Virginia Woolf, Contingency and the Concepts of
‘Public’ and ‘Private’

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Abstract

The concepts of ‘public’ and ‘private’ recur throughout Virginia Woolf’s life, work and feminism and the division itself was one to which she often referred and which she continually reworked on its many levels. To date, the division of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in Woolf’s work has only been considered at any length in terms of the influence of politics on her work. Using as a model Richard Rorty’s work on ‘public’ and ‘private’ vocabularies, primarily for the idea of the incommensurability of ‘public’ and ‘private’, I explore the division as it appears in several aspects of Woolf’s work. In addition, I use Rorty’s notion of contingency as a way of approaching Woolf’s own resistance to finality, as well as allowing for the flux and changing contexts of her negotiations between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’.

Chapter One introduces the importance of a ‘public’/‘private’ division for Woolf, explores its simplification in the hands of past critics, outlines Rorty’s ideas on contingency and the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ and shows how they relate to Woolf. Chapter Two offers a historical account of the changes as women entered the ‘public’ sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and places Woolf’s own experience within such an account. In Chapter Three I discuss Woolf’s extensive use of indirect interior monologue as a negotiation between ‘public’ and ‘private’ voices. Chapter Four looks at various generic divisions in terms of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’, focusing on the evolution of *The Years* from an essay-novel to a novel. In Chapter Five I continue the exploration of *The Years*, focusing on the interplay of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in the content of the novel, and the final chapter examines the increasing tension between ‘public’ and ‘private’ in the last three years of Woolf’s life, caused by the onset of WWII.

I argue that a ‘public’/‘private’ dichotomy was a central one for Woolf, a distinction which she consistently maintained, but that it manifested itself on many levels therefore an approach is needed which allows for those changing meanings.
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Abbreviations of Works by Virginia Woolf


‘Additions to Ch. One.’ Berg Collection. New York Public Library (15 p. 1941) ADD


British Library Manuscripts. BL


The Death of the Moth and Other Essays. London: The Hogarth Press, 1981. DM


Monk’s House Papers. (1st p. 1925) MHP


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Since Virginia Woolf made extensive use of ellipses, any ellipses which I have inserted will be marked by square brackets.
Introduction

The aim of this thesis is twofold: first, to explore the division of the 'public' and the 'private' as it appears in Virginia Woolf's life and work, and, secondly, to suggest that the notion of contingency is a useful term to elucidate both Woolf's own thinking and the strategies by which a literary critic might approach her work. To date, there has been no full-length study of Woolf's conception of a 'public'/ 'private' dialectic; indeed, the division can be used to distinguish between those critics who politicize her or see her as deeply concerned with 'public' issues, and those who call her apolitical, or confine her to the 'private' sphere. Critics who have approached the division itself have seen it largely in terms of the influence of politics, or the external world, on Woolf, only one of the many possible directions from which the configuration of the 'public' and the 'private' might be viewed.

The second aim arises out of what I see as the need for a way of reading Woolf which does not simplify her work by aligning her with one half of a dichotomy, or privileging one aspect or argument in her work over all others. Not only are these types of readings necessarily selective, but they also ignore Woolf's own explicitly stated commitment to change and resistance to traditions or definitions, particularly in relation to her feminism. What is needed is a way of reading Woolf which does not feel the necessity to simplify and/or unify either her arguments or her texts, and which is prepared to qualify or even to erase the distinction between text and context which is still so powerful in literary-historical studies.

I suggest that Richard Rorty’s notion of contingency, as outlined in
Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, could be useful for this purpose. Rorty argues that there are no trans- or supra-historical truths to which one can refer. Truths are a product of contingency or circumstance: the specifics of time, geography, language. There is no inherent nature to identity or the world which we can try to define. The world exists, but descriptions of the world are our creations, products of our vocabularies and situations. Rorty’s thinking then, demands a specificity, an awareness of contexts and vocabulary. Woolf’s own refusal to posit universal views or essences, her own contingency of thought, means that her ideas and methods often change: her novels deliberately work by different formal strategies and her feminism is deliberately not a unifiable set of beliefs. This in turn means that the critic must approach Woolf’s texts with a way of reading which allows for diversity, and does not hope to end up with an overarching argument.

In my exploration of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’, then, I am not attempting to schematize Woolf’s conception of them, nor am I claiming that in any way a ‘public’/‘private’ division is the ‘key’ to Woolf’s work. A ‘public’/‘private’ division is, of course, only one, partial way into Woolf’s work. There is no one way of reading the division, there is no one meaning to either ‘public’ or ‘private’ and there is no single description of Woolf’s formulation of the division. It can be read in a variety of ways, on a variety of levels. A discussion of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ can act as a test case of the usefulness of contingency: since the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ can be read in many different ways, the contingency or context of their use must be taken into account. Rather than coming at Woolf with rigid definitions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces, the various meanings will alter depending on context. Woolf’s use of the terms

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shows up the abstraction of the words themselves. The only arguments that can be made are that a 'public'/‘private’ dialectic is important to Woolf’s writing, proven by the number of times it arises, and that she saw a distinction between the two realms, however the realms happened to be characterized, again proven by Woolf’s own use of the terms in conjunction with one another.

This is not to suggest, however, that the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ are devoid of meaning, but rather that for the purposes of this discussion, that meaning will be contextual: their meanings will arise out of the circumstances in which they appear in Woolf’s work. Woolf uses the term ‘public’ to refer to public issues or politics, geographical public spaces (particularly the city, where the distinction between public and private spaces is intensified), her reading public, the realm of publication and public voices (in terms of a public speech, or a communal voice). ‘Private’ spaces, on the other hand, include the home, domestic spaces, private writing (the autobiography, the diary or fiction, which are privately generated as opposed to writing based on public fact) or the individual or internal voice. Woolf invariably uses the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ together, reinforcing the idea of a dialectic. Again, there are different permutations of her development of that dialectic: sometimes Woolf needed both the privacy of her Sussex home and London society, or she felt the need to combine public issues with fiction; in other instances, the pressure of politics intruded upon her private pursuit of writing novels. Whether it was fraught or harmonious, Woolf consistently maintained - worked over, thought through, reinvented - the distinction between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’.

Much theorizing has been done concerning the demarcation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms, often, however, offering a narrative which traces the privileging of one realm over another. Richard Sennett, for example, mourns the loss of ‘public’ man
which he sees occurring in the nineteenth century with the rise of the individual, and loss of belief in a transcendent human nature. For Sennett, ‘public’ life has ‘become a matter of formal obligation’; ‘public’ life, along with the city, is in decay, and the ‘tyrannies of intimacy’ and narcissism are our driving forces. ²

Hannah Arendt believed that the distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ has been blurred by a transference of economic concerns, which in classical Greece were household, or ‘private’ concerns, to the realm of society, or the social. The notion of society, in its political form the nation-state, has elided politics with economics, fusing formerly ‘public’ concerns with ‘private’ ones. For the Greeks, the ‘public’ realm was the realm of speech and action, of freedom from inequality; politics was not merely the protection of a society. Formerly ‘private’ matters have ‘become a "collective" concern’, and the ‘private’ realm is now felt to be the realm in which men and women are ‘truly’ human. ³ Like Sennett, Arendt saw an emptying of the ‘public’ realm, politics becoming administration, and the subsequent loss of a common nature or a common world. Ultimately, like Sennett, Arendt too mourned the death of ‘public’ man and people’s imprisonment ‘in the subjectivity of their own singular experience.’ ⁴

These theories of social evolution are not useful to this exploration of Woolf’s own experience of ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms, however, since their prescriptive linearity would override or clash with Woolf’s untheorized, contingent notion of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’. Richard Rorty’s notion of ‘public’ and ‘private’ concerns may, however, be useful for its emphasis, not on a historical narrative of the shifting

⁴ Arendt, p.58.
emphases of 'public' and 'private', but on the separation of, or distinction between, the two realms. Rorty argues that no universal aspect of human nature makes sense of our desire not to be cruel to others: individual happiness and solidarity are two distinct drives.

In Rorty's sense, Woolf's 'public' concerns are the political issues which occupied her, as opposed to her writing, which was 'private' in that she needed privacy in order to write and in that her writing was her means to individual fulfilment or self-creation, as Rorty terms it. Particularly in the late 1930s, Woolf felt the intrusion of politics and 'public' anxiety into her 'private' space, her writing. After a Labour Party meeting in October 1935, she was distracted from the writing of The Years and noted in her diary: 'The immersion in all that energy & all that striving for something that is quite oblivious of me; making me feel that I am oblivious of it' and also 'how far does anybodies [sic] single mind or work matter? Ought we all to be engaged in altering the structure of society?' Although she does not reach a decision as to whether to prioritize political reform or her 'private' endeavours, she clearly sees the two realms as distinct. She is not attempting to reconcile 'public' amelioration with 'private' fulfilment.

More specifically, the question of the conjunction of fiction and politics within her writing itself is another way of using Rorty's distinction, again Woolf's politics being concerned with 'public' issues and having an element of critique and desire for social change, and her fiction being personal expression. Only with one of her novels did Woolf consciously set out to combine politics and fiction, although of course in practice combination occurs in many of her works. She often felt that her politics were

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at odds with her fiction, and whatever relationship they hold in her writing, references in her diary entries and essays are to a conceptualization of two distinct realms. On this level an exploration of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ will provide a discussion of the conjunction of politics and fiction in Woolf’s work, how they are both combined and tensed one against the other. Much recent criticism written since the ‘politicization’ of Woolf by feminist critics in the 1980s has had difficulty dealing with both aspects of Woolf’s work, wanting either to look exclusively at the political elements of her writing or in denying the exclusivity of such readings, ignoring the political aspects altogether.

Rorty’s thinking, in its pragmatism and its antifoundationalism, comes under the label Postmodernism. Rather than labelling Woolf a Postmodernist and by implication denying her place as a Modernist, what I am suggesting is that certain aspects of certain ways of thinking which have come to be called Postmodernist are present in Woolf’s thinking, and that therefore it is no coincidence that a Postmodernist thinker’s notion of contingency is useful in reading Woolf. In the introduction to Sexual/Textual Politics, Toril Moi calls for a post-structuralist reading of Woolf. She is right, for the most part, when she argues that, to date, Woolf ‘has either been rejected by them [feminist critics] as insufficiently feminist, or praised on grounds that seem to exclude her fiction.’ 6 One of the aims of this thesis is to locate Woolf’s Postmodernism within her fiction, but also to be selective about which aspects of Postmodernism can be found in Woolf’s work, rather than bringing all that the term has come to mean to bear on Woolf. This kind of reading would be as reductive as the ones Moi is criticizing. By avoiding coy intimations of ambiguity, and by focusing this

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exploration on Woolf's experience of the 'public' and the 'private', I hope to maintain specificity and ground the thesis in readings of Woolf's writing.

Chapter One of this thesis is introductory in nature, setting out the importance of a 'public'/‘private’ dialectic in Woolf's work, problems in past Woolf criticism, and how those problems have affected the reading of that dialectic. Rorty's work on contingency and 'public' and 'private' will be discussed at length both on its own terms and in conjunction with Woolf. The subsequent chapters will each explore a different aspect of the 'public' and the 'private'. Chapter Two takes a biographical and historical approach; how Woolf experienced the gradual movement of women from their association with the 'private' sphere in the nineteenth century to an increasing association with the 'public' sphere. It asks how she saw writing contributing to that movement. Chapter Three tackles the idea of 'public' and 'private' narrative voices, arguing that Woolf's extensive use of indirect interior monologue is a conjunction, but not a synthesis, of 'public' and 'private' voices. In Chapter Four, I look at the idea of 'public' and 'private' genres, and trace the evolution of The Years, in which Woolf initially tried to combine essay and novel: fact or politics and fiction. Here, I look extensively at the research behind 'The Pargiters' and the subsequent manuscript versions. Chapter Five follows on from Chapter Four, negotiating the relationship of 'public' and 'private' in the content of The Years and arguing that the novel needs to be read on two levels, on one hand drawing out the 'public' or political arguments regarding the situation of women, and on the other, recognizing the 'private' or individual contingencies of the novel, which cannot be theorized. The final chapter explores the intrusion of 'public' concern in the shape of World War II, into Woolf's life and writing in the last three years of her life, and consequently the varying ways in which she conceptualized the term ‘public’ at this time. The intensification of
'public' events, the loss of readership and her enforced move to Sussex were all contributing factors to her increased preoccupation with the movement between 'public' and 'private' at this time.

Hereafter, for the sake of convenience, I will not place public and private in quotation marks. The looseness and variability of the terms will be understood.
1. The Private and the Public: Woolf and Rorty

When Woolf wrote in her diary on 26 January 1940, ‘How queer the change is from private writing to public writing’ ¹ regarding the shift from Between the Acts to Roger Fry, she marked a division which lay deep in her psychology as a writer. Woolf conceived both the separation and interconnectedness of public and private spaces, languages and concerns in many different ways, and her attitude towards the division altered depending on her project and the pressure of public or political issues on her at the time. The quotation highlights both Woolf’s clear demarcation of the respective works as well as her uneasiness with the shift even as late in her career as 1940.

As Alex Zwerdling writes: ‘her intense interest in the life of society and its effect on the individual [....] is a rich subject that has not, I think, been adequately addressed. Yet in almost everything she wrote, Woolf demonstrated her concern with the ways in which private and public life are linked.’ ² Projects dealing with this division in Woolf, such as Alex Zwerdling’s book Virginia Woolf and the Real World, have in the main been instigated by a desire to politicize Woolf in reaction to Quentin Bell’s biography, in which she is presented as apolitical. The extent of Woolf’s political involvement in women’s suffrage in 1910, the Richmond branch of the Women’s Co-operative Guild and the Rodmell Labour Party is now widely known and has changed the way in which she is viewed. This is without doubt a positive move, but this study hopes to look at more than the influence of politics or fact on her writing. Woolf’s own private difficulties in combining the solitude necessary for


writing with her need for social contact is an alternative way of exploring the division, as are both her use of narrative voices and her distinction between genres. Her fear of publishing, her anxiety about the transfer from the private to the public sphere, her sensitivity to reviewers and critics, even though her own career as a reviewer was an important source of personal authority: these are issues which merit discussion and inclusion in a study of Woolf and the public and the private.

A public/private division is also helpful in exploring the polarization of Woolf criticism itself, in that critics often see her either as excessively private, unconcerned and out of touch with the public world, or overtly political, reading all aspects of her work as evidence of a deep commitment to public issues. Woolf has become public property, her popularity has caused her to be 'alternately traduced, enshrined, and reconstituted.' It is not as though we can peel back the false interpretations to get at the 'real' Woolf, but we can expose readings which ignore aspects of her work or life, and explore the dangers of locating her on one side of a dichotomy. Critics such as Quentin Bell portray Woolf as exclusively frail and frigid: divorced 'from politics and the public realm.' He remarks that in her twenties, 'Her literary taciturnity was partly the result of shyness; she was still terrified of the world, terrified of exposing herself,' but does not alter or refine the description at any time in the biography. He concentrates predominantly on her illnesses and his comment that her acceptance of Leonard Woolf's proposal of marriage was the 'wisest decision of her life' reinforces the picture of a woman whose 'incapabilities' made her completely reliant on those


around her.  

For Bell, Woolf was never a ‘leader of the society within which she moved,’ and as for political involvement, ‘it was the ability, not the inclination, that was lacking.’  

She is made to seem pathologically private, a state necessitated by her ‘madness.’ David Daiches, on the other hand, argues that Woolf’s writing is private in content. Breaking away from the Victorian novel’s concentration on ‘public symbols’, Woolf restricts herself to a realm of ‘private illumination.’  

Daiches extends Bell’s account of Woolf’s biographical privacy into the form and content of all of her novels.

Although Bell’s recreation of Virginia Woolf has largely been made obsolete by American feminist critics of Woolf in the 1980s, through their reclaiming of her sexuality and political significance, the story is by no means over. Brenda R. Silver aptly describes Bell’s portrayal of Woolf as ‘witty and malicious, yes, and productive, but again, all of the above: delicate, ethereal, asexual, apolitical, and so on - and this image still has a great deal of currency, at least in the non-academic world today.’

New evidence for Silver’s claim can always be found, just one example being in the pages of The Independent on Sunday where Candia McWilliam responds to Fiona Pitt-Kethley’s denunciation of Woolf for her ‘lack of passion.’ McWilliam quotes Pitt-Kethley: “I can’t believe Virginia Woolf would have made it as an author out in the real world.” McWilliam retorts sarcastically, ‘Anyone who knows just a little of the

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6 Bell, p.187.


9 Silver, pp. 35-36.


11 McWilliam, p.28.
work and life of Virginia Woolf will feel sorry for Miss Pitt-Kethley and for what she has missed; they may also wonder if the poet has read any of the works of the snobbish, passionless and, in the "real world" authorially unsuccessful Mrs Woolf."

The Bloomsbury Group context stands, for many critics, for a protective, self-perpetuating shell, because of which Woolf never had to contend with the public world. Woolf continues to be the focal point of vicious disputes, both inside and outside academia, some based around substantiated claims, and others not. The polarity of much Woolf criticism, this great variance in opinion, is evidence of the way in which Woolf’s work can support multiple perspectives, something which is overlooked when critics insist on a single agenda.

Although the work of Jane Marcus has done much to counteract Bell’s perspective, a surprising amount of support can be found for his denial of the power of her feminism, an echoing of views held by E. M. Forster and Q. D. Leavis, as for example in Sharon L. Proudfit’s ‘Virginia Woolf: Reluctant Feminist in The Years.’

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12 McWilliam, p.28.

13 See, for example, Jane Marcus’ account of her disagreements with Quentin Bell: Art and Anger: Reading Like A Woman (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), pp. 201-212.

14 E.M. Forster largely dismisses Woolf’s feminism, claiming that she will be remembered instead for her novels, as though the two can be separated, and that in general her feminism is ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘unreasonable,’ stuck in the Suffragette mentality and unaware of subsequent changes (E.M. Forster, Two Cheers for Democracy, London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1951, p.263). Three Guineas is ‘cantankerous’ and A Room of One’s Own is ‘charming and persuasive,’ to be remembered for the two meals, part of Forster’s preoccupation with ‘the passages which describe eating’ in her oeuvre (pp. 262 & 259).

Q.D. Leavis finds Three Guineas classist, ‘unpleasant self-indulgence’ based on little experience of the ‘real world’ (Q.D. Leavis, ‘Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unite! Scrutiny 7.2 (1938), p.204). Leavis dislikes Three Guineas ‘deliberate avoidance of any argument,’ and its reliance on emotion (p.204). She seems to miss Woolf’s extensive use of fact and the coherent argument she makes concerning the link between public and private tyranny. Most importantly, rather than accepting Woolf speaking only for her own class and Woolf’s awareness of the narrowness of that audience, Leavis is affronted by the limitation to the daughters of educated men.
Proudfit argues that Woolf’s feminism, in for example *Three Guineas*, is ‘unnatural’ to her and that in her fiction she reaches an ‘inner, true reality’ through a vision of female femininity which does not focus on ‘unmarried, liberated women’ but on ‘freedom of thought.’ She writes that ‘women with a cause in her books have abandoned [sic] to that cause their right to be free and to be themselves as women.’

Proudfit extends Woolf’s fact/fiction division to imply that Woolf’s feminism changes as she moves from essay to novel, claiming that in Woolf’s novels she condemns women’s fight for equality, advocating instead women’s spiritual or mental freedom. The problem here is that Proudfit is not allowing for variety in Woolf’s thought and she is making mutually exclusive ideas which need not be. Woolf can hold feminist ideas without making all her working female characters role models and she can celebrate aspects of Mrs. Ramsay’s character without holding her up as a truer reality or an ultimate vision.

Elaine Showalter, in the infamous chapter on Woolf and androgyny in *A Literature of Their Own*, falls in line with Bell by claiming that Woolf avoided her own femaleness. According to Showalter, ‘Androgyny was the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition.’ Avoidance of didacticism and personal grievance, then, is ‘a rationalization of her own fears’; the transcendence of sex is, for Showalter, the way in which Woolf ignores her own sexuality and her own anger.

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16 Proudfit, p.73.


18 Showalter, p.289.
books show signs of a progressive technical inability to accommodate the facts and crises of day-to-day experience', so that Three Guineas is 'irritating and hysterical', its language is 'empty sloganeering and cliché.' 19 By presenting Woolf as afraid of her sex, Showalter makes the assumption that feminists must write autobiographically as well as militantly. Showalter maps biography directly onto fiction; ignoring Woolf's lesbianism, Showalter sees her and her novels as frigid, and takes at its most literal Woolf’s comment that sex consciousness is fatal. In her frantic search for Woolf’s sense of herself as a woman, and unable to see beyond the several images of androgyny in Woolf’s oeuvre, Showalter pays little attention to Woolf’s female characters, whose importance for Woolf could be said to be the variety of experience they represent. Showalter’s argument is based on an assumption of unitary femaleness; that there is one way in which women writers present themselves, their sexuality, their anger, their bodies. Showalter finds the rhetorical dispersion of the female narrative voice in A Room of One’s Own ‘impersonal’ and ‘distanced,’ eliding biography and narrative technique (Woolf cannot confront her own female identity, therefore she deconstructs it in her texts). 20 Also, for Showalter, the notion of a room of one’s own has been made to represent a withdrawal into the private sphere, an exile, an oppression, so that it will fit into her argument as a whole. 21 She ignores the possibility that the room is liberating in its practical and metaphorical offer of autonomy, control and free time. Rather than pointing to a deadly vision of abstracted womanhood, ultimately ‘the grave’, as Showalter suggests, it is from the room that

19 Showalter, pp. 291 & 295.

20 Showalter, p.282.

21 Showalter, p.285.
women will gain access to the public sphere, through writing. \(^{22}\) Showalter also reads *Three Guineas* as advocating a 'total withdrawal from male society,' when, on the contrary, Woolf is suggesting that women must enter the professions and the education system, while maintaining their own difference and resisting the glare of definition.\(^ {23}\)

Showalter has misread Woolf's complicated strategies for writing about women while not allowing 'woman' to be solidified, because she herself is working with such a solidified notion.

However, critics who oppose Bell and Showalter's angle and reclaim Woolf's feminist or political significance also need to recognize the ambivalence and flux in her thought. Such critics often over politicize Woolf, making all aspects of her work the result of her militant feminism. Merry Pawlowski writes that in her final novel Woolf enacted the 'most important theoretical revision of masculine, dominant culture as she saw it, but also her greatest technical innovation in the establishment of an essentially different feminine discourse, dismantling fascism, psychoanalytic theory, and a philosophy of unification in one blow.' \(^ {24}\) This statement seems dubious in both its grand, revolutionary claim and its assertion that the move is essentially feminine rather than simply innovative.

As Zwerdling comments, 'Woolf has been turned into the matron saint of contemporary feminism.' \(^ {25}\) He feels that she has often been taken out of her historical context and critics have read the entire oeuvre through the lens of *Three Guineas,* 'a

\(^ {22}\) Showalter, p.297.

\(^ {23}\) Showalter, p.294.


\(^ {25}\) Zwerdling, p.33.
book Woolf could not have written before her mid-fifties, and one that does not represent her earlier attitudes.' 26 A unique and integral part of Woolf’s work is her avoidance of delineation, either in terms of her aesthetics and politics, or stylistically in terms of character and structure. It is not that she has been labelled wrongly, but that she does not fit neatly into any one label or singular interpretation, and such readings do severe damage to the exploratory, shifting nature of her work. Mary M. Childers writes: ‘even those professors who declare allegiance to various sophisticated forms of relativism end up taking but one position on her writing, which, in contrast, aspires to evoke multiple perspectives.’ 27

Jane Marcus is sometimes guilty of over politicization, for example when she claims that all of Woolf’s work is an attack on the patriarchal family. Marcus does acknowledge that there are ‘many portraits of Virginia,’ and that her depiction of Woolf the ‘rebel’ is only one of many, but she nevertheless reads Woolf’s rebellion across the board. 28 Marcus also exaggerates when she writes that only women were able to nurse, mother and influence Woolf. In using the metaphor of the writer as an instrument played upon by, in this case, women, Marcus gives Woolf a ‘passive role.’ 29 Male influence, such as Roger Fry’s for example, is dismissed, Leslie Stephen ‘didn’t care for music’ and Woolf is said to have ‘matured as an artistic instrument under the bows of a series of women.’ 30 Undoubtedly, Woolf was heavily influenced

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26 Zwerdling, p.33.


29 Marcus, p.109.

30 Marcus, p.96.
throughout her life by women such as Violet Dickinson, Vita Sackville-West and Ethel Smyth, but there were influential men in her life, such as Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey and T.S. Eliot to name only three, including those, such as her father and Arnold Bennett, whom she criticized.

Other critics such as Pamela J. Transue, Makiko Minow-Pinkney and Eileen B. Sypher simplify Woolf by conflating the political and aesthetic in her work, thereby ignoring Woolf’s own distinctions between fact and fiction. Pamela J. Transue, in a book which looks at how Woolf manages her feminism and her aesthetics, argues that Woolf sublimates her feminism in order to produce ‘an art unfettered by the tone of grievance.’ Transue argues that Woolf’s ‘stylistic innovations function as subtle vehicles of a feminist consciousness.’ First, for Woolf there was no such thing as ‘a feminist consciousness’; her feminism was historically specific. Secondly, no form is implicitly feminist: innovation can only be feminist within a specific historical and literary context. Certain techniques such as ‘floating point of view’ do not inherently embody a female consciousness. Thirdly, this generalized conflation of politics and style leaves no space for stylistic innovation for its own sake, for the sake of questioning narrative techniques themselves. The consequence of Transue’s thinking is that novels such as The Voyage Out and Night and Day are condemned. Their conventional characterization and use of point of view are seen as inadequate: ‘Even her sentences lack the lyric grace of those in her later works, and because her vision is not embedded structurally, when she explores feminist issues she must do so on the

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32 Transue, p.12.

33 Transue, p.183.
The argument does not allow for change and variety, in terms of different ways of representing feminism. Transue implies that Woolf was searching for 'an appropriate style and form' in which to express her feminism; her changing narrative structures become a sign of 'difficulty.' Woolf's oeuvre becomes a search for the final, perfect relationship, and predictably, *Between the Acts* is that 'new reality.' Transue also suggests that Woolf's feminism is 'latent', sublimated and 'merged with the subnarrative elements of structure, style, point of view.' This again measures Woolf up to some external standard, by which her feminism appears repressed, only found in the depth of her texts' structure, rather than on the surface. Feminism in any given text is created through that text's structure, rather than above or below it.

In her book *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* Minow-Pinkney uses Lacan and Kristeva to assert that there is a semiotic and a symbolic side to Woolf's writing, both of which are essential, just as the male and female point of view are necessary for the androgynous writer. This dialectic maps loosely onto the dialectic between feminism and Modernism for Minow-Pinkney. As she shows both sides of Woolf, arguing that ultimately she reached a 'post-individualist subjectivity', a collective unconscious realm in *Between the Acts*, she is led to such misleading arguments as to say that Woolf had to make use of fiction and lies in *A Room of One's Own* because 'facts are completely ruled by men.' The male arena of reason

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34 Transue, pp. 181-182.
35 Transue, p.11.
36 Transue, p.188.
37 Transue, p.12.
and evidence was full, forcing women writers to find an alternative, is the implication here. Minow-Pinkney ignores the research and extensive footnotes in both *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* and therefore misses the intricate interplay between fact and fiction, making out that Woolf used fiction in her essays as a last resort.

Her simplistic parallels also cause trouble when she overpoliticizes *Jacob’s Room*, failing to separate Woolf’s political and aesthetic pursuits. She claims that *Jacob’s Room* is feminist in its critique of phallocentric ideology, but runs into difficulty, because the main character is male; she has to conclude that this is the reason that Jacob is in effect hollow and elusive. Minow-Pinkney wants to say both that Woolf’s feminist project succeeded, and that ‘[b]ecause its hero is a man to whom in part the novel desires to pay homage, its feminist critique remains shattered and half-suppressed.’ 39 Minow-Pinkney wrongly assumes that for Woolf a male protagonist is incompatible with a feminist perspective, and her conflation of the semiotic and the feminist means that stylistics necessarily have feminist consequences, which is not always the case. Moreover, how does one decide upon reading a novel that there is a level of repressed feminism beneath the surface? That would imply that a feminist critique is something whole and coherent to which *Jacob’s Room* only in part measures up. This kind of interpretation makes Woolf appear a slave to a single agenda which she could not realise. Minow-Pinkney comes up with this convoluted argument because she assumes that Woolf’s technical and functional strategies are also wholeheartedly political or feminist.

Eileen B. Sypher chooses *The Waves* as the novel which best expresses Woolf’s repressed feminism. Again, there is the objection that the central character, Bernard in this case, is male and that Woolf chose ‘a male center to repress her own

39 Minow-Pinkney, p.53.
voice.' 40 Sypher argues that Woolf was more comfortable with a male persona, ignoring the central female personae in The Voyage Out, Night and Day, Mrs Dalloway, Orlando, The Years and Between the Acts. Sypher, like Showalter, sees Bernard’s character as a strategy of ‘evasion and suppression’ because she reads him as a representation of androgyny in a male body. 41 Perhaps it is Sypher’s pronouncement of androgyny which is at fault rather than Woolf’s supposed ‘self-abnegation.’ 42 This claim seems strange when in fact the whole text is her voice, and in addition, half of the novel consists of the interior monologues of three women. Her sex by no means forces her to write solely or even mainly about women. Sypher gets herself into a complex mass of justifications by saying that Woolf was more at home in the male mind and that since she associated writing with men, Bernard is her spokesman, but that her hatred of the male ego has to be taken into account, which is why Bernard is a failed artist. It seems that because The Waves does not conform to Sypher’s conception of feminism and feminist writing, she has to read Woolf as suppressing her ‘natural’ tendencies.

Perhaps the tendency towards over politicization was a necessary stage in Woolf criticism to bring her out of the private, socially naive world which Bell made for her, but it is no longer adequate to say that she was politically informed. More attention needs to be paid to the changing relations between the public and the private in her life and work. We need to be able to look at her feminism and her reaction to certain political events as well as her need for solitude, her ambivalent reaction to her public and her

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42 Sypher, p.193.
aesthetic drives. Having said this, it is too simple to say that she ‘had the kind of apocalyptic imagination in which the historical reality and the visionary are one,’ because often one held sway over the other or the pull between the two caused her great torment. 43

The division tends to be simplified down to one set of factors, thereby ignoring the richness of the terms public and private themselves. The dichotomy is much more than a politics versus aesthetics debate. Janis M. Paul, in a similarly restrictive move, defines Woolf’s public and private dichotomy as symptomatic of her allegiances to both Victorianism and Modernism: ‘the controlling emotion in Virginia Woolf’s fictional vision is ambivalence - between society and individuality, between language and silence, between past and present, between traditionalism and experimentation, between externality and internality - in summary, between Victorianism and Modernism.’ 44 It seems too schematic to define Woolf’s ambivalence between the public and the private as merely the influence of two literary movements.

This need for complexity and recognition of the variety of Woolf’s thought also applies to critics who see her work as a trajectory, with Between the Acts or another of her late works as the culmination. This type of teleological reading, which sees the oeuvre in terms of final culmination and resolution, is dangerous for Woolf because it reduces the flexibility and ambiguity of her writing to a symptom of her own confusion and indecision. It also implies that, when the final vision is reached, the contradictions will cease. In a macabre way, suicide begins to look like a solution.

Howard Harper makes such a move with Woolf when he reads Between the Acts as


representing 'the fullest, most economical, and most elegant expression of the language of the *oeuvre,*' a statement which is telling in its use of language in the singular, as if her texts use one seamless vocabulary. *Between the Acts* is the 'fullest revelation' in the 'organic whole' which is Woolf's novels. However, one novel does not begin where the previous one left off; different novels work with different premises and structures, so that the outcome is not cumulative. Each novel is *not* 'more comprehensive than the one before' and each one does *not* 'encompass a larger field of meaning' and neither do 'Woolf's novels accrete into one huge novel, some vast composite novel.' The narrator in *Between the Acts* comments of Miss LaTrobe: 'another play always lay behind the play she had just written': there is no endpoint or final culminating vision. Woolf herself was often distracted when finishing one work by the new ideas for the next. Alice van Buren Kelley describes Woolf's fact/vision dichotomy, one aspect of the public/private division, in terms of a teleological narrative. Buren Kelley's schema sees Woolf's early novels as embodying a finite, isolated world of fact in which vision is a cure, her middle novels as refining the vision, in that objects are linked and take on universal significance, and the late novels as offering a final vision amidst chaos. Only by severely selective readings do Woolf's novels fit into any such schema.

