her well-meaning notions. She wants, for example, to start a club of intellectuals in Bloomsbury who will *really* get things done, like start a revolution in Russia. Terence scrutinizes Evelyn, noting the beginning signs of aging in her face, but he sees that “. . . she did not pity herself, or feel any desire to exchange her own life for the more refined and orderly lives of people like himself and St. John, although, as the years went by, the fight would become harder and harder” (304). She is a character reminiscent of Miss Merridew in “[The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn].” Mrs. Thornbury voices great confidence in a future with more freedom for young women, whether married or single; she sees married women, for example, already going about and doing many things on their own despite their household cares.

Such optimism for the future of young women is contradicted by Rachel’s demise. Her illness seems more than physical in nature; it appears to be connected to Terence’s plan for them to return to live a conventional married life in London. It seems that Rachel has contracted a fever from the jungle trip down river into the wilderness, but has also contracted a psychic fever from her encounter with love and all of its physicality, and from her realization that “civilization” entails the death of the authentic living (and loving) of the natives encountered on the trip. The images associated with her increasingly serious illness and subsequent death are images of women. In Rachel’s feverish brain, Nurse McInnis is connected with the frightening deformed woman (and

later two or more of the same women) in the tunnel under the Thames playing cards (*TVO* 312-13), an image repeated in another form in the archetypal “battered woman” singing near the Regents Park Tube station in *Mrs. Dalloway* (*MD* 81). Another female image returns again and again during her fever: that of the very old woman cutting off the heads of chickens with a knife amidst much bloodshed. Why all of these frightening images of older females? Woolf may imagine that her female ancestors, particularly her mother, would not approve of her new heroine.

In *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life*, Lyndall Gordon notes that Rachel represents the submerged woman--as emphasized in the *Comus* reference to Sabrina, the virgin who drowns herself and becomes the “Goddess of the silver lake”—and from this scene onward Rachel develops the headache that will prove fatal for her (107). Despite her love for Terence, Rachel realizes that marriage will enmesh her even further in a web of patriarchy that may strangle her best hopes and dreams. Rachel appears to side with Evelyn M. here; however, Rachel does not share Evelyn's optimism regarding opportunities available to young women who reject marriage as a lifestyle. As Gordon points out, Evelyn is also satirized as an empire-builder and the kind of feminist who is envious, desiring what men desire. It is common knowledge today among Woolf scholars that Woolf herself feared women would simply emulate a male power structure and language. Woolf instead in this novel seems to value strongly the nurturing, sewing, embroidering material lives of women like Helen Ambrose who provide the important support backdrop for family and social life (104). Rachel presents an alternative to Evelyn's definition of what a woman should be, but this evocation of gender-inflected class is shrouded in mystery at the end, for Rachel enters the absolute muteness of death,

the state of inexpressibility with which Rachel has been shadowed throughout the novel. She finally prematurely enters that ultimate state which knows no race or class. Her class-conscious voyage out has become a classless voyage of no return.

In the face of Rachel's deadly illness, St John loses all feeling simply because he feels too much. Dr. Lesage reports having been called to verify the death of an old lady of eighty-five by slitting her wrist because of her fear of being buried alive. This irruption into the text of a probable reference to the old servant whom Rachel observed slicing off the heads of chickens is chilling, as is the reference to the fear of being buried alive—a possible *Antigone* reference.²⁴ In an interesting class development, Mrs. Chailey loses a sense of her servant status and talks to the guests “quite familiarly as if she had nursed them and held them naked on her knee. She assured them over and over again that it was their duty to eat” (331). Again, death is the great class equalizer. Terence also feels different, chiefly very numb and in disbelief regarding Rachel's condition. He is finally alone with Rachel as she quietly dies and is surprised to find that death means simply ceasing to breathe. He is also surprised to experience deep happiness and a sense of complete union that was impossible while they were alive. Not recognizing whether he merely thinks the words or speaks them aloud, he says, ““No two people have ever been so happy as we have been. No one has ever loved as we have loved”” (334). Terence's lines are moving and disturbing to any Woolf scholar who recognizes that these are the very words she penned to Leonard in her 1941 suicide note.

After Terence leaves Rachel's bedside, the anguish of living without her penetrates his numbness and causes him to shout her name. Interestingly, the narrator then moves to a description of the moon, which has just been described as tracing its long path upon the

ocean's waves at the moment of Rachel's death. During the silent hours of the night, the moon's light "lay almost like a chill white frost over the sea and the earth" (335). The curious breathing sound of the night and a strong sense of the objective world are invoked here as well, and then the first sounds of earth as the sun rises: "The first sounds that were heard were little inarticulate cries, the cries, it seemed, of children or of the very poor, of people who were very weak or in pain" (335). The empathetic description almost begs us to heed the cry of the poor, the vulnerable, and the suffering. As people in Santa Marina awaken, the varied reactions to Rachel's death also form a commentary on class. Miss Allan, the single woman and scholar for whom Rachel felt a distinct affinity, is informed of Rachel's death by Mrs. Flushing's maid. Miss Allan is featured as the first person stirring and is among the first to relate the mournful morning news to other hotel guests. Evelyn M. is angry and believes that Rachel died for no good reason; in complete contradiction, Mrs. Thornbury believes that order will prevail and reveal a reason to everyone. In a scene of macabre humor, Arthur is forced to shout the news of Rachel's death to the deaf, old and rich Mrs. Paley, who gets Rachel mixed up with someone else, blames Rachel's death on not requesting selzer water instead of local water, and becomes absorbed with helping herself to a dish of potatoes. As the conversation is steered away from the gloom of death, Evelyn M. savagely voices her anger that people don't want to talk about what really matters—a frequent complaint by Woolf characters in her books. Steering conversation away from controversial matters, such as religion and politics, was an art form practiced and polished in the tradition of British teatime; Woolf associates such sterility with the repression and hypocrisy of British middle and upper-class society.

When an enormous tropical storm unleashes its force upon Santa Marina with sonorous thunder and powerful lightning, people are frightened at the flashes of harsh light and propelled into discussing life and death matters, but poor Mrs. Elliot still does not adequately express the full truth of her sorrow in not being able to have a child. Mr. Flushing believes that it is brave simply to want to live, and Miss Allan expresses a desire to live long enough to know if there is life on Mars. Terence has disappeared, and there is no further reference to him except by Evelyn M., who suggests he may have committed suicide. Mr. Pepper is beaten in his chess game at last, and St John, half-asleep in the hotel hall, is conscious of “a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people” (353). Woolf ends this tale of her heroine’s voyage out with a large view of life and an emphasis on the objective world. Rachel has passed away quietly. It is as though her death is merely part of the much larger fabric of life in a world of classless objects. It is an echo of Terence Hewet’s earlier expression of belief in humanity’s smallness in the face of the immensity and classlessness of the universe.

The Voyage Out concludes its exposition of the damaging class structures of empire with hints of Death the leveler and of the insignificance of class in the natural world. It also circles back to the keynote theme struck by Helen Ambrose upon observing Londoners while on her way to board the *Euphrosyne* with her husband:

She knew how to read the people who were passing her; there were the rich who were running to and from each others’ houses at this hour; there were the bigoted workers driving in a straight line to their offices; there were the poor who were unhappy and rightly malignant. Already, though there was sunlight in the haze,

tattered old men and women were nodding off to sleep upon the seats. When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath.(5)

Ripping away the façade of thriving British life, pushing aside the mask of individual performance, trying to discover what people really think and feel: all of these are concerns of Rachel's, but they are also concerns of her guardian aunt, Helen, and of Terence. Ironically, Helen still does not recognize her own bigotry. The skeleton of death must be recognized beneath the class divisions that prevent people from knowing each other and from deep, honest relationships.

The psychology of femininity as connected to class is depicted in Rachel's recognition and subsequent defiance of her subject position as identified by patriarchy and empire. Most young women of Rachel's era did not possess symbolic capital except as potential brides. In this novel, the single life for a woman is clearly disapproved of by the majority, but Woolf presents its positive values to her heroine. Yet, marriage is presented as perhaps also involving a frightening dissolution of ego, as in the jungle scene where Rachel alone with Terence seems to lose all sense of herself, and where the theme of mental illness also subtly intrudes. Can a young woman socialized under a patriarchal class system locate and maintain a strong identity, or is she more prone to emotional dysfunction precisely because of a system that does not permit enough freedom of choice? I believe that in this novel Woolf offers a fascinating yet ultimately depressing picture of the effects of contemplating one's insertion into patriarchy by means of the state institution of marriage.

Furthermore, *The Voyage Out* reveals Woolf's understanding of a the link between gender, class, and education. Launched upon a journey of self-discovery, Rachel quickly

realizes the deficiencies in her education. These deficiencies involve both formal education and knowledge of practical things in life, including sex, that can enhance one's agency. This situation clearly suggests unfair treatment of females, for she is one of the "uneducated daughters of educated men." As such, Rachel recognizes that she actually belongs to a sub-category of her own social class. Words are important, and Woolf takes pains to demonstrate that if you call something a certain thing long enough, such as calling a woman inferior, it will be so. The internalization and acceptance of the judgments of powerful social agents enable them to maintain power. Only in her later work does Woolf recognize more fully not only the complex operation of this powerful naming function of patriarchy and empire, but also its internalization by women. She then connects these elements to war as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

“But for me I suppose you would recommend marriage?’ said Katharine, with her eyes fixed on the moon.

*‘Certainly I should. Not for you only, but for all women. Why, you’re nothing at all without it; you’re only half alive; using only half your faculties; you must feel that for yourself.’” Rodney to Katharine in *Night and Day* (52).*

CLASS AND “A VAST NEST OF CHINESE BOXES”²⁵: EARLY STORIES AND *NIGHT AND DAY*

A number of Woolf’s short stories from the period 1917-21 advance her thinking on class issues: “The Mark on the Wall” (1917), “Kew Gardens” (1919), “Solid Objects” (1920), and “Lappin and Lapinova” (published in 1939 but written around 1919, according to Woolf). “The Mark on the Wall” is a fascinating study in epistemology, suggesting exposure to the work of Henri Bergson, William James, Albert Einstein, and others of her period interested in the nature of perception. Woolf is said to have viewed this story as having a kinship with “Kew Gardens” and “An Unwritten Novel,” stating that these three stories reflect her attempt to shape a new sort of fiction (Bell 2, 72). The story shows Woolf playing with chronology and radically questioning accepted categories and practices of literature, rigid compartmentalization of social classes, and conventional understanding of how “reality” is apprehended and labeled. Though gender is not directly specified, clues suggest that the narrator is female. She sits throughout the story, musing before a fire in “perhaps” January upon a small, round, black mark of six or seven inches on the white wall above the mantelpiece. Many aspects of the narrator’s recollection of her reverie are provisional, as she seems to propose that our labeling of “reality” should be. She speculates upon its origin throughout the story, exclaiming, “Oh! Dear me, the mystery of life! The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity”

(*Complete Shorter Fiction* 84). She then is led to ponder the rapidity of life and the haphazard nature of things before moving to a description of a strange garden scene reminiscent of “Kew Gardens.” The garden scene suggests an eventual return to the earth upon death and also suggests the complete unimportance after death of all the naming and labeling done by humans. As the narrator expresses a desire to sink deeper and deeper away from the surface, with its “separate facts,” she muses on how we see only the shell of a person in each other, how we look into a mirror as we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways and how novelists of the future will leave out ordinary “realistic” detail and recognize that there are almost infinite reflections of more important inner lives to explore.

Cleverly engaging in meta-fictional comment, the narrator notes that her own “generalizations” are worthless, which leads her to speculate upon the military sound of the word: “Generalizations bring back somehow Sunday in London, Sunday afternoon walks, Sunday luncheons, and also ways of speaking of the dead, clothes, and habits—like the habit of sitting all together in one room until a certain hour, although nobody liked it. There was a rule for everything” (*CSF* 86). She expresses delight at having discovered that these “real standard things” were only half phantoms, but regrets that these things have been replaced by “the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker’s Table of Precedency, which has become, I suppose, since the war half a phantom to many men and women, which soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go . . .” (*CSF* 86). Here Woolf attacks class issues, damning Whitaker’s *Almanack* as metonymic for the practice of separating classes of people in society, but she also suggests that women have

been labeled as a sub-class by men. Perhaps men have completely misinterpreted the mark on the wall? In this seemingly innocuous fashion, Woolf challenges the prevailing masculine point of view, with its quick judgments, interest in war, and general propensity for making (as well as interpreting) its mark on the wall of civilization. In effect, the story's conclusion argues for a gender-inflected definition of women as a sub-class.²⁶

Woolf has made the mark black on a white wall, suggesting that black and white, absolute categories are not always what they seem. She subverts the monolithic category of class here by her emphasis on its gender inflection. Woolf also employs effective Horatian satire throughout this short story, but particularly with her last lines: "Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail" (*CSF* 89). The two lines constitute their own paragraph. One might expect that the exclamation point would occur after the second sentence (the "aha" experience of the real thingness of the mark on the wall), but instead the final sentence could be interpreted as revealing the stereotypically matter-of-fact male point of view in declaring and labeling the truth of an experience. It is hum-drum, ho-hum. How could anyone imagine the wild interpretations of the mark concocted by our female narrator? Surely the male companion has no idea, for he does not delve beneath the surface as she has done; furthermore, the female narrator demonstrates the need for a protective, satiric veil for her subversive thinking by her low-key statement indicating immediate acquiescence in her male companion's point of view. Little does her companion realize that the next step may be (like Woolf's) to record her speculations upon what lies under the surface shell of a person, especially a female person whose emotions have left their primeval snail trace on the blank, white wall of patriarchy. . . .

Reminiscent of “The Mark on the Wall,” “Kew Gardens” opens with a garden scene and appears to provide a dramatic glimpse of humans from the perspective of nature itself, or possibly that of the snail (conceivably the very snail of the latter story)—perhaps even a primordial perspective of the world with a different conception of time and space. “Kew Gardens” suggests a pointillist painting with its repetition of red, blue and yellow colors (among others); its images of glass roofs of the palm house looking like an entire market full of shiny green umbrellas; and white butterflies forming the outline of a shattered marble column with their shifting flakes of color. The reader might want to read the story with one hand gripping a paintbrush and a canvas arranged alongside the text that could be splashed with rich color every few sentences in order to render even more solid visuals for the vibrant scenes described. In another sense, though, the words themselves, and the new perspectives they represent, *are* the subject and even become the “rain” in a scene featuring two lower middle class women, where the stout woman avoids listening to the sense of her companion’s words and simply lets them “fall over her” and looks “through the pattern of falling words at the flowers” (*CSF* 95, 93). In a way, “Kew Gardens” is about the inadequacy of words and of old perspectives; thus this aspect also pushes it toward the genre of painting and especially the new, experimental painting of the early 1900s.

Woolf had published her essay, “Modern Fiction,” (1919) just a month before the publication of this story. In this famous manifesto, she states that “Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged: life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (269).²⁷ Edward L. Bishop emphasizes that this sketch reveals a sequence of events that is subsidiary to what

he calls the “modulation of emotion” in a careful pattern of four couples that constitute a cross-section of social classes, ages, and relationships (husband/wife, female friends, male companions, lovers); these couples are eventually joined with the world of phenomena, dissolving like drops of water in the atmosphere. He believes that the reader is invited to participate in the atmosphere of the gardens in a highly sensuous manner, “becoming conscious of moving *among* words, just as the characters do,” and that the story is ultimately about *voices* and about raising questions about the nature of discourse and conventional methods of representing it. The reader must be active, for he or she experiences the sensation of one thing merging into another, as in a painting (271-74).²⁸

What does this have to do with classism? There are at least four connections. For one, a sharp consciousness of class divisions remains at the forefront of Woolf’s mind during this early period, especially in the condescending depiction of the two lower class female friends. For another, the merging of these voices and scenes, as well as the blending of painting and literary genres, nonetheless in some ways contradicts these very divisions. Furthermore, in this piece Woolf presents a dramatic example of the very ego blending (as in her personality melding with Vanessa’s, commented on in Woolf’s letters) she experienced in her own life. Lastly, the radically different perspective of a snail--or of nature defined more broadly, including the flowers, butterflies, trees, and so on--indirectly suggests the same concern as that in “The Mark on the Wall.” The concern is that society has been constructed as male and needs to be re-viewed from a wholly different angle of vision. That angle looks and sounds feminine in “Kew Gardens.” It is an angle of vision intimately linked here in content and style to the semiotic language of women posited by Julia Kristeva. The voice that emerges from the many voices of “Kew

Gardens” speaks a desire for a less divisive class society and a radical recognition of the voice of women; this recognition would be like standing people on their heads in order re-shape the sounds of the world primarily created by men. Perhaps the solution is to shape the world in provisional terms that at least reflect both sexes, riding the cusp of perception with full recognition of its temporary linguistic representation. Bishop does not emphasize the muted backdrop of war, alluded to especially by the elderly gentleman in the story who claims that because of war, “the spirit matter is rolling between the hills like thunder” (*CSF* 92). Nor does he call attention to a related and crucial image at the end of this story. The external narrator begins to describe voices breaking the silence, only to realize:

But there was no silence; all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air. (95)

The vast nest of Chinese boxes suggests the complicated manner in which grinding industrialization supports empire. A ceaseless, circular enclosure in such a system leads alternate voices (like hers) to finally cry out amid the context of nature, which is flashing the vibrant colors of life upon the wrought steel shaped by men and suggestive of war. Woolf’s concern with revolutionizing narrative technique results in her increasing consciousness of the need to revolutionize language and society itself. Her narrative techniques, alternate angle of vision, and stylistic innovations themselves constitute a radical politics and practice, with their own effects upon the common reader and upon

society as a whole, as Toril Moi has argued in *Sexual /Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (1985).

Written in 1918 and published in 1920 in *The Athenaeum*, “Solid Objects” is a story that develops Woolf’s earlier references (as in “Phyllis and Rosamond” in 1906) to her relief that the world consists of “solid objects,” things independent of her family’s emotional dramas. Woolf’s use of this phrase is intriguing, for at times it suggests the possibility of a completely separate existence of objects, something quite different from the objective correlative of Eliot, while at other times it seems indeed to suggest Eliot’s famous concept. Numerous other references to this independent world exist in her fiction. Thomas Caramagno provides insight into this tale of an apparently obsessive-compulsive man, noting that Woolf exhibits characteristics of manic-depressive disorder, as well as a family history of the illness. In the manic phase, individuals with this disorder find their senses of taste, smell, and touch extraordinary and often experience “intensified sensory perceptions [that] make their perceptions or visions seem profoundly meaningful: objects look significant” (*Flight 42*). Caramagno cites the case of John Custance, a British manic-depressive who wrote a book about his experiences, published in 1951, in which Custance describes how things looked deeper and more intense and how faces of hospital staff members appeared to glow with a special inner light (*Flight 42*). Woolf’s own experience of mania could be the genesis of “Solid Objects,” as well as that of other object-oriented scenes in her fiction. “Solid Objects” explores marginalization that hints at both the positive and negative border experiences of the mentally ill. Woolf herself said that some of her best ideas for writing came at times when she was mentally ill. In her introduction to Woolf’s essay, “On Being Ill,” Hermione Lee observes that Woolf

frequently comments upon the creative effect of illness. Woolf says, for example that “I believe these illnesses are in my case—how shall I express it?—partly mystical. Something happens in my mind” (xiv). One of these mystical effects is the ability to step outside “normal” reality to engage a perspective other than the dominant ideology of one’s society.