These problems of over politicized, schematized or teleological readings seem to

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come from a disregarding of the specificities of Woolf’s work, in terms of her varied stylistic and technical projects and in terms of her changing and often contradictory political attitudes. These problems arise from an attempt to make Woolf’s work match up to some external standard: either a neat progression or some supposedly coherent entity called feminism, reality or vision. An attempt, like Roger Poole’s, to read the novels as ‘records of a life’ and as ‘an account of the mental distress’ becomes reductive and simplistic.  

Woolf’s texts all work through their own individual structures, often structures that change throughout the course of the text, and readings of those texts must take into account those varied structures. Woolf’s politics are not always to be found in her style, nor are they always to be opposed to that style, each text creates its own relationship between the two. Woolf herself was aware that criticism on her would potentially fall into these traps: ‘Two books on Virginia Woolf have just appeared - in France & Germany. This is a danger signal. I must not settle into a figure’ (D IV, p.85).

Evidence for the complexity or ambivalence surrounding the inclusion of public or political concerns in Woolf’s fiction is found in two quotations on the same page of Leonard Woolf’s Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939. He writes, first, that ‘Virginia was the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition’, and then that she was ‘highly sensitive to the atmosphere which surrounded her, whether it was personal, social, or historical. She was therefore the last person who could ignore the political menaces under which we all lived.’  

The contradiction marks the difficulty Leonard had in trying to define his

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wife’s reaction to politics and suggests that we should always take full account of circumstances, where that reaction is concerned, given that her attitudes to public concerns and the expression of those attitudes varied both according to the issue and the time in her life. The quotation from Leonard Woolf presents a complexity and changeability in Woolf’s thought, particularly on the issue of the public and the private, which Woolf criticism has not yet found a way of expressing.

Useful to this discussion is the work of the philosopher Richard Rorty, both for his notion of contingency and for his ideas on the public and the private. ‘Contingency’ is defined as ‘The condition of being free from predetermining necessity in regard to existence or action; hence, the being open to the play of chance, or of free will.’ 52 This term is first fully elucidated in Rorty’s Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, published in 1989, nine years after the publication of his first major work, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.

For Rorty, there are no natural or inherent ways of thinking or being, therefore there is no progression towards any exterior truth. Everything is a product of contingency, ‘a product of time and chance,’ as there are no external truths, no such thing as human nature and no metalanguage. 53 Part of Rorty’s agenda is an attack on Western metaphysics and philosophy in general, for its attempt to find universal truths and its confidence in language as a transparent medium with which to do so.

Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity tackles the combination of contingency and liberalism. Rorty shows how a liberal belief that cruelty is the worst thing we do can sit with the belief that there is no essence which links all humans. Rorty explores these

53 Rorty, p.22.
questions through a distinction between public and private drives. Platonic and Christian attempts to deal with cruelty unite public and private, arguing that private satisfaction comes from human solidarity. Rorty argues that since Hegel, historicist thinkers have resisted the idea of human nature, but that they have substituted an opposition between public and private drives in that there are thinkers who deal with private autonomy (Heidegger, Nietzsche, Foucault) who see socialization as oppressive, and thinkers who deal with social reform (Dewey, Habermas, Mill, Marx) who see the desire for self-creation as irrational. Rorty's main thesis is that the drives for private and public freedom are separate and distinct, with no common language. There is no answer to the question of why we should not be cruel; there is no universal, private reason for public freedom. There is no common ground in the private life of humans which makes one public system superior to all others. For Rorty, public and private thinkers have equal weight, but do not need to be held in opposition, because they are serving different, irreconcilable purposes. The springs of 'private fulfilment' and 'human solidarity' are not the same. 54

In Part I of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, Rorty deals with the contingency of language and of selfhood, notions which fuel his argument about the separation of public and private work, and he also outlines his concept of the liberal ironist, a member of his political utopia. He traces the idea that truth is made rather than discovered, after the sudden change in social vocabulary brought about by the French Revolution. The Romantic poets, who saw art as the artist's self-creation rather than as mimesis, contributed to this notion, which continues to be set in opposition to science and the discovery of truth. The German Idealists trod a middle ground in that they agreed that scientific truth was made rather than discovered, but still wished to

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54 Rorty, p.xiii.
revere an intrinsic truth of the mind and spirit, which could be discovered by philosophy. 'What was needed, and what the idealists were unable to envisage, was a repudiation of the very idea of anything - mind or matter, self or world - having an intrinsic nature to be expressed or represented.' For Rorty, cultural history consists in changing vocabularies, or redescriptions, and no vocabularies are any better at explaining the world or the self: 'the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary.'

The philosopher Donald Davidson refuted the idea that language is a medium: a transmitter between the self and some non-human realm. Similar to Wittgenstein, he saw 'alternative vocabularies as more like alternative tools than like bits of a jigsaw puzzle.' Some vocabularies work better in certain situations or at certain times, but they replace each other rather than fitting in to a unified whole. Redescription is continuous, but non-teleological; the history of language is not a story of progression or improvement. Old metaphors die off and new ones take their place as a result of historical contingencies. With new vocabularies come new discoveries, so that rather than a poet hitting upon a new, undiscovered truth, he or she hits upon the tools which enable new poems to be written. Woolf expresses very similar ideas in the following passage from 'Modern Fiction':

> the analogy between literature and the process, to choose an example, of making motor cars scarcely holds good beyond the first glance. It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature. We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving, now a little in this direction, now

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55 Rorty, p.4.

56 Rorty, p.7.

57 Rorty, p.11.
in that. 58

Next Rorty begins to hold up the poet, and in turn the literary critic, as one who is best able to recognize contingency and as such is best able to embrace the idea of the impossibility of universals. The poet, as maker of new words and creator of new vocabularies, continually confronts his or her own contingency as well as the contingency of language. As Harold Bloom argued, the poet does not want to be a copy, rather, he or she wants to be immortalized through originality, the creation of a new vocabulary: the poet for Nietzsche was important because of his role as a self creator rather than a truth discoverer. 4

For Rorty, however, it is Freud who finally de-divinizes the self by exposing the contingency of morality. By tracing morality to the contingencies of an individual's upbringing, he breaks with the idea of a central core called reason or morality. A person's private morality is made up of chance contingencies and each person is acting out an idiosyncratic fantasy. He shows us why certain things trigger our sympathy, why we find certain behaviour particularly cruel. He shows us how a seemingly insignificant incident in a person's life can have an immense effect on their particular fantasy.

For Freud, there is no such thing as a dull unconscious; each person is a poet, the creator of a metaphor which has not caught on. The person with the metaphor which does catch on is called a genius; whereas his neighbour may be an eccentric or a pervert: 'poetic, artistic, philosophical, scientific, or political progress results from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need.' 59 Of course, there is no such thing as a completely new vocabulary, but instead new metaphors are


59 Rorty, p.37.
mixed with familiar words. Also, no project of redescription is ever completed: 'It cannot get completed because there is nothing to complete, there is only a web of relations to be rewoven.'

The crucial points about Freud's ideas, for Rorty, are that he breaks down the idea of a universal morality and therefore selfhood, by turning to contingency, but also that he gives up attempting to unite the public and private. His theories do not yield any kind of project for social amelioration, but work strictly for the private individual. This separation is essential for Rorty's liberal ironist. This is someone who is a liberal in that they believe cruelty is the worst thing humans do and an ironist in that they recognize the contingencies of their own beliefs, however strongly they believe in them. An ironist recognizes that their final vocabulary, the set of words a person uses to justify his or her own beliefs, is contingent or formulated through chance. They also question the vocabulary and wonder whether another would perhaps be more useful, although realising that neither is closer to reality in any way. Thirdly, they know that there is no stepping out of their vocabulary, no criticizing it through any external argument.

In this way, Rorty's utopian liberal community would have no divinities; it would look to nothing external for moral guidelines or truth of any kind. Although only a few members of this society would be creators of new vocabularies, and only a few would be poets who experience self-creation, or self-overcoming, the average member of the liberal society would recognize that the society is how it is 'not because it approximates the will of God or the nature of man but because certain poets and revolutionaries of the past spoke as they did.'

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60 Rorty, pp. 42-43.

61 Rorty, p.61.
Rorty continues his sketch of the liberal ironist by outlining his differences with Michel Foucault, an ironist who was not a liberal. Foucault feels that modern liberal societies are more oppressive than previous societies, indeed unlike Rorty, he sees the liberal society as past reform. For Rorty the society contains the tools for reform and prevention of suffering, as long as private searches for autonomy are separated from public lessening of suffering. Foucault attempts to solve the problem of human autonomy through public channels, or public institutions, when, for Rorty this kind of autonomy can only ever be achieved on a private level. 'Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation, and which a few actually do.'  

Foucault, of course, desired a decrease in cruelty, but fused it with private concerns thus coming up with problems which could never be solved in the public sphere because they led him to think there was 'some social goal more important than avoiding cruelty.' Foucault's ideas work well in the private sphere, in that they deal with private autonomy, but for Rorty they fall apart when they try to encompass public freedom.

In Part II of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity Rorty shows the incompatibility of irony and theory. The work of postmetaphysical, ironist philosophers is more suited to private than public concerns, because 'irony is of little public use.' On the other hand, it is the writer who can sensitize us to 'the pain of those who do not speak our language,' which must 'do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature

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62 Rorty, p.65.

63 Rorty, p.65.

64 Rorty, p.120.
were supposed to do.’

It is the writer which can help us make our society less cruel, by creating solidarities. The liberal ironist wants to notice suffering where it occurs rather than finding a reason to worry about suffering. He wants to be able to put himself in another person’s shoes so that he can recognize the humiliation of someone else. For Rorty, the place where the ironist will learn about suffering is literature. Literature is publicly useful since it awakens us to cruelty in ourselves and others. Ironist philosophy or theory will always feel impelled to answer the question ‘why not be cruel?’ It will feel the need to make generalizations. We need to get rid of the metaphysician’s desire to ask this question so that then ‘liberals would not ask ironist philosophy to do a job which it cannot do, and which it defines itself as unable to do.’

Ironist philosophy has been attacked by philosophers such as Habermas, as being cruel and irresponsible, because it has been expected to answer a question which the ironist cannot answer. In this ironist society, then, it is literature, which is aware of contingency and describes the private and specific, that will help people to be good liberals. Solidarity is made, through imaginative empathy, rather than discovered or perpetuated by some common human trait. In Rorty’s liberal ironist society, it is the literary critic whose methods are useful since the critic is a redescriber, expert at playing vocabularies off against one another and switching from possible world to possible world. The move from text to text is a move from one vocabulary to another, and the critic must find the relationships and progressions between them.

Rorty then contrasts Proust and Nietzsche, to show Nietzsche as an example of the tensions implicit in ironist theory between writing a narrative of ideas and wanting to create some transcendental, overarching reality. Proust, by writing fiction rather than

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65 Rorty, p.94.

66 Rorty, p.94.
theory, avoided this dilemma. He never attempted anything larger than the contingent, the specific. Nietzsche, however, wants revolutionary novelty, so that terms from the past and successors in the future will have no continuity with the redescription. His notion of superman is ‘pure self-creation, pure spontaneity.’ This implies a final or apocalyptic occurrence, rather than a redescription caused by chance encounters and collisions. He imagines himself outside of or above history, thereby giving himself some kind of privileged status. Proust, on the other hand, could show the contingency and hence finitude of authority figures, without claiming his own authority. He could recognize contingency, without being afraid of his own, therefore did not have to posit some kind of finality or exhaustion of possibility to his own redescriptions. ‘Novels are a safer medium than theory for expressing one’s recognition of the relativity and contingency of authority figures. For novels are usually about people - things which are, unlike general ideas and final vocabularies, quite evidently time-bound, embedded in a web of contingencies.’

In Part III of the text, Rorty explores the role of literature in exposing cruelty and helping us create solidarities. He explains how novels can operate by alerting us to cruelty of social institutions or codes that we had not previously noticed, as for example with Uncle Tom’s Cabin or The Well of Loneliness, or they can show us how our own attempts at autonomy may cause others pain.

Rorty then discusses Vladimir Nabokov and George Orwell as two writers who are liberals in that they believe cruelty to be the worst thing humans do and hence cruelty is the central concern in their writing. Although Nabokov deals with private cruelty and Orwell with political cruelty, both are liberals, in contrast to Nietzsche,

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67 Rorty, p.106.
68 Rorty, p.107.
who dealt with private self-creation. Orwell achieved his presentation of cruelty in *Animal Farm* through redescription. Rather than exposing the truth about communism, Orwell redescribed Soviet Russia. "*Animal Farm* was able to turn liberal opinion around. It was not its relation to reality, but its relation to the most popular alternative description of recent events, that gave it its power." 69 Neither Nabokov, in *Lolita* or Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* show cruelty as in any way 'natural' or essential, but rather a result of contingency. There is no natural law which determines whether future societies or governments will be cruel or not.

In his last chapter Rorty elucidates his idea about solidarity that 'feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such salience is a function of a historically contingent final vocabulary.' 70 He sees moral progress as the increase in the number of people with whom we feel solidarity, not because of some essential human core, but because we have imaginatively entered their vocabulary, or been alerted to their suffering. Rorty dispenses with both 'reason' as the foundation of and guide to morality and also the idea that public responsibility takes precedence over private goals. The two spheres are separate so that questions about suffering need to be distinguished from questions about private fulfilment and if the concerns of the liberal are distinct from the concerns of the ironist then it is 'possible for a single person to be both.' 71

The weak points in Rorty's argument seem to arise through oversimplification; although he praises literary critics for their attention to specifics, his own overarching ideas of a liberal utopia often ignore specifics. His notion that truth is whatever


70 Rorty, p.192.

71 Rorty, p.198.
happens to be the outcome of a ‘free and open encounter’, for example, raises
questions about how and whether such ‘domination-free communication’ can be
achieved. 72 Rorty acknowledges that discussion will never be free from ideology, but
he defines free discussion as what happens when

the press, the judiciary, the elections, and the universities are free,
social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher
education is common, and peace and wealth have made possible
the leisure necessary to listen to lots of different people and
think about what they say. 73

Rorty then goes on to say that ‘[m]odern, literate, secular societies depend on the
existence of reasonably concrete, optimistic, and plausible political scenarios’ which
his certainly does not seem to be. 74

Rorty also opens himself to attacks of elitism when he argues that since irony
is not publicly useful only the intellectuals would be ironists, the non-intellectuals
being only ‘commonsensically nominalist and historicist.’ 75 Only the intellectuals
would be bookish and look to the literary critic as a model, immediately giving them a
privileged position and giving them more insight into the workings of the society.
Rorty has built inequality into his redescription from the start, but yet he still hopes for
‘free and open encounters.’ 76

One important and radical aspect of Rorty’s ideas is his preference for the
literary critic over the philosopher. Rorty needs to be read and discussed by literary
critics to see whether literary critics agree with his representation of them and whether

72 Rorty, pp. 52 & 68.
73 Rorty, p.84.
74 Rorty, p.86.
75 Rorty, p.87.
76 Rorty, p.68.
his ideas are useful. Rorty is at least partially wrong when he claims that influential critics ‘are not in the business of explaining the real meaning of books, nor of evaluating something called their "literary merit."' One of the aims of this thesis is to show the number of Woolf critics who want her novels to duplicate the ‘real world,’ the ‘real’ situation of women and as in the case of The Years argue that it is a lesser book, a failure because it did not do so. For Rorty, the literary critic, unlike the philosopher, ceases to look for external standards with which to measure the book; a text is seen rather in its relationships to other texts. 'The true and the good and the beautiful drop out. The aim is to understand, not to judge.' In Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity Rorty goes further, arguing that not only does literary criticism move beyond the metaphysical trap, but that literature can help to increase our solidarity with others, because by reading, we are exposed to the pain of people with different final vocabularies. Also, the literary critic can serve as the moral advisor to the ironist because she, in moving from book to book, knows how not to become trapped 'in the vocabulary of any single book.'

The question is whether Rorty is presenting his ideas on literary criticism as a description of the way things are or the way they would ideally be. Ideally, literary critics do not attempt to schematize literature, ideally they are good at shifting contexts and taking historical and textual contingencies into account and ideally they do not attempt to separate good books from bad books or judge books solely on their mimetic qualities. However, many critics do operate along these lines: trying to judge texts by

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77 As is beginning to happen. See, for example, Brian May’s ‘Neoliberalism in Rorty and Forster’, Twentieth Century Literature 39.2 (1993): 185-207.

78 Rorty, p.80.


80 Rorty, 1989, p.81.
some external standard. Rorty seems to suggest that literature and literary criticism have already gained 'autonomy and supremacy' for their methods as well as for their moral guidance: 'Novels and poems are now the principal means by which a bright youth gains a self-image. Criticism of novels is the principal form in which the acquisition of a moral character is made articulate.' As Michael Fischer points out: 'Many professors of literature, disappointed by dwindling enrolments, shrinking job opportunities and stagnant salaries, will be surprised to learn, from Rorty that they are conquering heroes.' Indeed, Fischer's essay is proof that Rorty's account of the literary critic is not accurate. Fischer, a literary critic himself, feels the need to defend the rigorousness of literary criticism against Rorty's account. Fischer feels that Rorty makes literary criticism out to operate like a 'pre-school playroom,' without rules, logic or consistency. Fischer argues that rather than making something 'cognitive, serious, powerful and responsible' out of literary criticism, Rorty merely makes something 'imprecise, capricious and methodologically dishevelled' out of philosophy. Fischer misrepresents Rorty. He judges him according to orthodox notions of rigour and internal logic. Rorty's point, by contrast, is that literary criticism provides us with a new vocabulary because it works in a completely different way from scientific logic, or any generalized, metaphysical theory.

Peter Robinson, another literary critic, writing on Rorty on Nabokov, is troubled by Rorty’s ideas that literature cannot be measured in terms of accurate

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83 Fischer, p.235.
84 Fischer, p.241.
representation. Robinson accepts Rorty’s ‘dislike of transcendental appeals as foundations for ethics,’ but argues that readers of literature do accept texts as representations although they do not ‘begin to imagine that correctness or absolute accuracy is even relevant.’  

For Robinson, the reader recognizes ‘that a representation of something is occurring in the text, and that this representation can be correlated with a reader’s experiences.’  

Nowhere does Rorty deny that a literary text represents something; rather, he is arguing that literary critics should ‘understand’ the text, in part through their own experiences, textual and otherwise, without judging it. A text can be a representation of something without the literary critic needing to say that that representation is true. How would Rorty suppose that texts could increase our solidarity or understanding of others, if what we read does not bear some relation to our experience? Robinson quotes the paragraph in which Rorty makes clear this distinction between representation and accuracy. Rorty writes that ‘literary art, the nonstandard, nonpredictable use of words, cannot, indeed, be gauged in terms of accuracy of representation’ but that ‘you cannot create a memorable character without thereby making a suggestion about how your reader should act.’  

Although misguided in his use of the word ‘cannot’ since many literary critics do judge texts for their portrayal of something they call ‘reality’ or ‘human nature’, Rorty is right that this is not the most fruitful line of enquiry, since literature is about redescribing, making things new, most obviously through the use of metaphor. Much recent literary criticism is antimetaphysical in its historicism, its refusal to compare the text with any universal, external standards. Having said this, Rorty acknowledges that understanding a text.

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86 Robinson, p.178.

comes in part through analogy with one’s own experience, beliefs and behaviour. This
does not mean that the reader is judging the text by fixed external standards, but that
comparisons are continually being made. A memorable character is a representation
which the literary critic may compare to characters or people in his or her experience.
Here, particularly, Rorty’s ideas about literature’s public use bring him round, full
circle, to early twentieth-century ideas about literature making ‘better’ people. The
difference is, of course, that Rorty, unlike earlier critics, has no fixed idea of what
would constitute a ‘morally better’ person other than that they would dislike cruelty.

Robinson is right however, to question what comes after Rorty’s notion of
curiosity. If we read more texts to expose ourselves to alternative vocabularies and
alternative suffering, is that enough? Will the interest in a text actually make us a
better liberal, or encourage us to prevent suffering? In Robinson’s words: ‘Curiosity is
no guarantee of kindness or care.’ 88 How can we guarantee the move from fiction to
practice? Christopher Norris, in an attempt to differentiate ‘truth’ from tyranny, or to
question Postmodernism’s wholesale denial of truth, condemns Rorty amongst other
Postmodernists. He uses the timeworn criticism of Postmodernism: ‘from what critical
standpoint can we offer such judgements on the monstrous folly of the arms-race, the
exterminist "logic" of deterrence-theory, or the war-crimes and acts of mass-murder
committed in the name of some ultimate, all-justifying cause.’ 89 This criticism cannot
be levelled at Rorty since Rorty’s liberal ethic would require him to condemn the
cruelty or suffering produced by these acts. Norris also sarcastically opposes Rorty’s
'genial recommendation that we substitute "solidarity" for "objectivity," or a sense of
shared (that is, "North Atlantic postmodern bourgeois-liberal") values for the attempt to

88 Robinson, p.164.
get things right from a critical standpoint which challenges the currency of consensus belief.’ Norris objects to what he sees as the narrowness of Rorty’s notion of solidarity. This is a misreading, ignoring Rorty’s constant suggestions that we ‘create a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have.’

More to the point is Robinson’s question of what happens after those solidarities are forged. On this issue again there is the problem of Rorty’s habit of generalization. Rorty writes that the moral of Lolita is ‘not to keep one’s hands off little girls but to notice what one is doing, and in particular to notice what people are saying.’ For Rorty it is not the specifics of the cruelty in a text that matters but the process of becoming aware, of noticing cruelty itself. However, within the context of Lolita, we should be able to say that Humbert should keep his hands off Lolita because we know that she is suffering. As well as being attuned to cruelty, Rorty’s liberal ironist should be able to say that what Humbert is doing is wrong because it inflicts cruelty. Although the only generalizable moral is the need to be aware of cruelty and suffering, if Rorty sees literature as useful for making solidarities and for alerting people to unfamiliar forms of cruelty (for public purposes) then the reader has to be able to make a judgement about the specific cruelty presented in the text (child abuse, in the case of Lolita).

Another damaging effect of this habit of generalization is the sharpness of the distinction Rorty draws between the public and the private. Even though there may be no element of human nature which underpins our concern with society’s cruelty, therefore no universal link between public and private desires, Rorty ignores the idea

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90 Norris, p.297.
that in certain instances society’s cruelty may impinge on individuals to such an extent that it becomes inextricable from private desires. Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley question whether the distinction can even be made: ‘An individual’s self-descriptions are realized in his or her agency in the public world, and public practices and institutions impact on individual’s capacities for self-fulfilment.’  

John McGowan acknowledges that not everything is political, but questions both the possibility of a purely private identity and the process of self-creation itself. ‘The private is public and political in liberal society insofar as that society is constructed to ensure individualistic freedom and is legitimated by its success in that endeavor.’  

The problem is that Rorty does not question the possibility that the intellectual ironist’s search for self-creation might be hindered by or even connected to public systems, just as he does not consider the specifics ‘of the political arrangements required to create or maintain pluralism.’  

Understandably, in the context of his argument, Rorty cannot prescribe or even suggest a system which would ‘work best’ in minimizing cruelty, he can only suggest a way of thinking (that of the literary critic). Even so, this reticence does leave him open to the charge of utopianism.

One example which illustrates Rorty’s oversimplification of the public/private division is feminism, with its exposition of the deep-rootedness of patriarchal oppression. Women’s oppression within the private sphere, and in turn the restriction on their own self-creation, is inextricable from the oppression of social systems (the public sphere). The idea that the private is the political and the need for women to

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95 McGowan, p.199.
make the private public again blurs Rorty’s terminology. The personal or private must and can be theorized to reveal the power structures which operate on this level as well as on a public level. Obviously any large scale social cruelty (to ethnic groups for example) will affect the self-creation of the individuals within that group. Feminism, however, challenges the sharpness of the distinction Rorty has drawn between public and private realms by demonstrating that it is a gendered distinction, and that, for example, at a particular moment in history, a particular social group (Western middle-class women) came to be associated exclusively with the private realm. Rorty does not take full account of the constructedness and historical variability of the distinction upon which his argument is based. Feminism needs Rorty’s notions of contingency and redescription, in order that it can see a society which oppresses women as not natural, or reflecting any eternal essence, but merely as one vocabulary among many. It needs to have an ironist’s faith in redescription and the dissolving of old problems. However, these notions must be applied to the terms public and private themselves, which are ripe for redescription. This in turn shows up the absence of women from Rorty’s account of cultural history in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. In a book review of Annette Baier’s *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*, however, Rorty does confront the place of feminism in moral philosophy, in the academy and in pragmatism. In this review he tackles the need for feminists to mix public and private and the links between feminism and contingency. Rorty writes about Baier’s presidential address to the American Philosophical Society in 1990, and how she both politicized the personal and personalized the professional. Rather than speaking simply of a Kantian versus a Humean view, Baier gendered the distinction, by linking the Kantian transcendence of biology with a male perspective, and a Humean naturalistic view with women. Rorty links Baier’s rejection of unconditional morality with her situation as a woman. For
Baier, 'Everything, including the resolution of moral dilemmas, will look relative to circumstance, dependent on a local situation, messy.' 96 She sees rigorous theory and unconditional moral principles as 'products of a specifically patriarchal culture.' 97 Here Rorty raises the connections between feminism and contingency: 'The patriarchs have traditionally taken that inequality to be non-discussable [...]. One can hardly argue with a divine dispensation, or a biological law.' 98 'Moral progress is made by [...] enlarging the range of people taken to be moral agents and subjects - raising the possibility that the situation of the helots, or the blacks, or the workers, or the women, is not natural, but a suitable topic to discuss with them.' 99 Luce Irigaray has said that feminism may be the dream of the twenty-first century which keeps us re-evaluating and doubting our institutions and behaviour; Baier goes beyond this dream, for Rorty, by offering a concrete, new account of moral philosophy in a specific cultural environment. He writes that, 'It is her feminism, and the attention which feminism brings with it to specific, concrete, injustices, that have enabled her to do so.' 100 It is in this review that Rorty finally acknowledges the often complicated interplay which feminism brings to the terms private and public, as well as the important links between his pragmatism and feminism, in terms of changes in cultural codes and practices.

Feminism must confront the need to write and talk about female experience and must concern itself with ways in which the private can be brought into the public. The solution is not just to ensure that women have equal access to public places in

97 Rorty, 1994, p.3.
100 Rorty, 1994, p.6.
terms of geography and work, but to change the connotations which associate women
with the private sphere, both as a place of domestic tasks and as an emotional,
secretive space.

There are many reasons why Rorty’s ideas about contingency and about the
public and the private are useful to this study of Woolf’s experience of the public and
the private. First, I want to argue that Woolf herself was a contingent thinker (although
not a pragmatist) and that in turn contingency is a useful notion for critics of her work,
and indeed of any literary text or texts. Secondly, the conjunction is fruitful because
Woolf’s feminism shows up gaps in Rorty’s thinking. In that Woolf’s examination of
cruelty is largely feminist, and concerned primarily with cruelty to women, Woolf
expands on an absence in Rorty’s work. Thirdly, Rorty’s distinction may serve to
remind us that in her life and her work Woolf was with equal force both a public and
a private thinker. She was concerned with cruelty and public social reform as well as
autonomy and self-fulfilment. She, like Rorty, did not provide a theory to combine the
two, but saw them as two distinct spheres. Even when public and private concerns are
present in one work (when she combines the political and the individual in her fiction),
she is still aware of a separation, a distinction. Initially, then, she may seem an
exception to Rorty’s view that public and private concerns can be combined in a life
but not in a work or an oeuvre. Rorty’s thinkers are either public or private thinkers.
But it was precisely because she kept alive in her life and her work a vivid sense of
the difference between the two realms that she could so effectively redescribe both
human solidarity and individual creation.

Although, as mentioned, Woolf’s own autonomy was influenced by the
patriarchal oppression so clear in the public realm - indeed her argument in Three
Guineas is the connection between public and private tyranny of men over women - her self-fulfilment came largely from her writing. Although of course Woolf wrote about her feminism, her politics, she often separated this from her artistic drives, a separation evident in her desire to keep genres separate, her fear of fiction turning into propaganda, and her diary comments on the impetus behind her writing.

In terms of the content of her work as opposed to her life (her own public and private drives) Woolf writes both about struggles for autonomy and about the cruelty of social systems. Aspects of her work can be politicized, generalized, therefore useful to public reform, but this is not true of all of her work; she writes also about individual searches for autonomy, the contingencies of which cannot be theorized or politicized.

Woolf never achieved a perfect union of balance of the two realms. She often felt troubled by the struggle between the two impulses of fiction and politics and had difficulty working with them simultaneously. Alex Zwerdling describes these public and private drives in similar terms to Rorty: Zwerdling writes of Woolf that she was ‘never able to decide whether her criticism of certain conventions was designed to liberate herself and her coterie or to transform the larger social world. Explorers, reformers, and revolutionists each speak a different language, and, as we shall see, her satiric methods often reveal a considerable uneasiness about which style to adopt.’

She always had to separate public and private (the social and individual) through terminology, and often through genre: certain genres became the forum for certain kinds of expression. The Years is the only work in which she consciously set out to combine fiction and politics or vision and fact. Also, Woolf not only separated genres in this way, but often needed to alternate ‘public’ and ‘private’ projects themselves.

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101 Zwerdling, p.41.
She writes in her diary, 'I rather think the upshot will be books that relieve other books: a variety of styles and subjects.' Public and private genres carried distinct connotations, as seen in the phrase ‘the solid world of Roger, & then (again this morning) in the airy world of Poyntz Hall’ (D V, p.141). Woolf, then, oscillated between needing the variety of dissimilar projects and finding the strain of transition too much. She wrote in her diary that she could not write ‘The Pargiters’ and Three Guineas at the same time - ‘one can’t propagate at the same time as write fiction’ (WD, p.245) - but also that the division between Three Guineas and Roger Fry was ‘perfect, & I wonder I never hit on it before - some book or work for a book thats quite the other side of the brain between times’ (D IV, p.347).

Similar to Rorty’s idea that public and private concerns need separate languages because they serve different purposes, Woolf advocates two different languages, one for fact and one for fiction. In her essay ‘Craftsmanship’ she writes that words are not useful because they are ‘the wildest, freest, most irresponsible, most unteachable of all things.’ She prophecies a time when writers will have an unambiguous language of signs with which to convey factual information. Rorty writes that ‘The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange.’ In her essay Woolf is exploring the need for Rorty’s ‘public’ language, but also the difficulty in finding that language because, as Rorty himself points out in Chapter One of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, language is not a transparent medium through

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which one can give an objective account of reality. 'Words, like ourselves, in order to live at their ease, need privacy,' Woolf writes, 'Our unconsciousness is their privacy; our darkness is their light', 'they hate being lectured about in public' (DM, pp. 132 & 131). Woolf finds language most useful for private concerns, because of its changing, shifting nature. Public language, for Woolf, is restrictive in that it 'stamps them [words] with one meaning or confines them to one attitude' (DM, p.131). Woolf expresses the contingency of language; the ambiguities and connotations of words whose nature it is 'to change' (DM, p.131). Woolf, like Rorty, recognizes the need for two different languages, also like Rorty, recognizing the lack of transparency of language, but taking the issue further by questioning the possibility of a public language, a language which needs to be clear and controllable. Guignon and Hiley have a similar difficulty with Rorty's conception of language: 'At one moment we are swept away by faith in our capacity for "moral and intellectual progress" through imaginative redescriptions of the plight of the oppressed; at the next we see all discourse as directionless literary "play."' 105

In practice, however, Woolf's texts resist such clarity of definition. Three Guineas and A Room of One's Own, although making distinct use of fact and politics, also have unmistakably fictional elements. The two languages cannot be clearly separated in Woolf's work. Seeing that Woolf's refusal to write propaganda meant that none of her texts are completely public, in the sense of being completely factual, they all contain fictional elements so that every work of Woolf's maps a different division between the public and private or the political and aesthetic, however starkly Woolf saw the dichotomy: 'Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the imagination will

105 Guignon and Hiley, pp. 359-360.
not serve under two masters simultaneously.'  However, when in 1932, she conceived of the project of ‘The Pargiters’, a novel-essay about the sexual life of women, which later became The Years, she obviously felt it both possible and necessary to serve the two masters simultaneously. The genre of novel-essay itself signifies the link of fiction and fact, or public and private, and the three notebooks of newspaper cuttings which Woolf collected as factual evidence indicate the political foundation on which she based the book. Her omission of the essay sections in 1933 and the complicated five-year revision process which followed marks a working through of these two strands in Woolf’s work, the political and the fictional or the social and the individual. Woolf was ‘afraid of the didactic’ (D IV, p.145) and so worried about letting the fact play too prevalent a role, but ultimately wanted ‘facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both’ (D IV, p.151). At times she regarded ‘The Pargiters’ as ‘an empty snail shell’ ( D IV, p.161), but also felt that she had succeeded in presenting an ‘intellectual argument in the form of art’ (D IV, p.161), in ‘working out my theory of the different levels in writing, & how to combine them: for I begin to think the combination necessary’ (D IV, p.207). The point is that conceptually Woolf follows Rorty’s idea about public and private concerns and vocabularies, but in practice the division is not so clean. Secondly, her attitude towards the dichotomy changes, creating the complexity in Woolf’s treatment of public and private, taken here as politics or fact and fiction.

Although this thesis will explore Woolf’s public and private division on several levels, one of those levels is similar to Rorty’s sense of the division. In addition, I claim that Woolf was a contingent thinker, in her awareness of historical circumstance, in, as Rachel Bowlby puts it, ‘her continual refusal to come to a conclusion, to

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complete the sentence' and in the fluidity of her feminism. She is both a liberal and an ironist, in Rorty’s terms. Even in her feminism or her political concerns, Woolf did not wish to provide answers. In a letter to Ethel Smyth regarding Smyth’s protests over women and orchestras, Woolf writes: ‘all I ever said was that I hate all forms of principle. What’s the good of saying This is true, when nothing is true, except that some sounds are nicer than others and some shapes? No views are true.’ Through rhetorical strategies and openness she suggested rather than prescribed. As Zwerdling writes: ‘she was neither a social theorist nor a polemicist. Rather, her imagination absorbed and processed the discussion of "issues" until what emerged in her imaginative writing became a very different, often elusive product.’

The fact that much of her politics emerges in her fiction, in The Years for example, means also that her public concerns are embedded in the contingencies of the individual characters. Even in Three Guineas, the factual basis is found in a fictional framework. Just as Rorty advocates literature as solidarity-forming (‘novelists can do something which is socially useful’), Woolf uses literature for public purposes, to express social concern.

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In her essay ‘The Leaning Tower’, Woolf writes,

Directly we speak of tendencies or movements we commit ourselves to the belief that there is some force, influence, outer pressure which is strong enough to stamp itself upon a whole group of different writers so that all their writing has a certain common likeness. We must then have a theory as to what this influence is. But let us always remember - influences are infinitely numerous;


\[109\] Zwerdling, p.83.

\[110\] Rorty, 1989, p.95.
writers are infinitely sensitive; each writer has a different sensibility. 111

Woolf here acknowledges contingency; the individual and random circumstances that affect each writer and which make it difficult to come up with general theories of influence. This is not to say that Woolf never makes generalizations; particularly in her essays on women and writing Woolf offers reasons for women not having written in certain genres or having written in a certain style, but she is well aware of the historical and cultural specificity of her remarks and in her accounts literature by women is always presented as a changing process. Indeed, Woolf's own changing reactions to the word 'feminist' speak for her awareness of changing connotations of the word and the movement. On the question of female identity, Woolf resisted definitions and remained committed to the idea that women's identity must remain elusive. Woolf worried about her own identity as a writer being fixed or defined, largely because she knew her method of writing was one of exploration and change: 'I will not be "famous" "great." I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind & my eyes, refusing to be stamped & stereotyped' (D IV, p.187).

It is only in recent years that critics have realised, to quote Janis M. Paul, that 'Paradox and ambivalence, as well as duality, characterize Virginia Woolf's work.' 112 E.M. Forster recognized this in 1941 when he delivered the Rede Lecture and said that his topic was the work of Virginia Woolf, but that his aim was to 'speak on it, rather than to sum it up.' 113 Unfortunately, he quickly loses sight of the fact that the material is 'so rich and contradictory' as he proceeds to summarize each novel, her feminism

112 Paul, p.47.
113 Forster, p.251.
and her writing process. Woolf often changed her mind on issues, as well as fluctuated in her attitude towards her work. This self-contradiction and shifting of position is perhaps best illustrated in *A Room of One’s Own* when she writes, ‘Lies will flow from my lips,’ a version of the Sphinx’s riddle. Truth will be mixed up with lies, dispersed, as there is no ‘nugget of pure truth’ (ROOO, p.4). Most importantly, ‘the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction’ will remain unsolved (ROOO, p.4). There is no truth, only the narrator’s own opinion; and as she says, ‘I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money’ (ROOO, p.4). She is going to outline the contingencies of her argument, recognizing its partiality, and its uniqueness to her. Woolf places her argument, based on factual research, as was *Three Guineas*, on slippery ground; both undercutting and asserting her own accuracy. She wrote, ‘that is my temperament, I think, to be very little persuaded of the truth of anything’ (WD, p.137), but also that ‘I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say “This is it”?‘ (WD, p.86) Despite this searching, Woolf recognized the impossibility of such a discovery, she remained an ironist. Woolf is also aware of her own contingency in that as Rorty says, ‘no such working out gets completed before death interrupts. It cannot get completed because there is nothing to complete, there is only a web of relations to be rewoven.’ Woolf knew that ‘By writing I don’t reach anything. All I mean to make is a note of a curious state of mind’ (WD, p.102). She wrote to Gerald Brenan about their generation that ‘nothing is going to be achieved by us. Fragments [...] No one can see it [the human soul] whole’

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114 Forster, p.265.


and that 'one must [...] renounce finally the achievement of the greater beauty: the beauty which comes from completeness.' 117 Her inability to be persuaded by the truth of anything is shown here as immediately after she writes 'Only now that I have written this, I doubt its truth' (L II, p.599). Woolf had a 'fundamental awareness of the unstable basis of opinions.' 118

The first critic fully to explore the usefulness of a contingent approach to Woolf's work was Pamela Caughie in a book entitled Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself. Rather than invoking the pragmatists at any length, Caughie uses the term Postmodernism, not to label Woolf, or to single out Postmodern elements of her writing, but to 'explore the possibilities of reading Woolf in the afterglow (or aftermath, depending on one's point of view) of postmodern writing.' 119 Literary critics who work on the Modernist period often resist the conjunction of Woolf and Postmodernism as though it threatens the coherence and purpose of their work. Postmodernist thinking, in effect denying its own label, has shown us the constructedness of such labels as Modernism; such appeals to containment and homogeneity (which so many critics want to see in Woolf's oeuvre) run the risk of ignoring, in the interests of clarity, what will not be contained by the label. Reading Woolf with Postmodernist thinking in mind is not anachronistic, it is merely seeing whether recent developments in theory are useful in approaching Woolf's work, as has happened to a much greater extent, for example, in the area of Renaissance literature. As Rorty suggested, the literary critic places texts beside other


118 Childers, p.78.

texts, placing texts in different contexts and making comparisons between them, rather than seeing how a text matches up to a prescribed definition. Caughie is seeking to release Woolf from labels such as feminist or canonical female Modernist which again suggest comparison to something external, and instead to confront each text through its own contingencies and context, rather than trying to produce a 'true' or final Woolf. It is Postmodernism's concentration on the strategies by which any outcome is reached which Caughie sees in Woolf's work and as necessary in our readings of her work. Woolf called attention to the way in which her texts were constructed and so too, we, as critics, must be aware that 'what we find in Woolf’s writings is not "there" prior to our readings but posited by and constructed in the very course of our readings.'

Raising the possible charge that she undermines her argument by holding a Postmodern reading of Woolf up as the ‘right’ one, Caughie reminds us that she is not prioritizing the results of her readings or holding up Woolf’s equivocation as the ‘essence’ of her work, but is suggesting that if we ask different questions we will get different results, which may be useful in getting out of the oppositional deadlock found in some critics’ work. It is the method, both Woolf’s and the critic’s, which she is generalizing rather than the content of Woolf’s writing.

Finding the dualism of distinctions such as Modernism/Postmodernism, natural/conventional, feminist/not feminist restrictive, Caughie wants to allow a constantly changing strategy, which stops to rest nowhere and has no definition to which it repeatedly refers. Caughie does not ‘define a practice but enacts a way of proceeding.’

She is particularly averse to critics who assume a mimetic approach to Woolf’s work and judge her according to these standards. Woolf was not writing to uncover a

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120 Caughie, p.xiii.

121 Caughie, p.195.
natural, female self, or a liberated society. This assumes ‘a necessary opposition between conventional and modern, masculine and feminine, appearance and reality, the external and the essence, as if each term were coherent and stable, as if the novel, the self, or the world could be so simply polarized.’ Caughie writes: ‘[t]he answer, for Woolf and for feminist critics, lies not in reconciling, balancing, or choosing between two positions but in enacting, over and over again, certain ways of proceeding; not in arguing for any one position but in testing out the implications of many.’ A dynamic rather than a dualistic model is needed with Woolf in order that her contingencies be recognized and not obscured by critics who struggle to situate themselves on either side of a line.

Caughie sees the outcome of Woolf’s work as a result of the narrative and rhetorical strategies which she uses, just as the pragmatist sees truth as an effect of language and the contingency of circumstance. As Caughie writes, reality is a construct, a ‘plurality of stories.’ Each text is one partial, situated view; one possible world rather than an attempt to reproduce the world. Woolf was aware of the provisional status of her work, continually using rhetorical strategies to undermine the fixity of her ideas and stories, and continually being aware of historical contingencies. Woolf’s emphasis on situatedness, in her fiction and her essays, undermines critics’ attempts to generalize the essence of her work. Each novel is not ‘a further evolution of the same essential search for poetic meaning,’ but a unique set of strategies, questions, contexts. More specifically, The Years does not ‘progress toward freer

122 Caughie, p.5.
123 Caughie, pp. xi-xii.
124 Caughie, p.39.
125 Harper, p.5.
thought and speech,’ as one critic argues. In the same vein, another critic sees the ending of *The Years* as ‘[c]asting off the frozen forms of orations and gramophones [...] it uncovers the natural scene, the world of creation [...] and asserts in its last lines the celestial promise of an ordinary sky.’ Arguing that the novel ‘finds its conclusion and completes its spiritual ascent’ means ignoring the openendedness of the ending with the explicit absence of peroration, as well as implicitly valuing daybreak as a positive, spiritual regeneration, and other elements, for example, the interruptions or repetitions as negative: a symbol of spiritual decay. This kind of evaluation is not offered by the novel, but is imposed by critics who need to read a conclusive, unified novel with a conventional movement from problem to solution.

In ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ Woolf, according to Caughie, is not devising a new type of character, but is exploring ‘how character is used by writer and reader’; ‘the means of expressing character in fiction.’ In *Jacob’s Room*, for example, Jacob works as a structural element, inseparable from and a result of the narrative context. A critic trying to define him in terms of character traits will necessarily fail, since he is only seen through a handful of objects. Caughie sees Woolf as exploring what effect the dissolution of character will have on the novel, rather than representing some kind of modern crisis of identity. ‘Jacob changes shape, not because the modern (or postmodern) self is unstable, and not because the modern (or postmodern) character is

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128 Lipking, p.145.

129 Caughie, p.63.
unreal, but because the narrator changes roles."  The narrative voice changes pronouns, shifts identity, questions her own statements. She sometimes sounds like a biographer, sometimes is directly involved. Rather than reading Jacob mimetically, for what he represents, Caughie explores how he functions within the text itself. The text is not about Jacob but the processes of creating and perceiving identity. *Jacob's Room* alerts the reader to the incompleteness and partiality of any text, as with any character. This would be upsetting only for the critic who arrives at the text with an expectation or ideal of unity. Caughie shows how critics impose their standards of unity on Woolf's texts. With *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, many critics simplify the shifting perspective by seeing the different voices as aspects of a universal mind. Such critics elide narrative strategies with theme, by arguing that because the narrator does shift the point of view, Woolf is suggesting the communality of human experience.

The one drawback to Caughie's thinking is that she tends to reduce the motivation behind each text to a technical experiment on Woolf's part. She sees Woolf's feminism as 'an effect of her formal experiments.' In taking a functionalist approach, in which everything in the text is a result of the narrative strategies used, Caughie severely limits what she can say about the relations between Woolf's novels and Woolf's life, or the novels and the situation of women in nineteenth-century England. In line with Robinson's critique of Rorty, one can avoid judgements of accuracy or suggestions of essentialism, while still saying that *The Years*, for example, has something to do with the predicament of middle class women in nineteenth-century London, and therefore that Woolf had something to say about this predicament. Woolf presents her portrayal as historically contingent; she does not offer solutions, but the

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130 Caughie, p.69.
131 Caughie, p.6.
novel is a feminist critique.

Like Rorty's often narrow concentration on the *process* of reading, rather than what happens when one is alerted to cruelty in one's reading, Caughie tends to overemphasize process over content. She seems at times to imply that Woolf wrote each novel *solely* in order to test out a new narrative strategy, regardless of what she was writing about: 'Woolf's novels explore how the novel functions.'  

Caughie is right that Woolf continually changes her narrative strategies and that therefore contingency is important because 'different narrative structures evoke different kinds of reality.'  She then goes on to say that such changes are 'conducive to a feminist textual politics', ignoring the feminist aspect of Woolf's content. Although feminist content is of course expressed through narrative strategy, both must be taken into account: how one produces the other. For Caughie, Woolf seeks out 'the rhetorical element in the social order.'  In addition, I would argue, she had something to say about how that social order operated, and not just rhetorically. Caughie illuminates the rhetorical strategies of *Three Guineas*, in answer to Jane Marcus, who takes Woolf at face value, but surely there is a middle ground; a way of accounting for rhetoric, for the self conscious evasion of finality, as well as the fact, the commitment behind some of Woolf's arguments.

The point, however, is to acknowledge 'the various relations that make up the artistic event' rather than pushing all Woolf's novels through the same mill. 

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132 Caughie, p.8.
133 Caughie, p.107.
134 Caughie, p.107.
135 Caughie, p.135.
136 Caughie, p.54.
long as we accept authenticity, autonomy, permanence, and uniqueness as our aesthetic standards, and as long as we accept the relation of art to life (whether mental or material) as the defining relation of the novel. we will interpret a text that is fragmentary, contradictory, tenuous, or imitative either as a failed endeavour or as an accurate reflection of the chaos or banality of life itself.’ 137 This statement can be applied to the criticism of so many of Woolf’s works, in particular to Between the Acts, which shows us so clearly how art changes depending on the contingencies of its audience and the circumstances of its production and presentation.

The notion of contingency is both a way into Woolf’s writing and is useful to critics of her work. Of primary importance to this thesis, however, is the concentration on the public and the private in Woolf’s work, and it is Rorty’s ideas about the incommensurability of the two realms which makes his work useful to this discussion. Rorty’s separation of the public and the private must, however, be tensed against ideas about the constructedness and interrelatedness of the terms public and private developed by feminist critics and historians. Although Woolf, like Rorty, maintained a distinct division between the public and the private, in whatever context they appear, she also explored similarities between the spheres in relation to sexism and questioned the association of women with the private sphere, thereby questioning the definition and connotations of the word private itself. Also important, is the variety of ways in which Woolf conceptualized the public and the private: a variety not found in Rorty’s philosophical investigation of those concepts.

137 Caughie, p.30.
2. From Private to Public: History, Feminism and Women’s Writing

Tracing the flux of Woolf’s conception of the terms public and private requires both a historical understanding of how the terms were changing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with regard to women, and a biographical understanding of how Woolf herself experienced such changes. Women’s access to the public realm of the city was increasing, largely through employment and political involvement, and Woolf’s own reactions to both the city and feminist politics in the early twentieth century are crucial to a discussion of the public and the private in relation to her life and writing. In addition, a biographical understanding of Woolf’s own reaction to publishing and publicity itself and how she felt women should write themselves into the public sphere are important in a chapter about feminism and the movement of women from private to public.

(1) The Journey to Bloomsbury

Feminist historians have posited various periods in which British women have had greater access to the public sphere. It was not, however, until the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century that women began to have anywhere

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1 Although the majority of studies of women’s history make use of a public/private division, the following pay particular attention to women’s entry into and exclusion from public spaces and the validity of a public/private dichotomy itself: Gender, Ideology, and Action: Historical Perspectives on Women’s Public Lives, ed. Janet Sharistanian (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World 1500 to the Present, ed. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Women and Power in the Middle Ages, eds. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).
near equal access to the public realm, in terms of the literal space of the city or in terms of employment and politics. This period saw a gradual rise in the number of working women, and an increasingly open debate about female sexuality in terms of undesired sex, involuntary childbearing and prostitution. Private was made public particularly as women's fight for the vote necessitated the public debate of women's issues. The rise of the new woman novel during the 1880s and 1890s brought these concerns into the area of literature. Such changes, among others, forced a revision of the connotations of the terms public and private in that no longer was the public world a male domain and no longer were women confined to the home and financially dependent on men. As Dorothy Thompson writes, 'This question of the public and private spheres is essential to an understanding of many of the problems involving women's status and self-image.' Increasingly, women became employed in schools and in the civil service. By 1889 women were visible in local government, since unmarried women had been granted the municipal vote in 1872. Women were often top of the polls for school boards, largely because of the image of Victorian women as guardians of morality, which made them seem immediately suitable for such work.

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2 Patricia Stubbs in *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979) discusses the emergence of the 'new woman' in literature, in terms of a public/private dichotomy, outlining, in her introduction, the novel's association of women with the private sphere due to its emergence 'at a time when industrialization was beginning both to exclude women from production and to create an artificial split between public and private life' (p.x). The 'new woman' novel was, in part, a reaction against the novel's reinforcement of the placing of women within the private sphere.


Alternatively, Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), devotes a chapter to 'new woman' fiction, concerned predominantly with the way these novels were read, by both women and men.

However, as school government began to be taken over by town councils, women lost their power, and not until 1907, when women could sit on town councils, did they reenter that sphere. Also seen as nurturers and care-givers, women were accepted to work for Poor Law Boards, and were seen as a civilizing presence in V.D. wards. The middle class Victorian woman’s association with philanthropy, and hence her volunteer, charity and parish work, made her excel in local government, school and nursing work: it was ‘agreed by the late 1880s [...] that women were serving [...] with distinction.’

There was, therefore, a strong sense that only certain public tasks were suitable for women, which reinforced the connotations of the all-giving Victorian woman, the Angel in the House. Although many of these middle class working women were educated, sometimes university graduates and suffragists, they often wanted to retain their private, family role. The problem was therefore that while women were gaining more public authority, their private, untitled role as virtual manager of the home did not gain recognition or power in practical terms. The spheres were still radically divided, with women still linked to domesticity. Often public women, such as Florence Nightingale, had to renounce marriage and break with their families, because women could not bridge the public and private realms.

The experience of different classes must not be conflated, however, since working class women in certain towns controlled the dairy and poultry farms of their husbands. The working class woman was often employed out of necessity, doing either paid or unpaid work at home, in factories or cotton mills. Lower middle class and upper working class women often worked in shops, pharmacies, grocers and dress shops. Also, their educational experience was different from the middle and upper

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middle class woman since they were usually given equal education to boys and often received training for the job they needed to do. In her review of *Emily Davies and Girton College*, by Barbara Stephen, Woolf writes of the frustration of the middle class, nineteenth-century woman who had access to only the professions of needlewoman or governess and suggests that many of these women envied the relative freedom of the working class woman. Harriet Martineau, for example, rejoiced in the financial ruin of her family since the loss of status meant a relaxing of strict codes of behaviour (E IV, p.420). In this short review, Woolf charts the prejudices against women’s education and employment and subsequently the role played in the mid-nineteenth century by women such as Barbara Leigh Smith, Elizabeth Garrett and Emily Davies ‘to lead the army of the unemployed in search of work’ (E IV, p.420).

With the increase of women in employment, *how* women entered the literal, public arena of the city was an issue of concern. It is important that Coventry Patmore’s term the Angel in the House situates and entraps the Victorian middle class woman in the home, the foremost site of her angelic ministrations. She was severely restricted in her access to the streets; restricted to certain areas, certain times and if she wished to walk alone, even more restrictions were imposed. Her domain, her sphere of power was the home, since women walking the streets were associated with prostitution, immoral sexuality and the spread of disease. This was typified by the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, which enforced the medical and police examination of prostitutes at garrison towns and ports. There was a public push to clean up the streets, seen to be polluted by prostitutes, for middle class women. Men were not to be inspected, which angered middle class women reformers and radical workingmen and
eventually the bill was revoked in 1886. The Act brought with it much public debate about sexuality, which broke certain taboos and gradually the idea of social purity moved from prostitution into the area of marriage. The debate about public sexuality was extended to private, marital relationships. Journalist and radical, liberal feminist Mona Caird wrote an article in the Westminster Review in 1888 which sparked much talk about rape within marriage, the need for sex education and equality within marriage.

Nevertheless, change came slowly and even though the West End became a new commercial, shopping district, for women and men, with new department stores, women did not gain uncomplicated access to the city. 'By venturing into the city center, women entered a place traditionally imagined as the site of exchange and erotic activity, a place symbolically opposed to orderly domestic life.' Women were often mistakenly thought to be prostitutes as boundaries were crossed and stereotypes broken. 'Even as police cleared the streets and theaters of prostitutes to make room for respectable women, these two categories constantly overlapped and intersected at the juncture of commerce and femininity.' Rachel Bowlby also discusses the complex 'interplay of consumer and consumed' which resulted from women’s entry into the public world and the rise of consumer culture.

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6 Walkowitz, p.167.
7 Walkowitz, p.46.
8 Walkowitz, p.50.
which because of the large lower class, immigrant population was an arena of racism
and seen as a site of immorality. The charity workers and nurses who had to traverse
the streets and ride the buses to make their visits on East End homes 'reimagined the
cityscape of London, particularly the slums, as a place appropriate for women in
public.' 10 Walkowitz writes about the term 'Glorified Spinster', a stereotype based on
the financially independent, single, middle class woman, such as Eleanor in Woolf’s
The Years, who devoted her spare time to charity work. 11

Platform women spoke at public meetings and demonstrations, the Hallelujah
Lasses of the Salvation Army preached to large gatherings and tried to reform
wayward men, the British Library Reading Room offered two tables for women,
despite male furore, and in general women became an increasingly common sight in
late Victorian London. They became 'disturbing signs of modernity. Their presence
challenged the spatial boundaries - of East and West, of public and private - that
Victorian writers on the metropolis had imaginatively constructed to fix gender and
class difference in the city.' 12 Definitions and boundaries came apart as they were
challenged by women verbally and physically.

For the most part, Woolf herself experienced a typically Victorian upbringing
until the death of her mother in 1895, at which point her half-sister, Stella, and then
after Stella’s marriage and subsequent death, Vanessa, took the role of mother in the
home. In 1905, the year after her father’s death, Woolf and her siblings moved to
Gordon Square. Woolf, being only twenty-three, living alone with her brothers and
sister in Bloomsbury, was an exception to the typical experience of the upper middle-

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10 Walkowitz, p.57.
11 Walkowitz, pp. 61-65.
12 Walkowitz, p.80.
class Edwardian daughter. Even while her parents were alive, however, there were departures from the norm. Although Julia Stephen was the typical Angel in the House; a self-sacrificing, protective, centring force attending to the needs of her husband, and Leslie Stephen a demanding, often petulant, man of letters, Virginia was allowed certain atypical freedoms, because her father had earmarked her for a literary career. Woolf writes in 1932, in her essay ‘Leslie Stephen’: ‘Even today there may be parents who would doubt the wisdom of allowing a girl of fifteen the free run of a large and quite unexpurgated library. But my father allowed it’ (CE IV, p.79). In this essay Woolf is quite positive about the freedoms her father allowed her. She does not mention his tyrannical rages, his dependence on the sympathy of the female family members, or his strict idea of separate sex roles. ‘His sons, with the exception of the Army and Navy, should follow whatever professions they chose; his daughters, though he cared little enough for the higher education of women, should have the same freedom’ (CE IV, p.79). Virginia was allowed her Greek lessons and Vanessa her drawing lessons and from ten o’clock until one o’clock each day the two sisters were free to pursue their own intellectual pursuits within the home. Bell describes a typical day in the Stephen household: ‘She and her sister might spend the mornings studying Greek or drawing from the cast; but their afternoons and their evenings were given up to those occupations which the men of the family thought suitable: looking after the house, presiding at the teatable, making conversation, being agreeable to [...] all Leslie’s friends and admirers.’ For Woolf, the house was divided into downstairs, a

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13 Woolf also gives a positive account of her father in The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen by Frederic W. Maitland (Thoemmes: Bristol, 1991). She describes the pleasure her father’s reading aloud brought her and the ‘equal companionship’ he offered his children (p.474). It is clear that she is indebted to her father for an early appreciation of literature, as well as more analytical skills, since on the completion of each book, the children were required to discuss its merits.

place of convention and polite conversation, and upstairs, a place of study. This split
marks a public/private division in that downstairs she was on display, whereas in the
bedroom she was relatively free to pursue her own private endeavours.

It is important then to place Woolf historically in terms of her public and
private freedoms. In many ways her home was typical, for the class and time, but her
father's academic interests and aspirations for her meant that she was allowed certain
freedoms which would benefit her later in her literary career. Had she not moved to
Bloomsbury, however, there is no doubt that she would not have gained the
experience, the confidence or the autonomy to write as she did. As Woolf herself
continually acknowledged, the financial independence provided by her aunt Caroline
Emelia's legacy of £2,500 also completely altered her situation, since according to
Leonard Woolf his wife was forty before she could have lived on the earnings from
her writing. 'If she had had to earn her living during those years,' he writes, 'it is
highly improbable that she would ever have written a novel.'

In an early work entitled 'Phyllis and Rosamond', written in 1906, just after
the move to Gordon Square, two young girls escape their home in Belgravia to attend
a party in Bloomsbury, which is reminiscent of the famous Thursday evening
gatherings at the Stephens' in Gordon Square. In the story, it is clear that the young
women feel trapped in their Belgravia home, because out of five daughters they have
been designated the "daughters of the home" and are 'indigenous to the drawing
room.' They view themselves as 'victims' in 'slavery', for whom the only escape is
marriage (SF, p.20 &22). Although not autobiographical, this story obviously echoes
Woolf's own feelings and experience, particularly in the women's reaction to

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15 Woolf, p.17.

16 Virginia Woolf, 'Phyllis and Rosamond', *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick
Bloomsbury. ‘But if one lived here in Bloomsbury, she began to theorize [...] one might grow up as one liked’ (SF, p.24).

Bloomsbury was known as an ‘unfashionable quarter’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but one where single working women could live independently (SF, p.24). Apartment blocks, hostels and boarding-houses provided a place where female tenants were welcome. In an appendix to her book *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920*, Martha Vicinus briefly notes the upsurge of rented property for single women, Bloomsbury being one location in London where women could rent a room in subsidized boarding houses run by philanthropic organizations, or a flat in more expensive homes for single working women. 17 Women also often shared flats with other women, and many feminist groups met in the upstairs rooms of Bloomsbury. Both Mary Datchet of *Night and Day* and Nora Graham of ‘The Pargiters’ attend suffrage meetings in Bloomsbury. In Woolf’s short story, then, Bloomsbury represents an emancipated life, free from the conventions of the Edwardian home. In ‘Phyllis and Rosamond’, as in *A Room of One’s Own*, a flat or literal living space represents the chance of an unrestricted lifestyle for women. As Phyllis travels by cab to the Tristrams, she sees the immense, sprawling trees in Bloomsbury as a metaphor for the way in which she could grow freely were she to live there. Also the ‘roar and splendour of the Strand’ and the ‘talk and life’ of the Tristrams represent the unconstrained movement, both physical and metaphorical, of the inhabitants (SF, p.24). Bloomsbury represents motion and excess; the talk from the party spills out into the street, not contained by the limits of the home.

Woolf is by no means establishing a literary precedent in her use of a flat in

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Bloomsbury to symbolize a single woman’s chance of independence. In Olive Birrell’s *Love in a Mist*, Hilda Forester takes a flat in Bloomsbury with two other women. One of the flatmates in particular, Sybil, sees the flat as an ‘escape from her present mode of life’, an escape from family life to independence. In Radclyffe Hall’s *The Unlit Lamp*, Elizabeth Rodney gives her friend Joan Ogden the lease of a Bloomsbury flat for her birthday. After several changes of heart, Joan decides she cannot leave her invalid mother to join Elizabeth. Again, the chance of their own flat represents a potential revolution in lifestyle. ‘They would unlock their front door with their own latch-key and hang up their coats in their own front hall.’ In this text, the move from Seabourne to Bloomsbury represents not only freedom from convention and family, but also that in sharing a flat the two women can develop the lesbian relationship which is the ‘unlit lamp’. Bloomsbury would allow their relationship to be explored. As it turns out, after Joan’s refusal, Elizabeth marries and moves to South Africa while Joan remains under her mother’s jurisdiction. For Hall, Bloomsbury represents sexual as well as intellectual and personal freedom. Jehane Bruce, in Violet Hunt’s *A Workaday Woman*, ‘lives alone in a flat, and pays its rent and supports herself on regular journalism and occasional fiction.’ The narrator, Caroline, feels a ‘sensation of unaccustomed liberty’ as she sets out to visit Jehane at Hardicanute Mansions, Bloomsbury.

These are only a few examples of the symbolic power which a flat in Bloomsbury held for a single working woman. ‘The workaday women derive their

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21 Hunt, p.13.
identities from work, and from allegiance' made possible by the freedoms gained through independent living. In her short story Woolf draws on the changing situation in accommodation for women, previous literary representations, and of course her own move from Kensington to Bloomsbury. Here is Woolf, very early on in her career, writing her first short story (she had only written reviews and essays up to this point), and using it to express the inadequacies of the situation for upper middle class women, based on her own experiences. It is also interesting that so early in her literary career Woolf was concerned with the lives of the obscure, in particular obscure women, a notion which would reappear continually throughout her career. The narrator premises the story on the idea of bringing the experience of these two quite ordinary girls from private shadows into public circulation.

Woolf's situation marks an accelerated version of the historical change in the public/private split as women entered the public world. She moved from a home where the division was deeply entrenched, where private issues were silenced to convention, to a lifestyle in which she had more public freedoms, and the division between public and private issues was much more flexible. Her ambivalence towards the terms stems partly from this sudden change in lifestyle. She occupied an intermediary place; as she moved from upstairs to downstairs in the Stephen home, so she moved figuratively from 22 Hyde Park Gate to Bloomsbury during her life, never renouncing either one, always moving between the two.

(2) Suffrage

Feminism and the suffrage movement, as well as other public issues confronting women at the time, evoked varying responses from Woolf, although her interest in and awareness of women's issues was constant. In 1909, when the Suffragettes first used violent tactics such as window breaking, Woolf questioned her commitment, but still felt she could work for the Adult Suffragists in 1910 addressing envelopes. It is no great surprise, bearing in mind Woolf's pacifism, that she could not continue to support the violent and militaristic tactics of the Suffragettes under Christabel Pankhurst, or, given her resistance to ideological rigidity, that she could not support a campaign which single-mindedly believed that political power would bring an end to all other types of oppression of women. She wrote of the acquisition of the vote in 1918: 'I dont feel much more important - perhaps slightly so. Its like a knighthood; might be useful to impress people one despises.' 23 For Woolf, the problem was too deep-rooted, too much a matter of social psychology, to be solved by the chance to vote.

She was aware that feminism in general, a term which gained currency in Britain after its arrival from France in 1895, could be separated from the Suffrage campaign, but her attitude towards it was complicated. She wrote in 1916: 'I become steadily more feminist, owing to the Times, which I read at breakfast and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction keeps going a day longer - without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it.' 24 Her feminism emerges most clearly and urgently in reaction to war, since she saw militarism as symptomatic of the aspects of male psychology which needed to change before women would have


equality. However, Woolf was concerned about the divisiveness and sex antagonism associated with feminism. The militant Suffragettes had caused their campaign to be labelled the Sex War because of its often antagonistic and competitive fervour. Her reservations about the term ‘feminism’ can be seen in her worry that Three Guineas was ‘too patently feminist’ and in the work itself she declares that the word ‘feminist’ should be destroyed (WD, p.179). She describes how, as the word burns, the light ‘dances over the world’, symbolizing the unity of men and women in their cause (TG, p.302). As soon as men work with and not against women, Woolf feels, the word feminist will be obsolete.