The story begins with a mysterious black spot on the beach, observed by an unknown narrator from a distance. Woolf uses a telescopic spatial technique in this story that reminds us of her long-term proximity to painters and their techniques of manipulating perspective. The narrator narrows the perspective and adjusts what could be a telescope to allow readers to see that the small black spot possesses four legs and is actually comprised of two young men. We gradually observe, by way of manner of dress and a particular use of their walking sticks that they are likely men of the upper middle class. Eventually we are permitted to overhear their dialog and to discover that they are Charles and John, apparently two young attorneys.

The story is strange, for John discovers a smooth piece of green glass in the sandy water, “a full drop of solid matter,” and slips it into his pocket. Between the discovery and the pocketing of the solid object, the narrator muses extensively about what the lump of green-tinted glass could be: perhaps a jewel worn by a “dark Princess” as she “listened to the slaves singing as they rowed her across the Bay” or an emerald from a sunken Elizabethan treasure chest. John’s response to the green glass object is couched in a set of triple parallel statements, which culminate in a set of triple parallel phrases. The almost monosyllabic beginning and the declarative, definitive statements create a stereotypically masculine linguistic effect: “It pleased him; it puzzled him; it was so hard, so

concentrated, so definite an object compared with the vague sea and the hazy shore” (*CSF* 103). Again, perspective seems to matter, as does the tactile experience of touching something with definite texture and shape. At this point the function of the piece of glass appears to shift to represent an objective correlative for the feeling that knowledge is dependable, the knowledge of solid things in the universe that are accessible and proximate to the body. The relics of empire are reflected in an imagination which conjures up the dark Princess and her slaves, as well as the Elizabethan conquest motif. The narrator then muses upon the impulse of childhood that may have led John to pocket the piece of glass. The impulse is said to derive from the desire to rescue an object (which could just as well be a pebble on a path) from a life of cold, wet misery for “security upon the nursery mantelpiece,” and from a belief that “the heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it.” Again, objects are viewed as having a life pulse and as being able to declare “it was I, I, I!” when they have been rescued by a passerby.

Ironically, this childlike impulse to collect initiates for John a lifetime obsession with collecting discarded objects. He begins poking about in the grass and in junk piles, neglects his duties with the law, and eventually becomes a recluse who is thought to be deranged. This story perhaps explores the dangers of her own occupation as writer. Woolf may feel that, in her obsession with rescuing the unrecorded lives of the obscure, she herself will become marginalized and even appear mad to her friends, as John finally does to Charles. However, she also questions a conventional patriarchal society that overlooks imagination and the lives of citizens existing in sub-categories along its borders rather than in the social mainstream. In its larger outlines, the story as a whole

interrogates the entire frame of reference in which we first encounter Charles and John, planning for their futures in the profession of law. John becomes an outlaw, an outcast, someone alien to his culture because of an obsession constructed in terms of a keen imagination—an obsession that constitutes either sanity or madness, depending on the reader's frame of reference. It is ultimately an obsession with the possibility of vast changes that can occur when one changes one's perspective on life.

Providing context for Woolf's "Solid Objects"—as well as for several of her other stories—Bill Brown invokes Jean Baudrillard's undoing of the privilege of the subject, and Theodor Adorno's insistence that, sensation being distinct from cognition, one must acknowledge things outside of the subject/object trajectory. Brown also places this story in the context of Ezra Pound's and Marcel Duchamp's 1920s fresh engagement with things as objects worth investigating for their intrinsic value. Woolf's story becomes one not of solid objects, but of *fluidity* or how things recompose themselves. Material is torn from what Brown calls "instrumentalist teleology" and reinserted into an aesthetic scene that includes references to Britain's political economy. One related example is a letter to Woolf's artist/sister Vanessa, where Woolf discusses the difficulty of obtaining paint because of wartime scarcity--without ever mentioning war directly (1-4).²⁹

Brown sees *Jacob's Room* as similarly dependent upon the metonymic and symbolic powers of objects, arguing that "Woolf's poetics of space is in fact a poetics of the object" (13). Jacob's absence is evoked by the lingering presence of an object: his shoes, and the question of what to do with them. Brown writes that,

re-evaluating the material world seems to depend on its re-use and on some violence that violates the coherence of the object. Whereas John imagines this

violence as the act of an angry woman (hurling a ‘jar or a pot’ out the window), the violence that the story nowhere imagines but everywhere intimates is the violence of war. (13)

In letters and diaries Woolf often commented on the scarcities provoked by the war, including that of green glass, which she loved. The irony is that Britain’s glass had a greenish cast because of the iron in the soil, and Britain’s history of the development of iron as a resource, which Brown details, is connected with its war efforts and with colonial markets (for railroads needed in Africa, as an example). Woolf portrays John’s fetishism here as an alternative economy. The objects seen from a distance in the beginning of the story assume their solidity and “expose the vagueness of politics,” demonstrating how “utterly pedestrian passions” can be construed as “a longing for the fragments of the West not to be reassembled as they previously had been” (18-22). All of the stories examined by Brown are concerned with differences in perspective and in language use. The mark on the wall in the story of the same name might not be the snail which a supposedly male companion so definitely labels it as being. It might simply represent a fragment of the male point of view, much as the fragments in “Solid Objects” and the objects left behind in *Jacob’s Room*.

“Lappin and Lapinova” is a short story (published in 1939 in *Harpers’ Bazaar* but written about 1919) that interrogates the intimate relation between a newly-married couple. The “Lappin” nickname for Ernest, the young husband, is a seemingly innocent gesture by his wife. It plays on *lapin*, the French word for rabbit. Lapinova is the nickname for Rosalind, the young wife, who also has a real pet rabbit. Early on in the story Rosalind tells Ernest that he is a wild hunting rabbit, a King Rabbit who makes laws

for all the other rabbits. Ernest is not displeased at this flattery of his male ego. Though Rosalind is complicit in propping up the male ego, Woolf is also satirizing that very expected function of wifedom. However, as the young couple develops the rabbit conceit for themselves and their relationship, the reader begins to realize that Woolf is taking a darker view of some larger issue—here the institution of marriage as something akin to a rabbit trap. Some of the early sketches and stories already examined, as well as *The Voyage Out*, focus quite intensely upon a major character’s gradual realization of the imbrication of marriage in the class structure of empire. “Lappin and Lapinova” suggests Woolf’s gradual realization of the systemic nature of patriarchy and gender implications of marriage as its basis. Similar in certain respects to her 1928 piece, “Moments of Being: Slater’s Pins Have No Points,” the story suggests that the “protection” of men, particularly in the institution of marriage, often involves the concomitant economic and emotional subservience of women. Such subservience represents loss of control of time (or at least a battle for it), imagination, and vision: all essential elements for a serious writer.

Rosalind muses in paragraph two that “Perhaps she never would get used to the fact that she was Mrs. Ernest Anybody” and decides that the name suggests “the Albert Memorial, mahogany sideboards, steel engravings of the Prince Consort with his family—her mother-in-law’s dining-room in Porchester Terrace in short” (*A Haunted House* 68). The couple laughs happily at Rosalind’s bestowing of the rabbit nickname upon Ernest, but by the second page of the story, asks: “But how long does such happiness last? they asked themselves; and each answered according to his own circumstances” (*AHH* 69).³⁰

Rosalind imagines that she and her husband have become King Lapin and Queen Lapinova of the Lappin tribe. They are opposites, with Ernest ruling over the “busy world of rabbits” and she ruling “a desolate, mysterious place, which she ranged mostly by moonlight” (*AHH* 71). After their honeymoon, they continue this private world, feeling they are almost in a conspiracy against the rest of the world—the outsider sense Woolf often spoke of sharing with Leonard. They make up rabbit-world stories involving their friends, all the while keeping this private world a secret. The perpetuation of this fantasy appears to be an important survival strategy for Rosalind, as she wonders how she could ever have lived out the winter without it. For one, there was the golden-wedding celebration of Ernest’s parents, the Thorburns, a celebration including Ernest’s nine other siblings and their children as well. Echoes of Virginia Woolf’s discomfiture with Leonard’s large, rambunctious and conventional Jewish family abound in this portrait. Rosalind feels that she is “a mere drop” among those gathered in the drawing-room with all the family portraits. “Golden tributes” of cigar boxes, candlesticks, and chains are presented as though to royalty. Rosalind feels that her gift of an eighteenth-century sand caster, once used to sprinkle sand over wet ink, is completely inadequate. It is noteworthy that Rosalind’s gift is related to the art of writing. She notices suddenly that she is not happy with Ernest and that his nose is, after all, quite ramrod-straight, like all the other noses in the family portraits, and it really never twitches, rabbit-like, at all. The dining room takes on a golden cast, but, wearing her white wedding dress, only Rosalind “peering ahead of her with her prominent eyes seemed insoluble as an icicle” (*AHH* 73). Soon she feels that her icicle is being dissolved into nothingness and that she will faint. She revives upon hearing a comment about what great breeders the Thorburns are—they

are said to be like rabbits—and suddenly lets her imagination run wild with thoughts of the Thorburns in the roles of poachers and ferrets. She even imagines her mother-in-law (secretly hated by all of her children) as a Squire giving emotional thanks to her children for a “world that had ceased to exist” (*AHH* 74-75).

There is a sudden silence after Rosalind’s mother-in-law gives these emotional thanks for an (ironically) non-existent world, a silence followed by Rosalind’s comment: ““Oh, King Lappin!’ she cried as they went home together in the fog, ‘if your nose hadn’t twitched just at that moment, I should have been trapped.’” King Lappin tells her that she is safe, “pressing her paw” (*AHH* 75). Now the young wife seems to swing back into happiness, for the earnest King Lappin has once again agreed to play their imaginative game. Two years pass. On the anniversary of the golden-wedding party, Rosalind is sewing by the fire as Ernest Thorburn comes home from the office one winter’s night. This time he takes at least five minutes to change into King Lappin. That night Rosalind sleeps badly and awakens to feel cold and stiff. She seems to fear that Ernest will no longer play her game. Ernest is snoring, but his nose is not twitching. Once again, Rosalind feels forced to question the status of both her existence and her marriage: “Was it possible that he was really Ernest; and that she was really married to Ernest?” A vision of her mother-in-law’s dining room wafts in front of her, and she pictures the shocking sight of herself and Ernest as an old married couple sitting under the engravings on *their* golden-wedding day. This could be a happy occasion for some, but Rosalind’s response is: “She could not bear it.” Unable to sleep, “She lay curled up on her side of the bed, like a hare in its form,” an image I take to be the positioning of the rabbit before the kill (75-76). However, the street lamp, combined with the trees outside, creates a shadowy forest

on her bedroom ceiling and sets her imagination wandering again until she feels she is both “hunting, being hunted, hearing the bay of hounds and horns; flying, escaping . . . until the maid drew the blinds and brought their early tea” (76-77). The nameless maid’s services, of course, are taken for granted.

The next day Rosalind feels that her body has shrunk and grown hard, with still joints and eyes that “seemed to burst out of her head, like currants in a bun” (77). The rooms seem to have shrunk as well, and naturally, the first thing she sees upon venturing forth to the Natural History Museum is “a stuffed hare standing on sham snow with pink glass eyes” (77). Once home, she tries to imagine being alone on a moor and sits “crouched in her chair, with her hands dangling empty, and her eyes glazed, like glass eyes, in the firelight. Then there was the crack of a gun . . . She started as if she had been shot. It was only Ernest, turning his key in the door” (77). Rosalind has imagined herself so strongly as Lapinova that momentarily her ordinary self has been transformed into a rabbit—a dead one. She exclaims to Ernest that she has lost Lapinova, only to have him frown at her continued fantasy play. She feels “hands tightening at the back of her neck” as Ernest waits for ten silent seconds, apparently standing behind her. “‘Caught in a trap,’ he said, ‘killed.’” Ernest’s response is chilling, for it hints that he wishes to strangle his silly wife (or at least reflects her fear that he might wish to do so). The story’s concluding line, “So that was the end of that marriage” (78), leaves the reader to ask why.

Are they a young couple who have simply grown apart? Certainly Rosalind views conventional marriage as a straitjacket and flinches at the thought of celebrating a future, stereotypic golden wedding anniversary like that of the elder Thorburns. Ernest seems to have fallen into a conventional business model of the Victorian husband. But the most

egregious difficulty is that he no longer wants to maintain their private world of imagination. Rosalind may appear extreme in insisting upon their little game, but to her it appears to represent whether or not Ernest will honor her gifts of imagination. Much like Mrs. Ramsay knitting in *To the Lighthouse*, or Helen Ambrose in *The Voyage Out* embroidering in between reading about the Reality of Matter or the Nature of Good, women sewing or stitching in Woolf's fiction often seem to be storytellers looking for coherence in their universe. Rosalind is mentioned as sewing several times in the story. However, she clearly sews (sows) also with her imagination to fashion an alternate playful world in which she and her husband explore each other and their attitudes. The possibility of translating this imagination into writing is indicated when she presents the Thorburns with the sand caster used to sprinkle sand over ink. Immediately she feels it an idiotic gift in this age of blotting paper, a recognition that intensifies her feeling out of place in this family. However, Rosalind is also portrayed as infantile, obsessive, given to extremes. Does not Ernest's response to her continued imaginative ramblings seem measured and reasonable? Perhaps the story is a critique of not only conventional Victorian marriage but also the excesses of an artistic temperament, one which would be inclined to present archaic gifts such as sand casters.

The multivalent imagery of rabbits and excess fertility forms a kind of "overtone" that colors the entire story. The Thorburns with their large family, reminiscent of Leonard Woolf's family, are so described by Rosalind, who echoes the comment of another woman at the party: "The Thorburns—yes; they breed so" (73). Rosalind experiences the family as excessive--in sheer numbers (she feels like a mere drop of water, like an only child or orphan among them), in exuberance, in the display of material wealth

(appropriately enough, imagery of gold is prevalent at the golden anniversary party). It is curious and ironic that she chooses to continue her fantasy world with Ernest when she seems so repelled by the Thorburns and the prospect of a conventional married life, both of which are strongly associated with rabbits. Does Rosalind simultaneously desire and fear having children, certainly an expectation of the average married couple? Or does the story suggest that Rosalind desires, much as Woolf did, an alternate marital “breeding” story—one which privileges the progeny of imagination over real children? The narrator states, “Without that world, how, Rosalind wondered, that winter could she have lived at all?” (72). Rosalind’s imagination is fertile and vital to her very life. For example, it affords the “moment of being” when she is suddenly able to perceive the truth behind people, as when she sees that her sister-in-law is actually much like a snoopy, white ferret with pink eyes, busy rooting out other people’s secrets (74).

This story, not yet extensively examined in Woolf criticism, reveals Woolf herself as grappling with gender and marital concerns enmeshed in class issues. She may have wondered if she could maintain a conventional marriage without damaging the possibility of becoming a successful writer, or whether having children would interfere with her career goals. She could be speculating on the ways in which an artist belongs to a category apart from society’s ordinary class structure, and whether or not a female artist was different from a male artist in important ways. For instance, female artists might feel greater pressure to marry, for economic reasons if for nothing else. Rosalind feels alienated from the marriage model, and from a Victorian society soiled by the excesses of capitalism. Woolf also may have felt shame over her body and fear of frigidity, much as Rosalind sees herself as an icicle and is repelled by the sweating and warmth of the huge

Thorburn party. Woolf was strongly encouraged not to have children upon the advice of her family physician, Leonard, and Vanessa, who had dealt with her bouts of mental illness. Nonetheless, she wrote periodically of her regrets at not having any. Of course, at the time this story was written she could not have known what the future would bring, having been married for only about seven years. She may have been in a kind of “rabbit stew” at that point over questions of bearing children and yet maintaining the kind of separate, imaginative life she needed as a writer.

WOOLF’S INTERROGATION OF CLASS IN *NIGHT AND DAY*³¹

Written about the same time as “Lappin and Lapinova,” *Night and Day* (1919) raises border and identity questions related to Woolf’s experience of sexual abuse, war, and mental illness. In this novel a subterranean lesbian theme challenges the idea of gender as a “class” and questions whether women themselves constitute a distinct class. As a childless, married woman inclined toward “Sapphism,” Woolf was conscious of a deep contradiction between her desire for radical social reform of class codes and her own complicity (and enjoyment) in maintaining class privileges. As a childless, married woman inclined toward “Sapphism,” sustaining class boundaries may have been a psychological necessity and may have aided Woolf in shaping an identity that enabled her to retain—or at times regain—her sanity in periods of rupture. On the other hand, Woolf also found at times that class boundaries were exactly what were driving her mad. In *Night and Day*, Woolf initially employs a fairly gentle, Horatian mode of satire to interrogate the restrictive lifestyles of young men and women engaging in the still-Victorian dance of courtship, marriage, and drawing-room civilities. Nonetheless,

Katharine Hilbery retains (like Woolf herself) a solid nostalgia for the past--perhaps as a guarantor of class structures, which appear to support the British concept of "civilization." The tray that brings her cup of tea in the morning, along with her mother's note stating that she will travel to Stratford-on-Avon to visit the site of the Bard, is metonymic: the assumption of the continued material support of servants for a privileged lifestyle, the leisure to support contemplation of the great tradition of English literature, and a general involvement with the ideological and practical continuum of the British Empire.

However, Katharine Hilbery is in some ways quite unlike the average Victorian young woman, and she engages in behavior that places both her class and her personal identity in question. Her cousin, Cassandra, exclaims in exasperation near the end of the novel: "How queer, how strange, how unlike other people you are, Katharine" (*Night and Day* 427). Yet, even in this early novel, Woolf seems to recognize her heroine's complicity in perpetuating some form of an imperialist will-to-power. Katharine is satirized for her obvious delight in dominating both William and Ralph with her charms—as well as Cassandra, who searches frantically under Katharine's scornful eye (she is acknowledged as Cassandra's intellectual superior) for Macaulay's *History of England* so that she can impress William by tea time with her fifteen-minute foray into intellectual life. Katharine is glorified in a moment of possible Woolfian self-satire as another kind of society angel: the savior, the reformer, the independent artist whose vision incorporates a mountain in the north of England—a mountain nonexistent on any map, but which represents a vision possibly linked with that of Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*. Katharine's "mountain" is also the serious and solitary place of the artist, the "narrow room" of Clarissa Dalloway,

providing the solitude needed for work of the imagination. Though supposedly based upon Vanessa, Katharine periodically reincarnates instead a Virginia who craves this essential space for her personal, novel dialectic of class and identity, and who recognizes that such freedom depends upon income related to either inherited class wealth or one's own work (as exemplified by Mary Datchet).