Woolf’s ambivalence towards the Suffrage campaign in particular can be seen in her novel Night and Day, in which Mary Datchet works as a secretary in a Suffrage office in Russell Square. Doubt is cast through both Mary’s own uncertainties and also through the portraits of the other workers. Mary’s colleagues are a Mr Clacton and a Mrs Seal. Mrs Seal, her name a pun on the zeal she feels for her work, appears almost as a caricature; a woman who has served on every committee imaginable, but has given them all up for the Suffrage campaign, to which she is wholeheartedly committed. She is ‘permanently flushed with philanthropic enthusiasm’, but needs Mary’s organization to put her zeal into practice. Woolf presents Mrs Seal’s dedication, however, as conviction mixed with avoidance. The novel works around the tension between social duty, or public responsibility and private desire. In the discussion, found early in The Voyage Out, between Richard Dalloway and Rachel Vinrace, ‘[t]he strain of public life’ on Richard as a politician is juxtaposed with Rachel’s attempt to expose her ‘shivering private visions.’ Here, the division is


\footnote{Virginia Woolf, \textit{The Voyage Out} (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1992), p.68.}
gendered; Richard also contrasts his public work with his wife, Clarissa’s remaining in the private home, attending to ‘domestic duties’ (VO, p.68). Rachel’s visions are private because she has not yet had the opportunity to make them public. In Night and Day, with the inclusion of women in the sphere of public work, through the Suffrage campaign, the division shifts to the separation of public versus individual concerns within one person, although of course the influence of the gendered association of men with the public sphere and women with the private can still be felt. Mrs Seal, worried that Mary may marry and desert the campaign, ‘seemed for one moment to acknowledge the terrible side of life which is concerned with the emotions, the private lives, of the sexes, and then to sheer off from it with all possible speed into the shades of her own shivering virginity’ (ND, p.274). Mrs Seal’s public work is seen here as an evasion of her sexuality and of her private life. A few pages later, Mary, rather than the narrator sees something lacking in Mr Clacton and Mrs Seal. As she confronts and expresses her love for Ralph Denham, a feeling which has constantly interrupted her thoughts during her days in the office, she realises that ‘Mr Clacton and Mrs Seal were not in the running, and across the gulf that separated them she had seen them in the guise of shadow people, flitting in and out of the ranks of the living - eccentrics, undeveloped human beings, from whose substance some essential part had been cut away’ (ND, p.276).

Mary also begins to doubt the campaign because of its unquestioning rigidity. Mary realises that, to commit herself as fully as Mrs Seal, she must have no doubts as to the methods or goal of the campaign. She realises that her beliefs are not ‘rightly speaking, convictions at all. She could not see the world divided into separate compartments of good people and bad people, any more than she could believe so implicitly in the rightness of her own thought as to wish to bring the population of the
British Isles into agreement with it' (ND, pp.268-269). She moves from doubt in the campaign to a Rortian questioning of givens. She wishes she could feel faith or conviction as do her colleagues, but instead she cannot 'conceive fear or excitement. Did suffering in any form appal her? No, suffering was neither good nor bad' (ND, p.270). She is at a loss to find any universal truths in which she adamantly believes; she, like Woolf, finds she cannot dedicate her life to the Suffrage campaign, nor to any one truth or solution. Katharine Hilbery, the heroine of the novel, also initially resists the movement. She makes it clear, however, that not supporting the Suffragists does not mean a rejection of votes for women. When asked why she is not then a member of the society, she answers with silence.

The novel destabilizes utopian romantic love just as it questions the Suffrage campaign. Both Katharine and Ralph realise they are in love with an imaginary ideal. The movement in the novel from certainty to uncertainty on the subject of marriage and love is echoed on the suffrage question as Mary is in turn disillusioned and doubtful, and then determined and fulfilled. At times she agrees with Ralph that she is wasting her energy organizing 'drawing-room meetings and bazaars' (ND, p.135), but at other times she is 'serene [...] working out her plans far into the night - her plans for the good of a world that none of them were ever to know' (ND, p.533).

Eileen Sypher feels that ultimately Woolf is elevating Mary’s character and that the narrator moves from caricature and mockery of the society to admiration for Mary and her independence. Sypher does not mention Mary’s doubts and sees the image of Ralph and Katharine looking up at Mary’s lit window as ‘a different story of a “way out,” a story of the independent political new woman, a story waiting to be told.’

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Susan Squier also reads this scene as proof that 'Mary's story transcends the terms established by the classic city novel, and so makes possible its own utopian ending.'

For Squier, the text valorizes Mary’s position while Katharine sells out to convention. She reads as unequivocal a division which Woolf presents as one possibility out of many. Woolf explores public duty, private fulfilment and whether the latter can be achieved through the former, or whether a balance can be achieved, without positing any conclusions. Neither Sypher nor Squier mention the severe criticisms of Mrs. Seal quoted earlier, and in the last chapter when Ralph and Katharine are gazing up at Mary’s window the description of her as ‘serene’ is followed by ‘Then their minds jumped on and other little figures came by in procession, headed, in Ralph’s view, by the figure of Sally Seal’ (ND, p.533). Mary’s elevation is immediately lowered by the reminder of Mrs. Seal. The negative aspects of the campaign and its supporters follow close behind.

Certainties are constantly reversed, turned on their head, the most powerful image of this being in the final chapter: Katharine ‘held in her hands for one brief moment the globe which we spend our lives in trying to shape, round, whole, and entire from the confusion of chaos. To see Mary was to risk the destruction of this globe’ (ND, p.530). The illusion of unity is preserved as long as Katharine does not confront what she has excluded. The destruction is inevitable, however: the change to ‘fragments of belief, unsoldered and separate’ (ND, p.534). Nevertheless, from this land of ‘the unfinished, the unfulfilled, the unwritten, the unreturned [....] the future emerged more splendid than ever’ (ND, p.534). The key is the acceptance of partiality and inconclusiveness. Neither Mary nor Katharine can achieve a totality of both public

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and private fulfilment. Woolf, like Rorty, constantly sets love, marriage and private fulfilment up against public social good, but although she presents them as separate spheres, the division is not as clear cut as the title Night and Day suggests. The choice between the two, a choice which many women had to make, is not an easy one for either Katharine or Mary. The novel charts the two women's negotiations between various lifestyles and commitments, not drawing any conclusions and highlighting the questions and processes rather than the final choices. Similarly, Woolf's own attitude towards feminism was a changing, fluid process, meaning that her stance cannot be clearly defined, and must be viewed with its particular idiosyncrasies.

(3) The City

Woolf's attitude towards the city, and her own public freedom was also an ambivalent one. London provided Woolf with great inspiration and as she writes in 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure', the 'greatest pleasure of town life in winter - rambling the streets of London' (DM, p.19). She saw London as a place ripe for exploitation, a place that 'perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives me a play & a story & a poem, without any trouble, save that of moving my legs through the streets.' 29 London was a provider of fuel for her writing. 'Urban scenes offered particularly fertile possibilities to Woolf's creative imagination because, in addition to their personal meaning, they held cultural significance', as for example, the homeless

persons encountered by the narrator of ‘Street Haunting’ (DM, pp. 22-23). Her London walks had a regenerative power, as when she claims paradoxically that ‘To walk alone in London is the greatest rest’ (D III, p.298). This comment also emphasizes the ease at which Woolf felt in London, walking the streets alone. Reading her comments about walking in London, it becomes clear that Woolf fits the role of the flâneur, the originally nineteenth-century figure of the artist, who enters the public realm to observe. The flâneur is ‘driven out of the private and into the public by his own search for meaning.’ Detached from the movement of the city, the flâneur needs to spectate in order to remove him from his own privacy, his own alienation.

Undoubtedly, flânerie in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was a male activity, because women did not have the same freedom and ease in the public sphere. With the rise of the department store in the nineteenth century, women had increased access to the public realm, but being an act of consumption, shopping did not have the detachment required to produce a flâneuse. It is clear from Woolf’s diary comments, however, that she was at ease on the streets and that the act of flânerie provided her with inspiration. She enjoyed reading the city in order that she could rewrite it into her fiction. She, like a true flâneuse, used walking through the populated streets of London to escape the self. As she describes in ‘Street Haunting’, one can ‘put on briefly for a

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32 For further reading on women and flânerie see Janet Wolff’s ‘The Invisible flâneuse: women and the literature of modernity’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 2.3 (1985)) in which she argues erroneously, as Woolf shows, for the impossibility of the flâneuse due to ‘the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century’ (p.45) and the fact that women could not walk on the streets alone. Elizabeth Wilson’s ‘The invisible flâneur’ (*New Left Review* 191 (1992)) rightly complicates the division and argues among other things that this account does not recognize the women who did resist such divisions. Wilson posits the prostitute as a possible flâneuse, arguing ultimately that it was the flâneur who was invisible, in his passivity, making of himself ‘a blank page upon which the city writes itself’ (p.110).
few minutes the bodies and minds of others’ (DM, p.28). ‘To escape is the greatest of pleasures’ (DM, p.29). Although Woolf’s walks were most likely governed by practical restrictions of time and place, her comments make her a flâneuse, enacting then a subversive appropriation of a male gendered activity. Her confidence distances her from, for example, Eleanor’s feeling of victimization walking at night in London, and allows her access to the role of the flâneuse.

It is in her fiction that Woolf expresses trepidation about the city and its dangers. The issue of women’s entry into the physical, public world comes up most strongly in ‘The Pargiters’, the early version of The Years. This passage, for example, never appeared in The Years.

Eleanor and Milly and Delia could not possibly go for a walk alone - save in the streets round about Abercorn Terrace, and then only between the hours of eight-thirty and sunset. An exception might be made in favour of Eleanor, when she went to Lisson Grove; but even she, whose mission was charitable, was expected either to take a cab, or to get one of the girls at the Settlement to see her into the omnibus, if she went to a meeting or concert after dark. For any of them to walk in the West End even by day was out of the question. Bond Street was as impassable, save with their mother, as any swamp alive with crocodiles. The Burlington Arcade was nothing but a fever-stricken den as far as they were concerned. To be seen alone in Piccadilly was equivalent to walking up Abercorn Terrace in a dressing gown carrying a bath sponge.  

‘The Pargiters’ was written in an essay-novel format with alternating chapters and expository sections. This passage comes from an essay which follows a chapter set in 1880 and outlines the codes of behaviour appropriate for young, middle class women. The restrictions, if broken, allied the young woman with those women who did walk the streets. Public areas are associated with danger and disease, the women would be at risk of contamination. For them to be seen walking alone would be akin both to exposing themselves and treating a public place as though it were a private one. The

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sight of a middle class woman walking alone in Piccadilly would be matter out of
place, more importantly displaced from the private sphere, where she supposedly
‘belonged.’ The passage also presents the physical and logistical difficulties for women
who were entering the public sphere in terms of employment. The work they could do
was restricted by matters of transportation.

Also in ‘The Pargiters’, Woolf writes about how private duties overrode public
or political considerations for these young women. Delia meets Nora Graham, who

had told Delia that nothing could be done about it - about chastity, that
is - until women had votes. Delia [...] had been invited to join a queer little
society that met in the Gray’s Inn Road...had begun to read papers
like Punch and The Times with an eye to what they said about women’s
rights (P, pp.57-58),

but Delia must stay at home and look after her invalid mother. The private, or home
situation must be conducive for public involvement to take place, as for example with
Nora, whose liberal father, a mill owner, gives her the same allowance and
opportunities as he allows his sons.

Woolf edited much explicitly feminist material out of ‘The Pargiters’ as it
became The Years and in one of the ‘two enormous chunks’ which she cut during the
final revision of The Years. 34 Eleanor, who is similar to Woolf in her love of walking
through London, has just dined with her cousin Kitty and is walking home:

She half meant to walk home through the Park. She would go to the Marble
Arch, she thought, and walk part of the way back under the trees. But
suddenly as she glanced down a back street, fear came over her. She
saw the men in the bowler hats winking at the waitress. She was
afraid - even now, even I, she thought...afraid. Afraid to walk through
the Park alone, she thought; she despised herself. It was the bodies
[sic] fear, not the minds, but it settled the matter. She would keep to the main
streets, where there were lights and policemen. 35

34 Leonard Woolf, p.156.
35 Grace Radin, Virginia Woolf’s The Years: The Evolution of A Novel (Knoxville:
Eleanor shares Woolf's dislike of any consciousness of the sexuality of her body in public, and blames herself for the fear. Rather than imagining what could happen to her were she to walk alone in the park, Eleanor remembers the winking men, an intimation of the male sexual desire which represents danger for her.

Rarely in her diaries does Woolf articulate fear for her own safety in the public sphere, but such fears are present in the minds of her female characters.

Again, Woolf's experience of the public/private division is unique in that enjoyment gained from observing the city overrode her fear of walking in public.

(4) The London/Sussex Dialectic

An extension of Woolf's experience of public and private realms, and the way that relation varied, is her need for society in general, as opposed to her need for solitude. This is a movement which can be typified by Woolf's frequent journeys from London to the country. She would write, 'Oh to be private, alone, submerged' and 'Oh what a grind it is embodying all these ideas, & having perpetually to expose my mind, opened & intensified as it is by the heat of creation to the blasts of the outer world' (D V, p.148 and D IV, p.289). Her writing was a refuge, and she needed solitude to write, but only while she was actually writing, since she was a constant observer, a hoarder of detail. She dreamt of extreme privacy, of being immune to society: 'to exist apart from rubs, shocks, suffering; to be beyond the range of darts; to have enough to live on without courting flattery, success; not to need to accept invitations' (D IV, p.117), but she needed society for its own sake as well as for inspiration, hence her love of walking through the busy streets of London. The difficulty came in the move from one
sphere to another, or the accommodation of the two. A ‘protected shell’ of privacy was essential for her writing, and visits to London would ‘shiver it all to bits’, or using another metaphor ‘break the membrane, and the fluid escapes’ (L IV, pp.185 & 159). This is true of Woolf’s public and private split in general; she requires both terms, but needs to separate them; thereby causing difficulty in the move from one to the other.

‘The effort to live in two spheres: the novel; and life; is a strain’ (WD, p.209), but ‘the difficulty is the usual one - how to adjust the two worlds. It is no good getting violently excited: one must combine’ (WD, p.215). Just as Rorty divides public and private vocabularies, Woolf sees two worlds, two distinct realms.

A continual motif right through Woolf’s life is the move from city to country and back again. These journeys mark her childhood in that each summer meant a favourable move from 22 Hyde Park Gate to St. Ives, Cornwall and then from 1911 onwards she either owned or rented a house in Sussex. Little Talland House, Asham and then Monk’s House were the three houses to which she journeyed from London. This movement marks a public/private split in itself, and evidence that she saw it in this way appears in the final volume of her diaries when she writes that ‘This diary might be divided into London diary & Country. I think there is a division’ (D V, p.267).

Also, Woolf was continually entering periods of solitude because of her recurrent illnesses. Her life was interrupted by enforced rest at the Twickenham nursing home and Leonard often curtailed their stays in London to return to Monk’s House because he felt London society was becoming too much for her. The larger pattern of her life, then, parallels the smaller daily oscillations between society and solitude, or public and private. This movement intensified as WWII broke out and not only were the Woolfs often forced back to the country to seek safety, but public
broadcasts were constantly interrupting Woolf's writing, even when she was in Sussex. Leonard, in writing the fourth volume of his autobiography, traces the 'see-saw' from 'private life' to 'public events' which their lives took in the 1920s and 30s. 36 Quentin Bell also writes that 'Virginia was torn between the cosmic disasters of war and the little ennui of private life.' 37

(5) **Publication: Taking the Text From Private to Public**

(i) To narrow the exploration now, to writing itself, means looking at Woolf's own private investment in her writing, what type of relationship she had with her public and what happened when she took the text from a private to a public sphere.

One constant factor in the map of Woolf's attitudes towards her public and private life is the private necessity which writing was for her. Leonard was by no means exaggerating when he wrote that 'her writing was to her the most serious thing in life.' 38 Writing was essential for her survival and the orders not to write given during her many illnesses and rest periods were most likely the cause of frustration and depression rather than recuperation. Comments such as 'My life is a constant fight against Doctors follies' 39, were probably prompted by such prohibitions, which she knew were detrimental to her well-being. She wrote in her diary, towards the end of her life, 'If one can't write [...] one may as well kill oneself' (D V, p.239), and indeed in her suicide note to Leonard, she gives her inability to read or write as a partial

36 Woolf, p.48.


38 Woolf, p.56.

validation for her actions. Writing was her way of ordering and understanding the world and without that kind of control, she was unable to continue.

She was in a difficult position, however, in that she had an intense private need to write, but she was not content to write solely for herself. She needed a reading public, someone to write for and about, even though her sensitivity to criticism was so acute. ‘A writer is never alone. There is always the public with him - if not on the same seat, at least in the compartment next door’, Woolf writes in ‘Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.’ Despite this need, however, Woolf had an extremely ambivalent relationship with her reading public, both in terms of a consumer market and in terms of her reviewers, friends and critics. On one hand she needed to know that she was writing for an audience, shown by her anxiety when the onset of WWII meant that her readership decreased and was not as responsive (D V, p.299), but on the other hand, publication and the process of revising her texts caused her great torment. Lengthy sections of her diaries are taken up with cataloguing the reviews and reactions which her novels received from critics and friends. In Three Guineas, the narrator assures the woman writer that she will have a private room, away from any publicity and she advises the novice writer that in order to make the reading public less threatening she must ‘single it into separate people instead of massing it into one monster, gross in body, feeble in mind’ (TG, p.297).

However, reviews from individuals also caused Woolf anxiety. In March of 1937 after the publication of The Years on 11 March, elation is mixed with depression in the same entry depending on the nature of the review. On Friday April 2, Woolf writes, ‘All the lights sank; my reed bent to the ground. Dead & disappointing - so I’m

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found out & that odious rice pudding of a book is what I thought it - a dank failure’ (D V, p.75), because of Edwin Muir’s review in The Listener and R. A. Scott James’ in The London Mercury. Then a positive review raises her spirits somewhat, and Leonard telling her that none of their friends read The Listener causes her to record that ‘my spirits rose, calm & steady; & I feel once more immune, set on my own feet, a fighter’ (D V, p. 75). Woolf constantly goes through this pattern of vulnerability and self-doubt followed by immunity. She fluctuates from one mood to another, glorying in the praise from The Times, then put down by the negative words of E. M. Forster (D V, p.70 & 75). However much she claimed immunity, it was capable of being destroyed instantly by a few cruel words from a respected source.

The most difficult period for Woolf in the process of making the text public, seemed to be the moment at which she started revisions. Going back to the manuscript with objectivity caused Woolf great turmoil, almost as if she were forced to examine herself, or her own body, right before the public were to do so. She needed to write, but fear of exposure, of having said too much, of having let loose something monstrous tormented her. As Leonard Woolf writes, ‘the weeks or months in which she finished a book would always be a terrific mental and nervous strain upon her and bring her to the verge of a mental breakdown.’ With The Voyage Out and The Years this process caused two of Woolf’s most severe breakdowns. In March of 1910, as she was nearing the end of Melymbrosia, or The Voyage Out as it was to be called, Woolf fell ill and was sent to the Twickenham nursing home from June to August of that year. Again in February 1912 she stayed at Twickenham and then again from July to August of 1913, after The Voyage Out was completed. In September of 1913, after

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a holiday with Leonard which included a stay at Plough Inn, the site of their
honeymoon, she attempted suicide for the second time by taking a mortal dose of
Veronal, the first having been in 1904 after her father’s death when she jumped from a
window. In 1936, after finishing _The Years_, Woolf went to St. Ives in Cornwall, the
place of her childhood summers, in order to rest, came back to work on the proofs and
had to rest again for three and a half months. With _Between the Acts_, the suicide
attempt was final.

Publication, then, was like torture for Woolf. The torture ‘began as soon as she
had written the last word of the first draft of her book; it continued off and on until
the last reviewer, critic, friend, or acquaintance had said his say.’ It seems that
Woolf’s intense identification with her writing, and its place as the centre of her life,
made the process of publication, which naturally brings trepidation to most writers, not
unlike an exposure of her body itself. Woolf was extremely self-conscious about her
body; she hated trying on and buying clothes or even eating in public. ‘The public act
of buying touched both Woolf’s personal difficulty with crowds and her class
consciousness - a consciousness that demanded, even at an additional expense, privacy
for the act of purchasing.’ In Leonard’s words, ‘she had an almost morbid horror of
being looked at.’ When Leonard writes that publication for her was the ‘throwing of
it [the text] and of herself to the critics’, he comes close to the idea of publication as
rape; a process which put her at the mercy of the male world of critics.

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44 Reginald Abbott, ‘What Miss Kilman’s Petticoat Means: Virginia Woolf, Shopping, and
46 Leonard Woolf, 1964, p.149.
This attitude is not constant, however, since there were times at which Woolf felt more confidence in her writing and more immune to the public. In 1932 she had a 'revelation' which she refers to several times subsequently, which seems to coincide with the conception of 'The Pargiters' and contributed to giving her great confidence in the work until the revisions began. In 1933, Woolf writes, 'I have, at last laid hands upon my philosophy of anonymity [...] How odd last winter's revelation was!' (D IV, p.186) Several years later in 1937, she again points to the particular revelation: 'I observed, with pleasure, that all praise & blame & talk about that book [The Years] seems like tickling a rhinoceros with a feather. This is true; & remarkable. I connect it partly with my 1932 philosophic revelation: one doesn't matter: also with my present absorption in Three Guineas' (D V, p.55). It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the revelation in 1932 from the diaries. Anne Olivier Bell footnotes the reference as October 2 1932 when Woolf wrote: 'Odder still how possessed I am with the feeling that now, aged 50, I'm just poised to shoot forth quite free straight & undeflected my bolts whatever they are. Therefore all this flitter flutter of weekly newspapers interests me not at all' (D IV, p.125). She describes the feeling in more detail a few months later, 'this autumn has been a tremendous revelation. You will understand that all impediments suddenly dropped off. It was a great season of liberation. Everything appeared very distinct, amazingly exciting. I had no restrictions whatever, & was thus free to define my attitude with a vigour & certainty I have never known before'; and 'I therefore spoke out in my own voice' (D IV, pp.134-135). In 1938 she looks back on the revelation as marked by a specific encounter in the tube:

And even if the pack - reviewers, friends, enemies - pays me no attention or sneers, still I'm free. This is the actual result of that spiritual conversion... in the autumn of 1933 - or 4 - when I rushed through London, buying, I remember, a great magnifying glass, from sheer ecstasy, near Blackfriars: when I gave the man who played the harp half a crown for talking to me about his life in the Tube station (D V, p.141).
This newly found confidence largely manifests itself in Woolf’s comfortableness with *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. She has come to terms with her own way of working and her own concerns, particularly in the case of these two works, with feminism. She is ‘free & entire & absolute’ (D IV, p.133) and has accepted her position as a woman writer and one whose writing may generate criticism, as in the case of *Three Guineas*. ‘I can take my way: experiment with my own imagination in my own way. The pack may howl, but it shall never catch me’ (D V, p.141) and in 1938 after the publication of *Three Guineas* she writes, ‘I’m fundamentally, I think, an outsider. I do my best work & feel most braced with my back to the wall’ (D V, p.189). She began to care less what her critics thought of her, which was achieved by dissociating her public from her private persona. It is as if her private fulfilment no longer depended on public affirmation.

I think I’ve got rid of vanity: of Virginia. Oh what a riddance. I’ve not read an article on me by a man called Peel in the Criterion. I feel this a great liberation. Then I need not be that self. Then I can be entirely private. I have cut the string that ties me to that quivering bag of nerves - all its gratifications & acute despair. Time I did. It is another great discovery. One sees people lunging & striking at a thing like a straw horse & its not me at all (D IV, p.191).

She has distanced her private self from her public persona, creating an effigy at which all criticism can be aimed. This takes the idea of public and private separation to the extreme in that she has created, at this point, a self who poses as Woolf, but is completely external to and dissociated from herself.

These quotations are unambiguous statements, but two years before she had been, as she herself admitted, on the verge of insanity, hardly ever before having felt so tortured by her writing. Although the period 1932-1938 was on the whole one of increased confidence, it was by no means constant. In fact, Leonard contradicts the evidence from the diaries completely: ‘the more successful she became, the more
vulnerable she seemed to become, with a kind of humility and uncertainty which were
the exact opposite of the assurance and importance which one felt in the great men of
their day, like Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy and Shaw.’ 47 This discrepancy is evidence
of the impossibility of generalizations. Woolf’s diaries are further evidence since they
record the incredible flux of her moods and attitudes towards her writing. She was ‘so
divinely happy one day; so jaded the next’ (WD, p.221).

(6) Writing Women: Taking the Self From Private to Public

(i) Woolf’s attitude to the content rather than the circumstance of her writing, in
terms of what was too private to be exposed for public consumption, is another
complex issue, and one on which many critics see her as contradictory.

The ambivalence in Woolf’s feminism between the idea that women need to
tell their stories in order to give currency to female experience and the idea that
personal grievances, particularly female grievances, should not enter fictional writing is
a tension which has not yet been adequately dealt with in Woolf criticism. Feminist
critics who tackle the apparent contradiction either ignore part of the evidence, or they
view it as a flaw in Woolf’s thinking, perhaps an issue about which she could not
make up her mind.

Certainly, part of Woolf’s resistance to the personal stems from her own fear of
exposure, her own reluctance to write about her own life directly, but she did not mean
the statement ‘it is fatal to write about one’s sex’ as categorically as it has been taken.
Read in the context of other remarks, it seems that Woolf is warning against writing
about one’s sex dogmatically or prescriptively. Woolf acknowledges differences

between the sexes, but she refuses to pin them down or define the gap. Of course Woolf writes about women, and their experiences, some of which are close to her own, but the variety, complexity and contextualized nature of her female characters prevents generalization. The variety of her female characters and her essays about women is a testimony to her conception of female identity as relatively limitless. In A Room of One’s Own, the narrator makes it clear from the outset that she is not going to come to any conclusion about women and fiction, adding ‘women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems’ (ROOO, p.4). She is testing out various configurations of character rather than trying mimetically to capture one conception of ‘woman’. In a review of R. Brimley Johnson’s The Women Novelists, Woolf says that ‘any emphasis, either of pride or shame, laid consciously upon the sex of a writer is not only irritating but superfluous.’ 48 This rather ambiguous phrase is clarified in ‘Women and Fiction’:

In Middlemarch and in Jane Eyre we are conscious not merely of the writer’s character, as we are conscious of the character of Charles Dickens, but we are conscious of woman’s presence - of someone resenting the treatment of her sex and pleading for its rights. 49

She admits that ‘each sex describes itself’ (E II, p.316), but ‘it is fatal to write about one’s sex’ is a warning against a writer’s personal grievances rather than against creating a character who is, for example, a suffragist. The fear is that the fiction will become dogma, propaganda. The author must be able to take on numerous roles and not be trapped by his or her own personality or gender. Woolf acknowledges difference between men and women’s writing, but refuses to define that difference, saying only ‘women are apt to differ’ and chastising Johnson when he falls into


attempts to generalize about female characteristics (E II, p.316). As Caughie writes: ‘The changeable "I" and flexible approach suggest that the truth we seek is not single but multiple, not subjective but intersubjective.’  

Woolf’s adversity to anger, dogma or the obsessively personal stems from its stasis, its inflexibility.

In relation to her own writing, Woolf was often afraid that it was becoming too private, or too close to propaganda. She worried that a scene with Maggie in The Years was becoming ‘too personal’ (D IV, p.338) and also that Elvira in ‘The Pargiters’ was too autobiographical. She felt that ‘personality must be avoided at all costs’ (WD, p.60). She wanted to be the writer, like Rorty’s literary critic, who can slip into possible worlds and empathize with a variety of characters. She writes, ‘The dream is too often about myself. To correct this; and to forget one’s own sharp absurd little personality, reputation and the rest of it, one should read; see outsiders; think more; write more logically; above all be full of work; and practise anonymity’ (WD, p.121). Again this is Rorty’s idea of literature and narrative as the way to understand others, to escape one’s own egotism and cruelty. For Woolf, egotism is restrictive, it does not allow for variation, it is an impediment to the flexibility necessary for creativity. Probably the most enduring image Woolf had of egotism was her father and his rages of self-pity. In her memoirs, she describes the lasting effect of those rages: ‘From it all I gathered one obstinate and enduring conception; that nothing is so much to be dreaded as egotism. Nothing so cruelly hurts the person himself; nothing so wounds those who are forced into contact with it.’  

Her idea of propaganda is also linked to the personal, in that the ‘horror of the Aldous novel’, which she tries so hard

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to avoid, is motivated by personal grievance, or anger (D IV, p.281).

The Years and Three Guineas are the two works where this concern with autobiography and propaganda come across most clearly. It is interesting that in reference to Three Guineas Woolf writes: ‘I'm uneasy at taking this role in the public eye - afraid of autobiography in public’ (D V, p.141). It is not her fictional creations, such as the partially autobiographical To The Lighthouse, as much as her feminism that make Woolf feel she is writing about herself. Her anger and grievance are more autobiographical, more intimate, than her experiences. Although the text is generalized and full of factual references, Woolf obviously felt so strongly about her own arguments and felt that they applied to her own situation enough that they made her feel she was writing autobiographically. She knew, given her involvement and investment in her subject matter, how easily personal anger or grievance could show through. The crossover of public and private is evident here in that she regards a public or factual text as also autobiographical or private.

Woolf is not telling women to ignore their sex, but just not to be dogmatic and single-minded in their representation of women. Statements such as, ‘women are beginning to explore their own sex, to write of women as women have never been written of before’ view such a change as positive rather than fatal (GR, p.82). Since she does believe in a difference between the sexes, albeit a social rather than essential one, Woolf has to believe that it is only women who can write themselves out of obscurity. She wants women to explore their own sex without using their writing as a ‘dumping-ground for the personal emotions' (GR, p.84), and to see them writing essays, criticism, biographies and history as well as fiction. She wants their range of opportunity to be as great as that of male writers; again, she encourages variety in representations of women.
Part of Woolf’s aversion to anger and blatant politics was tactical, in that she was aware of the backlash which the Suffragettes had caused. She knew that antagonism would hinder communication. She often, particularly in *Three Guineas*, mutes her anger into satire or irony and works by indirection, such as the portrayal of lesbianism in *A Room of One’s Own*. Indirection ‘allows one, as I have found, to slip in things that would be inaudible if one marched straight up and spoke out loud’ (MB, p.164). She is careful not to upset the men who need to support her ideas, and she sees them as victims as well as women. In the speech given to the London/National Society for Women’s Service, Woolf asks her readers to put themselves in the shoes of the man who comes home to find his servants reading Plato; she is empathetic and flexible in her thought. ‘Do not therefore be angry; be patient; be amused’ (P, p.xliv). In *Three Guineas* Woolf takes her own advice in that she lets the facts do the work; the tone remains calm.

Far from advocating the avoidance of concern with a character’s sex Woolf actually encouraged women to write about female experience and she was often attracted by the idea of the lives of the obscure. In her famous essay ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ Woolf’s suggestion for change works on both aesthetic and feminist grounds. She urges writers to write about the woman they see on the train rather than avoiding the quotidian or concentrating on external details. In her reaction against Georgian writers such as Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy, who would not entertain the idea of Mrs. Brown as the subject for a novel, Woolf is discussing a change in literary aesthetics. However, it is no coincidence that Mrs. Brown is female, since Woolf looks to Georgian writers to explore the area of female experience and point of view. When Woolf writes, then, that the writer ‘should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress;
saying anything and doing heaven knows what' (CE I, p.336), she is reminding the reader both that ordinary experience can be found anywhere, as well as that female experience is a limitless subject. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf points out the number and strength of heroines in literature written by men. Women have been made public through writing, but 'this is woman in fiction. In fact [...] she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room (ROOO, p.56). She has been written about by men, in literature, but '[h]istory scarcely mentions her' (ROOO, p.57). She has entered the world of published literature as a fiction, while in the private world 'she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband' (ROOO, p.56). This is one reason why Woolf places importance on the quotidian in relation to Mrs Brown.

In her essay 'Memories of a Working Women's Guild' Woolf definitely sees a positive move in the fact that 'these voices are beginning only now to emerge from silence into half-articulate speech' (CE IV, p.148). The only way that female experience, will be recognized is if it is in some way understood; not defined, but heard. In a speech she gave for the London/National Society for Women's Service, Woolf describes the killing of the Angel in the House, an inhibiting force for women's writing, but

having rid herself of falsehood, so we might put it, she has now only to be herself <and write>. But what is 'herself'? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I dont know; I do not believe that you know; I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill (P, p.xxxiii).

It is not enough that women make themselves public, but the variety of modes of expression is important for Woolf. It is the variety which will keep stereotypes and definitions at bay. In the same speech, however, Woolf predicts that women will have to wait fifty years until they can speak unobstructedly about their experience. In the essay 'Professions for Women' which derived from the speech, Woolf imagines the
female writer as a fisherwoman whose line reaches to the depths of the female body and passions, but is brought up short by the thought of male reaction. She is ‘impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex’ (DM, p.152). In the third essay of ‘The Pargiters’ Woolf censors herself to prove this point. She is about to describe Rose’s encounter with the flasher, but writes:

‘He unbuttoned his clothes...’ testify, a convention, supported by law, which forbids, whether rightly or wrongly, any plain description of the sight that Rose, in common with many other little girls, saw under the lamp post (P, p.51).

Woolf in her self-censorship demonstrates the fact that the obstruction is so deeply rooted that it is self-imposed. The cut, marked by a typically Woolfian ellipsis is echoed in the choppy, short phrases which follow. The self-censorship seems to continue in the impeded sentence which comes next. Woolf admired her friend, composer Ethel Smyth, for her frank and autobiographical writing. In a letter to Smyth, Woolf writes, ‘I was thinking the other night that there’s never been a womans autobiography [....] Chastity and modesty I suppose have been the reason. Now why shouldnt you be not only the first woman to write an opera, but equally the first to tell the truths about yourself?’ (L VI, p.453) Woolf knows that she is not capable of the task, so has earmarked Smyth as a woman able to write intimately and explicitly about her sexuality. Autobiography falls under different strictures, for Woolf, than fiction. This is an arena in which the personal can be celebrated, and the female autobiography is to her an as yet unexplored genre. 52

These two strains of Woolf’s thought about women and writing, namely that sex consciousness must be avoided while female experience must be written about,

52 See Suzanne Raitt’s essay “‘The tide of Ethel’: femininity as narrative in the friendship of Ethel Smyth and Virginia Woolf”, Critical Quarterly 30.4 (1988) for an account of their relationship as it intersected with Smyth’s autobiographical writing and how Woolf saw Smyth as holding ‘the secret of self-representation’ (p.7).
may appear contradictory, but the point is that female experience is infinite, and undefinable. Egoism and dogma produce movement inward towards a single centre rather than outward towards tolerance. In her review of W.L. Courtney’s book *The Feminine Note in Fiction* Woolf notes that Courtney sets out to define what the feminine note is but ‘with disappointment, though not with surprise [...] we discover that he has done nothing of the kind.’  

ii) Woolf did however, encounter several philosophical difficulties with the idea of bringing women into the public sphere either through writing or literally through employment and education. First, she often associated the public sphere, particularly academia, with male competitiveness, pride and exhibitionism and secondly her desire to resist female definition pushed her towards keeping women obscure, as in the *Society of Outsiders* in *Three Guineas*.

Woolf distrusted the format of the lecture, fearing that it promoted the dogmatic pronouncement of ‘truths’ rather than a dialogic situation and that it became performance rather than education. In ‘Why?’ Woolf finds that lecturing ‘incites the most debased of human passions - vanity, ostentation, self-assertion, and the desire to convert’ (DM, p.147). ‘Why not abolish prigs and prophets?’ she writes, ‘Why not invent human intercourse’ (DM, p.147). Truth, for Woolf, is a conversation, a discourse rather than a statement. In the first essay of ‘The Pargiters’, Woolf writes, ‘to me it seems that the profession of lecturing ought to have been abolished long ago’ (P, p.5) and then that where truth is important she prefers to write fiction. Truths for Woolf, as for Rorty, are multiple, changing and can only be conveyed through stories,

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through partial, contingent and specific narratives.

In *Three Guineas*, in which Woolf is urging women to enter the public sphere, she again enacts her ambivalence by also urging that they stay as Outsiders. The bright light, or public glare 'paralyses the free action of the human faculties and inhibits the human power to change and create new wholes much as a strong head-lamp paralyses the little creatures who run out of the darkness into its beams' (TG, p.322). The Outsiders' society, a group without meetings, leaders or ceremonies, 'dodges and disappears' (TG, p.323). It resists definition and shrouds the mind in darkness. Woolf names anonymity and elasticity as keys to the success of the society. In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf discusses the convention that 'publicity in women is detestable', the privacy which women have had imposed on them (ROOO, p.65). Woolf turned this into her own 'philosophy of anonymity' (D IV, p.186); her own ideas on the destructive publicity of the press and her own attempt to deal with her vulnerability in the face of critics and reviewers. On October 28 1933, Woolf wrote a letter to the *New Statesman* publicly denouncing the intrusiveness of the press on 'private people, musicians, writers, painters, artists of all kinds.'  

54 Here, she advocates a Society for the Protection of Privacy, whose members would decline from photographs, interviews, autographs and public dinners. In several drafts for an essay to be entitled 'Reviewing' or 'Criticism of Contemporaries', Woolf, rather ironically since she herself wrote numerous reviews and entered the literary world through her reviewing, deconstructs the genre of the review in terms of its negative publicity. Reviewing, she argues, is financially motivated, written for the public rather than the writer and it offers a simplified reaction to the text in question. Again here she emphasizes the numbing

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effect of the glare of publicity and advocates private talk between the reviewer and the
writer: 'In talk far greater elasticity is possible; the pomposities and poses which are
inevitable when a critic is writing for the public are annhilated [sic].' 55 Woolf sees the
reviewer as operating solely for the writer, ignoring the public’s need, but this is
another example of her feelings on the dangers of publicity, stemming in part no doubt
from her own intense sensitivity to reviews.

Clearly, for Woolf, the move of women from private to public was an
extremely complicated question. Women must retain difference, so as not to take on
male roles, often associated for Woolf with public display, and so as to prevent one
definition from being substituted with another equally rigid one.

iii) The question of how women want to be perceived and how best they should
present themselves as they become increasingly prominent in the public realm is, of
course, a question still debated by feminists today. Woolf’s other concern of how and
to what extent women’s personal and private realms should enter into their writing is a
question which came to the fore in feminist criticism in the 1980s. Many women
writers want their personality included, they want their anger to be expressed and the
physicality of their body to be acknowledged. Also, feminist criticism is often inspired
and motivated by strong personal or private feelings so that the tension between
abstract theory and emotional writing is a very difficult one. Some feminists feel that
if they adopt a dry, academic tone, they are using the language which has oppressed
them, thereby continuing the oppression. The strong movement of personal or
autobiographical criticism which came to prominence in America in the 1980s held
that no longer should emotion, involvement or personal details be invalid and that this

was where women felt at home, so that traditional academic discourse was an enemy itself. Is this finding new methods for new concepts, or continuing to ensure that women are associated with the emotional and the personal?

Luce Irigaray writes of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*: ‘She was telling her life story, and at the same time supporting it with scientific data. She never stopped telling her story, bravely, in all its stages.’ Irigaray hears the private story, the emotional involvement behind the generalized, authoritative prose of *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir’s story is one with the abstract account she gives of women’s experience. Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* published in 1971 and 1970 respectively, are probably the most popular texts that uphold the ‘personal is the political’ slogan, but as Nancy Miller writes, ‘most academic women in the 1970s did not articulate that as a “new personalism” in their writing.’ It is necessary to take into account the contingencies of different stages in a movement. Emerging out of the slogans of the sixties, seventies feminism still needed to work to inform and to rally a movement. Greer does offer autobiographical comments intermittently in *The Female Eunuch*, such as ‘The clitoris is ignored: a nurse once narrowly missed cutting mine off when shaving me for an operation’, again relating the private story to the generalized account, however her main task is to break down oppressive stereotypes by revealing what has been left private, in general terms.

Greer wants to dispel the secrecy and mystery surrounding female sexuality, menstruation and genitalia; to make female biology as public as is male biology.

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Millett's project is to redefine the sexual as political and in this sense make it no longer a private, untouchable subject. Obviously, she must make theorizable and general what can also be idiosyncratic and specific to individuals, but there is an extent to which change can only be brought about if such generalizations are made. Millett wants to look at sexual relationships in the same way that race relationships had been analyzed in the 1960s.

Personal criticism did not take off until the 1980s and did so out of a sense that the specific, individual speaking subject, and speaking body, was being ignored in feminist theory. As Nancy Miller writes: 'Feminist theory has always built out from the personal: the witnessing "I" of subjective experience', but certain critics felt that that 'I' had been submerged and invalidated by the conventions of academic language.  For Gerald MacLean, 'the feminist strategy of personalizing the political is itself double, providing a voice for what was once situated outside while denying not the voice but the objectivity of the insider, the "typical" male position.'  The specifics of this problem of personal versus abstracted criticism comes certainly from the complicated logistics of bringing the private into the public realm and asserting the individuality of a marginalized subject, but the problem is also intimately linked to the question of whether women should adopt masculine methods, create their own, or tread some middle path. Other questions arise such as whether this is ultimately an anti-theory position and whether it is limited or necessary to marginalized groups who need to assert the authority of their experience.

Jane Tompkins, in an essay entitled 'Me and My Shadow', resents the


60 Miller, p.14.

convention that her academic writing must exclude her private life; that it ‘transcends
the merely personal.’ 62 For her, the private in the public/private split is the emotional
and the ‘public-private hierarchy, is a founding condition of female oppression’,
because since women have been required to dwell in an emotional or a private realm,
academic writing which denies the private also denies women’s authority. 63
Tompkins’s essay is a reply to and a rejection of Ellen Messer-Davidow’s essay ‘The
Philosophical Bases of Feminist Literary Criticisms’ which Tompkins feels denies its
power by following a masculine, epistemological style. She replies to the essay in two
ways; first as academic convention would urge her and then refuting it by celebrating
personal criticism. The latter section includes comments on her physical situation, her
lifestyle, past experiences, and when she met Messer-Davidow. A brief glance at
several of the books on her shelf such as Foucault’s History of Sexuality which uses
‘we’ too liberally she feels, and Bloom’s Poetry and Repression which denies the self,
convinces her that ‘the female subject par excellence, which is her self and her
experiences, has once more been elided by literary criticism.’ 64 The essay ends with
Tompkins expressing her anger at the denial of her emotion, a resolution of
forgiveness towards those who have caused the denial and the feeling of catharsis that
writing a personal essay has produced.

Tompkins states that personal critics must stand firm against charges of
essentialism, but the charge is certainly there to be made against her. Academic
discourse, for Tompkins, is the ‘father tongue’:

What is personal is completely a function of what is perceived as personal.

62 Jane Tompkins, ‘Me and My Shadow’, Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist
63 Tompkins, p.123.
64 Tompkins, p.135.
And what is perceived as personal by men, or rather, what is gripping, significant, 'juicy', is different from what is felt to be that way by women. For what we are really talking about is not the personal as such, what we are talking about is what is important, answers one's needs, strikes one as immediately interesting. For women, the personal is such a category. 65

Tompkins is asserting a natural connection between women and the emotional or personal, which seems dangerous, because if generalized, it returns women to their restrictive association with the private sphere. This is not to deny that the personal should or can be included in academic discourse, but it seems unnecessary either to be prescriptive on this point or to gender the different styles. Surely, different discourses are appropriate for different tasks. Also, Tompkins does not acknowledge that there can be different levels of the personal in academic writing. It could emerge as an acknowledgement of personal involvement at the beginning of the work, it could be intermittent personal anecdotes as in The Female Eunuch, or the entire work could be an argument constructed and supported by personal account. Mary Ann Caws, in her study of Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell and Carrington uses personal criticism which for her is 'a willing, knowledgeable, outspoken involvement on the part of the critic with the subject matter.' 66 As Nancy Miller points out, however, personal criticism does not have to exclude theory. 'If one of the original premises of seventies feminism (emerging out of sixties slogans) was that "the personal is the political," eighties feminism has made it possible to see that the personal is also the theoretical: the personal is part of theory's material.' 67

Gerald MacLean, in his essay 'Citing the Subject', which is a response to Tompkins’s essay, agrees with Nancy Miller that theory and the private can work

65 Tompkins, p.134.
67 Miller, p.21.
together. He feels that Tompkins needs to politicize or theorize her anger just as he needs to do with his own violence towards his wife which is discussed in the essay. He rejects the ideas of psychoanalysis and psychiatry which make such anger or resentment deeply personal and individual and then make it disappear as the individual comes to terms with the problem. Rather, an aspect of the issue needs to be generalized, theorized and brought into the public realm.

MacLean's essay raises another point about personal or autobiographical writing which relates to Woolf, namely the way in which the personal or private can be a rhetorical stance or a narrative strategy rather than an assertion of the validity of the personal out of interest in the material itself. For example, MacLean's essay is structured as a series of letters to Tompkins, but the chatty openings to the letters give way to conventional academic argument, thereby seeming only a token gesture to Tompkins that he stands behind personal criticism. Similarly, in Three Guineas Woolf uses an epistolary format to create a distinct speaker and addressee. One might be tempted to see Woolf in the speaker's role, but rather than autobiography, the letters are a narrative device which allow her to include the information she has gathered as well as adding a fictional element to the work. The speaker is also part of her strategy of presenting a specifically rooted female voice, but one which to some extent can speak for women in general. In A Room of One's Own as well, the 'I' represents both the disunity of the female subject as well as a general representativeness. 'Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please - it is not a matter of importance) sitting on the banks of a river' posits a real, situated woman, but a woman who cannot and need not be named (ROOO, p.5). She is simultaneously specific and anonymous. The forename, Mary, gives the women a common thread which is undercut by the narrator's denial of the importance of
naming. The speaker is not to be defined, least of all associated with Woolf herself.

Anne Fernald continues the debate by using *A Room of One’s Own* to make an important distinction between personal and autobiographical. She rejects Tompkins’s style of ‘self-centered criticism’ in favour of *A Room of One’s Own*, which is a personal essay in that Woolf’s engagement with and enthusiasm for, her project come through in the writing. Using a narrator prevents the essay from being autobiography, but in that Woolf reveals the workings of her mind, through questions, contradictions and uncertainties, Fernald calls it a work of personal criticism. The narrator’s anecdotes support the arguments rather than being gratuitously personal. Fernald is right when she notes that we equate the personal with emotion or the body, rather than with thought. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Fernald argues, ‘the personal is brought to the service of an idea.’ Fernald then invokes Rorty, indirectly, by claiming that personal criticism is ‘contingent, ironic’, because it presents thought and research as the ideas of an individual and ‘is skeptical of grand theories.’ Her distinction between autobiography and the personal, in that Woolf resisted the former, but used the latter in *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* by focusing on individual thought processes, is extremely perceptive. *A Room of One’s Own* displays a mind at work, an argument being developed, and in this way it is personal. Fernald has used Woolf to mark out a path between the impersonal philosophical or theoretical writing which Tompkins objects to, and the restrictiveness (as Woolf saw so clearly) of the gratuitously autobiographical. Tompkins’s autobiographical anecdotes often seem motivated by rebellion rather than a real desire to tell the reader about her daily life.


69 Fernald, p.187.

70 Fernald, p.172.
activities.

Woolf's work maps the early stages of the dilemma as to how women's writing and feminism can be personal, thus asserting a speaking body, without being self-centred and overly idiosyncratic, while also being able to generalize to some extent about change. Woolf can be prescriptive in certain of her essays about the future of women's writing, but at the same time she maintains the contingency of the subject through historical specificity, and the use of narrative personae.

iv) It is only in 'A Sketch of the Past' written late in her life, that Woolf can write autobiographically in a 'public' genre. In 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf moves most dramatically from private to public, in the process of self-definition. It is this work that shows most clearly Woolf's private conception of herself and the processes by which she made that self public. The work is also a meditation on autobiography itself, in that the first part of the text is self-conscious and experimental as it constructs its own approach. Woolf was undoubtedly influenced by the long tradition of autobiographical writing in the Stephen family, dating back to her great grandfather, James Stephen and his Memoirs. Christopher C. Dahl traces this influence on Woolf, particularly from Leslie Stephen's Mausoleum Book and Some Early Impressions, but sets 'A Sketch of the Past' apart, arguing that here she abandons 'the Victorian "factual" mode of autobiographical writing employed by her father.' 71 Until the admission of her obsession for her mother, after which the focus moves from Woolf to her family and the text moves along in a fairly straightforward narrative fashion, Woolf tries out many different types of storytelling.

Looking at the self portrayed in ‘Reminiscences’ the change from 1907 to 1939 in Woolf’s conception of herself is clear. The 1907 text is autobiographical and the narrator does write in the first person, but the voice is distant and seems not to have experienced the events described. The piece was written for Julian Bell, so Woolf writes ‘Your mother’, ‘your grandmother’, ‘your grandfather’, thereby separating herself further (MB, pp.34, 38 & 47). The experiences are related to Julian, they belong to him rather than the speaking voice. As LuAnn McCracken writes: ‘There is a narrative "I", but that narrative persona is more an observer of the effects of events than an experiencer of them.’ 72 The narration is dry and objective. Woolf does not present a self in the work.

In ‘A Sketch of the Past’, by contrast, Woolf appears as the central presence. She as the storyteller, moves between representations of herself in the present in which she is writing and in the past in which she experienced. Many critics have noted the passivity of her identity in this text, the way in which she is a victim of incest, the recipient of sensation, often overwhelmed by meaning, rather than an active ego making choices. It is true that descriptions of her earliest childhood memories of the flowers on her mother’s dress and the waves breaking at St. Ives convey a receptive subject. She writes: ‘I am hardly aware of myself, but only of the sensation. I am only the container of the feeling of ecstasy’ (MB, p.76). The action, however, comes in the writing, the ordering, the choice of memories to relate. Woolf confronts herself in this piece, confronts the question of writing the self, something she had not done in ‘Reminiscences’. Woolf includes the present in the work, even by noting the date as in diary entries, to create both continuity and contrast. This is the same self, the same

identity of her childhood memories, but it is also an adult identity, one who can control and order through writing. When Thoby hits her she is overcome by helplessness, but in retrospect she knows that ‘It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me’ (MB, p.81).

The self, however, cannot be made whole, cannot be mastered through language. Above all, this autobiographical piece shows how Woolf’s sense of self and identity was governed by an awareness of contingency. When trying to describe herself, Woolf constantly refers to the partiality of her memories: their transitoriness, their dependence on the present circumstances of remembering. Woolf has no objective evaluations of herself and rather describes herself through isolated incidents and images, noting the layers of distortion involved in both the process of remembering and of writing. Woolf admits ‘that it is so difficult to describe any human being’ (MB, p.73). She attempts through details of her birth, class and parentage, but is left with ‘I do not know how much of this, or what part of this, made me feel what I felt in the nursery at St. Ives. I do not know how far I differ from other people’ (MB, p.73). It is in this resistance to linearity, totality and definition, that Woolf’s private self is confronted. It is in her inability to present herself through external details or describe her inner self in any comprehensive or unchanging way that her identity is revealed. Including the present, and therefore the idea of the contingency of memory, contributes as well to the impossibility of a complete picture. Woolf does not give us the illusion of certainty or of chronological narrative. She replicates the ways in which the present remembers the past. She lets us know that she is uncertain whether the memory of her mother’s dress was on the way to St. Ives or back to London. She also reminds us that ‘What I write today I should not write in a year’s time’ (MB, p.84). Change occurs over the years as well as inherently in the past itself. ‘But somehow into that picture
must be brought, too, the sense of movement and change. Nothing remained stable long’ (MB, p.88). Shari Benstock writes that ‘the entire project is poised over an abyss of selflessness, or, to put it differently, that the entire project is posed on the question of self and its relation to language and storytelling strategies.’ Woolf presents her self as inextricably tied to language and the process of writing. She defines her own self as shifting, multiple and always in relation to her surroundings and experiences, in other words contingently.

For some critics this type of autobiography is incomprehensible due to its reliance on pastiche rather than chronology. Daniel Albright writes of Woolf that ‘in the autobiographical writings, as in the novels, the reader is drenched in impalpable subjectivity, in which the subject is not a definite body or face but a watery medium.’ For Albright this is a failing and he contrasts Woolf’s ‘A Sketch of the Past’ with ‘usual’ or ‘normal’ autobiography. An autobiographical account which acknowledges its contingency and which presents a self without distinct parameters equals a nonexistent self for him. He knows that she wants a self which is ‘fluid, mutable, ill-defined, capable of amazing acts of empathy’, but decides that it is impossible to write autobiography in such a manner. The problem is that Albright assumes a unified self, a strong ego which is coherent and controlling. He does not know what to do with a writer whose concept of self is far more flexible and contingent. Albright does gender and therefore generalize the ‘problem.’ He writes that

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75 Albright, p.5.

76 Albright, p.4.
the ‘whole process of imagination, of fiction writing, underwent some subliminal distortion in Virginia Woolf because she was a woman.’ 77 Her ‘program of self-suppression [...] is a continuation of just this sort of feminine anonymity.’ 78 Albright is coming to ‘A Sketch of the Past’ with his own assumptions rather than the openmindedness to accept a different conception of self. Woolf’s awareness of the elusiveness of memory, which is the tool by which self-definition is achieved, and the subsequent provisionality of her autobiography, means that certain critics read avoidance and repression into her autobiographical writing. Woolf was aware that this was a problem for women entering the public realm either literally or through writing. In rejecting the rigid definitions which had locked them in the private sphere, Woolf saw that women had to resist replacement definitions. The self that Woolf brings to the public is conscious of the constructedness of neatly unified representations. Through her continued resistance to a definition of ‘woman’, Woolf contributed to the movement of women from private to public through her autobiographical writing, her essays and her novels, but the variety of representation and her concept of the self as contingent, as seen in ‘A Sketch of the Past’, ensure that the movement is emancipatory rather than restrictive.

77 Albright, p.16.
78 Albright, p.17.

An alternative way of mapping public and private in Woolf’s work is to consider her use of narrative voices. The distinction entered into formal decisions regarding narrative point of view, and the depiction of characters’ internal states of mind. If Woolf’s narrators might be said to speak with a public voice, then a character’s internal thoughts might be said to constitute a private voice. In the sense that a narrator orders and moves the narrative focus, he or she is a public speaker: one who describes and presents for the benefit of others. In Woolf’s case, even the narrator of Jacob’s Room, who is conscious of her lack of authority, possesses a degree of omniscience and omnipresence. Although Woolf’s narrators have access to the characters’ private thoughts, they do not reveal their own. Woolf’s narrators are therefore public in their anonymity. This is not to say that Woolf’s narrators are characterless, but they are functionaries in that they are present in the text to relate the actions and thoughts of characters other than themselves. In Mrs Dalloway, the narrator’s voice exists at the opposite end of the spectrum from Clarissa Dalloway, where Clarissa’s voice is internal, the narrator’s is external. Forays into characters’ consciousness are evidence of the narrators’ public as opposed to private role, in that they have the omniscience to move the narrative while their own private realm remains untouched. The separation, combination and/or balance of these textual voices extends the discussion of Woolf’s division of the public and the private.

Yet again, the contingencies of the work in question determine the obtrusiveness and authority of the narrative voice as well as the depths to which Woolf enters her characters’ minds. In general, however, she avoided either an extreme public
or an extreme private voice. About Arnold Bennett’s *Hilda Lessways* Woolf writes, ‘We cannot hear her mother’s voice, or Hilda’s voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett’s voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines’ (CE I, p.330). Advocating instead a sharing of voice, she employed neither the omniscient, omnipresent recounting of external detail for which she criticized Bennett, nor the narrator who is made absent by the characters’ internal monologue as in, for example, Molly Bloom’s monologue in *Ulysses*. She was concerned, instead, with the movement from public to private; the *relationship* between inner and outer.

One technique which Woolf used repeatedly to focus or dramatize this movement was indirect interior monologue, whereby the character’s thoughts are presented in the third person by the narrator. The narrator enters the mind of the character and reports his or her thoughts verbatim, but the first and second person pronouns of internal monologue are absent. Passages of indirect interior monologue can be pages in length or consist merely of one phrase in a narrated or dialogic context. Indirect interior monologue can be signalled by the narrator with, for example, ‘she thought’, or the move into the character’s mind can be left to the reader to locate. In either case the reader has to be alert for signs such as the character’s idioms, and components of direct speech such as inverted questions and exclamatory phrases and signs of internal thought such as free association and fragmented sentence structure. Often the line between reporting and showing what a character is thinking is difficult to discern.

Indirect interior monologue, then, embodies a combination of public and private voices. Not only will this discussion be a reopening of a debate concerning Woolf’s most widely used narrative technique, but it will also reexamine that technique from a new angle: that of a public/private dialectic. The narrator is always present, but in
conjunction with the private voice of the character concerned. Dorrit Cohn describes
the technique as ‘rendering a character’s thought in his own idiom while maintaining
the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration.’ ¹ The tense and pronouns
ensure the continued presence of the narrator and allow a smooth transition out of and
into narrative passages. In terms of style, this is the closest Woolf comes to a union of
public and private, although importantly it is not a synthesis or a replacing of one
voice by another, but a combination of two separate, distinctive voices.

Since the technique is a conjunction of internal and external, neither completely
one nor the other, it is surrounded by ambiguity, which is worsened by the frequent
difficulty in locating the exact point at which shifts in point of view are made. As
Cohn notes, ‘this equivocation in turn creates the characteristic indeterminateness of
the narrated monologue’s relationship to the language of consciousness, suspending it
between the immediacy of quotation and the mediacy of narration.’ ² It is precisely this
ambiguity which appealed to Woolf as well as the way in which the technique allowed
her access to both public and private realms. However, this ambiguity has meant that
the critical definitions of the technique have sometimes been confused and
contradictory. Bound up with stream of consciousness, because it too is the expression
of a character’s thoughts, indirect interior monologue has not claimed its own
definitive place amongst work on the stream of consciousness technique. Whether it is
subsumed under the heading, given its own region or ignored altogether, indirect
interior monologue is treated as an elusive entity without a firmly established
definition.

A crucial point in distinguishing indirect interior monologue from stream of

¹ Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in
² Cohn, pp.105-106.
consciousness is that the former was in use much before the latter, in eighteenth-century novels and then more extensively in the nineteenth century, making it not a radical, new Modernist technique. What was new was rather the extent to and way in which it came to be used. The technique itself was identified at the turn of the century in French and German criticism, where it was called *style indirect libre* and *erlebte Rede*, respectively. Dorrit Cohn points out that it has been 'virtually ignored' in the Anglo-American tradition and is even without a stable term, as 'free indirect speech', 'free indirect discourse', and 'reported speech' are often used instead. Particularly, in relation to Woolf, the term stream of consciousness has been taken to denote now a method, now a genre. Woolf's extensive use of indirect interior monologue has caused some critics to view it almost as an idiosyncrasy or special feature of her writing and thereby to develop their own unique terminology. This creates confusion through the proliferation of terms, but also dissociates Woolf's use of indirect interior monologue from literary tradition.

An important disagreement occurs between two early, seminal definitions, one being Lawrence Bowling's article, 'What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?' and the other in Robert Humphrey's book *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Bowling defines stream of consciousness as a technique distinct from interior

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3 Cohn, p.108.

4 See, for example, Harvena Richter's *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970) in which she divides Woolf's portrayal of subjectivity into three voices (p.130). Her definitions are vague and often seem to overlap. Although she does not mention indirect interior monologue, her explanations of two of the three voices seem to be inching towards a definition of the technique. Dorrit Cohn also replaces existing terms with her own, albeit well thought out, terminology, but unless the replacements come into currency, the proliferation creates confusion and hinders discussion in the field (pp.11-14).

monologue, in that the latter covers only the linguistically coherent area of
consciousness, while the former reaches deeper, non-verbal areas of image and
sensation. Bowling makes no mention of indirect interior monologue. Humphrey, on
the other hand, wants stream of consciousness to denote a genre or subject rather than
a literary technique. He reminds readers of the term’s origin as a psychological process
rather than a literary-critical term. He then suggests four techniques used to convey
stream of consciousness, one of which is indirect interior monologue.

Consequently, there is also disagreement as to whether the term stream of
consciousness can be applied to Woolf at all. If one does not agree that indirect
interior monologue is a technique for rendering stream of consciousness, then Woolf is
not a stream of consciousness writer because apart from rare, isolated phrases of direct
interior monologue, Woolf captures private thoughts through indirect interior
monologue. Although this means that the consciousness is transcribed verbatim, the
presence of the narrator prevents it from being stream of consciousness. To call it such
is to ignore the narrator, or the public element to the technique. However direct
indirect interior monologue may seem, it is not so; the consciousness is always
reported, mediated. In addition, Woolf renders her characters’ private thought similarly
to speech. She, unlike Joyce, does not include non-verbal representations. Her
characters’ meditations are coherent and for the most part, follow the syntax and
structures of spoken language. This is crucial to an understanding of Woolf’s
conception of and interest in the private realm. She is not concerned with attempting
mimetically to reproduce the unconscious, but rather wishes to reveal character through
nonpublic thought. Following Bowling, then, Woolf’s technique is distinct from the
stream of consciousness technique precisely because it portrays ‘that part of a
character's interior life farthest from the unconscious.'

To call Woolf an exponent of the stream of consciousness technique is also to ignore her dislike of the technique in Joyce. While in the process of conceiving Jacob's Room, Woolf wrote in her diary: 'I suppose the danger is the damned egotistical self; which ruins Joyce & Richardson to my mind: is one pliant & rich enough to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming, as in Joyce and Richardson, narrowing & restricting?' This quotation suggests that it is not Joyce's own egotistical self that Woolf is complaining about, but the excessive interiority of the characters, caused by a complete separation between author and characters. For Woolf, Joyce and Richardson have gone too far and too exclusively into the private realm. Ulysses does not use direct interior monologue exclusively, but as Hugh Kenner writes, 'Within fifty pages we are so entoiled in his [Stephen Dedalus'] subjectivity that nothing much is happening save internal events, alterations of cadence and image, gestures of a mobile ego.' More important to Woolf, was the freedom to move between public relating of events and the privacy of thought; that is, between two modes which, if developed in isolation from each other, would result in narrowness and restriction. Although, a component of indirect interior monologue renders the unselfconscious, free associative meanderings of the stream of consciousness process, equally as important is the voice of the narrator needed to account for the third person pronouns and the 'he' and 'she thought's’. This voice is far from the embodiment of stream of consciousness, it is a public voice used to order and expose, however indirectly.

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6 Bowling, p. 334.


James Hafley is one of the few critics to conclude that Woolf chose not to use the stream of consciousness technique because it was ‘completely out of accord with her "vision".’^9 He defines the technique as a ‘transcription of verbal thought so direct that it seems to bare a human mind. The reader has the illusion of receiving everything; the author creates the illusion of having selected nothing, rejected nothing, corrected nothing.’ Woolf, by contrast, ‘is always present in her novels.’^10 Hafley’s overall characterization of Woolf’s writing is very useful, but his definition of indirect interior monologue has the unfortunate effect of locating it in limbo somewhere between the public and private voice.^11 In Woolf’s usage, the technique neither unites, nor separates the public and private realms; rather it places them in a dialectical relation. Also, it is not an approximation of the character’s thoughts, it is those thoughts. Hafley writes, ‘The narrator speaks directly, but never in the first person; so that although the reader has often a momentary illusion of entering a character’s consciousness, he never "actually does so" - he does not share the characters’ thoughts or watch them, but is only told about them.’^12 In fact, in *Jacob’s Room* the narrator does speak in the first person. More importantly, Hafley has missed the point of indirect interior monologue in that the reader does share the characters’ thoughts, in the characters’ own words, although they are presented by the voice of the narrator. The reader is not told about them, but shown them. Hafley recognizes Woolf’s resistance to stream of consciousness, but does not recognize how far indirect interior monologue takes her into the private mind.


^10 Hafley, pp. 73 & 74.

^11 Hafley, p.91.

^12 Hafley, p.74.
Ralph Freedman, caught up in his thesis that Woolf was working towards a formal, lyrical vision, also misconstrues stream of consciousness and misses the presence of indirect interior monologue. Freedman argues that Woolf's writing underwent a 'progressive depersonalization, a formal rendering of consciousness.' In his discussion of *Mrs Dalloway*, he calls her technique interior monologue, thereby ignoring the fact that Woolf does not use the first person, and argues that interior monologue 'converted association into formal soliloquies, imposing controlled imagery on inner speech.' He finds her use of stream of consciousness 'logical and planned' in order that it accord with his final thesis of formalized lyricism. Stream of consciousness is never logical and planned, so that he either needs to change his terminology or his reading of the indirect interior monologue in *Mrs Dalloway*. Also, like so many early Woolf critics, he ignores the narrator's presence, both in what he erroneously calls interior monologue and also as the producer of the 'controlled imagery.'

The confusion surrounding the term stream of consciousness, or if not confusion then its rather random usage, is clear from the varying contexts in which it appears in Woolf criticism. It has been claimed both that Woolf never used the technique, and that she made it 'her own particular method.' Some critics make more precise distinctions than others. Some do not even mention indirect interior monologue

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14 Freedman, p.218.

15 Freedman, p.218.

16 Freedman, p.218.

in conjunction with Woolf: which seems curious, as eight of her nine novels make use of it, two of them almost continuously. Even with critics who do acknowledge Woolf’s use of indirect interior monologue, discrepancies over specific readings occur. Sometimes stylistic contagion occurs, whereby a narrator takes on the idioms of a character, making the decision even more difficult. Such ambiguities often produce conflicting interpretations, as for example when Mitchell Leaska and James Hafley, analysing the same passage of the dinner scene in To The Lighthouse reach different conclusions regarding a particular sentence. What Leaska reads as Mrs Ramsay’s direct interior monologue, is for Hafley William Bankes’ indirect interior monologue.

It is worth looking at this discrepancy in some detail, as it typifies the frequent difficulty in assigning agency due to the many modulations in voice in Woolf’s writing. The passage in question reads as follows;

(1) "It is a triumph," said Mr Bankes, laying his knife down for a moment. (2) He had eaten attentively. (3) It was rich; it was tender. (4) It was perfectly cooked. (5) How did she manage these things in the depth of the country? he asked her. (6) She was a wonderful woman. (7) All his love, all his reverence had returned; and she knew it.