Night and Day signals the concentric circles of class, which encompass all of Woolf's work and could be viewed as a lesson in coordinate geometry presented by its mathematically inclined heroine. The novel presents a plot graph of spatial complexity: line tracings of "star-crossed" couples crossing street after London street, unexpected negative and positive encounters at zoo and home, opposing movement of emotions in scenes with the engaged (then unengaged) couples, reflections upon the conflicting prospects of married and single life, the divergent agonies of comparing suitors, opposing lines of heterosexual and homosexual desire, and the oppositions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Michael Whitworth's presentation on "*Night and Day* and National Efficiency" at the Thirteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf (6 June 2003) corroborates my sense of the novel as very much an interconnected web. Whitworth points out that prewar Britain was engaged in a major national efficiency debate that emphasized a rational business model for government, the centralization of charitable work, a plan for physical fitness (after the realization that Boer War recruits were often unfit), and street straightening and slum demolition. The vision of the state as an interconnected web began to dominate. Streets became more gridlike, and a strong model of rationality was endorsed as a means for, among other things, preventing the horror of war. Ironically, Whitworth suggests that

this very emphasis upon rationality may have led to war. Did Virginia Woolf, writing in this context, perhaps mean to suggest this very contradiction? If so, Katherine Mansfield's criticism of *Night and Day* for ignoring the war becomes less potent.³²

"It was a Sunday evening in October, and in common with many other young ladies of her class, Katharine Hilbery was pouring out tea" (*Night and Day* 1). In the very first sentence Woolf presents the tradition of tea and company, striking a chord emblematic of the British upper classes, which will reverberate throughout this novel. Ralph Denham, pointedly introduced to the reader as a member of a lower class, enters the room full of people "much at their ease, and all launched upon sentences" (2). Katharine, keenly aware of merely pretending to enjoy this required ritual, feels the discord represented in her "sentencing" (in a darker sense) by her social class, and by her "class" as a woman, to a birdcage of expectations that constrict her true desires. As Alex Zwerdling notes, Woolf was convinced that a novelist must acknowledge that class differences were real and not to be ignored. He quotes E. M. Forster on Woolf: "'Her snobbery—for she was a snob—has more courage in it than arrogance. It is connected with her insatiable honesty'" (89).

Night and Day might be seen as fleshing out Woolf's essay "Am I a Snob?" by means of Katharine Hilbery, who strikes a note of duality consonant with the novel's title. Her inner life does not match her outer life. Secrecy appears necessary in order to preserve some core of her individual self; she may also be furtive (we discover later) because of an initially dimly recognized attraction for women, or at least for the life of a permanently single woman—not an option generally sanctioned by her class.

The Hilberys comprise an intellectual aristocracy, which sees itself as the caretaker of Britain's cultural past—a fact that both attracts and repels Katharine as she seeks to clarify her vocation in life. Her job has been defined by her family: to help her mother write a biography of her famous grandfather, the poet Richard Alardyce—a project hopelessly bogged down in an overwhelming mass of materials, and one that remains unfinished throughout the novel. Katharine secretly studies math at night and hides her work, Austen-like, at the sound of a step on the staircase. She professes to have no aptitude for literature and to dislike expressing herself in words—preferring silence and absorption in some vision of her own. According to Julia Briggs, Katharine's fantasy visions of taming wild ponies on the American prairies and saving a vast ship in a hurricane seem to come from book scenes influenced by masculine ideas of power, and to signal a concern in the novel with issues of dominance and subordination (Briggs xxviii). These issues are related to class as well as gender.

Although Katharine envies Mary Datchet's "rooms of her own," she also plays the role of a dominant female (partially because of class difference) in lesbian-nuanced scenes related to Mary. However, Katharine is also able to analyze her own desire for control of her possible marriage to William Rodney: caring about his happiness but not *really* loving him may provide for the kind of independence she senses as necessary for her in a marital relationship, if she is to have one at all.

Shirley Nelson Garner points out that *Night and Day* represents a tentative exploration of lesbian love, an issue often disguised in Woolf because of events like the banning of *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928 (331). Garner also observes that *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) contains a more emphatically lesbian-nuanced scene between Sally Seton and Clarissa,

which exactly replicates in its structure the scene where Katharine and Mary meet for the first time. *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests even more clearly that lesbian love may threaten heterosexual love (326). Garner also analyzes Katharine's recognition of the privacy she will lose in marriage, for she is often depicted as wanting to be away from even Ralph, desiring her own space (330-31).

When Katharine attends a gathering at the rooms of Mary Datchet, the suffragist, Woolf sounds more strongly the counterpoint of another "class" or category: that of the single woman, possibly that of the Sapphist. Although Katharine leaves the meeting with William Rodney, who is soon to become involved in a serious courtship with her, it is not before she inquires about the room in which Mary sleeps and registers a "momentary flush of pleasure" (*ND* 56) in coming perceptibly nearer to another person by repeating Mary's first name four times. Mary and Katharine also join each other in staring out the window at the moon and are linked as "star-gazers"³³ by others in the room—an image frequently associated with Katharine. When Mary finds herself affectionately placing a hand on Katharine's knee for an instant, the reader begins to realize that there is possibly more of a physical spark between the two women than between Katharine and William.

Mathematical graphing, webbing, and net imagery pervade this novel. Although the underlying web seems to be one of class identity, which inextricably complicates individual identity (both physically and psychically), other enmeshing and related structures are also apparent. Mary Datchet sits amid her growing pile of letters at the suffragist center and feels at last that she is in control, that she is the "centre ganglion of a very fine network of nerves which fell over England" and which would eventually emit a "splendid blaze of revolutionary fireworks" (*ND* 78). The center's office equipment and

tactics are presented as operating like spider webs flung down upon the torrent of street life below. The suffragist aim of equality is a threat to established class structures. Katharine calls out to Mary later in the novel: “Remember, I want to belong to your society—remember” (382). She is repelled by some aspects of the society (such as its shabby material surroundings), but attracted strongly by the sense of vocation, of deeply felt work giving meaning to one’s life, and by the society of Mary herself. Curiously, Katharine leaves her purse behind at Mary’s, necessitating a return, whereupon she jingles the coins in her purse and remarks, “I think being engaged is very bad for the character” (183). Her words seem to acknowledge the class-based commodity exchange system she has recently agreed to in becoming engaged to William Rodney. William has also just alluded to Katharine as *being* Shakespeare’s Rosalind, who in *As You Like It* is disguised as a boy. Does Woolf then encode Katharine’s unspoken contemplation of an intimate relationship with a woman instead of a man? Are the characters also enmeshed in a cage of heterosexuality? Is not heterosexuality indispensable for the replication of class structures solidly based on Victorian family life models? Perhaps Katharine’s “turbulent map of the emotions” (351) registers a space for unexpressed Sapphist desire. Throughout the novel, various “border crossings” seem to signify irruptions from the logic of class boundary markers (as when William regularly registers annoyance at Katharine’s lack of conventional womanly behavior).

In some ways Woolf’s webbing technique in this novel is ironically similar to Peter Lurie’s description of a computer Web: contingent, associative, antiauthoritarian, suggestive of links to other times and even to other starlike worlds, and subversive because of the very *structure* itself. The traditional, linear happy ending is subverted by

the satiric, mathematical webbing structure, where the technology of the telephone also lurks in the background as destructive of the old order. In *Night and Day* issues of class become endlessly referential and seem to spiral off to the stars in Derridean fashion. Each one points to another, much like the web of complicated changes wrought by the new technology of telephone lines featured in the novel. Suddenly anyone who can afford to have a telephone or to place a call can be connected to anyone else. Class lines, and the tradition of formality attached to the upper classes, are breaking down with the advent of such communication.

Mark Hussey asserts that *Night and Day* was written partially as a response by Virginia to Leonard Woolf's *The Wise Virgins* (1914)—a bitter, misogynistic novel revealing the negative effects of convention and class divisions upon heterosexual relations (Hussey 129).³⁴ Hussey points out that a character in this novel, Arthur, is distressed over Camilla's refusal to play her expected role in the social order: ““What she really wants, only she doesn't know it, is to be a man; and—damn, damn, damn—she never will be”” (134). Hussey also notes the class-related disgust with physical demonstration of emotions reflected in letters exchanged between Lytton Strachey and Leonard and in *The Wise Virgins*; he seconds Roger Poole's claim that Virginia's fear of physical sex was related to her experience of sexual abuse as a child (132). Hussey additionally highlights class issues related to Leonard's Jewishness, observing that both novels involve male characters who aspire to (but also despise) the social class to which they could gain entry by way of marriage.³⁵ Hermione Lee insists that Woolf resisted being identified as a Sapphist or lesbian because she despised all simplistic categories and delighted in sexual amorphousness and complexity (484-85). Is *Night and Day* an

early exploration of the turmoil involved in realizing that the categories of class and heterosexuality are inadequate? Woolf wrote *Night and Day* while recovering from a serious bout of mental illness, and later told Ethel Smyth that she wrote the novel as an academic exercise, as a kind of protection against her own insanity, which terrified her (*Letters* 4: 231). She may also reveal in this novel some of the irruptions of emotional imbalance experienced either before or during her recovery. She may have begun to consider herself as part of the category of the mentally ill. One example of a trigger to a “night” experience not brought to daylight until many years later may be revealed in Katharine’s assertion to Ralph: ““In fact, there never was a family so unable to take care of itself as ours is. [. . .] Once I was left in a field with a bull when I was a baby”” (*ND* 247). This odd remark may allude to Woolf’s early experience of sexual abuse by her Duckworth half-brothers, and her family’s failure to stop it. Hussey observes that the families in both Leonard’s *The Wise Virgins* and Virginia’s *Night and Day* are drawn from the Stephen family (129).

References abound in *Night and Day* to Katharine’s frequent habit of being abstracted, withdrawn, and even undemonstrative regarding emotions (except with Mary Datchet!). She abruptly decides to visit Mary in the middle of the night after she has been musing on the dream nature of life, the world as an antechamber to reality, “as if, lately dead, she heard the living talking” (*ND* 373). Later she holds out an empty cup to a visitor, having forgotten to pour tea into it, and then gets dressed to go out, still holding her unfinished bread and butter in her hand. The portrait of Katharine here may reflect Woolf’s own undiagnosed dissociative disorder due to earlier emotional trauma. Dr. Marlene Steinberg, a Harvard-trained psychiatrist specializing in treatment of trauma victims,

observes that feelings of separation from reality, of having lost pieces of time, feeling “spacey,” and feelings of impersonality—all experienced by both Katharine and Woolf—are symptoms of trauma (Personal Interview). Hussey references Woolf’s early title for the novel (“Dreams and Realities”) as representing Woolf’s scrutiny of the advantages and disadvantages of the unembodied dream world versus the “real” world of heterosexual relations (133).³⁶ Katharine appears alternately in this novel as someone strong and yet, ironically, in need of care, someone who periodically is removed (or removes herself) from the real world of fact to a place offering another vision. Is the single life practical for one inclined toward mental illness? Surely Woolf must have speculated about her need for an unconventional marriage, much as Katharine does, and may have decided that marriage could be both a personal and a political act.

The term “queer” occurs at interesting junctures in the novel. In addition to Cassandra having labeled Katharine as “queer” on several occasions, later when visiting Mary Datchet alone, Katharine describes her own dress in terms of “the queer look of her blue silk skirt and blue shoes upon the stone” (*ND* 375). Cassandra later admits that perhaps William is queer as well, but she makes this remark while looking “with shy devotion at her cousin’s beautiful face” (385), a scene marking her attraction toward Katharine. Hermione Lee observes that “*queer* was certainly a known code word for homosexuality by the 1930s” (*Virginia Woolf* 487). Though *Night and Day* was published in 1919, Woolf easily could have been familiar with the term by that date and did, in fact, use the term in 1927 in telling Vita that “Moments of Being: Slater’s Pins Have No Points” was “a nice little story about Sapphism” (Lee 487). Ralph Denham characterizes marriage as “a very queer business” (*ND* 405), a comment perhaps suggestive of Woolf’s speculation

(via Katharine) on the advantages of marriage to a homosexual male—or a relationship with another female—as less complicated and more rewarding than the conventional emotional turmoil of heterosexual coupling.

Toril Moi and others demonstrate the manner in which Woolf undermines the notion of a unitary self; I maintain that inevitably Woolf also undermines the notion of a unitary social class. Woolf appears to deconstruct the category of class along several fault lines, suggesting that it may not be simplistically determined by one's socioeconomic status at birth but may involve gender, education, and even health issues. Katharine, for example, anticipates Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas* that the daughters of educated men may in some respects be worse off than the daughters of the poor or relatively poor (like Mary Datchet) who perform honest (and even socially useful) labor and who support themselves. What, then, does the category of class signify for women if they remain essentially dependent upon fathers or brothers? For Katharine to have a "house of her own" in practical terms, she must marry; otherwise, she will be trapped as a single woman working interminably on the Alardyce family biography project. Men in the novel, particularly because they are given opportunities for a college education, are not so dependent, even when they are born into a lower class (like Ralph Denham and Leonard Woolf). Granted, a woman could inherit wealth, but constricting class expectations would still deter her from living alone—and certainly from living with another woman. Marriage and family life, the crucible for producing more subjects of the British Empire, were certainly the expectations for women, negating in many instances the kind of independence that both Katharine and Virginia seem to dream about. And what about the question of mental illness? Perhaps Woolf recognized, after several episodes of mental

breakdown, that she could not easily live alone, that her disability placed her in an additional class of dependency despite her birth as a Stephen. I do not suggest that she married Leonard primarily for security, but I do propose that her own experiences of dependency because of her gender, her lack of formal education, and her emotional disability caused her to view the category of class through a kaleidoscopic lens that shifted with circumstance and perspective.

Shirley Nelson Garner reports that the Bloomsbury group, though tolerant of homosexuality, regarded lesbianism with suspicion. Garner quotes Quentin Bell as reporting that Virginia's good friend, E. M. Forster (a homosexual), told Virginia that he "thought Sapphism disgusting: partly from convention, partly because he disliked that women should be independent of men" (332). Garner believes that some of Woolf's evasiveness in portraying lesbianism in *Night and Day* is related to Woolf's fear of losing Forster's good critical opinion or friendship or both; furthermore, Forster's response to *Night and Day* was unenthusiastic.

Silences in the text may represent spaces in the web or graph structure of the novel, particularly regarding homosexuality and mental illness. In several instances, Mary Datchet provocatively fingers the fur on the edge of Katharine's skirt, which may function as a kind of border she longs to cross. Mary is also swept on the "breast of a wave" to tell Katharine that Ralph loves her (291). Shortly thereafter, Mary and Katharine sit *in silence* as Mary again fingers the fur on Katharine's dress. Later Katharine feels lonely and longs to be with Mary Datchet; in doing so, she draws the curtains so that the draperies meet in deep folds in the middle of the window—a possible

psychosexual reference. Does Katharine speculate about whether Sapphists constitute a special “class” of people?

Just earlier, Katharine and Rodney have decided *not* to marry, and Katharine is flooded with *Antigone* imagery (anticipating Woolf’s later, related “novel of fact,” *The Years*) as she muses upon a lonely, “sealed away” existence (346). Mary Datchet also reflects *Antigone* imagery in living an “immured life” in her loneliness, a state she both treasures and fears (289). Perhaps indicative of the deep duality theme of the novel, Mrs. Hilbery confides to Katharine that she had once considered naming her “Mary.” The single life chosen by Mary is one that both *Night and Day* and *The Voyage Out* suggest Woolf herself seriously considered before deciding to marry Leonard. Did Virginia Stephen decide, however, that living alone as a person subject to bouts of mental illness might not be a smart choice? Choosing a marriage partner on the basis of a larger shared vision (as Ralph and Katharine do) rather than simply upon the basis of sexual compatibility, desire for children, or other conventional reasons eventually seems eminently rational in this novel. It solves the problem of loneliness to a degree: Katharine invites Ralph to share her loneliness in a profound sense, for she believes that reality can be apprehended only in loneliness and that this recognition is a more honest approach to a marital relationship than one based upon conventional class expectations. Katharine has had her vision of being alone on a mountain in the north of England, the vision of an outsider, a vision subversive of her society’s class structure. Toward the end of the novel, Ralph and Katharine are finally alone at the *bottom* of the house, “which rose, story upon story, upon the top of them” (445)—a curious inversion of an image for a new relationship for “The Third Generation,” another early title for this novel (Briggs xiii),

and one suggesting a new foundation for the “house” of civilization that Woolf seems to be trying to preserve, yet modernize, in *Night and Day*.

CHAPTER FIVE

*“She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day.”—Clarissa in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, [1925]1990, p. 8).*

“The corruption of language is war’s first casualty.”

--Jane Marcus in “Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War.” In *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation*. Ed. Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Auslander Munich and Susan Merrill Squier. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1989.

“THAT ANTEDILUVIAN TOPIC”: FEMINISM, GENDER, AND CLASS IN *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Mark Hussey observes that in the past several decades *Mrs. Dalloway’s* (1925) social critique, the intent of which Woolf was clear about in her diary, has been foregrounded in discussions of the novel. Critics such as Susan Merrill Squier, Suzette Henke, and Lee R. Edwards focus upon the novel’s investigation of the roots of war and sexual oppression in modern London’s sexually polarized society. Henke calls *Mrs. Dalloway* a feminist and socialist critique of patriarchy--a social satire employing ironic patterns of mythic reference, such as that of the scapegoat. Edwards views the topic of individual isolation in terms of a larger sociopolitical framework and believes that critics have often overlooked the scope of the novel (Hussey 177). Other critics, such as Pamela Caughie, Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Jane Marcus, and Patricia Laurence, examine postmodern concerns regarding subject formation and the far-reaching effects of the social construction of “truths” about gender relations in the novel.

Previously Woolf's aim of showing the British class system at its worst was largely unrecognized except by two critics: Alex Zwerdling and Katharine C. Hill. Hill seconds Zwerdling's views and provides insight into the sociological underpinnings of Leslie Stephen's literary theories and their influence on Woolf.³⁷ I propose that the chief reason for earlier misinterpretations has been the veil Woolf throws the harshness of her social criticism by portraying Mrs. Dalloway as a pleasant, attractive, likeable socialite simply trying to do her best in her role as an established Westminster hostess. Clarissa evokes sympathy from the reader as she struggles with Bourton memories of lost love(s), and rallies against the beginning of menopause and its hints of old age and eventual death. However, closer examination reveals that Clarissa is herself satirized and often trivialized. Critical tradition holds that she is modeled after society hostess Kitty Maxse, whose death around the time Woolf wrote the novel was thought to be a suicide (Lee 160-61). Woolf also wrote in her notes for the novel that she wanted Septimus' madness connected to the horror of war and that she planned for Septimus to be "partly me" (Lee 459). In a 1925 letter to Gerald Brenan, Woolf declares "And I certainly did mean—that Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway should be entirely dependent on each other" (L 3 189). This biographical information provides an intriguing context for Septimus' suicide and Woolf's initial idea of having Clarissa herself commit suicide. Clarissa also represents a striking example of Woolfian self-critique (a realization that she is "framed by the text she frames"); it is almost as if Woolf imagines what might have happened if Leonard had served in Parliament as Richard Dalloway did, or what might have happened if she had never married and Leslie not died when he did.

On another level, the novel seems emblematic of Marianne DeKoven's idea of modernist indeterminacy as an unresolved contradiction, for Woolf herself adored parties, much as Clarissa does. Hermoine Lee, one of Woolf's most highly-respected biographers, provides an entire chapter about parties, stating that "The lure of solitude, anonymity, countryside, reading, creating, pulled against the desire for fame, society, money, gossip, parties, and involvements. There was no resolution to the conflict" (448). It is easy to observe this push and pull in Woolf's diaries and letters. Woolf was born and bred into a certain social role, actively rejecting it with difficulty even as she proudly claimed her right to solitude and the life of a writer. Woolf's self-critique in *Mrs. Dalloway* is palpable once the reader steps back—much as in attempting to apprehend the larger pattern of figures and objects in a pointillist painting—and grasps the manner in which Clarissa, Septimus, and Peter are all the effects of a seemingly benevolent but ultimately deleterious social system. Clarissa, delightful in many ways, must be judged as culpable for some aspects of her "hostessing," for she enables not only the positive, but also the harmful operations of Empire. Thus she should actually blame herself to some extent for even "those poor girls in Piccadilly"; ironically, she does not, but blames Peter instead (*MD* 73). Her misrecognition speaks loudly of the difficulty of realizing one's own interpellation into a social system. Yet it does not excuse her lack of personal involvement to effect social change and, despite her marriage to Richard, her ultimate escape to the solitude of her narrow room where, unlike Woolf herself, Clarissa does not engage in the productive life of a writer.