The first sentence is clearly reported speech followed by omniscient description. Leaska calls the second sentence Mrs Ramsay’s thoughts but through indirect interior monologue due to the past perfect tense. Certain reasons for attributing this sentence to Mrs Ramsay are obscured by taking the passage out of context, since the reader does not know that Mrs Ramsay is worried about Mr Bankes’ reaction to the meal and that much of the previous two pages has been her indirect interior monologue. Sentences three and four Leaska labels direct interior monologue from Mrs Ramsay. About sentence five, Leaska writes that ‘the interior monologue changes to direct statement.’

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19 If the sentence were a direct transcription of Mr Bankes’ question it would read
‘How do you manage these things in the depths of the country?’ Rather it is indirect
speech; the narrator reporting Mr Bankes’ question. Sentence six, Hafley describes as
Mr Bankes’ thought and Leaska as his direct interior monologue. There is no disputing
that we are inside Bankes’ mind, but the imperfect tense provides some ambiguity as
to whether it is direct or indirect interior monologue. Surely his direct thought would
be, ‘She is a wonderful woman’ since he is still seated at the dinner table in her
presence. It is with sentence seven that the discrepancy between Hafley and Leaska
occurs. Both critics obviously recognize ‘and she knew it’ as the narrator’s voice, but
Leaska reads ‘All his love, all his reverence, had returned’ as Mrs Ramsay’s direct
interior monologue and Hafley as William Bankes’ indirect interior monologue; a
significant disagreement. 20 Again, the past perfect tense proves Leaska wrong as the
sentence cannot be direct interior monologue. Mrs Ramsay would think ‘has returned’
in this situation. However, Hafley’s attributing of the thought to Bankes seems wrong
as well. It is Mrs Ramsay who is concerned with the approval of the men around her,
so the thoughts seem to suit her character rather than William Bankes analysing his
own feelings. Either, then, the phrase is Mrs Ramsay’s indirect interior monologue, or
more likely the whole sentence is omniscient narration, since if the first phrase were
indirect interior monologue the ‘and she knew it’ would be redundant since the reader,
having been in Mrs Ramsay’s mind, is aware that she knows it. This is one example of
discrepancies between critics, the difficulty in pinning the technique down exactly, and
the need for complete attention on the reader’s part in order to decipher whose mind
has been entered. Few critics attempt such a detailed analysis as Leaska’s, which often

19 Mitchell A. Leaska, Virginia Woolf’s Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method (London:

20 Hafley, p.91 & Leaska, p.51.
means they do not have a specific enough understanding of the technique.

The question of Woolf’s narrative technique needs to be reopened not only to resolve issues of terminology, but also because it is one of the ways in which her affinities with Postmodernism manifest themselves. Woolf’s use of indirect interior monologue has not yet come under the scrutiny of critics with a Postmodern leaning since most of the work on Woolf and indirect interior monologue was written between 1945 and 1970, when her narrative techniques, particularly her use of point of view, were of foremost interest. Woolf’s use of narrative voice obviously forms an integral part of her writing and it is important that such an issue is not ignored in favour of her politics, but is seen as essential to that debate. As William R. Handley writes, ‘her narrative experiments are in their effects and functions discernibly political.’

Also, by suggesting a basis for Woolf’s Postmodernism in her narrative methods, this ensures that the argument is rooted in specificity. By linking content directly with style, the gain will be an attention to detail, often lacking in Postmodern literary criticism. The issue of narrative technique needs to be revisited from a fresh perspective because much early Woolf criticism, written without the influence of Postmodernist thinking, reads Woolf’s work as a search for unity, thereby misreading some of her reasons for using indirect interior monologue so extensively, and in turn its effect in her novels. Critics lapse into quasi-mysticism as they read Woolf’s use of multiple voices as ‘the oneness of the vital impulse beneath diversity.’

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22 Haflay, p.69.

Harvena Richter ensures the success of her search for unity by reading multiple voices as aspects of a single being or universal consciousness (p.127). Secondly, she links this being to Woolf herself, thereby erasing any notion of narrative distance (p.129). This allows her to acknowledge variation and flux, while guarding against their disruptive consequences. In *Mimesis* Erich Auerbach acknowledges the lack of an ultimate vision in Woolf’s work, brought about, he argues, in part by indirect interior monologue, in that the narrator
contrary, Woolf’s choice of indirect interior monologue stemmed from the ability it
gave her to represent difference, to give a voice to a wide array of major and minor
characters. Sudden and frequent shifts in direct interior monologue would have been
jarring, whereas with indirect interior monologue the narrator can move the focus
swiftly and smoothly from voice to voice. This shifting of perspective allows Woolf to
undercut the dominance of the narrator without replacing it by what she saw as the
tyrranny of the first person monologue. The sense of ambiguity and of partial narratives
created by the frequent shifting of perspective, particularly in Mrs Dalloway, Jacob’s
Room and Between the Acts, points to Postmodernism and its challenging of such
tenets of liberal humanism as certainty, unity, closure and linearity. Rather than
labelling Woolf a Postmodernist and denying her Modernism, I am suggesting that a
Postmodern approach to her work allows certain of her strategies to be acknowledged
which other critical methodologies have obscured.

Indirect interior monologue is used most extensively in Mrs Dalloway, hardly
surprising given the interiority of the work. It is significant, however, that Woolf did
not use direct interior monologue and that she combined so private a focus as Clarissa
Dalloway’s thoughts on a day in June 1923 with the public world of London. Indirect
interior monologue allowed her to negotiate between the two, as well as move between
the thoughts of a wide cross-section of characters on the London streets. The public
scene is always related to the characters as they make their way through London.
‘Bond Street fascinated her; Bond Street early in the morning in the season; its flags
flying; its shops; no splash; no glitter; one roll of tweed in the shop where her father

relinquishes authority to the characters (trans. Willard R. Trask, New Jersey: Princeton
University Press, 1953, p.534). However, this is not, for Auerbach, symptomatic of Woolf’s
thinking or narrative strategies, but of the decay of civilization (pp. 551-553).
had bought his suits for fifty years' 23 is an example of the narrator filtering his or her descriptions through Mrs Dalloway's impressions. In another sentence - 'Away and away the aeroplane shot, till it was nothing but a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol (so it seemed to Mr Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich)' - a public event visible to many people is described by its perception by one of them (MD, pp.35-36). The public is intimately linked to the private; the external is rendered at the moment when it becomes internal. Recognizing the inevitable subjective representation of public spaces, Woolf portrays London not as a monolithic, fixed realm, but as the meeting of empirical fact and private interpretation and response. There is a continuous dialectic between inner and outer.

Integral to the public aspect of the novel is the issue of authority and how Woolf represents the characters who hold positions of public importance. Clarissa is surrounded by those in power in 1923, namely the Conservative Party, and the novel reveals both her marginalization from and her ignorance of the events of the day. The harshest attack however, falls on a figure of medical authority, Sir William Bradshaw, Septimus Smith's doctor. Bradshaw's obsession with proportion and control, and his simplistic diagnosis and treatment of mental illness comes under fire both ironically and directly, as in 'He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up' (MD, p.133).

The most telling scene for its treatment of a public figure of authority is the scene in which a motor car, carrying an unidentified dignitary or magisterial figure, winds its way through the centre of London. Woolf undoubtedly used the viceregal cavalcade in the Wandering Rocks section of Joyce's Ulysses as a model for this scene and comparing the two emphasizes the difference in Woolf's narrative strategies. In Ulysses, the section of Wandering Rocks dedicated to the journey of the Earl of

Dudley through Dublin, is narrated through third person omniscient narration. The narrator describes exactly who is in the car, and systematically lists the reactions to the car of the various characters, who have been introduced earlier in the text.  

Wandering Rocks consists of nineteen sections, the first eighteen of which take a single character and trace his or her thoughts and actions. In these sections, Joyce uses a mixture of direct speech, omniscient narration and direct and indirect interior monologue. However, in the last section the narrator brings the characters together using solely a public voice, and an external view of their various greetings of the car. The narrator's omniscience gives the reader limited insight into the moods of the onlookers, for example Miss Kennedy and Miss Douce 'admired' the car, but the reader is not allowed any more detail as to their thoughts.

In Joyce's scene the prevalence of names and titles, the abundance of signifiers, distinguishes the passage. The weight of titles accorded to the Earl of Dudley and his entourage, provides the authority which pervades the scene. Names of places, as well as people abound, in that each conjunction of a character and the cavalcade is given a specific location in Dublin. Initials and acronyms are rife, from 'Gerald Ward, A.D.C.' to 'M.C.Green, H. Thrift, T.M.Patey, C. Scaife, J.B.Jeffs, G.N. Morphy', all contributing to the focus on titles and labels. The omniscient narrator follows the same pattern with each onlooker, describing the character, his/her reaction to the car, and His Excellency's reaction back. The characters do not interlink; the scene is in effect a list of compartmentalized meetings. The characters are all presented publicly, as they would appear on the street, particularly the viceroy, and description of internal

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25 Joyce, p.325.

26 Joyce, pp. 324 & 327.
thoughts is kept to a minimum. The viceroy is the focus of the scene, the centre around which the characters revolve, and they are described through their relation to him.

In contrast, the extent to which Woolf subverts the authority figure is clear. She achieves this by leaving the identity of the figure in the car unknown. Whereas in Ulysses, names are emphasized and crowd the passage, here the signifier is absent, there is an empty centre around which the characters can construct their own narratives. The sex of the figure is in dispute and even the chauffeur, 'who had been opening something, turning something, shutting something' contributes to the uncertainty (MD, p.19). The irony in the narrator’s voice adds an element of mockery to the scene as well, undercutting the bystanders’ awe for the invisible personage. The figure is of ‘the very greatest importance’, breathes the ‘dark breath of veneration’ on the onlookers and represents an ‘immortal presence’ (MD, pp. 17, 20 & 23). These are all examples of the narrator’s hyperbole, used in order to convey the characters’ overreaction.

Instead of the tangible, identifiable authority of Joyce’s focal figure, Woolf subverts the power of her authority figure by constructing the scene around a vacant centre. Only three people see the face of the figure for a few seconds, the narrator tells us, and the other bystanders see only ‘a square of dove grey’ (MD, p.17). Through indirect interior monologue, the characters fill the centre themselves. For Septimus, the focus of the car signifies the arrival of some horror which threatens to burst into flames, for Lucrezia, his wife, it is the Queen going shopping, for Clarissa, the Queen is on her way to perform some charitable deed, and for Moll Pratt it is definitely the Prince of Wales (MD, pp. 18, 19, 21 & 23). As the crowd gathers at Buckingham Palace, Sarah Bletchley, Mr Bowley and Emily Coates are added to the bystanders
given a voice through indirect interior monologue; their private narratives are given in reaction to the public event and there is no one reaction that takes priority. Tony E. Jackson describes the subversiveness of this scene: ‘This entire section consists of what would, in a conventional novel, become subplots [....] But the narrator pointedly provides just enough information to open a vein of narrative anxiety for each one and then leaves the character and never returns [...] us to a conclusion.’ 27 Not only does the narrator provide information through omniscient narration, but the characters speak for themselves through indirect interior monologue.

Whereas the focus in the Wandering Rocks scene remains firmly on the Earl of Dudley, in Mrs Dalloway the emphasis is on the community of characters and the movement from the crowd to the individual. Woolf uses what I shall call communal indirect interior monologue, internal thoughts which are not attributable to any one character, to create the sense of the crowd’s unity: ‘Was it the Prince of Wales’s, the Queen’s, the Prime Minister’s? Whose face was it?’ (MD, p.17) Then, however, the narrative breaks away to the preoccupations of one character, creating fluidity and movement in the scene. Clarissa, for example, seeing the ‘white, magical, circular’ disc in the footman’s hand - signifying the vacant centre of authority - is reminded of a party at Buckingham Palace, where she was surrounded by ‘the gentlemen of England’ (MD, pp. 21 & 22). Clarissa creates her own image of authority. The narrative voice constantly shifts, omniscient narration and communal indirect interior monologue being broken by a cross-section of individual perspectives. Without a voice or name, the figure must stand as an ‘enduring symbol of the state’ and the onlookers must create their own interpretations and reactions (MD, p.20). Rather than dominating the

characters, either in terms of voice or position, both the dignitary and the narrator, who is ignorant of the figure’s identity as well, leave the characters free to have their own voice in the narrative. The public figure is silenced, left without identity or voice. Although there is omniscient narration in the scene, the narrator is not party to any knowledge about the person inside the car, thereby allowing the private thoughts of the onlookers equal weight. Had the narrator revealed the person’s identity, putting the reader in a privileged position, the incorrect guesses of certain of the onlookers would emphasize their lack of authority. As it is, their narratives are not prioritized, there is no competition for the right answer, because it is nonexistent.

Woolf undercuts the authority figure further by introducing the airplane which immediately takes the attention away from the car, but again represents uncertainty, needing to be interpreted by the onlookers. The airplane writes seemingly random letters in the sky, quite literally empty signifiers. Transitory and temporary as ‘they moved and melted and were rubbed out’, they can be read in contrast to the multitude of initials and acronyms in the Ulysses scene which have a very definite signification (MD, p.25). The letters are, like the car, ‘on a mission of the greatest importance’, but similarly it will ‘never be revealed’, and again even the narrator does not know what the plane is writing (MD, p.26). New characters are introduced, Maisie Johnson, Mrs Dempster and Mr Bentley, all of whom have their own narratives and reactions, presented through indirect interior monologue. In Leon Edel’s words, ‘we feel we have seen London through many eyes - and so are aware of it through many awarenesses.’

Woolf, in this scene, enacts a Postmodern undercutting of an authoritative or ultimate viewpoint by leaving that centre unwritten and letting her characters write

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their own narratives. In the same way that the person in the car is unidentified and silent, Woolf's narrator is anti-authoritative in that s/he relinquishes the narrative voice to various characters and although omniscient and anonymous, and therefore public, is just as ignorant as the characters regarding the car and the airplane. Indirect interior monologue allows Woolf the flexibility to move smoothly and rapidly from one character to another, as well as negotiating between public and private; public event, public narrator and private thoughts. She does not want either the dominating voice of Joyce's omniscient narrator, or the intensely private voice of his direct interior monologue, rather she wants a negotiation between public and private. In Constructing Postmodernism, Brian McHale argues that Ulysses can be divided into sections which are Modernist and sections which are Postmodernist. The Modernist sections are marked by the use of multiple perspectives, a 'mobility of consciousness' (and here he cites the final Wandering Rocks section, as well as Mrs Dalloway) whereas a mobility of worlds marks the Postmodern sections (here he cites the Oxen of the Sun and Circe sections). In the Modernist sections, voices change, whereas the Postmodern sections are characterized by a disorienting lack of certainty, represented by, for example, dream sequences, hallucinations and the carnivalesque. Woolf's novels are not avant garde in this way, and by McHale's reasoning this prevents her from having affinities with Postmodernism. This seems to be an example of rather superficial categorizing, detrimental to Woolf because her writing is not disorienting or surreal. Firstly, mobility of consciousness, the Modernist characteristic, can be found in nineteenth century novels, Wilkie Collins' The Moonstone to name only one, and I argue that this characteristic can take on Postmodern affinities in Woolf's case if more factors are accounted for, such as which consciousnesses are represented, how they are

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represented and what relationship they bear to the main narrator.

The following reading of Mrs McNab in To The Lighthouse should serve to challenge McHale's argument, as well as shedding further light on Woolf's use of indirect interior monologue. Having established that Woolf represents a multiplicity of voices in her work, the question now is which voices she includes, as multiplicity does not necessarily mean variety. Postmodernist art, with its awareness of the constructedness of representation, often gives voices to those who have been silenced, mis- or under-represented. Although women are well represented in Woolf's work, and she does cross class boundaries in Mrs Dalloway, with Crosby in The Years and Mrs McNab in To The Lighthouse, one still asks how these characters are situated within the narrative and what kind of status their voice are given.

In To The Lighthouse Mrs McNab appears in 'Time Passes', the second section, to clean the Ramsay's house while it lies empty. Several objections have been made to Woolf's portrayal of McNab. Pamela L. Caughie argues that 'it is Woolf's narrative that cannot accommodate Mrs McNab except by robbing her of meaning, agency.' 30 She believes that Woolf wants to harmonize the narrative, rather than acknowledging that while a text can include varied voices, they will not necessarily cohere. Bette London also feels that McNab has been appropriated, that the narrator 'domesticates' her, and speaks for her. 31

Structurally, McNab is marginalized in the narrative as she is essentially given her own section, but rather than being condescension, this seems to be Woolf's acknowledgement that McNab is not part of the family situation. In contrast to

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Caughie’s point, Woolf seems to be representing formally the fact that McNab is an outsider to the Ramsays. Rather than trying to force McNab to unite with the family, the narrative allows her her own space. Within the context of the novel, McNab is a marginal figure, but by giving her her own section, Woolf brings her into focus. The problem that Caughie and London have with this issue seems to arise from a lack of distinction between the narrator and the narrative. With typical Postmodern selfconsciousness, Woolf lets McNab prove the narrator wrong. Through indirect interior monologue, she is given her own voice at which point the narrator’s prescriptive comments are subverted.

There is no doubt that the narrator portrays McNab simplistically. According to the narrator, her singing is like ‘the voice of witlessness’, ‘robbed of meaning’ (TTL, p.178). She lurches and leers, not even in control of her own movement. The narrator presents her stereotypically, as incapable of insight or change. In section eight of ‘Time Passes’, however, this changes as soon as McNab is represented through indirect interior monologue, when public voice gives way to private. Far from being ‘witless’, McNab imagines what will happen to the deserted house, she remembers Mrs Ramsay and runs through various scenes in her mind. Her ability to imagine and analyze the past disproves Caughie’s assertion that she is denied ‘narrative agency, the ability to select and order events into some meaningful sequence.’ 32 When McNab speaks for herself, she destroys the narrator’s description. In section eight the narrator’s comment that ‘she stood arms akimbo’, is bracketed within a passage of indirect interior monologue and does not coincide with the account McNab is giving of herself (TTL, p.184). In section nine when Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast return to ready the house for the Ramsays, the same pattern occurs. The narrator starts off by describing McNab as

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'a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered, something that lurched' (TTL, p.189). Then McNab's indirect interior monologue reveals that she is highly conscious, full of memories of the Ramsay's parties and also that her staying of 'the corruption and the rot' is an achievement in itself, not unlike Lily's completion of her painting or the trip to the lighthouse (TTL, p.189).

The narrator's naive and denigrating view of McNab is shown to be so by McNab herself. The reader is given two different representations which are at odds with one another. Woolf is unsettling the notion of the reliable, omniscient narrator and can do this by using indirect interior monologue, thereby introducing McNab's own voice. In this case, the public voice of the narrator is undercut by the private thoughts of McNab. When we are allowed into her head, we find something very different from what the narrator described. The narrator is denied the final word, only possible if there are additional voices. Furthermore, in remarking that, 'Visions of joy there must have been', the narrator reveals through the word 'must' that s/he is imposing his/her reading, is in fact guessing, thereby revealing his/her lack of authority to define her (TTL, p.178). With indirect interior monologue Woolf shows the necessity of letting McNab speak for herself, and the danger inherent in an omniscient narrator. In addition, she is exploring the problematics of incorporating the voices on the margins into the structure of a text. Woolf is doing what Linda Hutcheon calls 'postmodern de-naturalizing - the simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions of narrative.' 33 Woolf uses the narrator in this case to expose the problems of omniscient narration and the representation of multiple perspectives, but obviously the narrator is an integral part of To The Lighthouse, and this does not mean a completely unreliable, overthrown narrator.

Indirect interior monologue is also used in *To The Lighthouse* to portray the private dynamics within the Ramsay family. Mrs Ramsay's thought is the focus, as is Mrs Dalloway's, but in *To The Lighthouse* the indirect interior monologue is shared more evenly amongst the characters. The movement between characters is smoother in *To The Lighthouse*, less marked by 'he thought' or 'she thought', the increased movement from character to character being in part a stylistic embodiment of Mrs Ramsay's concern with the well-being of those around her. Based on Julia Stephen, and the Victorian character-type, the Angel in the House, Mrs Ramsay is constantly seeking to pacify, support and bring together the family and friends around her. This characteristic is paralleled formally in the first section of *To The Lighthouse* in the bringing together and mingling of the various voices centred around Mrs Ramsay.

Indirect interior monologue is also fundamental in portraying the relationship of Mr and Mrs Ramsay on both its public and private levels. Sometimes a mere alternation in indirect interior monologue between husband and wife creates the impression of their intimacy and symbiotic relationship. The scene in which Mr Ramsay has been caught talking to himself and returns to his wife for consolation is an example of this. She is constantly watching, listening to and gauging her husband's moods, ready at any moment to care for him. Initially Mrs Ramsay feels that Mr Ramsay needs privacy to gain his composure so she transfers the love she has ready, to her son James. Then, the reader is given alternating passages of indirect interior monologue, Mr Ramsay's easily identifiable with sentences such as 'The extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him' (*TTL*, pp.44-45) and Mrs Ramsay's by 'There was nobody she reverenced more. She was not good enough to tie his shoe strings, she felt' (*TTL*, p.46). This internal movement between man and wife is typical of the process by which Mrs Ramsay continually calms,
soothes and reaffirms her husband. It is as though his feelings always reach her, making her ‘a sponge sopped full of human emotions’ (TTL, p.45). She takes care of her children in the same way. The reader is by no means denied Mrs Ramsay’s own feelings, indeed the indirect interior monologue in ‘The Window’ section is predominantly hers, but her thoughts are largely her reaction to other people.

Occasionally the indirect interior monologue, as well as alternating, actually forms an internal conversation. This occurs at the dinner party scene when tension is caused between the couple by Augustus asking for a second bowl of soup. In the passage that follows their thoughts alternate, answering one another;

What could be the matter? Only that poor old Augustus had asked for another plate of soup - that was all. It was unthinkable, it was detestable (so he signalled to her across the table) that Augustus should be beginning his soup over again. He loathed people eating when he had finished. She saw his anger fly like a pack of hounds into his eyes, his brow, and she knew that in a moment something violent would explode, and then - but thank goodness! she saw him clutch himself and clap a brake on the wheel, and the whole of his body seemed to emit sparks but not words. He sat there scowling. He had said nothing, he would have her observe. Let her give him the credit for that! But why after all should poor Augustus not ask for another plate of soup? He had merely touched Ellen’s arm and said:

‘Ellen, please, another plate of soup,’ and then Mr Ramsay scowled like that.

And why not? Mrs Ramsay demanded. Surely they could let Augustus have his soup if he wanted it. He hated people wallowing in food, Mr Ramsay frowned at her. He hated everything dragging on for hours like this. But he had controlled himself, Mr Ramsay would have her observe, disgusting though the sight was. But why show it so plainly, Mrs Ramsay demanded (they looked at each other down the long table sending these questions and answers across, each knowing exactly what the other felt). (TTL, pp.129-130)

The narrator’s explicit parenthetical comments frame the implicit dialogue which emerges through the juxtaposition of indirect interior monologues. The passage reveals dialectic within dialectic: the relation between husband and wife framed by and comparable to the relation between narratorial commentary and interior monologue. Mrs Ramsay is obsessed with being able to read her husband’s feelings in order that
she can cater to his needs and Mr Ramsay, in his self-pity needs to know that she sees both this distress and his ability to control it. Indirect interior monologue renders this process effectively because the point of view can move rapidly from mind to mind. Had Woolf used direct interior monologue the shifts would be too sudden and too frequent, giving the scene a discontinuous feel.

By using indirect interior monologue as well as omniscient narration, Woolf also shows how the power Mr Ramsay wields over his wife is reinforced in her own consciousness. The reader sees first hand her passivity and self-effacement, therefore her partial responsibility for her husband's control over her thoughts and actions. Indirect interior monologue reenacts the way in which her thoughts are inextricably linked to her husband's moods. This is clear in the last section of 'The Window' in which both are reading, but still conscious of the dynamic between them. Although Mr Ramsay is not actually speaking, he is controlling her. 'Don't interrupt me, he seemed to be saying, don't say anything; just sit there' (TTL, p.161). This is Mrs Ramsay's thought, implying that either she can read his thoughts or she has internalized him as a figure of control. Later in the scene she thinks that 'if he wanted her to wake she would, she really would, but otherwise, might she go on sleeping, just a little longer, just a little longer' (TTL, p.163). The narrative voice introduces this thought with 'seemed to say that' not to express his or her own doubt as to Mrs Ramsay's thoughts, but to indicate that, although she is not speaking, the words come across to Mr Ramsay like speech.

At the end of the scene Mrs Ramsay knows that her husband wants her to say she loves him, but this is something she can only communicate silently 'though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him' (TTL, p.167). Then she proves this to herself and him by admitting that he was right about it being
wet tomorrow and ruining the trip to the lighthouse. The last sentences of Section One are

‘Yes, you were right, It’s going to be wet tomorrow.’ She had not said it, but he knew it. And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. (TTL, p.167)

The ‘she had not said it’ does not refer to the previous sentence, but to the unsaid ‘I love you’ and her triumph is in letting him know her love, without actually saying it, by capitulating to his superiority, his correctness. Woolf uses indirect interior monologue expertly to convey these subtle movements and negotiations between the couple. Having both the ability to convey the exact thoughts as well as a narrative voice, both to comment and to shift the point of view, Woolf captures the dynamic, well known to her, of the self-effacing Victorian wife and mother and the self-centred, demanding man of letters. The dynamic moves between perception of public or outward signals and private thought. Mrs Ramsay is a constant reader of signs, an interpreter, so the reader of the novel needs both omniscient narration, private indirect interior monologue and direct speech to gauge the various levels of their relationship.

*Jacob’s Room* is distinctive because indirect interior monologue is deliberately not used extensively in this work. Leon Edel calls *Jacob’s Room* Woolf’s ‘first attempt at stream-of-consciousness writing’ 34 and Melvin Friedman calls it ‘her first work relying entirely on stream of consciousness.’ 35 If they are referring to indirect interior monologue as stream of consciousness, then they are incorrect, as both *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* use the technique; and if they are referring specifically to direct interior monologue, the work can hardly be said to rely entirely on a technique it uses approximately four times. Even when indirect interior monologue is used it

34 Edel, p.135.

appears in isolated sentences within narrative description or dialogue rather than the extended passages, as in Mrs Dalloway and To The Lighthouse.

With Jacob’s Room, Woolf set out to explore the problematics of the idea of stable identity. She was examining the difficulty in representing identity and the difficulty in summarizing identity relying only on empirical observation. Passages of indirect interior monologue would allow Jacob to define himself, thereby defeating her purpose. Jacob, like the car in Mrs Dalloway, is an unknown centre. Instead, the narrator plays a much greater role and has a more distinctive voice than in either Mrs Dalloway or To The Lighthouse. The private/public dialectic changes here in that Woolf is deliberately suppressing the private, in order to convey its importance. She is illustrating the difficulty in making any assertions about character using only external observations. In a sense, through its absence, Jacob’s Room exhibits the need for indirect interior monologue in order that her characters can be understood. The female narrator’s tone is more colloquial, but most importantly she doubts, questions and admits her ignorance. Still, critics misread the lack of objectivity as Woolf’s own confusion. For example, Friedman argues that ‘there is discernible here a certain lack of confidence on the novelist’s part’, hence the ‘female evasive manner’ and her ‘frequent interventions in propria persona, as a way of thrusting herself between Jacob and the reader to explain the actions of the former and enlist the sympathy of the latter.’ Friedman has entirely missed the point of the narrator’s doubt. The narrative intervention is not compensation but an emphasis on the impossibility of defining

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36 Friedman, p.192. This quotation has been lifted almost verbatim from Daiches’ Virginia Woolf, in which he writes, ‘There is discernible here a certain lack of confidence on the author’s part in her own technique. She has to introduce herself at intervals, in propria persona, to explain her doubts and difficulties to the reader, and enlist his sympathy’ (David Daiches, Virginia Woolf, London: Nicholson & Watson, 1945, p.61). No mention is made of Daiches’ work in Friedman’s bibliography.
identity. Woolf is exposing the artificiality of the objective, omniscient narrator, not making up for her inexperience. She probably chose a female narrator not because, as Friedman suggests, women are essentially evasive, but because in realist fiction narrative authority has traditionally been coded as male. Also Woolf is writing about women's marginalization, since the narrator is an outsider to the male world of Cambridge, and this is paralleled in her inability to get inside his head. Phillip Brian Harper has recently argued that the decenteredness and fragmented subjectivity found in much Postmodern literature is similar to the alienation experienced and written about by certain marginalized communities and individuals beginning well before Postmodernism came into currency. By this account, Woolf's affinities with Postmodernism could be in part accounted for by her own marginalization due to gender. Her own acute awareness of sexism, and the resulting oppression and exclusion of women, represented here clearly in the position of the narrator of Jacob's Room, caused her to predate Postmodernism in her critique of the unified subject, her questioning of representation and her subversion of certain power structures. In her constant exploration of the representation of women, their histories, their sexuality, their professions, to name only a few areas, Woolf realised the constructedness of oppressive representations of women, leading her in turn to acknowledge the artificiality of all fixed representations.

Woolf's introducing of gender issues into the assumption of narratorial access, results in her narrator having a more distinctive character than the narrator of Mrs Dalloway, for example. In Jacob’s Room, then, the public/private dialectic shifts since we experience rare moments of insight into the private mind of the narrator. In a few

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instances, she focuses the attention on herself, her own questions, preferences and problems. In these moments she speaks in the first person, telling us that she has no wish to be the Queen of England or of her fear of and distance from Jacob. Although the narrator still has, on the whole, a public voice, Woolf has deliberately altered the public/private dialectic by introducing elements of the private into the narrator’s voice, so as to raise questions of identity, representation and gender.

The narrator makes her lack of omniscience clear with phrases such as ‘perhaps Jacob only said "hum", or said nothing at all’, and unsure of Jacob’s whereabouts, surmises that he is ‘Dining in Hall, presumably’ (JR, pp. 59 & 48). The narrator at some points assumes only the empirical knowledge of an on-the-spot observer, ‘Whether this is the right interpretation of Jacob’s gloom as he sat naked, in the sun, looking at the Land’s End, it is impossible to say; for he never spoke a word’ (JR, p.63). Often she must glean information from his words and actions. Indirect interior monologue would clearly undermine this deliberate reliance on empirical observation. Not that empirical observation gets one very far. It is no use, the narrator asserts, ‘trying to sum people up’ (JR, p.37 & 214). This comment occurs twice in the novel, the first time after an elderly woman has tried to summarize Jacob, who is sitting opposite her in a train. ‘Taking note of socks (loose), of tie (shabby)’ she starts with externals but only comes up with ‘youthful, indifferent, unconscious’ as character traits (JR, p.36).

The one instance of direct interior monologue is used to demonstrate its own limitations. After presenting Jacob’s thoughts, the narrator remarks that ‘there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself’ (JR, p.97). Inflections and mood cannot be conveyed through direct interior

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monologue and 'the room; the market carts; the hour; the very moment of history', in other words the contingencies of the moment are lost. 'What remains is mostly a matter of guess work' (JR, pp. 97 & 98). As she writes in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', 'You see one thing in character, and I another. You say it means this, and I that. And when it comes to writing, each makes a further selection on principles of his own. Thus Mrs Brown can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer' (CE I, p.325). As well as being a testament to Woolf's awareness of contingency, she also captures here the elusiveness of both identity itself and the process by which it is perceived. Even Jacob, when writing to his mother 'could make no sense himself of his extraordinary excitement, and as for writing it down -' (JR, p.180). Woolf foregrounds the difficulty in the transcription of experience, particularly the transcription of the internal workings of the mind, which she would go on to attempt in her next two novels. The problematics of representation, a Postmodern distrust of mimesis and the communicative capacity of language, problems to occupy Woolf throughout her lifetime, are at issue here. Woolf has created a public voice, a voice which can be central and control the narrative without being dogmatic or authoritarian, a voice aware of its status and the importance of contingency.

Virginia Blain argues that 'Under the conditions of this male-dominated tradition which Virginia Woolf inherited, to adopt the all-knowing voice of omniscient narration was, in effect, to adopt a thoroughly masculine tone.' No doubt, this association of conventional narration with masculinity was part of the reason behind Woolf's deliberate use of a female narrator in Jacob's Room. However, Woolf did not

reject the omniscient narrator. Indirect interior monologue is a stylistic analogy for Woolf's ambivalence towards her Victorian heritage. Woolf never undergoes a wholesale rejection of convention, and the extensive third person omniscient narrative description of The Voyage Out and Night and Day reappears in The Years towards the end of her career. Woolf does not reject tradition in favour of experiment, but rather tenses one against the other, thus in part undoing the opposition. 'Rewriting sustains and disperses, dispels, restores, and interrupts.' Woolf writes in 1928, 'And what is my own position towards the inner and the outer? I think a kind of ease and dash are good; - yes: I think even externality is good; some combination of them ought to be possible' (WD, p.139). Indirect interior monologue made the combination possible.

Indirect interior monologue also allowed Woolf flexibility and multiplicity, two other emphases central to her thinking. She gives a voice to many; the narrator is continually surrendering the story to the various characters. The narrator, omniscient because he or she can enter the characters' minds as well as describe their thoughts, relinquishes his or her authority, often as in Mrs Dalloway making pure narration secondary to the indirect interior monologue. In this way, Woolf's technique is more innovative than stream of consciousness writing which uses direct interior monologue, in the way that it looks forward to Postmodernism with its continual shifting and sharing of voice. Woolf displays the artificiality of the omniscient narrator, and his or her unproblematic conveying of subjectivity. Her use of multiple voices through indirect interior monologue acknowledges the variety, fragmentation and situatedness of subjectivity. It cannot be totalized or contained. Linda Hutcheon describes what is at work here, 'Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate any neat attempts at unifying

coherence (formal or thematic). Historical and narrative continuity and closure are contested. Through its reworking of the relationship between public and private, indirect interior monologue breaks down any notion of a fixed binary opposition. Blain notes, ‘The enormously creative skill with which she varies, modulates, divides and joins the narrating voices of these fictions, in such a way that each voicing gives utterance not only to itself, and to its subject of discourse, but to a different relation between public and private vision.’

The Waves is the only novel in which Woolf does not use indirect interior monologue, and instead uses, as she put it, ‘a series of dramatic soliloquies’, alternating amongst six characters (D II, p.312). The privacy and self-analysis of the speeches initially suggest direct interior monologue, but the inclusion of ‘said Jinny’ or ‘said Bernard’ defines them as speech rather than thought. Woolf does not use indirect interior monologue and only uses omniscient narration in the brief opening passages of each section, but neither does she use the intensely private voice of direct interior monologue. The work was to be a ‘play-poem’, corroborating the idea of soliloquies, and also emphasizing the presence of an implied audience (D III, p.139). The soliloquies are not the unconscious ramblings of inner thought, but are descriptive stories presented to a listener. The use of the present tense creates the impression that the characters are relating the events as they happen, for the benefit of a reader who cannot see. “Now we move out of this cool temple, into the yellow playing-fields” is descriptive, background information which a narrator would normally supply, but here the characters take the reader into their lives. Woolf does not use a narrator because

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the characters narrate their own lives, and the novel is in part about that process; the articulation of identity.

The characters’ voices, then, are both public and private. Public in that they are speaking to an audience rather than thinking. Private in that the subject matter is intimate and the voices do not appear constrained or inhibited by the presence of a listener, who is, after all, the reader, rather than a literal audience within the text. Woolf emphasizes the presence of the reader by making explicit the conventionally implied relationship between characters and reader. At certain places, however, the characters do appear to hear each other. In the opening section, for example, the similar syntax implies that each character is aware of the comments of the others, or in a later passage such as

‘A mysterious illumination,’ said Louis, ‘visible against those yew trees.’
‘Built up with much pain, many strokes,’ said Jinny (W, p.191),

when the speeches follow on from and complement each other. The voices oscillate between public and private, between description (‘"The lights are beginning to make yellow slits across the square"’ (W, p.69)) and private meditation (‘"What did I write last night if it was not good poetry? Am I too fast, too facile? I do not know. I do not know myself sometimes"’ (W, p.67)). Also, even though she does use the first person point of view, Woolf employs a stylized lyricism in all the soliloquies rather than mimaetically attempting to recreate the unconsciousness of inner thought, in other words she prevents the speeches from being either intensely private or intensely individual. The similarity of each character’s tone suggests that in part, they are one person. They are the many selves Bernard speaks of.

By emphasizing the process of narration and storytelling, boundaries between author, character and reader are broken down. The creator and receiver of the text
appear both inside and outside the work. Firstly, Elvedon, the "unknown land", the "primeval" place which the children discover early in the novel, is a place of imagination, inhabited by a "lady writing" (W, p.12). This woman is an author figure, writing the text in which she constantly figures, even though within the novel she occupies her own separate place which the children recognize as "a hostile country" (W, p.12). As the characters tell their own stories, attempting to put themselves into writing, the lady at Elvedon is creating them. Secondly, the character/reader division is complicated by Bernard's final soliloquy, the final story he tells while dining in a gentleman's club, which is addressed to a particular person with whom Bernard is dining. The listener is a stranger to Bernard, although they met once "on board a ship going to Africa" (W, p.199). The listener is, in part, the reader, who has been the audience all along, but now is placed inside the text as a character. Bernard's final story is overtly public, whereas the other speeches slip between public utterance and private thought.

In *Jacob's Room*, also concerned with the representation of self, the reader is rarely allowed any direct insight into Jacob's character, the novel is full of other characters' attempts to describe him. In *The Waves* the characters describe themselves, tell their own life stories. While the characters tell their stories intimately to the reader, Bernard is the entertainer, the public story teller; "I make stories", he states, attempting to "fix the moment" (W, pp.181 & 29). Everything is fuel for Bernard's stories, "[w]aves of hands, hesitations at street corners, someone dropping a cigarette into the gutter - all are stories" (W, p.182). Bernard is the writer, the creator of narratives, able to spin a tale around anyone by picking from his "book, stuffed with phrases" (W, p.246). There is a tension in the novel, however, between Bernard's neatly formed stories and his awareness of what must be left out in the creation of
these stories. Bernard’s stories are often left unfinished, they “tail off absurdly”, an acknowledgement that life cannot be summarized in this way (W, p.39).

In contrast with his sleek narratives, Bernard’s sense of his own identity is multiple and varied. He is one and many, “made and remade continually”, like the constant disintegration and coming together of the waves (W, p.109). He says of his own biography, a logical, contained lifestory, that “one cannot despise these phrases laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives” (W, p.216), but recognizes that like his own stories, his biography is simplified and partial. As in Jacob’s Room, Woolf portrays the representation of identity as contingent. As Bernard says, “Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others leap and sizzle” (W, p.214). Every utterance, every attempt to define, to describe, emphasizes the countless untold stories.

Throughout the novel, the characters are given many opportunities to speak, many chances to rehearse and adjust their own self-representation. Speaking only to the implied reader, their speeches are private in comparison with Bernard’s final performance, which is given to an explicit audience and distinguished further by the use of the past tense. This is a retrospective summation, whereas the previous speeches are descriptions of the moment as it occurs. It is here, Bernard’s final chance to tell his story, that he rejects his polished phrases; “[h]ow tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground!” (W, p.199) Bernard starts to tell the story of his childhood, to describe his friends, but the narrative breaks down when he exclaims, “[b]ut it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie” (W, p.213). He needs instead “some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the
shuffling of feet on the pavement”" (W, p.199). Only death brings an end to the vastness of identity and subjectivity. Only in the face of death does Bernard cease to think himself ""so vast, a temple, a church, a whole universe”" and become simply ""an elderly man”" (W, p.243). Paradoxically, only in death, in silence, can the self be described.

The Waves sets out one of the central points of Woolf’s negotiation between public and private. Bernard, as the public storyteller, entertainer, is constantly faced as Woolf was with the restrictiveness of public speaking. Woolf’s attitude towards lecturing encapsulates the harm she saw in a form which demands clarity, brevity and summation. When Bernard tells stories he must be reductive, telling only one, neatly packaged version, whereas in their soliloquies the characters have many opportunities. They tell their story again and again, like the action of the waves, redefining and rewriting. Just as the extreme public utterance repelled Woolf, so did the extreme private. This is why it is important to acknowledge that although she did not use indirect interior monologue in The Waves and did use the first person point of view, the voices are both multiple and stylized. Her one foray exclusively into the private mind retains its public aspect, since the interior monologues are speech rather than thought, and since they are coherent. The Waves, although about the conception of self, is as much about public stories as private, about the linguistic process of bringing the private self to a listener, or a reader, rather than Woolf creating the illusion that the reader is actually entering the private mind of the character.

Direct interior monologue was restrictive, in Woolf’s view, because it trapped the reader within a single subjectivity. Her rejection of definition in general, in terms of female identity for example, is seen in her avoidance of a single, defining point of view. Woolf’s choice of indirect interior monologue as a narrative technique is largely
informed by the way in which it allows her to give a literal voice to many characters, particularly in Mrs Dalloway, To The Lighthouse and The Years. Ann Marie Herbert writes that, 'Postmodernism spawns multiplicity and, for Woolf, multiplicity was at the heart of her ontological and epistemological explorations, her experiments with form, and her representations of subjectivity.' 44 Rather than imposing form or unity on this multiplicity in order to end it, a goal of Modernism, Woolf accepts plurality as such, and she seeks structures in her writing which will allow ambiguity. Woolf is not afraid to 'Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure’ as she writes in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ (CE I, p.337). It has been suggested that such tolerance was intensified with the threat of fascism. 'In Between the Acts, Woolf rejects the Modernist beliefs in art as unified and the artist as unifier; such artists and artwork too easily serve the agenda of fascism', Marlowe Miller rightly argues, but this rejection can be seen much earlier than Between the Acts. 45 Woolf resisted totalizing narratives and narrators before she saw their link with fascism.

Mitchell Leaska also makes a connection between Woolf’s stylistics and her general philosophy, ‘That Virginia Woolf should have chosen to use multiple perspectives is indication enough that no interpretation can be arrived at which settles on one aspect at the expense of the other.’ 46 This is why so many of Woolf’s earlier critics who search for unity are unwittingly going against her commitment to change, about which she was prophetically unequivocal, ‘No critic ever gives full weight to the


46 Leaska, p.112.
desire of the mind for change' (WD, p.194). Although she did, at times search for unity, or for the transcendant moment of vision, as Herbert writes, she was 'deeply skeptical of its possibility.' As Woolf herself wrote in her diary about Lytton Strachey, "'[Gibbon] has a point of view & sticks to it" I said. "And so do you. I wobble"' (D II, p.115).

Indirect interior monologue is one of the stylistic ways in which Woolf's resistance to stasis and definition manifested itself, in that it allowed her movement between public and private voices; between varying points of view. It is also evidence of the importance of both public and private voices to Woolf, but her continual distinction between the realms. Indirect interior monologue is a conjunction not a synthesis, further evidence of the usefulness of Rorty's idea of the incommensurability of public and private realms. Woolf's awareness and portrayal of multiplicity has caused critics to align her with what might now be loosely labelled a Postmodern sensibility. Rather than vague and abstract declarations about Woolf's multivalency, it is important to acknowledge that these traits can and should be anchored in readings of the specifics of her texts and their techniques.

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47 Herbert, p.14.
4. **Woolf’s Generic Choices as Public/Private Division**

With the exception of poetry, into which she made two brief forays, Woolf was remarkably comprehensive in her use of genre. This comprehensiveness raises the question of how Woolf matched content with genre, and what criteria influenced her choices. In two ways, her use of genre can be seen as a choice between public and private. The most obvious generic public/private dichotomy is determined by publication. Private genres include diaries and letters, while public genres are those intended for publication. This division is most clear at the start of Woolf’s career in 1904, when her diaries are intensely private, but her essays and reviews carry a voice of surprising confidence and authority for a twenty-four year old beginning her career as a writer. Woolf finds comfort in the anonymous, public voice of these early essays which allows her to overcome the fear of exposure which often accompanied publication.

The question of genre becomes more complex and fruitful, however, if we consider Woolf’s own method of dividing genre, namely along lines of fact and fiction, or fact and vision as she often called them. Although crossovers occur, Woolf saw her projects as either based on fact or on fiction, and this distinction can also be seen as a public/private division. For Woolf, non-fictional, or predominantly fact-based, genres such as the essay, review or biography were public, and fictional genres such as novels, and short stories were private. In her eyes, factual genres employed real, public events, or issues as a foundation or point of origin, whereas fiction was

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1 *Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions of a private house into cash*, a poem on the invasion of privacy by the public media (Bell, Vol. II, pp.253-254) and *Ode Written Partly in Prose on Seeing the Name of Cutbush Above a Butcher’s Shop in Pentonville* (SF, p.237).
internal rather than external in origin, coming from her own private consciousness. Dividing genres as public and private in this way moves beyond the obvious distinction of published and non-published, and since it is a distinction which Woolf herself used, offers insight into how she distinguished fact from fiction, how she chose between nonfictional and fictional genres and how she moved between the two.

This problem of movement or oscillation between fact and fiction, public and private, was a constant preoccupation for Woolf. As late as 1940, Woolf found the shift from ‘public’ to ‘private’ writing awkward (D V, p.261). Although she often made too clean a division - Three Guineas, although predominantly factual contains fictional elements - the sense of upheaval in moving between ‘the 2 worlds’ represented by Three Guineas and The Years speaks of the depth of Woolf’s distinction (D IV, p.350). Moving also between the fact of Three Guineas and the fiction of ‘Poyntz Hall’ created ‘violent oscillations’ (D V, p.155). Factual writing was grounded, as in the ‘solid world of Roger’, compared to the ‘airy world of Poyntz Hall’ (D V, p.141), just as behind the ‘solid possession’ which was ‘The Pargiters’, based on hours of research, loomed the ‘shape of pure poetry’ (D IV, p.145). The fact/fiction split was an essential one for Woolf and one which divided her work in terms of genre. The move between public and private genres was sometimes refreshing, a source of new energy, as when she found herself ‘infinitely delighting in facts for a change’ and sometimes disruptive (D IV, p.129).

For Woolf, the division between fact and fiction came to the fore in the 1930s when she became more adamant in her feminism and relied on fact more heavily to convey her arguments. How did she incorporate fact and politics into her work? What genres did she use for the purpose? These questions came to a head with the conception of ‘The Pargiters’, an essay-novel, namely a conjunction of public and
private genres, of fact and fiction. The essays were to explore factually and historically what the chapters depicted fictionally. This is the only time that Woolf attempted to mix public and private genres in this way. The evolution of the essay-novel 'The Pargiters' into the novel The Years reveals much about how Woolf viewed the use of genre, how she divided and combined both her feminism and her fiction, mixing real public events and issues with her own private fictions. The writing of The Years also demonstrates the increase in the crossover between fact and fiction in the 1930s due to the urgency of her feminism, the extensive research Woolf did on the situation of women, which she wanted to use in her private as well as her public genres.

(1) The Entry Into Publication

Woolf's most private and most consistently used genre, the diary, escapes any rigid characterization. The diary is the text which exemplifies most clearly the contingency of Woolf's response to the various events of her life. The mood, tone, style, function and subject matter constantly shift, as does Woolf's own response to the diary itself. The diary was a space for private emotion for Woolf, a place for recording private and public events, but it was also a literary text, a place where she could practice her writing and a text which she could reread with a critical eye. This self-consciousness is part of the tension in the diary between public and private personae; 'the anxieties the journal discloses about her public persona.' In its privacy, Woolf can use the diary to express, for example, her fear of publication and reviews, but also its privacy emphasizes the potential presence of a public, a reader, even if it is only

Woolf herself. Nancy Walker writes of the diaries of three women writers, one of whom is Woolf, that “each addresses the page/reader from behind a series of identities or “masks”; and each makes clear that her "private" writing is addressed to some "public" with which she has an uneasy relationship.” Although Woolf’s early journal entries are for the most part either writing exercises or factual recounting of daily events, the amount of material from 1897, for example, when Woolf was fourteen and fifteen, is evidence of the importance the diary held for her. It is in these early years that Woolf’s published and non-published work marks the clearest dichotomy between public and private.

One distancing technique which is evidence of Woolf’s difficulty with self-expression is the use of the persona of Miss Jan, who appears periodically in the 1897 journal. Miss Jan appears when Woolf wants to dissociate herself from either embarrassment or excessive emotion. On February 19th 1897, having felt uncomfortable while paying a visit, Woolf writes, ‘Poor Miss Jan utterly lost her wits dropped her umbrella, answered at random talked nonsense, and grew red as a turkey cock.’ Woolf can examine herself without having to take the full burden of what she sees. The division of self is made clear by the use of ‘I’ and ‘Miss Jan’ in one sentence: ‘So we left, I with the conviction that what ever talents Miss Jan may have’ (PA, p.39). On 2 May Woolf uses Miss Jan again to distance herself from unpleasant truths after hearing one of her father’s lectures. She writes, ‘The lecture was very deep

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rather too deep for the audience; very logical & difficult for the ignorant (i.e. Miss Jan) to follow’ (PA, p.79). She is separate both from ‘the audience’ and also from herself through the persona. Not only the use of Miss Jan, but also the avoidance of emotional reactions suggests that Woolf felt restricted in her diary writing. She no doubt felt that what she was writing was intensely private, hence the comment in cramped holiday accommodation that ‘This diary is written under difficulties’ (PA, p.32), but that there was much which was too private for the diary. Later in life Woolf foresaw the publication of at least sections of her diaries but in her early journals she relied on the security of privacy and was inhibited by fear of publicity (D III, p.67 and D V, p.54).

Louise De Salvo maintains that Woolf glued her 1899 summer journal, written while on holiday at Warboys, into the pages of Dr. Issac Watt’s Logick: or, the right use of Reason to ensure privacy. The journal suggests other reasons, however, namely that she wanted to replace the paper cover of her notebook with the ‘ancient tooled calf’ of Dr Watt’s book (PA, p.159). Rather than privacy, it seems Woolf wanted the authority, the ‘air of distinction’ (PA, p.160). She wished to recast her work in the pages of a ‘worthy & ancient work’ (PA, p.159) instantly giving her own work importance and dignity. The renaming is not to hide her work, but to increase its importance, to clothe it in the robes of a ‘resplendent’ binding (PA, p.159). Woolf wrote that she did not mind defacing Watts’s writing and in that she glues her pages in upside down on Watts’s there is a complete inversion of his dry advocacy of reason and logic by her private diary entries.

In stark contrast to the voice of Woolf’s early journals is the voice of her early essays, the first one written in 1904, at age twenty-two, for the Guardian, a weekly

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6 De Salvo, pp. 100-101.
Christian newspaper, at the suggestion of Violet Dickinson. The public nature of her nonfiction is reinforced here, since it was literally with these essays that Woolf became public, and in opposition to the diaries she developed a strong, authoritative voice for the purpose. Woolf wrote two pieces in 1904, the year of her father’s death, one a review and one an essay, both published in December. Both pieces were tentative in parts, but by 1905 she had settled into a public voice. Her first publication was a review of W. D. Howells’s *The Son of Royal Langbrith*, which consists of little more than a rather pedantic plot summary (E I, pp.3-5). Awkward phrases such as ‘his child knows him only through the words of the widow, which, for a good reason, are few’ and tentative observations such as ‘the weak point of the book seems to us to lie’ separate this review from her work in the following year (E I, pp. 3&4). The second piece from 1904 is an account of her visit to Haworth, and a deliberation on the value of visits to the dwelling places of famous people. This essay opens with: ‘I do not know whether pilgrimages to the shrines of famous men ought not to be condemned as sentimental journeys’ (E I, p.5). The opening phrase, ‘I do not know’ immediately suggests uncertainty and then the sentence as a whole undercuts the premise of the essay. In addition, the double negative adds to the circuitous awkwardness of the first section of the essay, as Woolf shies away from opinion. ‘How far surroundings radically affect people’s minds it is not for me to ask’ (E I, p.5) is a denial of authority, but then Woolf goes ahead anyway and asks whether Charlotte Brontë would have written differently had she lived in Whitechapel. Avoiding answering the question, she backs away from the issue with ‘However, I am taking away my only excuse for visiting Haworth’ (E I, p.6). The opening is a confused avoidance of assertion; the voice only relaxes when the factual description of the places begins.

By the time we reach Woolf’s review of W.L. Courtney’s *The Feminine Note*
in Fiction, published not much later, on January 25 1905, Woolf’s voice has become more authoritative. The piece is underscored by sarcasm and ironic distance, a sign of her confidence in her criticism of Courtney’s attempt to define feminine fiction. ‘We would have spared him the trouble willingly in exchange for some definite verdict; we can all read Mrs Humphrey Ward’ (E I, p.15) is a biting attack on Courtney’s certainty that ‘there is such a thing as the feminine note in fiction’ (E I, p.15). In using the pronoun ‘we’, Woolf gives the essay weight, creating an opposition between Courtney and women. Her sarcasm as she exposes and then counters two of Courtney’s claims about women’s writing again speaks for her confidence in both her argument and her ability to express it: ‘Women, we gather, are seldom artists, because they have a passion for detail which conflicts with the proper artistic proportion of their work’ and ‘Women, again, excel in “close analytic miniature work;” they are more happy when they reproduce than when they create’ (E I, p.16). With the ‘we gather’ and the use of quotation marks, Woolf subtly displays her disagreement and distances herself from Courtney’s unfounded generalizations. It seems that Woolf discovers the confident, public voice of her essays in reaction to a display of assertive masculinity. Anger and annoyance at Courtney, rather than admiration of Brontë led her to tighten her style and sharpen her tone.

A last example is Woolf’s review, published in February 1905, of Henry James’s The Golden Bowl. The first and last sentences of this piece are the best examples of the clarity and assertiveness of tone which characterize Woolf’s essay writing. ‘Mr Henry James is one of the very few living writers who are sufficiently great to possess a point of view’ and ‘There is no living novelist whose standard is higher, or whose achievement is so consistently great’ frame an essay which carries a tone of age and experience, typical of Woolf’s essays in general but surprising in this,
only the third month of her career as a published writer (E I, pp.22 & 24). Woolf’s confidence with her subject matter as well as her tone is made clearer through comparison with other contemporary reviews. She writes observantly and directly about James’s style, whereas other reviewers stick to summaries of theme and plot. Woolf describes the obscuration of James’ excessive use of detail and his ‘overburdened sentences’ (E I, p.23). She gives examples of sentences which ‘suffer from a surfeit of words’, stating that genius ‘would have dissolved them, and whole chapters of the same kind, into a single word’ (E I, p.23). An anonymous review in the Nation, published the month before Woolf’s, is noncommittal in its brief analysis of James’s style, attributing its obscurity to ‘saying too much and saying too little, even from sentences too complex and too elliptical, too long and too short’, before moving quickly on to plot summary. Another anonymous review in the Graphic merely laments the complexity of style without attempting to analyze it. The writer resorts to the cliché of ‘not being able to see the forest for the trees’ and decides that James is ‘an acquired taste’, obviously one not acquired by the reviewer. In contrast, Woolf is direct and assertive in her judgement, avoiding the tone of defeat found in so many contemporary reviews of the novel.

Woolf develops extremely quickly a public voice for the public genre of the essay. Undoubtedly, the anonymity of the unsigned essays contributed to Woolf’s confidence. Here was a forum in which she could express her opinion outright. ‘My real delight in reviewing is to say nasty things; and hitherto I have had to [be] respectful,’ she writes in 1904, evidence of the authority she felt the genre of the essay

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8 Clarke, p.342.
9 Clarke, p.342.
afforded her, allowing her an honest response (L I, pp. 166-167). As with the Courtney essay, Woolf was liberated by nastiness, freed by the opportunity to resist.

Woolf’s letters of November 1904, primarily to Violet Dickinson, parallel the change in voice heard in the essays, moving rapidly from a tentative beginning to a fully confident tone. Woolf writes to Violet of Mrs Lyttleton, editor of the woman’s pages of the Guardian, ‘Of course I don’t for a moment expect her to take this which is probably too long or too short, or in some way utterly unsuitable’ (L I, p. 154). Quickly, however, Woolf loses respect for Margaret Lyttleton and gains confidence in her own work. ‘It was quite good before the official eye fell upon it; now it is worthless, and doesn’t in the least represent all the toil I put into it’ (L I, p. 178), she writes of the Golden Bowl review. Her letters become scathing of Mrs Lyttleton and her newspaper: ‘Really I never read such pedantic commonplace as the Guardianese: it takes up the line of a Governess, and maiden Lady, and high church Parson mixed; how they ever got such a black little goat into their fold, I can’t conceive’ (L I, p. 178). No doubt, the doctrinaire narrowness of the Guardian made her rapidly aware of her own abilities, and yet again she was stimulated by disagreement.

The public genre of the essay allowed Woolf the context in which to cultivate an assertive public voice. This confidence did not appear in her early diaries, nor did it surround the publication of her first novel, The Voyage Out, in 1915. With fiction, a private genre as she conceived it, she was exposing more of herself, more was at stake than with a short newspaper review. Generic distinctions, then, are important in terms of Woolf’s psychology of writing, in that the choice of genre affected Woolf’s confidence in her work.
Generic Crossovers

The fact/fiction division does not remain this clear, however, and in August 1906, early in her career, Woolf, while on holiday in Norfolk at Blo’ Norton Hall with Vanessa, wrote part of an unfinished work, which questioned the mixture of public and private genres. Titled ‘The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn’ by Susan M. Squier and Louise A. De Salvo, who published it in 1979, it is the story of Rosamond Merridew, a historian of systems of land tenure in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, who comes across the journal of Miss Joan Martyn written in the year 1480. The piece raises questions which return again and again to Woolf about the mixing of fact and fiction, of external fact and private observation. Can the private be incorporated into a public genre, can fiction be part of history and vice versa?

Public and private occur in the text on many levels, often in conjunction with feminist issues. Rosamond Merridew’s narrative occupies the first half of the text, after which it becomes a transcription of Miss Martyn’s journal. Merridew has relinquished her desire for a family in favour of her work as a historian. In carrying out her own archival and manuscript work, however, she is in competition with the state, which she says, ‘robs my poor private voice of all its persuasion.’ 10 Her private, female voice is up against the masculine conglomerate of the state. Secondly, she is interested in the private, individual life of the people she is researching. She values intimate detail as opposed to bare descriptions of land tenure. She wants to describe the Lord walking his dogs and ‘Dame Elinor, at work with her needle’ (JM, p.241). Her critics tell her this is unproven and therefore fiction, as well as being irrelevant. Merridew wants to

mix public records with private life, just as she wants a mixture of fact and fictionalized account. Merridew, like Woolf, is questioning the boundaries of genre, the limits of historical research; the work is a ‘meditation upon the relationship between the woman as historian and history and upon the need of women such as Merridew to write women into history.’ 11 To solve the problem, Merridew begins afresh: ‘Let me draw a line here then so _________ & put the whole of this question of right & wrong, truth & fiction behind me’ (JM, p.242). She leaves the argument and proceeds on her own terms, largely because of her concern with women’s history. If Merridew wants to include a female perspective on medieval history she must include the private sphere: something which, in the absence of documentary evidence, she will have to imagine. Woolf was interested in ‘those many women who cluster in the shade’ (SF, p.17), the ‘lives of the obscure’ as she often referred to them, and in 1928 considered writing a book with that title (D III, p.198). When faced with the many texts at Martyn’s Hall, she picks Mistress Joan’s, despite John, the owner’s, insistence that ‘I don’t think you’ll find anything out of the way in her; She was very much the same as the rest of us --- as far as I can see, not remarkable’ (JM, p.251). It is the men of the family and their achievements which he values. He is dismissive of the diary: “no need to bother about that," he said, carelessly, as though my request were not of sufficient importance to need his scrutiny’ (JM, p.251).

Joan, privileged in her literacy, gives an account of her restricted life within the gates of Martyn’s Hall. She retreats into fiction, reading about Helen of Troy and recreating her father’s trip to London in narrative as though she herself were making it. Joan’s journal speaks of the importance of women’s diaries and in turn the

importance of private, individual experience. Joan’s own father values her writing, but she, like Woolf, needs privacy for her writing and feels the guilt of exposure when she is discovered. ‘But confusion came over me when he asked me what I wrote; & stammering that it was a "Diary" I covered the pages with my hands’ (JM, p.266).

Woolf, like Joan, had a similar fear of exposure regarding autobiographical writing. However, Woolf, like Merridew, recognizes the importance of Joan’s journal and the publication of such a journal. Joan, locked in Martyn’s Hall, and destined to marry and run a household, as does her mother, will be written out of history, unless historians like Merridew publish such documents.

In this early work, the public/private dichotomy emerges through Woolf’s questioning of generic mixture. Merridew questions the inclusion both of fiction and of the journal, within the public, factual realm of history. Woolf, in making the text half Merridew’s autobiographical account of her work and the finding of the journal, and half a transcription of that journal, reinforces the importance of women’s private experience. In other words, the text is not literally a mixture of factual medieval history and Joan’s private account, rather it speaks about such a mixture. However, both Rosamond and Joan’s account constitute history, as well as emphasize the importance of private narrative within women’s history in particular. Lastly, the entire text presents itself as fact, but is of course fiction, which creates another crossover of public and private genres.

(3) Generic Crossovers Continued: The Evolution of The Years

Woolf’s only actual mixing of genres, comes in the 1930s with ‘The Pargiters’, later to become The Years. ‘The Pargiters’ represents not only the mixing of fact and
fiction, but of actual genres, namely the essay and the novel. The evolution of this work spans from 20 January 1931 to 11 March 1937 and is a testament to Woolf’s negotiations between public and private, in terms of fact and fiction. She wanted the work to be based on fact, based on the extensive research she was conducting during the 1930s, but the lengthy process of writing speaks for the difficulty she had incorporating this research and deciding how it would sit with the fiction in the work.

In tracing the evolution of The Years, the importance of contingency soon becomes clear, since the conception of the work changed so often, as did Woolf’s attitude towards its success and also towards the presence of fact. The germ of the whole project lies in a speech Woolf gave to the London/National Society for Women’s Service on 21 January 1931, a condensed version of which was published posthumously as ‘Professions for Women’ in The Death of the Moth in 1942. The speech deals with the entry of women into employment, particularly centering on her own experience as a writer, and the obstacles she faced, such as the influence of the Angel in the House. On 20 January 1931, the day before the speech was to be read, Woolf conceived of ‘a sequel to a Room of Ones Own - about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps - Lord how exciting! This sprang out of my paper to be read on Wednesday to Pippa’s society’ (D IV, p.6). In connecting the work to A Room of One’s Own and stating the concern with women’s sexuality, the feminist base is clear from the start. In May 1934 Woolf goes back to this entry and writes in the margin, ‘This is Here & Now I think’, Here & Now being one of the titles briefly attached to The Years. This is evidence that the moment in the bath on 20 January was the conception of The Years and not Three Guineas. In the next entry, on 23 January, the title becomes ‘The Open Door’, taken from the speech which closes with the image of a working woman, installed in her own room, who
hears someone coming up the stairs: what will take place will be the ‘most interesting, exciting, and important conversation that has ever been heard’ (P, p.xliv). Woolf felt that thinking about ‘Open Door’ or ‘Opening the Door’ (D IV, p.7) was keeping her from finishing The Waves and that ‘the didactive [sic] demonstrative style conflicts with the dramatic’ (D IV, p.6). Already, even before she started writing, she felt a tension between fact and fiction, novel and essay. There is evidence that in July 1931 Woolf began to make some notes for her essay, as the first page of the first notebook of the holograph of The Years bears the title ‘Notes for The Knock on the Door’, the title again inspired by her speech, and is dated 20 July 1931, but subsequently several pages were cut out of the notebook. On 3 September 1931 Woolf writes, ‘I read Montaigne this morning & found a passage about the passions of women - their voracity - which I at once opposed to Squire’s remarks & so made up a whole chapter of my Tap at the Door or whatever it is’ (D IV, p.42). In the fourth volume of Woolf’s diaries, the editor, Anne Olivier Bell, listing the various titles for The Years and Three Guineas respectively, cites Professions for Women, The Open Door, Opening the Door and A Tap at the Door as the original titles for Three Guineas and labels Three Guineas the sequel to A Room of One’s Own. However, they should in fact be the early titles of The Years, as Woolf’s conception of the sequel was what became The Years and these diary entries lead from that conception into the beginning of ‘The Pargiters’ on 11 October 1932. Woolf began to research her topic, writing on 11 February 1932: ‘My mind is set running upon A Knock on the Door (whats its name?) owing largely to reading "Wells on Woman" - how she must be ancillary & decorative in the world of the future, because she has been tried, in 10 years, & has not proved anything’ (D IV, p.75). Further proof of her research comes on 16 February 1932; ‘And I’m quivering & itching to write my - whats it to be called? - ”Men are like
that?" - no that's too patently feminist: the sequel then, for which I have collected
enough powder to blow up St Pauls' (D IV, p.77). She has gathered the evidence to
fuel her attack but even here she is wary of being too overt. Her constant change of
title during the evolutionary process represents her uneasiness in putting a label to the
work; she is reluctant to classify it, to summarize, as the genre is still ambiguous. She
has not yet worked out how her research will be presented.

On 13 July 1932, the work is mentioned again, this time as a 'promising novel'
(D IV, p.115). Also in this entry Woolf describes her respect for Joseph Wright, the
philologist, whose biography she was reading. She was clearly fascinated by Wright
and his wife Elizabeth, the author of the biography, and the prominent role which the
couple play in 'The Pargiters' confirms that this novel-to-be is The Years. Finally, on
11 October 1932, nearly two years after the conception of the work, Woolf wrote in
her manuscript volume, 'The Pargiters: An Essay based upon a paper read to the
London/National Society for Women's Service.' Obviously oscillating between fact
and fiction in terms of genre choice, by 2 November 1932 she returned to the title
page and 'An Essay' becomes 'A Novel-Essay.' She writes in her diary, 'I have
entirely remodelled my "Essay". Its to be an Essay-Novel, called the Pargiters - & its
to take in everything, sex, education, life &c' (D IV, p.129). Woolf decided on a new
experiment in genre, in order to enable her to devise a comprehensive form which
could include fact and fiction.