The past decade has seen a proliferation of political criticism specifically about war and its relation to class issues in Woolf's fiction.³⁸ I would like to demonstrate the deep

connection between war and social class as explored in this novel, a connection also providing vital background for Woolf's later work in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *The Waves* (1937). The buried discussion of war's deep relationship to social class in *Mrs. Dalloway* later erupts into overt critique in *Three Guineas* (1938). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, a personal "war" on the part of Clarissa and Septimus, in particular, resonates with the large-scale ideological war waged in defense of World War I, and also with the concept of war in general. Woolf recognizes that power is a form of warlike domination that operates in a web of structures accepted as "natural." Foucault believes that power as a generalized form of war can also assume the form of peace waged by the state. He states in an interview:

Isn't power simply a form of warlike domination? Shouldn't one therefore conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war? Isn't power a sort of generalized war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the state? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it.

(Power/Knowledge 65)

Woolf arrives at a similar conclusion, laying bare the invisible underpinnings of war as she unpacks the layers of ideology operative in the class-dominated lives of her characters.

Woolf excavates ideological connections between patriarchy, class, and war in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In fact, close textual analysis shows that ideology plays a larger role than previously recognized in the staging of the characters' material lives. Woolf also raises related epistemological questions regarding truth and the definition of madness that resonate with the work of Foucault and other theorists on the linkages between ideology,

power, and desire. I will show a connection between these epistemological concerns and Woolf's gender-nuanced view of the construction of social classes and their functioning as pieces of the human puzzle of war--as well as to Woolf's recognition of her stake in her own class interest. I will also discuss Woolf's psychology of class in terms of her fear of a dissolution of ego boundaries associated with social divisions. Her treatment of the character of Septimus amply manifests this psychology of class, as does her treatment of Clarissa.

Foucault's concept of war operating in the form of "peace" is especially applicable to *Mrs. Dalloway*, for the novel's setting is the aftermath of war. This aftermath showcases the shell-shocked veteran, Septimus, and Clarissa as another kind of veteran--a survivor of illness and gender discrimination in her society, as well as someone more indirectly affected by the war experience. Foucault also illuminates the politics of sexuality, and he emphasizes the need for power structures to gain access to bodies in everyday life via reproduction (*Power/Knowledge* 66-67). An illustration in the novel of Foucault's point: Clarissa's friend, Sally, who kissed her years ago in a moment hinting at passionate lesbian inclinations, finally succumbs to the dominant social system, marries, and raises five boys. Clarissa's shock at this news may indicate the childless Woolf's criticism of a social system that reproduces citizens for the purpose of war and domination. Clarissa, however, though at times keenly aware of her own capitulation, fails to appreciate fully the extent of her participation in problematic social structures.

Woolf had personal reasons to be concerned both with the reality of war and discourse concerning it. In 1915, she was deeply saddened by the death of poet Rupert Brooke, whom she knew well and who had become an icon of young British men lost in war

(Hussey 127). In 1922 she wrote *Jacob's Room*, a novel based upon the strong residual undercurrent of the 1914-18 war and the ghostly character of Jacob. Jacob's character was widely acknowledged to be modeled after Woolf's brother, Thoby Stephen, who died suddenly in 1906 at age 26 after a trip to Greece (Hussey 272). Woolf was haunted by the specter of war and death for much of her life.³⁹ She was particularly concerned with militaristic paradigms of world order manifested in linguistic discourse (as featured on the radio, in speeches and publications) and in gender relations. Metaphorically and psychologically, *Mrs. Dalloway* paves the way for Woolf's later works dealing with war.

A prelude to treatment of war issues in *Mrs. Dalloway* is Woolf's first explicitly war-based novel, *Jacob's Room*, an experimental work that interrogates issues of biography and epistemology in the context of the violence of war as visited upon a young male. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, however, we see Woolf as a feminist researcher excavating the rubble of war in society's psyche via a female protagonist *and* a male protagonist; here Woolf unearths the disturbing images, questionable linguistic constructions, and faulty patriarchal paradigms that lead her to the direct outrage expressed in *Three Guineas* and to the still partially-veiled satire of *The Years* (the two texts were originally conceived as a single "novel-essay"). Woolf interrogates herself as writer, as well as her central characters, in her quest to provide a kind of emotional ethnography of individuals affected by war. She sees war in broad terms as including violence against feminist identity (because war is inherently patriarchal, as Woolf interprets it), linguistic violence against objective "reality," and violence against the human psyche that can lead to serious mental illness. Woolf is really talking about the same ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses) as Althusser, who argues that we are all ideologically interpellated through

such institutions as education, religion, and the family (Althusser 136-37). To Althusser, we are always already subjects hailed in or recruited by ideology in multiple ways (162-63). Woolf recognizes the same categorical violence in the social divisions of her society and in the subtle, web-like workings of power extending far beyond the state. For Clarissa Dalloway, the tentacles of power are revealed in gender/class relations between men and women, particularly in marriage, and in gendered relations between women. There is, in fact, some evidence that Woolf originally included more explicit lesbian references in the relationship between Sally and Clarissa (Henke qtd. in Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A to Z* 176). Her awareness of the powerful constricting forces of ideology may have been the reason for the elision of such references in her final manuscript. Woolf periodically hints at a view of lesbians as a repressed “class” of their own, one which, ironically, cuts across traditional class lines just as the “class” of women does. Again, as Max Weber and others emphasize, the category of class is famously subject to shifting and slippage. It also involves repressed, submerged elements. Lesbianism was one of those elements in Woolf’s era.

Woolf instructs us in her introduction to the 1928 edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* that Septimus Warren Smith is the double of Mrs. Dalloway. When the news of Septimus’s death is brought to her sparkling party, Mrs. Dalloway intuits that their fates are connected. Shell-shocked and broken, Septimus is a continual reminder of the waste of war. Karen Levenback points out that Woolf knew of the government’s reports of shell-shocked veterans and that she may have modeled Septimus after Philip Woolf, Leonard’s brother. Philip had enlisted early and also witnessed the death of another brother in the war. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the use of hyperbole, litotes, and non sequiturs suggests an ironic

distancing and a distinctive narrative treatment of Septimus that differs from that of other characters. As Levenback also notes, at this time Woolf was reading Freud on the issue of the denial of death and repression; in addition, Freud was concurrently being published in England by the Woolfs' own Hogarth Press (52-56). An example of the characterization of Septimus as distinctive is the passage detailing his response to Rezia's announcement in Regents Park that "It is time," meaning time for his appointment with the doctor:

The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shaving from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself--. (*MD* 69-70)

The novel's treatment of the devastating impact of war upon Septimus, as well as his demeaning and damaging treatment by two doctors functioning as mouthpieces for the dominant ideology of the State, is one example that Woolf intended a profound critique of the ideological underpinnings of a psychology of class. That is, class is constructed by embedding notions of socially acceptable behavior into the mind; these notions create patterns of behavior that become definitive of social class and of "normalcy."

Such is the social work of Dr. William Bradshaw, who treats Septimus. Notably, Bradshaw has attained high social status by treating dysfunctional members of British society, as indicated by the title "Sir," which adds to his functioning as an official representative of a divisive social structure. Sir William's view of his difficult mental

patients, who could be sent to a place in Surrey to be taught a sense of proportion is expressed in this way:

If they failed him, he had to support police and the good of society, which, he remarked very quietly, would take care, down in Surrey, that these unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control. And then stole out from her hiding-place and mounted her throne that Goddess whose lust is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself. Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up. (*MD* 102)⁴⁰

The last sentence is particularly evocative, for Bradshaw not only literally confines people, but he shuts them up in his paradigm of normalcy, one that ideologically supports empire, and also denies them a speaking voice. Ironically, Lady Bradshaw represents a devolution connected to her gender, for she has slowly sunk, submitting to the will of her husband: "Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through . . ." (*MD* 101). Lady Bradshaw's marriage arrests her personal growth, displaying the negative effects of a social system founded on patriarchy and empire.

In this novel, the socially-constructed system of order enacts a dialectic with the natural order of a day running its course from sunrise to sunset. This dual order is imposed upon the novel in a deceptively simple, Joycean manner, for the novel takes place in one day in mid-June in London in 1923. Yet, death hovers over this crisp and

glorious day, and eventually we see that even the “natural” order has been defined by an indeterminate narrator whose overarching response seems to be one of deep sadness at the passing of time and the ravages of World War I. Clarissa sparkles at the novel’s beginning, however, for she is in love with life and floats on waves of “divine vitality” as she prepares to be the perfect hostess for her perfect party. She stiffens at the curb as she feels:

a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. (*MD* 4)

The reference to Clarissa’s heart problem could be an allusion to another element in the adverse aftermath of World War I: the 1918 influenza epidemic. Time asserts its Janus face at the outset of the novel. Woolf seems to say that we are full of vitality, but the leaden circles of Time weigh us down and eventually grind us into the earth; war is waged between the body and time. Elizabeth Hirsh (2005) discusses the connection between menopause and death that Woolf has embedded in the novel. Menopause itself has often been associated with heart palpitations, providing further bodily connections between the tolling of the bell and the body’s decline over time. We are warned subtly but clearly that Clarissa’s vitality is connected to the triad of war, death, and “Father Time.” The striking of the clock, Big Ben, is connected both with benevolence (creating order out of time, marking time with a human gesture of sorts) and malevolence (a warning that time is passing and irrevocable). The nexus of time and death also creates a grounding of classlessness in this novel that ultimately unites the upper-class Clarissa and

the lower-class Septimus. Clarissa is past fifty, the opening pages announce, and she is acutely conscious of fleeting “moments of being.” These moments suffer the rupture of war that throws into focus the patriarchal ruptures of gender relations inherited from the Victorian period. War also clarifies the socioeconomic ramifications of violence on a large scale, the birthing of children destined for war, which later will be called into question directly by Woolf in *Three Guineas*. For now, she examines closely both the causes and the effects of war upon Clarissa and Septimus.

An ironic self-reflexivity informs the beginning section of the novel. Woolf writes, “Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh” (*MD* 4). A postmodern sense of the fluctuating nature of reality surfaces here in the disembodied narrator’s rendition of Clarissa’s interior monologue. The construction of reality expressed here is provisional, built around the self as subjective interpreter, and subject to deconstruction and re-creation. Clarissa’s monologue is a prime example of Woolf’s sense of modernist indeterminacy and also illustrates some postmodernist tendencies. Life is lived moment to moment and recreated moment to moment, but Clarissa’s life is infused with a sense of foreboding brought on by the end of the War and the oppressive sense that war could recur. Pamela Caughie suggests that though Woolf conveys a communal sense in the novel, she also calls attention to the world’s constructedness as a symbolic structure; the world in *Mrs. Dalloway* is aleatoric rather than unified, for it does not unite us in some absolute *beyond* the moment but rather immerses us *in* the moment (75).

Clarissa herself is shell-shocked in another way, for she has long suffered the violations of patriarchy, a paradigm demanding that she fulfill her expected upper-class function as hostess of brilliant parties, even though she enjoys doing so. Clarissa will never become a prime minister: she does not even possess the opportunity for a university education, still denied to many women (a fact Woolf roundly criticizes in *A Room of One's Own*). Clarissa reveals, however, an agency as “hostess” for her own view of the world, selecting the flowers, furniture arrangement, food, and ideas she wishes her guests to enjoy. Clarissa (and Woolf) continually interrogates her party--i.e. she speculates on the ways in which she arranges the furniture of her mind to make sense of the party of life she encounters in the midst of the lingering violence of war. Clarissa's interrogation includes a questioning of gender relations. How is she connected to Septimus Smith, she wonders at the end of the novel. How should she act toward Peter? Sally? She had been excited when Sally kissed her on the lips, and she launches into a reflection upon heterosexual versus homosexual desires: “But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?” (*MD* 32). A few moments later Clarissa reflects: “The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up” (*MD* 34). Clarissa is not performing gender “properly” (particularly in response to the kiss); she feels guilty but also deliciously rebellious.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler points out that performing skills create the status of the subject as a social being. In an extension of Althusser, Butler here argues

that the subject continually submits to “the law” in a process of being acquitted of the accusation of guilt. Only after guilt and repetitive practice to learn proper linguistic skills does the subject assume the grammatical place within the social world as subject (118-19). Clarissa criticizes her own subject position and the authority of those who would elicit an excessively constricted gender performance. She both submits to the law and secretly wishes to subvert her society’s paradigm of “proper performance” for women, one circumscribed also by specific expectations for women of different social classes. This implicit critique expands in scope as the novel continues.

Clarissa muses in the beginning of the novel upon her decision not to marry Peter. She believes that her marriage to Richard has saved her, for, unlike Peter, he gives her the freedom to do what she wishes--a freedom that includes sleeping alone like a nun, protected in “a room of her own” against the onslaughts of sexual overtures and the unwanted general intrusion of the “violent” outer world. Peter had warned her that she would marry a prime minister and become a perfect hostess. She would “stand at the top of a staircase,” a perfect icon for the pinnacle of achievement in her social class. Clarissa remembers that she cried later at home about Peter’s prediction (*MD* 7-8). Of course, it all came true.

Woolf might be describing her own technique in writing novels when she positions Clarissa gazing upon the omnibuses (an objective correlative for the world’s constantly moving masses of humanity) and remarking in highly philosophical terms:

She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that.

She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife

through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual

sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fraulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself I am this, I am that. (*MD* 8-9)

The above passage anticipates postmodern views on the necessity of a provisional approach to reality. To Donna Haraway, for example, the most sensible epistemological stance is not one of deceptive objectivity as a fixed position; rather, the knowing self--which cannot simultaneously be in all positions structured by gender, race, and class--must be partial, imperfect, engaged in heterogeneous multiplicity (193-95). Clarissa recognizes her necessarily limited standpoint. Despite it, or perhaps because of it, she refuses to impose categorical violence on herself or others, particularly in speaking of her own identity or Peter's. Throughout the novel she both directly and indirectly indicts the categorical violence inherent in the material effects of war--including the practices of war embedded in "peacetime" gender and class relations.

War is a clarifying moment in gender/class relations which provokes philosophical discourse on many topics in the novel. Clarissa reads a passage from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, an elegiac romance, in a book spread open in a shop window: "'Fear no more the heat o'the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages'" (*MD* 9). She links this passage to the novel's post-war setting amid the aftermath of the Great War. Clarissa rejects the social

construction of various feminine roles that become ever more painfully obvious when the inherently patriarchal structure of war is laid bare. Women are expected to support their men as representatives of their country in a war that involves killing human beings. Those human beings have been birthed by mothers, who are therefore biologically essential to the project of war. In the figure of Septimus, Clarissa also criticizes the social construction of sanity as related to the war effort. Who really is the sane person when one considers the insanity of war? Furthermore, in the passage quoted earlier, Clarissa reveals a postmodernist sense of the slipperiness of language when called upon to name reality. Clarissa states that she is both insider and outsider, slicing like a knife through everything and yet standing outside the experience as an observer. She also relates the paradoxical sensation of simultaneous youth and old age. Both paradoxes suggest a rejection of essentialist conceptions of time and space.

Patricia Laurence in *The Reading of Silence* (1991) observes that Woolf often engages in a kind of psycho-narration that involves self-address, instead of using “said” and quotation marks. This practice results in a kind of theater of the mind in which Woolf questions the possibility of the self as a narrator “outside the thinker” (Laurence 23-25). Laurence sees Woolf as the first modernist novelist to practice silence rather than speech, a novelist of subjectivity who confronts and narrates silences between islands of speech in a way that reflects her gender. Such silence draws attention to itself and reveals the mask of language. Laurence distinguishes between the unsaid, the unspoken, and the unsayable in Woolf. The unsayable is laid bare through punctuation, metaphor, space, and the rhythms of silence (1-5). Laurence also points out that in Woolf’s novel, talk is often equated with men (a mastered presence over the moment *because* they talk), and

silence equated with the absence of women, a silence which nonetheless has its own rhetoric and psychic life (11). Postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak insist on the vital need to intervene in ideological inscription of the terrain of women to measure those silences (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 286-87). I believe that in *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf was performing exactly the intervention of which Spivak and Laurence speak. In a sense, Woolf was bodily colonized by patriarchy, perhaps most intimately in her childhood sexual abuse. Nonetheless, in the character of Clarissa (and elsewhere) Woolf questions the role of women, using a rhetoric of both silence and speech about the war. She exposes the colonizing web of patriarchy and empire in a manner that connects closely to her explicit discussion of these relations in *Three Guineas*. Gwen Anderson has noted that only later in life, under the influence of strong figures such as Ethel Smyth, did Woolf discard her relative silence and coded language to openly attack the interrelated structures of patriarchy, empire, and war (*MD* 9).

Clarissa’s chance reading of the passage from *Cymbeline* suggests the power of the common reader championed by Woolf, who entitled her first collection of essays by that name. Anyone, a common reader of any station in life, could have happened upon this book spread open in a shop window. Anyone could have been inspired or touched by it. This passage also initiates the novel’s elegiac theme. A war has enacted the death of innocence and the necessity of an elegiac response to life even in the midst of a beautiful June day. Against this backdrop, Clarissa says, “Oh if she could have had her life over again!” and been “interested in politics like a man,” and not had the odd “sense of being herself invisible, unseen, unknown . . . this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway” (*MD* 10-11). Woolf here illustrates Clarissa’s

discomfort with a prescribed social role that militates against taking one's own interest in war and other worldly matters seriously enough to warrant engagement. Clarissa's self-identity has been absorbed into that of her husband, reflected in a name change that obscures everything about her except her relation to a man. Woolf engages her protagonist in a series of meditations upon the social construction of roles and self-knowledge but does so in a way that problematizes such construction. Clarissa wishes she could be interested in politics like a man, but she is unable to escape the patriarchal order inscribed in her brain. One critic argues that Woolf was concerned with her own dependence upon a patrilineal literary heritage, particularly that of Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot, whose echoes resound in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf represses the patriarchal symbolic order which is "other" to her but repeatedly turns to it, unable to break free (Childs 80-81). She is often trapped in a state of indeterminacy.

John Carey argues that modernist literature and culture organized itself around a sense of cultural superiority to the unthinking masses. Clarissa, for instance, is repulsed by Doris Kilman because Kilman is so common that she wears a green mackintosh (qtd. in Day 155). Clarissa's contradictory class views are reflected in her alternating sympathy for the working-class Septimus and for shop-girls on the one hand, and fascination with Lady Bruton on the other. Woolf admired her brother-in-law Clive Bell despite his elitist views espoused in *Civilization* (though she criticized Bell for his snobbery) and of course loved Vita Sackville-West, who was married to the famously elitist Harold Nicholson. Woolf wants and needs the refinements of a "civilization" that she was born into as a member of the upper middle class, though great material wealth was neither part of her heritage nor her aspirations. She remains deeply in favor of equality for all, yet she

finally realizes that she herself is implicated in the maintenance of repressive social divisions, partly because of her role as a Bloomsbury artist raised above the fray, and partly because of an inherited sense of privilege she found hard to shake.

However, eventually Woolf places an increasing focus upon the common reader, hoping thereby to promote critical thinking and self-education among the lower classes. Some of her essays reproduced in *The Common Reader* series (1925 and 1932) are impressive even in their pedagogical methods for teaching critical thinking and reading about a subject. They also provide evidence of her growing concern with the common reader at the midpoint of her career, rather than simply at its conclusion. She may have been influenced by her early experiences of teaching at Morley College, an institution for the working-class. In later life she was also strongly affected by the rabble-rousing Ethel Smyth, who prodded Woolf even further into dismantling her class prejudices. Furthermore, the aftermath of World War I resulted in class upheavals that had a profound effect upon Woolf and many others. *Mrs. Dalloway* embodies many of these effects, situating them in the deceptively safe structures of ordinary British life in London: the regularity of Big Ben's striking bells, the statuary of Whitehall, the protective mantle of the monarchy.

As the novel proceeds, suddenly Clarissa and other passersby hear a pistol-shot, which turns out to be the agitation of a passing car possibly carrying the Queen (a representative of Empire). Clarissa notices poor women waiting to see the Queen--leading to a chilling association of "nice little children, orphans, widows, the War" (MD 18-20). Next, the sound of an airplane bores ominously into the ears of the crowd. These war sounds are invoked here as a prelude to Woolf's interrogation of social constructions, including

epistemological categories, for at this point Septimus is introduced as a strange man who cannot make out what word is being spelled out in smoke in the sky. He has just threatened to kill himself. Rezia, his wife, tries valiantly to conceal his desires from the public, and attempts to interest him in things outside of himself, as the doctor treating Septimus has instructed her to do. Hearing the voices of birds chirping in Greek, Septimus suddenly hallucinates, thinking he sees his comrade, Evans, from the war. With acutely sensitive nerves, Septimus feels connected to the fluttering of leaves and of sparrows, to the sense that a new religion is being birthed. He takes notes on backs of envelopes, writing "There is a God" (*MD* 24).

It is no accident that a few pages later readers are introduced to Clarissa's ideas on a Supreme Being: "not for a moment did she believe in God." Clarissa, however, believes that her husband is the foundation for much of her happiness, and that she must pay back humanity from a secret deposit of exquisite moments (*MD* 29). Nonetheless, life with Richard is not all sweetness and light. Discovering that her husband is lunching with Lady Bruton, she feels the pang of exclusion and trudges upstairs to her narrow room where Richard insists, after her illness, that she sleep alone for her own good. Lucio Ruotolo observes that Clarissa retreats to herself in times of difficulty in a manner similar to the shell-shocked Septimus (110). While there, she reflects upon how she has failed Richard again in her virginal coldness of spirit. Woolf need not comment directly here, for silence speaks eloquently of a war waged against women in their own heads as they internalize a patriarchal idea of their identities. To complicate matters, Clarissa at several points exclaims that she is quite happy that Richard allows her a space of her own.⁴¹

Clarissa's reflection upon the manner in which she has failed Richard leads to a surprising dissection of her passionate feelings for women --in particular, Sally Seton. Woolf's famous "match burning in a crocus" passage describing Clarissa's sexual feelings for Sally is a daring excavation of an undercurrent of feeling and behavior not openly discussed in English society. In girlhood, Sally smokes, runs naked down the hall, kisses Clarissa on the lips. The exquisite moment of the kiss is interrupted by two men with (appropriately) biblical names, old Joseph and Peter. Clarissa remembers the interrupted moment like this: "It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!" (*MD* 36). Thus, Woolf suggests, society interrupts such an alliance between two women, particularly a passionate alliance. To Woolf, society is at war with any but the kind of sexual relations that support Empire, colonialism, and birthing babies for war in order to maintain material dominance.

Interruption functions as a key device for suggesting irony in much of Woolf's writing, a technique she often uses as a gender-specific experience because of its frequent occurrence in women's fragmented daily lives. Earlier, Rezia had interrupted the mentally-disturbed Septimus at an important moment. Now Clarissa is interrupted at eleven o'clock, on the day she is giving a party, by her lost love, Peter Walsh. Peter comments on the shallow role Clarissa has embraced, while fiddling with a sharp and symbolic knife. He reflects that nothing in the world is so bad for some women as marriage and politics and having a Conservative husband. Peter suddenly seizes her by the shoulders and asks if she is happy with Richard. Clarissa is struck by a desire to run away with Peter and discard her present life, when once again she is interrupted by Elizabeth, her silent daughter. Later she is interrupted by Elizabeth's teacher, the

unpleasant Miss Kilman (whose name suggests obvious gender-violence). Ironically, Elizabeth is a mostly silent presence in the text, a presence suggesting the pathos of absent female discourse. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, as in most of her fiction, Woolf uses silence, interruption, and the internal subversion of superficial attention to men to indicate that women indeed constitute a separate class in terms of gendered psychology and behavior. As Patricia Laurence notes, such silence may also be read as a yet undisclosed richness, or as a refusal to enact a subordinate position (*The Reading* 57-58).

Time intervenes with its own violence as Peter and Clarissa are talking. At the half-hour, Big Ben “stuck out between them with extraordinary vigour as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that” (*MD* 48). Paradoxically, time is at war with the intensity of the moment, the dumb-bells of time rupturing moments of passion. This recurrent image in the novel evokes an intriguing backdrop of universal classlessness, a sense of Time as the great leveler who does not respect social divisions.

As Peter walks away from that moment with Clarissa, he comes upon young boys in uniform, marching to a strict rhythm with guns, and “on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (*MD* 51). The young boys march “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” (*MD* 51). Particularly frightening in its evocation of fascism is the formation of young individuals into a herd dominated by “one will.”

Peter sees a problem with this scene, but shows no understanding of similarly “fascist” gender relations. His interior monologue represents the way Clarissa’s gender is shaped by the expressed thought of a patriarchal system representing the ideology of the ruling class. The sociologist John Thompson argues that symbolic forms are constitutive of social reality; symbolic operations like reification and narrativization legitimate the meanings of the dominant power group (58-61). Peter’s inner speech narrativizes the conditions of Clarissa’s life and continues their reification. The unnamed narrator describes Peter watching the young boys marching with their guns down Whitehall, drugged into a “staring corpse by discipline”:

One had to respect it; one might laugh; but one had to respect it, he thought. There they go, thought Peter Walsh, pausing at the edge of the pavement; and all the exalted statues, Nelson, Gordon, Havelock, the black, the spectacular images of great soldiers looking ahead of them, as if they too had made the same renunciation (Peter Walsh felt he too had made it, the great renunciation), trampled under the same temptations, and achieved at length a marble stare. (*MD* 51)

Peter has accepted the militaristic paradigm for his gender and his society. His acceptance legitimates power for the dominant group in his society, one that denies full personhood for some members of the military and even for his beloved upper-class Clarissa.

Lately returned to England after five years in India, Peter muses about changes in modern British life--ranging from “paint” on women to writers openly discussing water-closets—and upon dear old friends like Sally Seton, who argued at Bourton with social climber Hugh Whitbread about women’s rights--“that antediluvian topic” (*MD* 73). Peter

seeks a deep understanding of his world, as do Clarissa and Septimus. Peter cannot slice through everything, as Clarissa is said to do, for he often only bumbles with his pocket-knife, but he nonetheless scratches messages on the walls of what Sally Seton calls his individual prison of self. He does so perhaps as frequently as Clarissa and Septimus; all three provide the fascinating refractions of gender and class revealed by Woolf in this novel.

Sally Seton's loud argument with Hugh Whitbread is presented at a remove-- embedded in Peter's reverie, a technique used effectively in *The Voyage Out* and elsewhere to mitigate the socially-negative effects of Woolf's satire. Sally remembers Peter telling Hugh that "he represented all that was most detestable in middle-class British life" and that she "considered him responsible for the state of 'those poor girls in Piccadilly'" (*MD* 73). As we saw, the latter phrase echoes earlier concerns in *The Voyage Out*, where the exact words are used to reflect concern with a capitalist social system that breeds prostitution of women.

In her middle period, Woolf begins to realize more fully that she is herself "framed by the text she frames."⁴² Some of her critique is embedded in a politics of silence that demands careful reading. Silent critique is implied in Peter's pocket knife and Clarissa's needle; the periodic interjection of the *Cymbeline* quote; the frequent use of parentheses and semicolons (rather than the full stops of periods) and dashes; the general rhythms of life marked by both the regularity of Big Ben's booming and by constant interruptions. Woolf's zigzag musings are difficult to pin down at any particular moment—a practice that seems deliberate and suitable for the view expressed in the first few pages that "no

one is any one thing"--but for the discerning reader they create a cumulative, deceptively subtle effect of devastating social criticism.

Woolf's exploration of these rhythms suits her characterization of Clarissa. Clarissa's heart condition caused by influenza (an epidemic associated with the War) provides an appropriate link with Septimus and other war connections in the novel. Both characters have been strongly affected by the war, and both engage in elegiac behavior, with Septimus ultimately choosing death—a death felt bodily, however briefly, by Clarissa as well. After a spring bout of flu, Woolf herself was misdiagnosed with heart problems in 1922, an experience that frightened her into a contemplation of death. Hermione Lee observes that *Mrs. Dalloway*, which Woolf began in October of 1922, "was powerfully affected by this brush with mortality" and that Woolf decided that the theme of this novel would be the contrast between life and death (449).

Through Peter, *Mrs. Dalloway* presents a criticism of marriage: "there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought" (41). But this social criticism is characteristically placed in the mouth of a character other than Clarissa (who is more likely to be identified with the author). In the midst of his meeting with Clarissa, Peter engages in an interior conversation in which he berates himself for being a failure compared with the Dalloways, whose home boasts inlaid floors, a mounted paper-knife, old and valuable English tinted prints. Ironically, it is the upper-class Richard who later observes prostitutes at Piccadilly and comments upon "our detestable social system" (*MD* 116). In fact, Woolf frequently refers to the prostitutes in Piccadilly in her fiction, positioning them as part of the class of women and yet as definitely "other." Peter, Richard, and Clarissa all lament the state of affairs at Piccadilly, yet all three reinscribe

the social system that enables these prostitutes by passively maintaining their own class status.

In the initial phase of Peter and Clarissa's meeting, the rush of give and take in the words and emotions between them is described in competitive, martial terms: "So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground" and they "challenged each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him" and "the indomitable egotism which for ever rides down the hosts opposed to it" urges Clarissa onward (*MD* 44-45). The martial theme is continued as Peter notices the young boys in uniform marching up Whitehall. The British Empire is richly evoked in the opening of the novel, beginning with references to Peter coming home from India, the booming of Big Ben, Parliament, Clarissa's observation that "The War was over," (*MD* 5) Hugh Whitbread and his party at Buckingham Palace, the mysterious motorcar which might be carrying the Queen--"the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state" (*MD* 16). As emblematic for British society, Clarissa admiringly recalls Lady Bexborough, who placed duty ahead of emotion as she stalwartly opened a bazaar despite the telegram in hand stating that her favorite son, John, has been killed in the war. At times this martial drumbeat is submerged for the casual reader by the surface focus upon the glittering but sympathetic society figure of Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

Peter is a significant vehicle for Woolf's criticism of Clarissa and the class system in this novel. Clarissa is contrasted with Sally Seton, whom she has always admired for her liberal and daring lack of conventionality. But in youth Peter had mentally criticized Clarissa's prudish reaction when Sally declared that a housemaid who married a neighboring squire had become pregnant before their marriage. Peter called Clarissa's

response “arrogant; unimaginative; prudish; ‘The death of the soul’” (*MD* 59). Now, as the outside observer who has lived in the colonies for many years, he is the figure who can recognize some of the class issues affecting women (if not men like himself). Still, Peter seems oblivious to his own class bias. Of course Clarissa is also contrasted with Doris Kilman, the highly-protective Rezia, and various other minor female figures, as well as with her husband, Richard. Peter is actually depicted as fairly liberated in his social role, despite the personal constraints he reveals as the novel proceeds. Richard is a more shadowy figure who seems to represent the novel’s skeleton, so to speak, the backgrounded but ever-present British legal and political structure.

Only the Great War deeply challenged class divisions in the British Empire. Christine Darrohn delineates the effects of the war upon class in Britain, noting the profound upset of established ways of thinking and living. Many thousands of young, marriageable, upper- and middle-class men, for instance, were among the casualties. Maroula Joannou explains that many women from the upper and middle classes wanted to promote a more socialist society after the war, but recoiled at the thought of diminished leisure and means. Joannou quotes Naomi Mitchison’s 1932 letter to Woolf’s friend, Edward Garnett: “It will be damned uncomfortable, and I shall never any more have any of the things I like, no baths and silk clothes and quiet and leisure and a good typewriter of my own” (4). Woolf harbored the same conflicting feelings; after all, she argued in 1929 for the importance of a *room* of one’s own, not to mention an independent income.

Peter muses: “The future lies in the hands of young men like that, he thought” (*MD* 50). Certainly, it did not seem to lie in the hands of young girls, or fifty-two-year-old women. Peter later reflects on the ways England is connected with the very essence of

civilization. Peter here represents a view that Woolf critiques in her final novel, *Between the Acts*. His view is evocative of Clive Bell's *Civilization*. It is understandable that a profound concern with what elements comprise a civilized society should be discussed against the background chaos of war and destruction.

Descending from a respectable Anglo-Indian family that for three generations has administered the affairs of a continent, Peter finds the male web of dominance essential to the civilizing impulse. As he approaches Regent's Park, he meditates that women live much more in the past and attach themselves to places and to their fathers (as Clarissa does, in his estimation). Peter is even driven to an absolute statement: "a woman's always proud of her father" (*MD* 55). Woolf, who felt deeply ambivalent about her father, may be tweaking our sensibilities--particularly as she places this observation in the mind of the masculine (though at times also emasculated) Peter Walsh.

For Molly Hoff, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a full-fledged parody of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, using numerous encoded references to Homer's *Odyssey*. Hoff claims that *Mrs. Dalloway* employs at least 600 paraphrases and parodies of a chrestomathy of texts which share the rhetoric of dis-membering and re-membering, suggesting that literature is one of the things that *Mrs. Dalloway* is about. Hoff wonders how one "names" the web of patriarchal relations in a novel (186-88) and notes the appropriation of war imagery from the *Odyssey*, including even Miss Kilman's description as an unwieldy battleship (192). Hoff's argument supports my contention that Woolf uses satire extensively, a fact inadequately recognized by many readers. Because satire depends upon the recognition of an alternative norm, much of Woolf's satire was unrecognized in her time. Patriarchal constructions were so thoroughly embedded in her society that they were invisible.

Michele Pridmore-Brown argues that in *Between the Acts* Woolf fights fascism by exploiting the noise or static inherent in the new communications technology in order to show a way out of the politics of domination. Woolf demonstrates that the *surplus* (what exceeds official messages sent or recorded) can be used as a form of resistance and exploits the physicist's notion that multiple subjective worlds lurk beneath a surface sequence of events. In *Between the Acts*, entropic metaphors drawn from nineteenth century science imply the imminent dissolution of civilization. Woolf employs her understanding of the new physics that resolved Newton's solid world into an invisible world of waves (408-09). Pridmore-Brown's observations can be applied to *Mrs. Dalloway*, an important prelude Woolf's later work. *Mrs. Dalloway* incorporates Woolf's early examination of shifting identities, damaging paradigms, and the political web of domination that connects even marriage and war. Her early short stories—"Solid Objects," "The Mark on the Wall," and "Kew Gardens," for example—provide clear evidence of the "multiple subjective worlds" hidden under the surface and of entropic metaphors; they also hint at the waves of the new physics that proves Newton's solid world a myth.

Pridmore-Brown provides a trope for human nature in *Three Guineas* that suits *Mrs. Dalloway* as well: a gramophone whose needle has stuck in a rhythm of marching boots and a rhyme of private property (male possessiveness, domestic tyranny, nationalism). However, the critique is less severe in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Peter remarks repeatedly that still "one had to respect it" (*MD* 51). In their youth, Peter, Sally Seton and Clarissa talk hour after hour about how they will reform the world and even found a society to abolish private property, but having actually written a letter, they do not even send it (*MD*

33). In her early work, Woolf often *discusses* or suggests, embedding many criticisms of her society and of language in seemingly harmless vignettes, metaphors, interruptions, ellipses. In *Three Guineas*, she *debates* issues fiercely and openly. She cannot agree with Peter's qualification that still one must "respect it," meaning war and training for war, with all of its class, gender, and patriarchal implications. Later Woolf directly connects gender politics and war, declaring that patriarchy is the private face of fascism; the English, she states, simply do privately what the Nazis do publicly (*TG* 102). It is important to recognize the cumulative and preparatory effect of her early work and its close relationship to her critically important declaration of political values in *Three Guineas*.

As the novel continues, Septimus is hallucinating in the same park where Peter sleeps like a child. Septimus suggests that he and Rezia kill themselves, thinks he sees the head of an old woman in a fern, once again believes that he sees Evans, and claims that he (Septimus) knows the meaning of the world. Vacillating between universal bliss and nightmarish hallucination, Septimus inhabits a frightening world resulting from shellshock. As Reizia tells him that it is time for his appointment with the doctor, Septimus discovers that the word "time" has split its husk and that words fly "to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time" (*MD* 69-70). Time and space are presented as classless categories that can rupture in both positive and negative ways. Because these categories have ruptured for Septimus, he is further cast down from his working-class status into the sub-category of the mentally ill, as well as the possible sub-category of a person with homosexual tendencies—a relationship hinted at in the close but perhaps physically repressed friendship between him and Evans. The

overlapping categories create a Venn diagram whose central figure becomes Dante's seventh circle of hell.

Septimus is a lower-class man who has immersed himself in libraries and studied Shakespeare only to end up with a mind destroyed by war. Woolf also suffered the ignominy of paternalistic, incompetent treatment for mental illness at the hands of domineering physicians like Dr. Bradshaw. Bradshaw is a satiric portrait of Woolf's own doctors and an illustration of the will to power that produces public Hitlerism from the cachepot of private tyranny. Woolf demonstrates that class does not rest solely upon a socioeconomic base, but is built also upon status, which depends upon other factors affecting placement in a social hierarchy. Beverly Skeggs argues that a "dialogic judgmental other" is central to subject formation, particularly for women; thus class functions on an emotional level (13). I interpret Skeggs to mean that the dialog between a "judgmental other" and the subject-- such as Dr. Bradshaw in treating Septimus or Woolf's doctors in treating her—itself helps to shape one's perception of self and thus one's sense of class based on status. This sense of class as status, which then becomes internalized and controls one's behavior, is not monolithic. Thus a person may belong to a high social class as defined by socioeconomic standards, but may still feel marginalized within that class because of dialogic judgmental others who shape the individual's sense of his or her own status as less desirable than the norm.

Similarly, Max Weber argued in Woolf's lifetime that the category of class is full of slippages. An adequate lexicon of words to label distinctions and subdivisions is lacking. Woolf's initial sense of marginalization arose when she realized the drawbacks she suffered as a result of being denied the university education offered to her brothers. As

one of the “uneducated daughters of educated men,” she experienced her first bitter taste of lower status within her upper middle class because of her gender. Early on she began to explore the difference and psychology of class she experienced because of her gender. First, she was viewed differently than males in her society, with her opinions and even intelligence not taken as seriously. Second, she was discriminated against in the same areas because she had not attended a university, which was linked to the gender difference in her class. And third, she felt an internally different status at times because of her Sapphist leanings and because of her history of mental illness.

When Peter Walsh awakens, he remembers an argument between Sally Seton and Hugh Whitbread about “women’s rights (that antediluvian topic)” (*MD* 73). Sally later, half laughing, implored Peter to carry Clarissa off to save her from the Hughs and Dalloways and all the other “perfect gentlemen” who would surely stifle her soul. Peter extends the criticism, observing that the British Empire has grown on her since her marriage to Richard Dalloway. As he muses, an ancient sound bubbles up out of the earth across from the Regent’s Park Tube station. The station is a womb image, and beside it an archetypal, battered old woman sings unintelligible words which evoke a love that prevails over the pageant of the universe. Death, with its enormous sickle, is also evoked. In the midst of the June day one is presented with a rude mouth, a hole in the earth “fertilising, leaving a damp stain” (81). This striking symbol of the maternal issuing forth life stands in opposition to the definition of sanity in the British Empire. In an ironic juxtaposition, Septimus is hurried along in the park by Rezia toward his appointment with Dr. Bradshaw. Woolf suggests that there is little chance of cure with this representative of empire. While in Dr. Bradshaw’s office, Septimus mutters “Communication is health;

communication is happiness, communication--” (*MD* 93). Big Ben rings exactly twelve o’clock as Clarissa at this very moment of Septimus’ appointment lays out her green dress upon the bed. Woolf’s readers see that the circles of Big Ben are now closing upon both Clarissa and Septimus. Again, the image of a Venn diagram is useful to describe their coming together from different social classes under the auspices of the classlessness represented by Time’s tolling bells, moving them both ever onward.

Having defined sanity as healthful communication, society is complicit in maintaining ill health, for it rejects all aspects of their humanity that exceed its rigidly constructed boundaries. Clarissa seems constrained at times to maintain silence about important matters in her life, including her homoerotic fascination with Sally Seton. Septimus has been violated by a society that teaches men not to feel so that they may better serve the war machine. Furthermore, his shell-shocked condition is not treated effectively. He is trivialized, spoken to as though he were a small child, urged to go to live in a home in the country where he can be taught to rest. He is treated as a member of a sub-class because of his mental problems and as a second-class citizen. Clarissa engages voluntarily in the trivial. Karen Levenback quotes Kierkegaard on this point: one can tranquilize oneself with the trivial in order to avoid the pain of full consciousness (49). Levenback’s assessment supports my point that Clarissa is also satirized by Woolf as complicit in maintaining class divisions.

Bradshaw defines good health as having a sense of proportion. Woolf observes scathingly through her narrator that “Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too,

shared his sense of proportion. . .” (*MD* 99). Woolf here critiques a male authority that would define sanity according to its own norms. Hermoine Lee notes that Woolf internalized the vocabulary of mental illness prevalent during her time and at various points reveals ambivalence in her feelings about the illness for which she herself was treated (182-84). Foucault argues that defining madness as outside the boundaries of “truth” reveals its connections to desire and power. Defining “truth” in this system of exclusion is connected to a “will to truth” on the part of human beings, a will which must be called into question (*The Order of Discourse* 1155-57). Woolf contests this “will to truth,” sometimes with satiric quills as her only real weapons in these warring world views.

The clocks of Harley Street are described as nibbling at the June day, counseling submission, upholding authority, and pointing out the advantages of a sense of proportion as Rezia and Septimus leave the domain of Sir William Bradshaw and Lady Bradshaw. The imagery reinforces the dominant paradigm illustrated in the doctor-patient relationship, a relationship oddly similar to the Bradshaw marriage. Sir William defines the norm for marriage, supported by the socially-constructed notion of marriage belonging to his class. The proportions of dependence and independence allotted to his wife are seen, ironically, to be unbalanced, but completely in tune with Big Ben as a kind of Patriarch of Time, slicing and dicing time into categorical pieces that suit the Empire.

Complicating her critique of patriarchy, Woolf parodies Lady Bruton, who lost her son in the war and now has the reputation of talking like a man and being more interested in politics than people. She is described as having lost her sense of proportion, for she is now pushing for a great Emigration project involving the financing of young people of

both sexes to settle in Canada and prosper. Her web of political connections is great, as she engages in political maneuvers with Richard under the portrait of the General in her family. Clarissa envies Lady Bruton for having lunch with Richard and for being able to engage in the political maneuvers of the world of men. Clarissa cannot function at this level of power because of her lack of education and political connections.

In scenes punctuated by the sounds of Big Ben, Clarissa meditates upon why she gives parties. They are an offering to life, a combination of people, a creation that men cannot understand, she feels. Clarissa is interrupted (again) by Miss Kilman, who has come to take Elizabeth to the Army and Navy Stores (the military allusion touches even Clarissa's female offspring). Miss Kilman, who may also embody Woolf's self-critique here, despises Clarissa and views her as a tissue of vanity and deceit. Herbert Marder sees Miss Kilman as problematic. Clarissa admires her for her independence, but she is a woman whose emancipation is illusory; she has absorbed the evils of patriarchy and embodies the dangers of a fanatical devotion to a cause, worshipping abstractions in her religious fervor and hating individuals. Woolf here may be warning that the feminist movement itself is not exempt from these dangers (Marder, *Feminism and Art* 94-96). Woolf often registers distrust of do-gooders who harbor, consciously or unconsciously, a will to power, an internal Hitlerism.

The color of war pervades the last portion of *Mrs. Dalloway* more strongly. Septimus realizes that Rezia has concurred with Holmes and Bradshaw: he is to be sent to a rest home. He demands his writings, conversations with Shakespeare, the dead Evans who appears to him, musings on universal love: all must be destroyed. But the narrator says, "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings--what did

they want?" (*MD* 149). The penultimate line is ironic because it is an allusion to Clarissa's much-earlier meditation on Shakespeare's words: "Far no more the heat o' the sun." Septimus stands upstairs at the large window in his Bloomsbury lodgings. With Holmes at the door, "I'll give it to you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings" (*MD* 149). Soon after, Peter hears the high bell of the ambulance, leading him to reflect how some poor devil had perhaps suddenly come to his death in the busy traffic of urban civilization.

Has Septimus committed an act of heroic defiance in a world that has lost its humanity? Linden Peach argues that Septimus' lack of feeling for both men and women has been affected by his suppressed homosexuality. Peach cites Baudrillard's observation that the death of millions in war is justified within the broad system of symbolic exchange. Suicide reverses society's economic norms because one is removing one's capital from the system (*Virginia Woolf* 111-12).

Septimus' death resonates with Clarissa's feelings of unreality as the moment for her party arrives. The narrator tells us that, "now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings and a silver-green mermaid's dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed" (*MD* 174). Yet, these social semblances seem hollow to her now. She is not satisfied until the sight of a portrait reminds her of her enemy, Miss Kilman, and thinks, "That was satisfying; that was real" and "It was enemies one wanted, not friends" (*MD* 174-75). Contemporary theorists of ideology such as Ernesto Laclau argue for the necessity of constructing the Other, who dislocates one's identity for purposes that ultimately serve

one's own desire for power (qtd. in Worsham and Olson 137). Miss Kilman's functioning as an enemy helps Clarissa to define herself. Clarissa behaves like Septimus, who married Rezia because he feared otherwise he would not be able to feel anymore. It may be surprising to some readers that what Woolf depicts as feeling most real to Clarissa at this moment is hatred. However, at this point Clarissa *wants* to "other" Miss Kilman and enjoys mentally drawing a bright red chalk circle around this "other" to emphasize her own superior class status. Sally Seton has just insisted to Peter in this final scene that,

Clarissa was at heart a snob—one had to admit it, a snob. And it was that that was between them, she was convinced. Clarissa thought she [Sally] had married beneath her, her husband being—she was proud of it—a miner's son. Every penny they had he had earned. As a little boy (her voice trembled) he had carried great sacks (*MD* 190).

Mrs. Hilbery tells Clarissa that she looks so like Clarissa's mother, who also fulfilled a hostess role important to the politics of empire.⁴³ Even Sir William Bradshaw is present at the party, the reader learning for the first time that Clarissa once consulted him: another circle has been drawn around Clarissa and Septimus. When Lady Bradshaw explains that a young man who had been in the army just killed himself, the narrator says, "Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought" (*MD* 183). Christine Darrohn suggests that Woolf does not fully ironize this epiphanic moment, but reveals a conflicted response to Septimus' death that involves the loss of security in class privilege for the middle and upper classes, many of whom lost family members to the first major world war ("Woolf Constructing" 100-02). Clarissa thinks to herself: "Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate. . . ." (*MD* 184). Clarissa does not

pity the young man who killed himself. Time presses us all down to death, she seems to say in repeating the analogy of time to leaden circles. But she also sums up her feelings in this way:

She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (*MD* 186)

Because of passages like this, Howard Harper asserts that the final revelation toward which the dialectic of the novel moves is the realization of the nature of Clarissa's existence, a final unity emerging from a long series of diversities (129). Perhaps Woolf is suggesting that Clarissa's psyche has started to dissolve and that she must reassemble her patriarchally designated self in order to maintain sanity--indeed to escape the symbolic "little room" of death. The streak of domination or will-to-power in her becomes positive only when, faced with the real possibility of death, Clarissa decides to speak her own *Führer*-like "must" and gather her disparate selves into one that will maintain life at this moment of confrontation with insanity and suicide.

Laclau argues that social identities *require* conflict for their constitution. Violence of various kinds actually prevents social decline (316-17). Conflict may help individuals define themselves more sharply and maintain strong identities. In this scene Clarissa dominates with one part of her self over the "others" and appears to choose the box marked "sanity." She does so knowing its erroneous and narrow construction by a phallogentric, war-dominated society. For Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Clarissa's internal

divisions denote the difficult problem of women's writing in an essentially masculine symbolic order, an order dependent upon the repression of women. To enter the symbolic game of men, women must constitute themselves as split subjects. Thus Woolf does not radically destroy the laws of syntax in this novel, so that she can continue to play the game (82-83). Later she engages in a more significant departure from the conventional form of the novel in *The Waves* and in *Between the Acts*.

The explicitly paired Clarissa and Septimus both suffer from the execrable effects of the violence of war. Both attempt to understand its causes, though Septimus' thoughts obviously exceed ordinary logic. Clarissa begins to perceive a gender politics of identity and domination extending to marital relations and ultimately to a nationalistic, colonial stance linked to war. She is trivialized in some ways by Woolf as a hostess, a supreme support system for her government official husband; however, the very trivialization powerfully speaks to the denigration of women and to the patriarchal underpinnings of war. Much is left unsaid or remains in shadow. The corruption of space, time, and language itself in the service of war is suggested. Some commentary is veiled in a satire that depends upon imagery, techniques of interruption, ellipsis, and encoded, parodic commentary. Had Woolf lived in the postmodern era, she would have explicitly identified "gender," "sanity," and "truth," and "class" as contested terms. *Mrs. Dalloway* is an eloquent, subtle prelude to her later, more direct attacks upon private and public fascism that leads to war and destroys the multiplicity vital to the lives of human beings.

CHAPTER SIX

"I have already said all I have to say in my book Three Guineas." Virginia Woolf. Unpublished letter dated 30 November 1938 to R. A. Scott James, editor of the *London Mercury*, regarding a request to write an article on the same topic as E. M. Forster's "Credo," published in the *London Mercury* in September 1938.

" . . . O we're all the same. Take myself now. Do I escape my own reprobation, simulating indignation, in the bush, among the leaves? There's a rhyme to suggest, in spite of protestation and the desire for immolation, I too have had some, what's called, education . . . Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?"—Miss La Trobe in Woolf's *Between the Acts* (187-88).

MISS LA TROBE GAZES INTO HER OWN MIRRORS⁴⁴: WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT CLASS FROM WOOLF

Woolf has been extolled for her critique of the imperialist project, her understanding of the relationship of war to the private tyrannies of the home, and her attempts to develop a uniquely feminine writing style. She has been lauded for her interest in the common reader and for her sensitive exploration of the complexities of issues of biography and character development in fiction. Woolf is now classified as one of the great, ground-breaking modernists, and some critics claim that she exhibits strong postmodernist tendencies as well. Her influence upon many other writers--Toni Morrison, Jeanette Winterson, and Zadie Smith are a few examples--is indisputable. However, as this study has attempted to demonstrate, her role as a feminist and her treatment of class issues remain contested, with various critics taking diverse positions, and with American and British readers not always reaching consensus on this point. Indeed, Woolf's reputation has been harmed historically by several powerful critics. *The Hours*, a 1998 film based on Michael Cunningham's novel, did little to improve Woolf's stereotype as a neurasthenic, depressed victim who eventually committed suicide. The film opens with

the suicide scene, which is repeated later in full cinematic detail. Scenes of Woolf's attendance at social reform society meetings or of her talks at a women's college or of her brilliant socializing at parties are not presented. The one plus is perhaps a kindling of interest in Woolf's writing and effective placement of Woolf's name in front of the public; unfortunately the real person behind the name remains narrowly drawn.

Molly Hite observes in a 2003 post to the Virginia Woolf International listserv that the image of Woolf as an elitist snob is still with us: "The repressed Woolf seems of a piece with the snobbish, hysterical, limited writer purveyed with tremendous success by F.R. and Q.D. Leavis at Cambridge (and still with us in the current *Pelican Guide to Literature*)" (1). F.R. and Q.D. Leavis are well-known to Woolf scholars for their negative and long-lasting effect upon Woolf's reputation.⁴⁵ Elaine Showalter also famously presented Woolf as an elitist who made no significant contribution to the feminist social movement. It is unfortunate that this stereotype persists, despite discussions of Woolf and class in the last two decades by critics such as Natania Rosenfeld, Michael Tratner, Georgia Johnston, Jeanette McVicker, Patrick McGee, Anna Snaith, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and others. Toril Moi offers a rebuttal to Showalter, stating that Woolf's radical narrative practices contribute a significant political intervention, a position with which I agree. Moi also notes the extent to which Woolf undermines the notion of the unitary self—certainly a politically-charged epistemological move. I have suggested that in doing so Virginia Woolf also undermines the notion of a unitary class system.

Recent, long-overdue and more extensive examinations of the class issue in Woolf studies generally look at one specific work of Woolf's or a specific genre of her writing

(for example, Cuddy-Keane's 2004 study of Woolf's essays). Several critics engage the imbrication of class and war, an important line of inquiry which I investigated in chapter five. I believe it is vital to fill in the gaps with regard to Woolf's treatment of class. Therefore I have emphasized misunderstandings of her class positionality and her use of satire in her early work, as well as her development up to her middle period and against the backdrop of her later non-fiction masterpiece, *Three Guineas*. I contend that many aspects of her later development are present in more than embryonic form in her early thinking, and that examining this early work in relation to class theory is useful in seeing how she developed in her treatment of class issues. Understanding Woolf's early wrestling with the relation between gender and class, her conception of both self and class as fluid, her recognition of the difficulties in extricating oneself from the chalk circles of class, and the intense need for the self-protective veil of satire all help readers to see that she did not simply bask in supposed blueblood status until prodded by Leonard or by the social changes brought on by war. Hers was a lifelong struggle to be "in the true" in Foucault's sense—to gather in all of reality, not excluding the warts even of her own biases and sharp-tongued unpleasantness.

Woolf was never part of the aristocracy, and she broke class rules by setting up housekeeping in Bloomsbury and living a bohemian life. This Bloomsbury outsider then married a Jewish man who himself suffered marginalization. Nonetheless, Woolf is not a simple case, for she also engages in backsliding and in a strong nostalgia for the stability and civility of the Victorian past. She is attracted to structured class divisions because they represent safe, known norms of behavior for someone who suffered some degree of

sexual trauma and more than one nervous breakdown. These same class divisions help to guarantee the leisure time for her writing.

I would like to further situate Woolf's early work in the context of her later examinations of class in order to emphasize how Woolf's treatment of class changes over time. Ann Fernald observes that "Class Distinctions," an unpublished Woolf essay tucked into the manuscript of *The Voyage Out*, and miscataloged for a long time, shows just how far Woolf was in 1912 from her position twenty-five years later in *Three Guineas*. In this early relic of Edwardian Bloomsbury, Woolf writes as an insider discussing the definition of the word "gentleman." She moves between "we" and "you," ironically not revealing her own sex and thus her exclusion from the category of "gentleman." Only later in her career, when she becomes aware of the price of adopting the voice of the gentleman essayist, does she insist on the radical connection between familial and national politics (3), and between gender-inflected class and the definition of what it means to be "civilized" in Britain. Though Woolf often remains conflicted, her treatment of class issues matures, changing from criticisms of social class embedded in the reveries of characters unlikely to be identified with her, to overt social critique in *Three Guineas* and *The Years*.

The Years may be plain in its critique only to discerning readers, for many in Woolf's time seem to have missed the extent of her criticism in this relatively popular novel. As I noted earlier, Woolf's childhood writing adopts a satiric tone in her family's amateur publication, *The Hyde Park Gate News*. She continues in this vein with *A Cockney's Farming Experiences*,⁴⁶ a precocious piece that links marriage and class issues. Even early adult sketches, such as "Carlyle's House,"⁴⁷ reveal a definite satiric bent. But Woolf

begins in Horatian mode: gently, tentatively, carefully—at least on the surface. Deep dissatisfaction with the status quo may be discerned underneath, particularly with regard to the status of women. I believe that Woolf feared dissolution of her ego after her traumatic experiences of sexual abuse and of the early deaths of her mother, half-sister, and brother (later her father as well and then nephew, Julian, in the war). Scholars disagree about the degree of sexual abuse; however, few have questioned its harmful effects on Woolf, who sought therapy for the events in later years. This fear was compounded by actual mental breakdowns that seemed more severe in her early years. Her diffuse psychic boundaries led her to seek definition, a coherent sense of self. The boundaries of her social class, then, formed a protective as well as a constrictive fence.

Her later work is marked by an increased confidence in expressing her views and a realization, nascent in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, of the strong role played by class position in forming each person's class view—in the root sense of providing paradigms for practical living. This realization strengthens the perceptiveness and depth of her class critique. Initially she fears being laughed at by family and friends. She also fears an inability to establish herself as a writer if she antagonizes the very individuals who might publish or favorably review her work. Later success empowers more directness in her social critique. However, her key ideas were incipient in many early works. For example, *Melymbrosia*, essentially the first manuscript version of *The Voyage Out*, reveals more direct, unmistakable social criticism not reflected in the final version of the novel, where Rachel is presented as an excessively naïve girl, and where more biting social criticism is voiced by male characters like Terence Hewet and St John Hirst. The language of silence, which Patricia Laurence speaks about so eloquently in her book, is

practiced by the heroine here, and also by Katharine Hilbery in *Night and Day*, where much of what Katharine wants is vocalized by Ralph Denham. Despite Katharine's emergence in this second novel as a stronger character than Rachel, it is only in later works that Woolf fully claims her own voice.

Natania Rosenfeld argues that Woolf's famous "web technique," linking the minds of disparate people and their subjectivities, is also one that underlines the skeleton of class division beneath an interwoven fabric. References to railings and fences enforce proportion and become a border between "plots" (topographical and narrative), the character of Septimus being seen as a "border case" (139-42). Rosenfeld quotes a passage from the *Diary* (III 104) in which Woolf analyzes her instinct to throw up "screens" of judgment regarding other people (in this diary entry, lower-class sun-burnt girls). Woolf recognizes these screens as barriers to communication but observes that these same screens may serve as devices to preserve one's sanity, for separateness would be impossible if we constantly sympathized with all people at all times (qtd. in Rosenfeld 143-44). In effect I have expanded upon such insights to illustrate how Woolf sometimes clung to the skeleton of class because it offered a definition of ego boundaries that otherwise became dangerously fluid.

After publication of *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, Woolf becomes increasingly sensitive to the extent to the way women are socialized to quash their thoughts and feelings because of economic dependence upon men, along with the unspoken expectations of gender. *Jacob's Room* is Woolf's first radical experiment with a novel form largely developed by male authors; she interrogates gender and class issues in the process. Jeanette McVicker contends that Woolf's early short story, "Kew Gardens"

(1919), demonstrates “a capsulized version of Woolf’s critique of Empire” (“Vast Nests” 41). I agree and believe Woolf does so in a fascinatingly modern, oblique, and impressionistic manner. Mrs. *Dalloway* reflects an advance in self-critique, one pushed to the borders of indeterminacy by her later experimental novel, *The Waves* (1931). Mrs. *Dalloway* employs a Joycean stream-of-consciousness technique for presenting the thoughts of Peter, Clarissa, and Septimus, thoughts that contain explicit social critique but at the remove of reverie. The effects are unquestionably blunted with this fictive technique.

According to Brian Shaffer, Clive Bell’s idea of the function of class in *Civilization*⁴⁸ is treated parodically and subverted in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This argument supports my contention that Woolf employed satire in her novels from early to mid-career as a protective measure in critiquing British society. As I have argued, Woolf clearly knew the general tenor of the arguments in Bell’s book long before its publication.

Later, in *Orlando* (1928) and *Flush* (1933), the gloves come off, and hard-hitting satire is used. *Orlando* outrageously satirizes gender categories themselves, foreshadowing Judith Butler’s theories of gender as performance and demonstrating class as performance as well. Even here, however, Woolf mutes some of the effect by employing humor and fantasy. *Flush* brilliantly uses the figure of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s dog to poke fun at the rigidities of the class system in Britain, and utilizes footnotes on the hidden life of Lily Wilson, Barrett-Browning’s maid, to provide both social satire and satire of male literary formats.⁴⁹ *Three Guineas*, however, is Woolf’s real manifesto, where she forthrightly claims her right to critique an entire social structure that, in material fact, supports not only the enterprise of war, but a whole system of

damaging gender domination. As Naomi Black points out, *Three Guineas* “is the clearest, most explicit statement of Woolf’s feminism”(7). Black says that, for Woolf, “war is only one of the products, admittedly one of the worst products, of a system of power and domination that has its roots in gender hierarchy. That hierarchy, and all others, are the targets of her feminism” (7).

Woolf continues to explore the silence of women in all of her novels, expanding her interrogation in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* (1941). Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts* is intriguing for her apparent classlessness and outsider status. This final novel skewers the notions of a stable subject, society, and or even a stable history. It seems postmodern, particularly in its emphasis on the self-referentiality of language. Woolf’s own social class and Woolf herself, who is implicated in the figure of Miss La Trobe, are satirized. Georgia Johnston contrasts Brechtian and Aristotelian performance methods in this novel, arguing that Miss La Trobe undermines and exposes class divisions by means of her performance techniques. Class is the foundation for battles between Mrs. Manresa and Miss La Trobe. Miss La Trobe does not wish to conform to set behavior patterns but instead attempts to expose the class system as one that promotes division through codes, and she tries to manipulate class structure in order to be accepted. Bartholomew and Giles own Pointz Hall but are not descendants of the builders of the manor. All four of these characters suggest that class lines are no longer stable. Mrs. Manresa makes people conscious of the power and instability of class structure by speaking of what has previously remained unsaid in polite circles; however, as Johnston notes, Mrs. Manresa opposes class structure in a manner that is a pose for her own class only. (That is, only in front of her own class does she identify herself with her servants.)

Through Mrs. Manresa, Woolf reveals class convention as performance (61-65). Johnston contends that “Woolf shows the artist outside the construction of individuality and class; indeed the ability to create art depends on transgression of individual and class restrictions” (65-66). I suggest that this position is exactly what Woolf aimed for as her writing developed. Miss La Trobe forces the audience to become part of the performance by having all characters on stage hold mirrors that are turned upon audience members at a strategic point in the performance. Through this figure, Woolf suggests the need to recognize that we are all complicit at any particular point in history, wrapped up in our own paradigm of class, monied power structures, and behavioral expectations.

As emphasized in this study, the effects of class are essential to Woolf’s identity and to her psychosexual maturation. She gradually realizes her own internalized functioning as an individual interpellated into a patriarchal ideology, one essentially supporting war, and only then recognizes her inevitable complicity in structures of oppression. even as she critiques them. Jeanette McVicker, in a 1996 article, contends that Woolf’s increasing involvement in the social, political, cultural, and economic issues that were part of the public sphere in the late 1920s to early 1930s made her more aware of way ideology functioned. Woolf was implicated because of her class in the hegemony of that dominant culture, and one might read her increasing focus on androgyny in *A Room of One’s Own* and in *Orlando* as a deepening recognition of this fact. However, for McVicker, Woolf’s defining interventions into the public sphere are reflected in her texts and speeches of 1930-32, the introductory letter to *Life as We Have Known It*, the speech before the London/National Society for Women’s Service,⁵⁰ and the six essays for the *Good Housekeeping* series on “the London Scene” (published in 1931-32). McVicker claims

that in the six essays, Woolf links class and gender oppression more often and more explicitly than in her previous work. This difference, I hope, has been shown in this study, for initially Woolf did not recognize the extent of the *systemic* nature of the oppression. McVicker also notes that, in her 1930 letter prefacing *Life as We Have Known It*, Woolf calls attention to her own class status and argues that the domestic and public spheres are interdependent; in her Women's Service speech Woolf points out the vital importance of killing off the Angel in the House, who symbolizes the hegemonic order upheld by the dominant Victorian culture (30-34).

Such direct statements were not possible for the early Woolf. However, Woolf's views were developing along these same lines and were simply expressed in the spaces between characters and words, with much greater use of indirection, satire, and techniques of interruption. It is as though the stitching of Woolf's early thought and writing was loose and exploratory, only to tighten and define itself more clearly with regard to class issues as she matured. Yet, one can never say that Woolf is any one thing, since she continues throughout her career to remain ever open to the flux of life in true postmodernist fashion. She is also always already highly cognizant of the boxes of language that often impede accurate expression of thought.

Woolf hated generalizations on class and on other matters. She disliked being called a feminist, though she worked on important feminist causes. Basically, she disliked the rigidity of labels for anyone. She even hated do-gooders who did not see their own ego involvement in helping others, and she suspected that every reformer concealed a fascist within. This idea mandated a painful look at her own class position in writing about necessary social reform in works like *Three Guineas*. Woolf promoted the importance of

the individual versus mass conformity and a belief in non-hierarchical, loosely-organized individual efforts. She stressed the importance of intellectual freedom⁵¹ and would have despised the contemporary culture of political correctness. Importantly, she believed that freedom was class-dependent and that it was determined by whether or not one was economically independent.

Woolf's relation to class is complicated by several factors. These very complications, however, teach us important things both about Woolf and about class. The first is the elusive nature of class itself. Social theorists from Max Weber in Woolf's time to Gary Day in our own century have emphasized the changing definition of class in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in particular. The biggest change applicable to Woolf's era was the shift from a land-based class system to one based on status, a foundation that continues to change in contemporary capitalist societies. Sharon O'Dair claims that both E. M. Forster's *Howards End* and *Mrs. Dalloway* demonstrate that inequality is not only a matter of class defined in terms of one's relationship to production, but also a matter of prestige, defined for the most part in terms of a person's relationship to consumption—i.e. in terms of one's lifestyle or culture. Furthermore, the relation between status and class, between culture and economy, is complicated. Status acquisition is linked to material conditions of life but is not simply a reflection or superstructural effect of class (337-44).⁵² O'Dair reminds us how visionary Woolf was even in her early thinking about class. Woolf is concerned about the new consumerism, and she appears conflicted over this point, for along with Clive Bell, she fears that a new striving for wealth and an excessive business work ethic will destroy civilized life. In Rosemary Hennessy's terms, Woolf views class as a set of social relations that undergird capitalism; yet she also

paradoxically perceives class divisions as support beams for the superstructure of civilization.

A second problem is the internalized nature of class conditioning, an important aspect of class examined by Bourdieu, Althusser, and others. It is this very gender-nuanced class conditioning that Woolf struggled mightily against from a young age. Nancy Hartsock and others have argued that staking a position of marginality is the best way to examine and fight against a system of domination. Woolf engages in this fight with the classic weapon of the marginalized: satire. She continues to wield the weapon of satire, sometimes flamboyantly (as in *Orlando*), throughout her career, finding class and class-related gender divisions themselves a fertile source of derision. However, the advantages of this positionality were not entirely clear to her until later in her career. Natania Rosenfeld (2000) has studied the outsider position staked by both Virginia and Leonard in detail. Rosenfeld contends that Woolf's "alliance to an impecunious Jew with the highest connections in British academe and politics multiplied and illuminated the contradictions in her own identity and politics" (3). For instance, Rosenfeld observes that Leonard was a former colonial administrator but developed an anti-imperialist stand, becoming an active socialist involved with questions of feminism and international relations. He also experienced a divided class and ethnic identity, for he vacillated between pride and rejection of his heritage. Woolf was privileged in her background but suffered exclusion because of gender; Leonard was excluded through background but privileged by his gender. Together they enacted border crossings (3-4). I believe Virginia's marriage to Leonard contributed significantly to her thinking on class. She had already made keen observations about the damaging nature of patriarchy in early short

stories and sketches and in *The Voyage Out*, and she had developed feminist views before her 1912 marriage. However, her intimate relationship with Leonard, both emotional and intellectual, pushed her views in the direction of fresh questioning of any kind of rigid categorization. She realized only later that complete escape from one's insider position was never possible.

A third difficulty in investigating classism in Woolf is the existence of a very large corpus that now includes published diaries and letters--in addition to her essays, reviews, short stories, novels, and a play. Some of her comments in letters and diaries, including snobbish or otherwise negative statements, were likely never intended for publication. Nonetheless, these have been mined in detail, so that critics are propelled into the difficulty of deciding how much weight to give private commentary on class issues. A fourth problem is the nature of Woolf's own protean self and the tendency of modernist writers to situate themselves within a space of indeterminacy. Still, some conclusions can be offered.

Primarily, Woolf teaches that one's thinking and acting are profoundly affected by the class into which one is born and bred. One can become conscious of some of these elements and transcend them to some extent, but never fully. One is always an insider, even if one develops—as Woolf did—the ability to step outside the glass box of a particular class. One cannot know intimately individuals from another class. Woolf was plagued in her later years by recognition of the limitations this fact placed on her as a writer. Woolf was sometimes embarrassed, for example, about her sketches of lower-class characters, fearing a lack of verisimilitude in relating their inner lives, to which she was not privy.

Early on, Woolf admits outright her lack of understanding of the lives of working women. However, her willingness to assist and actively encourage the publication of the stories of the working lives of women speaks volumes about her honesty. At the end of her life, Woolf can be found eavesdropping in a restaurant in order to gain insight (and perhaps snatches of dialog) for a short story based on lower-class characters. Heather Levy analyzes Woolf's field work in this regard in her study (2004) of Woolf's "The Watering Place" and "The Ladies Lavatory." Levy demonstrates patterns of idealization, elision, and even derision at some points in Woolf's presentation of working-class and lesbian individuals. Again, Woolf is a quintessential modernist in some respects, sometimes impossible to pin down at a given moment and demonstrating contradictory beliefs and behavior.

Furthermore, as George Orwell demonstrates, to abolish class is to abolish part of yourself, for class pervasively forms your tastes, habits, and life. Nonetheless, periodically stepping outside one's chalk circle⁵³ is essential in order to recognize one's own biases and limitations. In Woolf's early career, the constricting nature of class boundaries prevented recognition of the full extent of her own complicity in maintaining class structures. Woolf had a stake in her own class interest; for one thing, she could not even expect to be published if she did not maintain positive relationships with important reviewers, publishers, and friends and family related to this enterprise. Later the Hogarth Press guaranteed precious freedom of thought and expression. She also relied upon an educated readership, particularly for her modernist experiments with narrative form and extensive exploration of her characters' inner consciousness. In later years, however, she engaged in solid efforts to promote the common reader, believing passionately in the

importance, if not the necessity, of encouraging ordinary citizens to educate themselves by critical reading and thinking. Her belief in separating didacticism from art also played a role in her partially covert engagement in a politics of language and epistemology.

Woolf unquestioningly demonstrates that class is more nuanced for women than for men, involving distinct gender differences related to economic status, (lack of) education, and marriage. Class status can also be affected by Sapphist inclinations, by childlessness, by the manner in which the aging process for women is socially constructed. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*, as well as various short stories--such as "Lappin and Lapinova" and "[The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn]"--investigate these issues in detail. *Orlando* foregrounds the fact, for example, that Vita Sackville-West could not inherit the family estate of Knole because of her gender. *Three Guineas* deals explicitly with all of these gender-nuanced class issues.

Woolf vacillates in her position on class, revealing ambivalence about social position and access to economic means of support. Susan Squier notes that, in the final essay for *The London Scene*, Woolf appears to disguise her woman's *outsider* position with the unchallenging tones of the insider, though she explicitly joins class and sexual oppression in the spatial imagery used for her portrait of the Carlyle house (496-99). However, Squier believes that even though Woolf is tempted to identify with the security represented by the insider world (rational, ordered London connected with the literary elite), she eventually sides with the freedom and vitality of the outsider. Thus she ultimately affirms the worth and dignity of the working class in a number of these essays, where she overtly joins gender relations to class relations (488-91). I concur with Squier

that Woolf discovers her freedom in her very marginalization and that ultimately Woolf deliberately chooses this position.⁵⁴

Later in life Woolf acknowledges difficulties with her writing *because* of her inherited class position. Her sometimes sterile upper-class characters and shadowy renderings of lower-class characters (family servants, for example, are almost completely invisible in earlier work) show the difficulty of attaining a deep understanding of a class beneath or above one's own. To wit, in the early *Night and Day* Woolf appears not even interested in investigating the lives of servants because they are completely relegated to the novel's background, though they clearly are important to the family life of the Hilberys. In her 1928 essay, "The Niece of an Earl," Woolf declares that English fiction would be unrecognizable without class distinctions and that society can be compared to a "nest of glass boxes" that keeps classes separated, unable to fully understand one another intimately. Consequently, fiction does not provide insight into the highest or lowest classes because these classes do not write about themselves. She also states that English fiction is highly dependent upon class differences for its humor and that in a classless society of the future, the novel may be unrecognizable.

Furthermore, as Woolf emphasizes in her late-career essay on class, "The Leaning Tower" (1940), writers reflect class divisions in theme, form, and style, even if not directly analyzing class. Here Woolf criticizes young leftists--such as W.H. Auden--who claim solidarity with the working class while still enjoying upper-class privileges, and she envisions a classless society that could lead to the end of the novel as she knows it. Woolf does not explicitly discuss syntax and vocabulary differences in detail, but she does recognize the need for "a woman's sentence" and aims for freedom from linguistic

masculine bias as her career progresses.⁵⁵ This is a partially impossible task, as Rita Felski has pointed out in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989). Felski's analysis of "masculine" and "feminine" texts concludes that "feminine" texts must be read as a complex dialectic of meaning production that involves class and other historical factors, and not just gender.

Anna Snaith observes that the strength of Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas* derives precisely from Woolf's consciousness of the limitations of her own class position, contending that Woolf's notion of audience was indeed democratic and that letters kept by Woolf from respondents to *Three Guineas* reveal how mixed her reading public was in terms of class. To Snaith, Woolf also situates herself outside rather than within the tower of literature in "The Leaning Tower" and claims that literature is no one's private ground. Here she also writes for and about the common reader in advocating public libraries, and she advocates a non-hierarchical, two-way dialog between a writer and the common reader ("Virginia Woolf" 219-20). Snaith notes that forty-nine of the extant fifty-eight respondents to Woolf's *Three Guineas* are self-identified as members of the working class and are predominantly positive in response. In most cases, the respondents praise Woolf for strongly and accurately describing their experiences of inequality. Many argue that the text should reach a wider working-class audience and should, in fact, become mandatory reading. They would seem to disprove the charge that the book was of little relevance at the time of its publication except to Woolf and her friends. Furthermore, the letters extend Woolf's text in a sense, and they are also evidence of Woolf's own public position as an intellectual ("Virginia Woolf" 221-24).

Woolf sheds light on the importance of salvaging “civilization” and thinking critically about what should constitute civilized society. As I discussed earlier, she was influenced by Clive Bell’s *Civilization*, a reflection on the chief components of civilization that relied heavily upon an idealized Greek model. Along with Bell, many in Bloomsbury believed that one should make only enough money for adequate leisure to contemplate the finer things in life. Leisure related to the ability to write, a conflicted class issue dissected by Patrick McGee in his 1992 article on *The Waves* (1931), where he notes that the figure of the lady writing in that novel is an ambivalent one enabled by the servant class. I suggest that this desire for the leisure to pursue the “good life” creates an impossible dialectic of elitism coexisting with egalitarian democracy. I do not believe that Woolf could resolve this issue.

Woolf shows how class divisions constrict development of the individual and hamper the ability to communicate. A prime example is the repression caused by fear of being laughed at for lapses in social etiquette, as in Woolf’s famous short story, “The New Dress,” where even the name of the main character, Mabel Waring, appears to play on worries about “what Mabel is wearing.” This sense of not measuring up can create an invisible class boundary marker. I hope this study has demonstrated, especially in the close examinations of class issues in *The Voyage Out* and in *Night and Day*, that Woolf was keenly aware of the constrictive nature of class divisions from the time of her earliest writing.

Woolf demonstrates that social class is constructed by means of patriarchal practice-- especially in *The Voyage Out*, in *Night and Day*, in *Three Guineas*, and in short stories such as “Lappin and Lapinova.” She illustrates Juliet Mitchell’s claim that patriarchy

depends upon men exchanging women in marriage. Thus, Woolf would agree that women are colonized subjects even in a capitalist system. Woolf establishes connections between patriarchy, mental illness, marriage, war, and empire as early as *Mrs. Dalloway*, a work that should be considered a distinct prelude to *Three Guineas*. Rita Felski contends that not all patriarchal elements are oppressive, that one should not hypothesize an essence of femininity, and that categories like class are too simple because class is a complex dialectic. But Woolf escapes Felski's critique because she uncovers exactly what elements of patriarchy are most oppressive: those limiting education and professional advancement for women and those advocating war. Woolf also avoids essentializing women, recognizing individual differences, as well as important class differences, and she does not find the category of class anything but a complex dialectic. Woolf nonetheless eventually groups women as a class sharing the general burden of fewer economic and educational opportunities—and thus truncated psychological, social, and intellectual development—as a result of a general system of patriarchy connected to empire and war. They are a class of their own trained to fawn over male egos, often thanklessly to maintain the emotional lives of families, to endure constant interruption of their tasks, and to accept the constant monitoring of protective male figures. They do indeed share commonalities despite the historic specificity inflecting their particular location on the grid of class.

Yet Woolf was periodically conflicted over unwillingness to abandon an attraction for a certain degree of material wealth. As Sally Alexander observes in a discussion of *Three Guineas*, Woolf admits after attending a Women's Co-operative Guild meeting in 1913 that laws that women wanted passed (laws addressing minimum wage, labor-saving

appliances, maternity, and housing, among others) “‘would not touch a hair of my comfortable, capitalist head’” (281). Woolf’s comment highlights recognition of her separation from working class women and both her comfort and discomfort in that separation. Nonetheless, she unquestionably expended effort to work toward the betterment of this class of women, as well as the “uneducated daughters of uneducated men”—a class she ironically partially escaped later in life by becoming the common reader she championed. Granted, Leslie Stephen’s tutelage in the setting of his large library provided a fine head start, but she was largely self-educated by virtue of her extensive reading.

Woolf’s self-education involved immersion in the classics and in Britain’s long and illustrious literary history, but this also largely meant immersion in patriarchal language and thought. Woolf laments that history has lost the contributions of many anonymous women and spotlights the truncated career of Shakespeare’s hypothetical sister in *A Room of One’s Own*. She is adamant in her conclusion that women suffer serious social limitations when they lack a good education. She worries about the undesirable effects of the kind of standardization required by trends toward democracy, for she values highly the uniqueness of the individual, but she stresses the importance of the common reader more and more strongly as her career develops. Woolf ultimately radically promotes critical thinking and reading in her writing practice by uncovering the dominant sexist, racist, classist ideology of her time.

Mark Hussey reminds us that in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1923) Woolf clearly contends that “‘reality’ is an ideological construct, for if you tell people for long enough that all men have humps and women tails, she says, eventually they will believe it and

will accuse you of heresy if you suggest otherwise” (qtd. in Hussey, “Hiding Behind” 11). That class is also related to race and politics is a conclusion Woolf illustrates in novels such as *Flush*, where dog class divisions, racial purity as linked to the high and low purity of aristocracy, fascism, and eugenics merge to form a text highly political in a covert way. The Jewish question prominent in British politics of the 1930s is also dealt with extensively in *The Years*. Beatrice Webb emphasizes in her essay “The Drawbacks of Democracy” that the magic of political democracy for any race is the enlargement of the human personality and a loss of the sense of inferiority (184). This was Leonard’s belief, as a person dealing with class resentment related to his Jewish heritage, and one shared by Virginia; both worked to further the cause of democracy for societies around the globe. Furthermore, in “Women and Fiction,” a 1929 essay, Woolf writes of a future where women will write not simply of clashing emotions but about clashing classes and races (CE II 147).

In a new biography of D.H. Lawrence (2005), John Worthen argues that Lawrence was not notably anti-Semitic and certainly not as bad as Pound or Eliot. It is worth remembering that Woolf wrote her major work in a general climate of anti-Semitism in Britain, not just among the literati but among the general public. She cannot be excused for engaging in damaging racial slurs even in her early life and work, but its seriousness must be placed in the context of attitudes commonly held by her peers and judged also against maturation in her later treatment of race and class. I agree with David Bradshaw that Woolf’s later resistance to bigotry against Jews—apart from the significance of the love and longevity of her marriage to a marginalized Jewish man—has not been adequately examined or appreciated. As Bradshaw points out, she forges links among

various exclusions: homosexuals, servants, women, the colonized, and Jews. She eventually admits the shameful nature of her own ethnic bias and takes pains to underscore the value of a marginalized standpoint position outside the dominant social order.

Woolf's early work, set in the context of her midpoint masterpiece of *Mrs. Dalloway* and her late-career *Three Guineas*, demonstrates a continuous thread of concern with a nexus of class and gender issues. Gary Day contends that class has been ignored for at least twenty years in literary studies, stating the value of its primacy over other kinds of identity politics and a theory as to why a system of domination should develop at all: "In short, class provides an account of the origin of inequality from which other forms of oppression arise. 'Literature' is one of those forms of oppression, but it also has the potential to transcend the mechanism of exchange with which it is otherwise so unwittingly complicit" (18). Woolf explores the issue of class as an origin of inequality, but she explores it in a gender-nuanced manner, teaching us that class is a particularly unstable demarcation for women.

Admittedly, Woolf emphasizes the class of the "uneducated daughters of educated men" most strongly in her class analysis, for that is where her stake in her own class interest is strongest. But Woolf worries about the larger internalized nature of class oppression, its relationship to language itself, and its effects of alienation and general negative impact upon one's psychological development. She reflects a sense of the modernist indeterminacy of her period and some personal need to retain class boundaries. She is concerned with the effects of war upon class dissolution, for she feels connected to a sense of "Englishness" and a need to preserve civilization, however contested the two

concepts might be. Perhaps inevitably, Woolf performs her own class by the very language she uses. To her credit, she recognizes that one cannot know fully a class above or beneath one's own. She calls for a truly feminine sentence and demonstrates an associative, digressive style that counters a more prevailing direct, masculine pattern. She uses satire as an effective tool to expose the social system at its worst in the texts highlighted in this study. Ultimately, I believe her satire is turned upon herself in the figure of Miss La Trobe in Woolf's posthumously-published final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Miss La Trobe is a childless, possibly lesbian, outsider who has been directing the villagers in a play, which at a critical point involves the actors turning mirrors upon the audience. In this *tour de force* of class, gender, war, and the pageant of English history—against the backdrop of the beginnings of civilization itself—Miss La Trobe peers into her own mirror, figuratively speaking, and discovers that she herself is part of the game, part of the audience, part of the play. By this very action, both Woolf and her character champion the common reader (and listener) by educating him and her in critical thinking, viewing, and reading. This common reader effort, continued on many other fronts in her lifetime, is perhaps her finest contribution to a more democratic but discriminating society, free from the worst effects of classism. Woolf was at work on yet another novel when she died, a novel tellingly and tentatively titled *Anon*.

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER ONE:

¹ A term used by Katherine C. Hill in "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen and Literary Revolution." *PMLA* 96 (1981), p. 360, to describe the influence of Stephen's agnostic rationalism upon his daughters, especially regarding their participation in the cultural rebelliousness central to bohemian Bloomsbury during the early part of the twentieth century.

² Found in the *Mrs. Dalloway* manuscript, this story was published posthumously in 1965 in the *Times Literary Supplement* and again in 1966 by the Hogarth Press. It was reissued in 1991 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich under the title *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*.

³ See Kathy J. Phillips in *Virginia Woolf against Empire* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1994) for good background on this point.

⁴ Examples are Crosby in *The Years* and Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's maid in *Flush*.

⁵ Lyndall Gordon, for instance, interprets Woolf's understanding of the fin as that which is unknown or only half-glimpsed. See p. 235 and p. 238 in *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life*. New York: Norton, 1984.

⁶ Woolf, Virginia. Letters to Janet Case, Madge Vaughn, Violet Dickinson, Lady Ottoline Morrell (Lee 304).

⁷ This famous quote appears in Virginia Woolf's *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, III*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell. New York: Harcourt, 1980, p. 108.

⁸ Virginia Woolf in "A Sketch of the Past" in *Moments of Being*. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. Sussex: U of Sussex, 1976, p. 136.

⁹ From Vanessa Bell's *Notes on Virginia's Childhood*. New York: Frank Hallman, 1974, p. 7.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf. *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. London: Hogarth, 1972, p. 57.

CHAPTER TWO:

¹¹ I disagree with Louise DeSalvo over the extent to which she believes that readers should connect numerous other aspects of Woolf's writing to incidents of possible sex abuse in her early life. Though it provides valuable insight and background, DeSalvo's book in some respects seems a totalizing, overly simplified, and problematic account. Nonetheless, I do agree that Woolf's writing reveals the effects of trauma.

¹² The title was supplied by Susan M. Squier and Louise A. DeSalvo in their introduction to the publication of this Woolf story in *Twentieth Century Literature* 25:3/4 (Fall/Winter 1979): 237-69.

¹³ Woolf's dating in this story seems a little awry. Since Miss Merridew refers to being known at Oxford and Cambridge universities, she probably lives in at least the latter part of the nineteenth, if not the twentieth, century. This does not match with the fact that John Martyn's grandmother, Mistress Joan, is referred to as living in the medieval period. In addition, John says that Joan kept the journal in 1480 but was born in 1495. Woolf may here intend to mock the obsession of the typical historian with dates, or she may simply have made a mistake she would have rectified later. However, there are other date and age discrepancies, so I believe that Woolf may indeed be satirizing the male historian's excessive preoccupation with these relatively sterile numbers, especially at the expense of accounts of real-life, obscure women.

¹⁴ Hereafter, references to *The Complete Shorter Fiction* will be abbreviated as *CSF*.

¹⁵ Brenda Silver believes that this story of Woolf's presents many themes that recur in her later work, and Louise DeSalvo concurs. See Silver article, p. 651 in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*. Ed. Bonnie Kime Scott. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. See also p. 63 and p. 79 in DeSalvo's "Shakespeare's Other Sister" in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Jane Marcus. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981. 61-81. DeSalvo believes this story is important to the Woolf canon because it sets the

stage for Woolf's central concerns in her later writing and proposes that Woolf is Shakespeare's *other* sister—a reference to Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*.

¹⁶ Shaffer also notes Woolf's criticism of Bell by melding his character with that of her father, Leslie, in the depiction of Mr. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. Mr. Ramsay's "pseudo-philosophical speculations can be seen as a parody of Bell's two attributes of all civilizations—'A Sense of Values [a quality] and Reason Enthroned [a mental capacity]'" (86).

¹⁷ Brian Shaffer discusses Woolf's diary entry dismissing Clive's book as superficial and Leonard's later comment that Bell's method and assumptions were wrong in footnote 38 on p. 82 of his article "Civilization in Bloomsbury: Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Bell's 'Theory of Civilization.'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 19, No. 1 (1994 Summer): 73-87.

¹⁸ Arguing in this article that Woolf displays a keen sensitivity to the nexus of gender, class, culture, and power in many of her novels, Bradshaw also discusses *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room*, and *The Years* with respect to these issues.

¹⁹ Five of these were republished in 1975 as *The London Scene*. Susan Squier in *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1985) discusses Woolf's emphasis in all six essays on the great contrast between the comforts of the upper and middle classes in London and the darker world of the working classes and the poor.

CHAPTER THREE:

²⁰ This phrase is chanted by Terence in Chapter XIV of *The Voyage Out*. It is also noted by Julia Briggs in her Introduction to *Night and Day* as the early title for the novel in its manuscript form. See Woolf, Virginia. *Night and Day*. New York: Penguin, 1992, xxxi.

²¹ Hereafter, references to *The Voyage Out* will be abbreviated as *TVO*.

²² Peach believes that even Woolf's later fiction shows that her aim is not that of the social realist—to define what is hidden or revealed in discourse—but rather that of an "archaeologist," in Foucault's sense, who is concerned with the diffusion of knowledge, its development into concepts in cultural texts, and its relation to social customs, politics, institutions, and private behavior.

²³ A reference to King Edward VII's love of ceremony, displayed in evening courts held next to St. James Park to show the magnificence of life in England.

²⁴ Antigone, of course, defies the State and dies for the sake of a larger moral principle. References to the story of Sophocles' *Antigone*, a favorite of Woolf's, abound in Woolf's writing, especially in *The Years*.

CHAPTER FOUR:

²⁵ This phrase describing the "machinery" of London occurs in Woolf's short story entitled "Kew Gardens" (publ. 1919). Woolf also states in "The Niece of an Earl" (CE1219-23) that "[Society is] a nest of glass boxes . . ."

²⁶ Marc Cyr observes that this story lacks plot and that the ending subverts the ordinary expectation for plot closure. He also observes that none of the mini-stories in the narrative ever reaches a conclusion, which makes the confident and swift identification of the black mark as a snail, made by an apparently male companion, so pointed a gender difference when juxtaposed to the female narrator's musing on the same mark (7-9). Cyr quotes Bette London's view that gender coding reveals that the narrator's companion is male, since "'The masculine intervention of the discourse of 'fact' . . . closes the story by foreclosing the woman speaker's inconclusive, self-proliferating text'" (8-9). In addition, Cyr discusses London's belief that the companion's central and strong concern with war is usually thought of as masculine rather than feminine. For the female narrator, war swirls on the periphery (9).

²⁷ Woolf, Virginia. "Modern Fiction." *Collected Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. London: Hogarth, 1972. II: 106.

²⁸ The couple merges with the words, and the words merge with objects near them. Just as the story centers upon voices, Bishop asserts that so, too, does Woolf here discover a voice of her own, one that she would employ in her major narratives from this point onward. To Bishop, Woolf found that life could be captured by a net of words that produced their own luminous halo, representing and evoking the *process* of consciousness rather than a specific, concrete picture of life (273-75).

²⁹ Brown observes that Woolf agreed with Roger Fry in rejecting the perfection of objects which are mechanically reproduced (as with the production of china by the Wedgwood company) in favor of handcrafted items that retain their unique characteristics. Fry felt that people must really *see* things and not just look at them (I would note that Woolf believed men in general should take this stance toward women). For Brown, this is a story which grants things their sovereignty, which looks at things anew and apart from habitual perception in the sense of William James' object/thing distinction (in the sense of separating the object itself from its habitual perception). John develops a cosmological sense of objects similar to that expressed by Woolf in other tales: he imagines the piece of glass as one of the dead stars or a cinder of the moon. Brown believes that the ambiguity of the story is connected to the "specularity" of the life of things and to the sense of "commodity culture as usual." John's desire to possess objects anticipates later "bourgeois consumerism where consumption and collection seem increasingly conflated" (7-9).

³⁰ It is interesting for contemporary readers to note use of the solely masculine pronoun in these lines, though of course it was conventional for the era to exclude the female pronoun when referring to mixed company. In a brief 1993 *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* article, Ann Fernald discusses "Class Distinctions," an unpublished essay found tucked in the manuscript of *The Voyage Out*, as revealing Woolf's early inability to reveal her sex in writing. Here Woolf can be seen at a time just before class and gender issues became intertwined. Fernald notes that "it was still possible in 1912 for Woolf to imagine an essay on class distinctions wholly without reference to women" (3).

³¹ A version of this portion of the chapter has been published in *Woolf in the Real World: Selected Papers from the Thirteenth International Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Clemson, SC: Clemson U D P, 2005. 56-63. References here are to the 1919 Duckworth version of *Night and Day*.

³² Julia Briggs discusses Mansfield's criticism of *Night and Day* in her introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition of the novel (xi).

³³ Mark Hussey discusses the star-gazer reference in fascinating detail in "Refractions of Desire: The Early Fiction of Virginia and Leonard Woolf." *Modern Fiction Studies* 38 (1992): 127-46.

³⁴ Although the date of composition of *Night and Day* is uncertain, Hussey reminds us in this article of Elizabeth Heine's belief that it was early in 1915, which would have been soon after Virginia's suicide attempt in 1913.

³⁵ Hussey also notes that DeSalvo reveals a general association for Virginia in both the *Melymbrosia* manuscript and in *The Voyage Out* of heterosexual love and death.

³⁶ Hussey in this article also quotes Leonard's depiction of Virginia as Aspasia: a woman like "a snow-covered hill, as probably having no heart, but possessed of a pure and clear mind interested only in the pursuit of reality" (130).

CHAPTER FIVE:

³⁷ Credit should also be given to Selma S. Meyerowitz for one of the earliest studies of class in the novel in her 1976 unpublished dissertation on Woolf and class.

³⁸ Mark Hussey has edited a series of essays entitled *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth*. Other examples are Karen Levenback's *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* and Linden Peach's *Virginia Woolf*, which includes a chapter on war-related issues and *Mrs. Dalloway*.

³⁹ In 1937, Julian Bell, Woolf's nephew, returned from China convinced that the antifascist cause justified violent action; he began work as an ambulance driver and was killed by shrapnel in Spain on July 18. By the 1940s, Woolf and her husband, Leonard, were part of the Gestapo Arrest List for England (Levenback xi).

⁴⁰ Hereafter, parenthetical references to *Mrs. Dalloway* will employ the abbreviation *MD*. Obvious abbreviations for other Woolf novels and stories will also be used, such as *TG* for *Three Guineas*.

⁴¹ Interestingly, and ironically, Nicholas Marsh criticizes Clarissa for making a selfish choice in marrying Richard, a man who does not demand a great deal from her emotionally—as Peter Walsh, her rejected lover, might have (145).

⁴² An insightful phrase employed by Patrick McGee to discuss Woolf's novel, *The Waves*, in "The Politics of Modernist Form; or, Who Rules the Waves." *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 38, No. 3 (1992 Fall): 631-50.

⁴³ Mrs. Hilbery also appears in *Night and Day*, where she is a hostess figure and wife of a husband similar to Leslie Stephen, as well as mother to Katharine Hilbery, the novel's main character. Katharine partially resembles Woolf herself—despite Woolf's disclaimer that Katharine is based upon her sister, Vanessa.

CHAPTER SIX:

⁴⁴ Miss La Trobe is a character who directs a play in *Between the Acts* where mirrors are turned upon the audience as a signal of the need for self-knowledge. She is sometimes associated with Woolf herself in this last novel of Woolf's, published posthumously in 1941.

⁴⁵ As Mark Hussey points out in *Virginia Woolf A to Z*, F.R. and Q.D. Leavis also published dismissive reviews of Woolf's writing in their journal, *Scrutiny*--most significantly Q.D. Leavis's 'Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unite!' in 1938, a review of Woolf's *Three Guineas* (144).

⁴⁶ Not published until 1994.

⁴⁷ These sketches were not collected and published until 2003.

⁴⁸ Published in 1928 but known by Woolf in draft form as early as 1906.

⁴⁹ Anna Snaith's 2002 *Modern Fiction Studies* article on *Flush* offers detailed, fascinating class and racial analysis of this often-overlooked novel.

⁵⁰ This speech provided the idea for *The Pargiters*, an early version of *The Years*.

⁵¹ Naomi Black points out in *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* that Woolf was a founding member of FIL, an intellectual freedom group in Britain formed in 1936 to provide support for French intellectuals pressured by rightist groups in their country; Woolf became impatient with the group but recognized that achieving the group's goals was vital to the success of her own feminism (195).

⁵² O'Dair also discusses the depiction of Septimus as a self-educated man whose education was all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries, noting that books as repositories of culture are still powerful instruments of status in society (352).

⁵³ The chalk circle is an image used in an early discussion of class among characters in *The Voyage Out*.

⁵⁴ Mary M. Childers argues that Woolf scholars should dispel the illusion that Woolf's thought constitutes an entirely consistent totality. Rather, Woolf's writing ranges from pointed and responsible commentary on middle-class women to unwarranted generalizations about gender, to expressions of discomfort that border on distaste for women with materially restricted lives that do not inspire elegant prose. Despite Woolf's honesty in admitting class discomfort in the presence of working-class women, she still represses the knowledge that there is a power relation between women employers and their women servants, and between the silent working-class women and the speaking middle-class women. Childers also criticizes Woolf for expecting literature to transcend class conflict and for using maids in her writing in exactly the way that she gently mocks her own class for doing. Childers argues that Woolf is torn between political questions and the question of Being, and that in some respects she embraces a priestly role to maintain her class dominance by advocating forms of consciousness dependent upon adequate leisure time (73-78).

⁵⁵ Rita Felski has pointed out in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989) that this is a partially impossible task. Felski's analysis of "masculine" and "feminine" texts concludes that "feminine" texts must be read as a complex dialectic of meaning production that involves class and other historical factors, and not just gender.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary C. Madden teaches at the University of South Florida, Tampa. She has been published in *Woolf in the Real World* (2005) and in *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, *Style*, *Sunscripts*, *Kalliope*, and the *Florida English Journal*, among other publications. She is currently researching class issues in the work of Virginia Woolf. She is also a published and performance poet.