By 19 December 1932 she had written 60,320 words, consisting of six essays
and five fictional sections, in alternating order. This is roughly equivalent in content to
the initial 1880 section of The Years. On 31 January 1933 she returned to her writing,
starting a new page with 'The Pargiters (additions to Chapter One)', but by 2 February
1933 her decision was made; 'I'm leaving out the interchapters - compacting them in
the text’ (D IV, p.146). From then on, the work was unequivocally a novel, but the place of fact, the ‘compacting’ process, had still to be negotiated.

Woolf completed a 900 page first draft of her ‘nameless book’ (D IV, p.245) on 30 September 1934. She was still searching for a title as none of the previous possibilities seemed satisfactory. On 2 September 1933 the title became ‘Here & Now’, having been ‘The Pargiters’ from 11 October 1932 until then. This stuck for almost a year until doubt appeared on 17 August 1934 when she wrote ‘I think I see the end of Here & Now (or Music, or Dawn or whatever I shall call it)’ (D IV, p.237). On 2 September 1934 she wondered ‘shall it be Dawn’ (D IV, p.241) and then one month later toyed with ‘Sons & Daughters - perhaps Daughters & Sons’ (D IV, p.246). Sometimes The Pargiters crept back in, as on 14 October 1934 (D IV, p.251) and 30 December 1934 (D IV, p.266), although in the latter entry she also wrote ‘I think it shall be called Ordinary People.’ Before she finally settled on The Years on 5 September 1935 (D IV, p.338) she went through ‘The Caravan (so called suddenly)’ (D IV, p.274), back to Ordinary People (D IV, p.279) and Other People’s Houses (D IV, p.335). These sudden and frequent changes in title parallel the oscillations in Woolf’s attitude towards and expectations of the work and represent its variability throughout its evolution.

The last holograph entry is dated 15 November 1934, making 7 1/4 volumes of which the first 1 3/4 are the six essays and five chapters which make up the section of ‘The Pargiters’ published in 1978. Also, on 15 November 1934, in her diary, Woolf declared that she was about to start ‘re-reading & re-writing The Pargiters’ (D IV, p.261) and by 30 December 1934 she was ‘re-writing considerably’ (D IV, p.266). By 17 July 1935, she had completed her ‘first wild retyping’ (D IV, p.332) of 740 pages and then 16 August saw her typing it out again (D IV, p.334). On 29 December 1935
she wrote that she had ‘put the last words to The Years’ (D IV, p.360) but it was 797 pages this time and still needed condensing.

The revisions were coming to an end in March of 1936, at which point she began to send pages to her printer, R & R Clark of Edinburgh. 18 March saw the first galley proofs coming back and Leonard began to read the work in April. On 8 April Woolf sent the last typescript page to the printers. By this time illness was setting in and there are no diary entries from April to 11 June 1936 or between 23 June and October 1936. Revising the galleys late in 1936, her illness having improved by the end of October, Woolf cut out two large sections of the text in November or December 1936 and the page proofs were set by 15 December 1936. These proofs differ considerably from the published version of The Years, so there must have been one more setting before publication in March 1937.

(4) The Evolution Continued - The Critics’ Response

The long six year process which resulted in The Years was a complicated one during which Woolf changed her mind many times, notably on the issue of genre, moving from essay to novel, to essay-novel to novel. It now remains to look at the research Woolf did for the work, how it appears in the various versions and what this reveals about her attempt to bring together fact and fiction or public and private. Why did she abandon the essay-novel, the combining of public and private genres, and what happened to the essay material after the work became a novel?

The Years traces the Pargiter family and two related families from 1880 to ‘The Present Day.’ In focusing mainly on seven women, the novel follows the
movement from the nineteenth to the twentieth century and the effect this has on the women’s freedom in terms of employment, education and sexuality. During these six years Woolf compiled three notebooks full of quotations, newspaper articles and letters dealing with women’s situation and the attitudes of men towards it. The first notebook contains material from 1931 to 1933, undoubtedly fuel for ‘The Pargiters’; in the second and third notebooks, the material dates mainly from 1935 to 1937, and is therefore most likely research for Three Guineas, since the first draft of The Years was completed by 1935. The focus shifts slightly as the war becomes an increasingly urgent presence in Woolf’s research in the second and third notebooks. Volume One, however, is the focus of Woolf’s research for ‘The Pargiters’ and The Years. The scope of material collected for Volume One matches the comprehensiveness Woolf wanted for her novel-essay. Women and war, crime, employment, writing, education, marriage, religion, medicine, dress, law and smoking are all represented, either through newspaper articles announcing, for example, the appointment of a female manager of the Shoreditch Labour Exchange or through quotations from men such as ‘Never yet have I committed the error of looking on women writers as serious fellow artists.’  

Woolf cleverly juxtaposed comments made by men denigrating women’s abilities in these various realms with articles disproving such comments through concrete evidence. Of the sixty-six entries in the first notebook, some quotations make their way to ‘The Pargiters’ directly, some indirectly and some not at all. For the most part, it was Woolf’s research on women’s education which appeared in ‘The Pargiters.’ This is because the essays are found in the 1880 section, when the Pargiter women are kept at home because they, unlike their brothers, are denied education, apart from music

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12 Monks House Papers, B 16f, University of Sussex Library. The quotation is from William Gerhardi, Memoirs of a Polyglot (London: Duckworth, 1931), p.320.
and sketching lessons. Also central to the 1880 section is Kitty, the daughter of the master of an Oxford college, cousin to the Pargiter daughters, who resents her purely ornamental position at St Katharine’s College and whose only education consists of history lessons from a female teacher who is also marginalized by the university, despite her intellectual pursuits.

In the first essay of ‘The Pargiters’, Woolf writes of the work as a whole, ‘There is scarcely a statement in it that cannot be [traced to some biography, or] verified, if anybody should wish so to misuse their time’ (P, p.9 italics indicate a deletion editorially restored). On the contrary, the tracing of fact proves a worthwhile project, precisely because this was an experiment for Woolf; never before had she incorporated so much fact into her fiction, and never before had her fiction been so decidedly and openly feminist. Initially, having conceived of the work as an essay, the project was factual, and changing the genre did not make it any less factual. As many critics have shown, with the change from novel-essay to novel, direct quotations and factual evidence obviously had to be dropped and Woolf toned down several of her arguments, especially those concerned with sexuality, but there is still a substantial foundation of fact in The Years and Woolf still conceived of it primarily as a ‘novel of fact’ (P, p.9). The six years represented the long process by which Woolf worked out an appropriate balance of fact and fiction. The generic shift from novel-essay to novel did not end the tension between fact and fiction, and there were many revisions to be made after 2 February 1933.

The majority of critics who study the evolution of The Years mistakenly see this process as an unresolved struggle, and see The Years as flawed because of the gaps they see left by the revisions. Charles G. Hoffmann was the first critic to examine
‘The Pargiters’ in 1968 and he concludes that ‘too much of the external is left out.’ 13 Here, Hoffmann means ‘external’ not as research, but as detail. He finds the novel sketchy and diffuse because it attempts to cover too much ground. This for Hoffmann ruins what he sees as Woolf’s ‘vision’, the continuity of the years. Again, as with so many critics, Hoffmann’s desire for unity leads him to misread Woolf’s work. He is sure that he has found the ‘novel’s purpose of showing the continuity of human personality’, but when this is ‘too tentative and indefinite’ he blames the evolution of the novel and the revisions that evolution necessitated. 14 It seems strange to hunt for unity in a novel about radical change and transition, as well as to claim that the novel looks nostalgically back to the Victorian family as a ‘center of security’, when Woolf explicitly portrays the stifling patriarchal oppression of the Victorian family on its female members. 15 Woolf does not offer a unified solution or a utopian vision, rather she shows the welcome breaking apart of Victorian codes from the point of view of women.

Mitchell A. Leaska, in his introduction to The Pargiters, finds that ‘fact and feeling are in deadly conflict’ (P, p.xv). Without actually naming them, he writes of the finished novel’s ‘seemingly endless ambiguities’ (P, p.xix) caused by the editing process. In the same paragraph as he is explaining the process of condensation and the resulting ambiguities, he describes the ‘splinters of memory, fragments of speech, titles of quoted passages left unnamed or forgotten, lines of poetry or remnants of nursery rhymes left dangling in mid-air, understanding between characters incomplete, and utterances missing the mark and misunderstood’ (P, p.xviii). Leaska does not raise the

14 Hoffmann, pp.87&89.
15 Hoffmann, p.88.
possibility that these characteristics could be deliberate on Woolf's part rather than her revisions having cut ideas in half. Leaska describes Woolf's sense of failure with the novel, when this despair came only as publication neared and she was faced with her proof corrections, a task which caused despair with all her novels. Leaska writes, 'For Virginia Woolf, the truth of fact and the truth of the imagination simply would not come together in that queer "marriage of granite and rainbow"' (P, p.xvii), when in fact it was the conjunction of genres which she could not maintain rather than the fact/fiction conjunction. It was the separation in form rather than the division of content which Woolf found unworkable.

Grace Radin, in her book-length study of the revisions leading up to The Years, also assumes Woolf's intention was unity, and therefore finds an aspect of failure in the novel's 'refusal to cohere.' Radin argues that towards the end of writing The Years Woolf wanted to 'encapsulate experience and present it whole' as she believes Woolf had done in To The Lighthouse. This seems unlikely, if only for the reason that one of the last lines of The Years is 'And now?'; the novel is left open-ended. Radin, like Leaska, desiring unity and convinced that Woolf had similar desires, finds too many loose ends in the work, and feels that Woolf included too much material. This is both explained and made worse for them, by the process of revision itself, in that the editing process necessitated substantial omissions. This disparateness is summarized for Radin in the character of Elvira, or Sara in The Years, who is to her the means by which Woolf attempted to counter the research behind the novel. Radin is correct on the second point, as Elvira's character is portrayed through poetic rather

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16 Radin, p.158.
17 Radin, p.109.
than objective language, however, for Radin, Elvira is a character 'whose oddities never quite coalesce into a recognizable human being.'

She is a failure as a character because she is not unified and eludes definition.

Hoffmann, Leaska and Radin have done invaluable archival work on the specifics of the evolutionary process, but come up against difficulties when analysing the finished project. To varying degrees, all three imply that The Years is flawed because of Woolf’s original idea of using fact and fiction. They find an irreconcilable tension between the two, both in Woolf’s mind and the text itself. Omitting much of the research-based material left gaps, they feel, and she failed to call on vision to adequately unify the work. It seems that there must be another way of conceiving of the process which allows critics to take into account ‘The Pargiters’, and the factual foundation, without reading The Years as a lesser version, or scarred remnant, of the initial holograph.

Another attempt at a reconception of the Pargiter/Years dilemma was made by Gloria G. Fromm, who also pinpointed these difficulties with critics who can only conceive of the omissions negatively. She writes that former critics of The Years ‘are nearly all on the same track, riding in the same closed cars, breathing the same ideological air.’ Fromm wants The Years read completely on its own terms, arguing that Woolf grew ‘dissatisfied with and skeptical of her initial stances.’ This is all very well, until Fromm reveals her reconception, which is that The Years is Woolf’s rebuttal to Rose Macaulay. Fromm herself is in a closed car, reading the whole text through Woolf’s relations with Macaulay. Fromm rather savagely attacks her

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19 Radin, p.61.


21 Fromm, p.291.
forerunners and then slips into a much more restrictive and narrow-minded reading. Although *The Years* is its own text and Woolf had several changes of mind *en route* from ‘The Pargiters’, nevertheless seeing as we have access to the inspiration behind ‘The Pargiters’, as well as the manuscripts, and ‘The Pargiters’ was the first version of *The Years*, it seems that all this must be taken into account. Fromm needs to turn her attack on herself, as for example when she criticises Leaska for his speculation about Woolf’s choice of dates for chapter headings and then speculates herself about Woolf using the dates of Macaulay’s *Told By An Idiot*. 22 Most importantly, by dismissing ‘The Pargiters’, Fromm misses its sociopolitical basis, also the basis of *The Years*, one which Woolf made clear in her original intentions for the work, and I argue never let go of, however the work changed formally or stylistically.

Caughie sees the move from ‘The Pargiters’ to *The Years* as a process of realization: a movement from an attempt to peel away convention to expose the truth, to an abandonment of the idea of true nature. In ‘The Pargiters’, for Caughie, the generic division is the conjunction of fictional representations of conventions and then descriptions of what is real, what is beneath the surface, in the essays. In *The Years*, Woolf moves, she argues, to ‘the adoption of a relational mode of thinking,’ where there is no ‘fixed conception of the world’ to uncover. 23 Caughie uses the evolution from ‘The Pargiters’ to *The Years* as a microcosmic example of the journey to a Postmodernist way of thinking: the rejection of the idea of ‘true nature.’ First, in ‘The Pargiters’ Woolf did not set out any conception of women’s true nature. She was criticizing certain restrictions imposed upon women in the nineteenth century, but she gives no account of a unified self which those restrictions are oppressing. The effects

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22 Fromm, pp.300-301.

and implications of women's lack of education, for example, have a different impact on Delia as on Eleanor as on Kitty. She criticizes conventions restricting women's sexuality or public freedom, but she does not suggest that a coherent unified self would emerge upon the removal of these restrictions. Secondly, the novel/essay split represents two different ways of presenting the same information, rather than representing a surface/depth dichotomy. The essays reinforce rather than deconstruct the fictional chapters. Similarly, the move from 'The Pargiters' to The Years is a different way of representing the same material rather than the evidence of a philosophical shift in Woolf's thinking. Again, Caughie privileges form to the exclusion of content. There must be a middle ground, one in which Woolf's research is neither idolized nor dismissed. To reach this point, a detailed analysis of exactly what research Woolf conducted and how it appeared and disappeared in the various versions is needed.

By the time that she actually started writing 'The Pargiters', Woolf had collected a wealth of factual material, which she added to throughout the 1930s. We can see from her diaries that she enjoyed the factual basis of her work, for its own sake and for its difference from The Waves, published in 1931. Woolf surprised herself with the worth of her novel of fact: 'there's a good deal of gold - more than I'd thought - in externality' (D IV, p.133). More important, however, was the gold to be found in the combination of fact and fiction, or public and private, the contrasts and variety which her new form allowed. In April 1933, she wrote, 'I want to give the whole of the present society - nothing less: facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both. I mean, The Waves going on simultaneously with Night & Day' (D IV, pp.151-152) and then one year later, 'this is working out my theory of the different levels in writing, & how to combine them: for I begin to think the
combination necessary’ (D IV, p.207). At this point in her writing Woolf needed both fact and fiction, and was excited by the variety, the comprehensive scope, of ‘The Pargiters.’ Initially this variety appeared in the novel-essay format, the mixing of public and private genres. This being too cumbersome, the essays were dropped, but Woolf retained the idea of alternation and oscillation. In December 1934, while rewriting, Woolf noted, ‘My idea is to <space> contrast the scenes; very intense, less so: then drama; then narrative. Keeping a kind of swing & rhythm through them all. Anyhow it admits of great variety - this book’ (D IV, p.266). The change from the novel-essay was motivated by an inability to mix genres, not a rejection of the fact/fiction conjunction. The shift to the novel genre actually meant that the fact and fiction, or external and internal, came even closer together. In the novel-essay version the fact/fiction division is not entirely clean as the first essay contains the fictional framework that the narrator is giving a speech and decides to read ‘short extracts from a novel that will run into many volumes’ (P, p.9). Also the essays very often slip from analysis into narrative, thus blurring the distinction further. Despite this crossover, however, removing the genre division brought fact and fiction closer both by removing segregation and by changing the place of fact. Instead of direct analysis, not accommodatable in a novel, the fact becomes an implicit foundation for the fiction. In the first essay of ‘The Pargiters’ the narrator tells her audience of professional women that she prefers, ‘where truth is important, to write fiction’ (P, p.9). She wants to show the audience what their lives would have been like fifty years before, but finds history ‘so elementary, and so clumsy’ (P, p.9). The combination of fact and fiction, of real, public events and privately, individually generated fiction, is explicit in the way Woolf writes about her project. It is both truth and fiction, ‘a novel of fact’ (P, p.9).

As with indirect interior monologue, Woolf created a conjunction but not a
synthesis, as she consistently used distinct terminology. Fact and fiction were always kept separate in her mind; again, further evidence of the incommensurability of the public and the private, in this case specifically public fact and private fiction.

Zwerdling argues rightly that Woolf was constantly interested in the dialectic between public and private experience, but he errs when he suggests that she was also constantly searching for a 'seamless fictional language' to express this relationship, and that her separation of the terms occurred through a failure to combine the two. 24 The point is that she saw public and private as distinct, specifically in the context of The Years, the distinction between external historical fact and private consciousness. This division meant that a seamless language would be an impossibility. Zwerdling goes on to assert that by the latter half of the 1930s Woolf had found that language and that the 'stream of history, the stream of consciousness, and the flow of her artistic imagination had become a single current.' 25 Even though in Three Guineas she argues the relevance of her feminist ideas to both public and private worlds, politics and the private home, in terms of context, fact and fiction always remained distinct. This retaining of the distinction, however, did make Woolf more aware of the difficulty of her task. Although Leaska's 'deadly conflict' (P, p.xv) is proven wrong even by the quotations cited here, which depict the satisfaction and benefit which Woolf derived from the combination, there were times at which Woolf felt one or the other was overbalanced, particularly the factual element. Ultimately though, Woolf found success in her method, concluding in 1934 that 'the lesson of Here & Now is that one can use all kinds of "forms" in one book' (D IV, p.238). The idea of alternation also enticed Woolf to juxtapose the kinds of texts she wrote. After Flush she writes, 'having bent

24 Zwerdling, p.25.

25 Zwerdling, p.25.
my mind for 5 weeks sternly this way, I must unbend them the other - the Pargiter way' (D IV, p.145) and in 1935, ‘This division is by the way perfect [...] some book or work for a book thats quite the other side of the brain between times’ (D IV, p.347). No form or genre was final for Woolf; she continually experimented and varied her method. She did not come up with a genre which was to be used exclusively, rather she fitted genre and method to the project. Again, this is an example of Woolf’s resistance to finality, made explicit by her own comment that, ‘I have to some extent forced myself to break every mould & find a fresh form of being, that is of expression, for everything I feel & think [....] Here in H. & N. I am breaking the mould made by The Waves’ (D IV, p.233). She enjoyed the renewal, the openness to contingency created by constant change. It is important, then, to acknowledge the excitement which ‘The Pargiters’ and The Years afforded Woolf; the regeneration caused by the fact and fiction combination, even after the essay-novel format had been discarded.

Woolf also felt in the 1930s that she had definite arguments which needed to be expressed, and required fact to back them up. The comment in her diary in November 1932 - ‘feeling as I do for the first time that this book is important’ (D IV, p.130) - is typical of how she felt about her work in the 1930s. This is particularly true of Three Guineas, of which she wrote, ‘I wanted - how violently - how persistently, pressingly compulsorily I cant say - to write this book’ (D V, p.133). Since she conceived of The Years and Three Guineas ‘as one book’ (D V, p.148), this confidence and urgency is applicable to the arguments behind The Years, as proven by the similar quotation, from six years earlier, about ‘The Pargiters’: ‘I have never lived in such a race, such a dream, such a violent impulsion & compulsion’ (D IV, p.133). Comments such as these, are often ignored or passed over by critics of The Years in favour of those marking the despair during her revisions, when this is symptomatic
more of Woolf and the revision process, than of a sense of failure about the work itself.

(5) **Researching The Years**

It is necessary now to look specifically at how Woolf incorporated fact, where that fact originated and how its position changed as the work evolved. Woolf collected and used material on such a vast array of women’s issues that this discussion will focus only on her research into women’s education and the philologist, Joseph Wright. With the help of Woolf’s notebooks, we know some of what she read during this period and which texts influenced ‘The Pargiters.’ Her research surfaces in various ways, sometimes through direct quotation in ‘The Pargiters’, and sometimes indirectly, often resurfacing directly in Three Guineas. After writing the last page of Three Guineas Woolf noted in her diary that she had had the ideas in her head since 1932, when she started writing ‘The Pargiters’, but that she had forced herself ‘to put it into fiction first. No, the fiction came first. The Years’ (D V, p.112), again, reinforcing the connection between The Years and Three Guineas. The research, which with The Years became only a foundation, an analogy, could resurface directly in the essay Three Guineas. There is no doubt that the facts in The Years are submerged, and that ‘The Pargiters’ is more polemical on many issues, especially sexuality, but I want to argue that Woolf’s research remains in The Years, as it informs the fiction, and as she herself said, the fiction can be traced back to fact, to real events.

The initial essay-chapter version of ‘The Pargiters’ concerns itself most directly with education, since the Pargiter children are still young and the discrepancy between the male and female children’s situation is most clear. As Louise De Salvo concludes
in her work on Woolf's experience of sexual abuse, 'Virginia Woolf was a significant, if often overlooked, contributor to both the history and the philosophy of education.'

Her conviction that changing patriarchal society meant altering the education system, led her to read widely on nineteenth century education, particularly on women involved in educational reform. Bobby, the youngest son, later Martin in The Years, is at public school, Edward is at Oxford and Morris is training to be a barrister. In contrast the female children are allowed minimal education. Delia, who wants to study music in Germany, is forced to make do with violin lessons from a misogynist, Signor Morelli, and Milly is forbidden to study at the Slade because 'it was unthinkable that a girl <an English lady> should see a naked man' (P, pp.29-30), so she has to make do with a sketching club. The women also take classes at Bedford College, but the narrator writes in the second essay that each year the four girls' education put together cost no more than two hundred pounds. Here Woolf draws on Stephen Gwynn's The Life of Mary Kingsley, the biography of a British anthropologist and explorer who lived from 1862 to 1900 and made two journeys to West Africa, where she lived among the native peoples. Later in life Kingsley was consulted by colonial administrators and influenced certain British policy changes, campaigning against the colonial government's treatment of the native Africans. Gwynn provides evidence of Kingsley's frustration at being denied a formal education: "I cried bitterly at not being taught things. My home authorities said I had no business to want to be taught such things." Rather like Woolf herself, Kingsley raided her father's library, teaching herself science. Kingsley's frustration is obviously similar to Milly and Delia's in 'The

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Pargiter's, but the quotation which Woolf actually uses in 'The Pargiters' and Three
Guineas is "I don't know if I ever revealed the fact to you that being allowed to learn
German was all the paid-for education I ever had. £2000 was spent on my brother's, I
still hope not in vain."

Kingsley's emphasis on the financial discrepancy in education costs inspires Woolf's account of the similar situation in the Pargiter household. Woolf's narrator takes it further, arguing that each of three boys had ten years' schooling at £300 each a year, totalling £9000, compared to the £200 a year total for the four women. Woolf also compares Morris' allowance of £150 a year to the girls' £30 or £40 (P, pp.30-31). Financial discrepancy also comes up when Bobby is rewarded with a sixpence by Colonel Pargiter for coming top in his class, in the same passage that Milly, on telling her father that she went to Whiteley's, is asked whether she was "Spending <more> money?" (P, p.13) Bobby is rewarded financially and encouraged in the same breath that Milly is reminded to keep a tight rein on the family expenditure. All through the 1880 section of both 'The Pargiters' and The Years, the claustrophobic life of the daughters, who run the home due to Mrs Pargiter's illness, is contrasted with the individualistic pursuits of the sons.

Besides the obvious educational discrimination against the Pargiter women, Woolf also explores the psychological divide this causes between the siblings. The source text for this is Annabel Huth Jackson's autobiography, A Victorian Childhood.

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29 Gwynn, p.15. It is worth noting that the biographer, who knew Kingsley, reveals his essentialism and implicit dislike of her unconventionality in this passage: "On the whole we gather the picture of a queer gawky hobbledehoyish girlhood, in a way exceedingly unfeminine, with no use for frills. Yet in another way, and much more primitive, we see the training of a woman for woman's work, which, in the primitive relation, is to wait upon man: doing the work of the house for the benefit of one whose interest and occupation lie outside the house. No woman that ever lived had more admiration for man in his manliness - man the hunter, the warrior" (Gwynn, p.15). Obviously Kingsley's life's work sat uneasily with Gwynn, so he rewrites her childhood so it will fit his image of woman as private, domestic, and in the service of public, aggressive man.
For Jackson and Woolf it is the competition and arrogance fostered by the public school system which is largely to blame for the rift between male and female siblings once the boys begin school. Woolf noted the following quotation from Jackson in the first of her three notebooks:

Adrian was now at Mr West’s school at Bournemouth where the elder boys had been. We had been constant companions and very great friends up to this time whenever the two elder boys were away and he had not to show his manhood by ill-treating girls, and I was horrified and miserable when he came back for the first holidays and I realised that he had really learnt to despise girls and no longer wanted to play with me. 31

In ‘The Pargiters’, relations between Rose, the youngest child, and Bobby are strained in the same way. Rose wants to go to Lamleys’ to buy a bath toy, but as it is evening, Eleanor orders her to ask Bobby to accompany her. Rose answers that Bobby is doing his lessons, implying that she cannot interrupt him (P, p.17). In Chapter Two, afraid of his reaction, Rose approaches him on what he considers his territory: ‘Bobby considered that he had a right to the school room between tea & dinner - indeed, he was seeking to establish a right to keep all his cabinets there [...] & was secretly determined to claim it for his own room’ (P, pp.39-40). Rose enters ‘cautiously’ and ‘apologetically’ (P, pp.39&40) not able to speak before Bobby cries “Blast you, Rose!” [...] thumping his fist on the table. "Get [out of here] along with you - [What d’you want here] I dont want you here” (P, p.40). She has trespassed on male territory and he threatens to throw a ball of paper at her. She meditates on how sometimes they were ‘the best of friends’ (P, p.40) but ‘now that he was what she called "a proper schoolboy" he was apt to sneer at her & treat her as if she were a baby, especially when she interrupted his work’ (P, p.40). As with Jackson, Bobby’s entry into

30 Annabel Huth Jackson, _A Victorian Childhood_ (London: Methuen, 1932).

31 Jackson, pp.35-36.
education has given him an importance and an arrogance which makes Rose seem insignificant and inferior. The fact that Victorian society denies Rose a formal education reinforces or gives license to Bobby’s cruelty and arrogance.

In the Third Essay, Woolf’s narrator elaborates on this situation, an explanation obviously not offered after the elimination of the essays. The narrator describes Bobby’s entry into ‘the fellowship of men together - a fellowship which, he began to feel, yielded a great many rights and privileges’ (P, p.54). He has to make sure Rose vanishes when his friends visit and that the schoolroom is seen to be his. ‘Privately, he still liked playing with Rose’, but in front of his peers he must maintain his image (P, p.54). Rose begins to ‘fear’ and ‘dislike’ her brother when he starts school, just as Jackson writes, ‘it took me years to get over my terror of Evelyn’, and quarrels lead to Rose engaging in what she calls ‘in her private language, a "Grand Council of War"’ (P, pp.54-55). Bobby becomes an enemy to be resented and avoided. Also in the third essay, Woolf actually uses the quotation from Jackson about Mr West’s school in Bournemouth, which she had typed into her notebook, proof of the direct link between fact and fiction.

Woolf extends this idea by also having Eleanor experience a distancing from Morris because of her lack of education. Morris has stopped telling Eleanor about his law cases because ‘"The female" as he put it, "hasn’t got a legal mind" [...] He had tried to explain cases to Eleanor; but she muddled things up’ (P, p.26). Eleanor wishes she had been better educated and reflects that ‘they had been such friends when they were children - they had shared everything’ (P, p.26). Woolf’s fiction is inspired by and based on fact, with the subsequent essays containing further elaboration or a quotation from the relevant text. Even without the essays then, The Years remains fact-

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32 Jackson, p.22.
based fiction.

The question now is what of this material on male versus female education remains in The Years. Of course direct quotations are eliminated, as are the explanatory sections, but what remains is the fictional reconstruction of fact. In general, the tension between male and female siblings caused by the boys' education is preserved in The Years, but details about the discrepancy in education are omitted. Milly's painting is excised and Delia's music lessons are only referred to once, briefly. The sense of the women's claustrophobia and boredom is heightened in The Years.

"Look here, Delia," said Eleanor, shutting her book, "you've only got to wait..." She meant but she could not say it, "until Mama dies" (Y, p.19). Woolf leaves ambiguity as to what Delia is waiting for, so that the idea of freedom is emphasized over the desire for a specific education. Apart from the reference to Delia's music lessons (Y, p.12), which is by no means evidence of her desire to be a musician, an interest in Parnell replaces the desire to study the violin in Germany found in 'The Pargiters.' Delia dreams that she is on the platform with Parnell, addressing an audience "'in the cause of Liberty'" (Y, p.22). Again, the emphasis on freedom, revolution, in Parnell's fight for Home Rule in Ireland, fits with Delia's frustration and need for change.

Woolf was reading The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell by R. Barry O'Brien in January 1933, just before she decided to leave out the essays and rewrite the 1880 section, so undoubtedly her reading resulted in the addition of Parnell to the novel (D IV, p.143).

Delia, with her music lessons, is the only Pargiter daughter who receives education of any kind in The Years, making the discrepancy between male and female siblings even stronger. By omitting certain of the specifics regarding education Woolf increases the sense of monotony and boredom. In The Years, for example, Delia agrees
to go and sit with her mother saying "I've nothing whatever to do" (Y, p.20), whereas in 'The Pargiters' the debate as to whose turn it is includes such factors as that Delia has had two hours of music practice and Eleanor has been out all day. In 'The Pargiters' the sisters come across as more active than in The Years. Woolf added a brief scene to The Years in which Morris, sitting in the drawing-room with Milly, Eleanor and Delia, is irritated by the 'atmosphere of suppressed emotion' (Y, p.42). 'There he was cooped up with all these women in an atmosphere of unreal emotion' (Y, p.43). Invariably, critics only comment on the omissions, ignoring the additions and substitutions. Although the specifics of the educational goals of the Pargiter sisters disappear, the atmosphere of entrapment within the private home speaks as loudly for the discrepancy between the lives of men and women in 1880.

The issue of the changed relationships between male and female siblings, due to the disparity in education, remains, although the conflict between Bobby/Martin and Rose is condensed. Woolf retains the incident when Bobby, or Martin in The Years, is given a sixpence as a reward for coming top in his class and Milly is chastised for spending money on sheets. In both texts, Colonel Pargiter, initially Captain in 'The Pargiters', interrupts Milly to ask Martin about his academic achievements, but in The Years, Woolf emphasizes the significance of Colonel Pargiter silencing his daughter, by adding, 'Colonel Pargiter asked, cutting short his daughter's statement' (Y, p.12).

The Rose/Martin conflict loses the detail about Martin's wanting to take over the schoolroom and his banishing of Rose when his schoolfriends visit. In The Years we are told of Rose's reluctance to enter the schoolroom, implying that it is Martin's territory. The effect of past quarrels between brother and sister is shown by his closing his hand on a piece of paper as if he were going to throw it at her. Her fear is clear as she 'braced herself and stood with her back against the door' (Y, p.17). Brief though
the scene is, Woolf makes an addition by clarifying, through indirect interior monologue, Rose’s ignorance as to whether Martin is studying Greek or Latin (Y, p.17). This again emphasizes the educational disparity between brother and sister. In The Years, Woolf divides the scene in two, cutting it when Rose begins to ask Martin whether he will accompany her to Lamley’s and then concluding it from Delia’s point of view, when she hears Rose and Martin quarrelling, Rose saying ‘“Don’t then!”’ (Y, p.20) and slamming the nursery door. The shift to an outsider’s perspective fits with the overall reduction in interior commentary. The reader is denied Martin’s views completely and also loses the extended passage of Rose’s feelings towards Bobby found in ‘The Pargiters’.

The scene between Eleanor and Morris, although slightly condensed and revised stylistically, changes only marginally in content. Eleanor still feels she cannot converse with Morris about his work as she feels out of her depth and confuses the Lord Chancellor with the Lord Chief Justice. Woolf excises Morris’ comment about women not having legal minds, but makes more explicit the growing distance between them. ‘That was the worst of growing up, she thought; they couldn’t share things as they used to share them. When they met they never had time to talk as they used to talk - about things in general - they always talked about facts - little facts’ (Y, p.33).

Five years passed between the completion of the first draft of the 1880 section and its publication as The Years, during which time further revisions were made. Although not all of the revisions survive, we have Woolf’s ‘Additions to Ch. 1’ which she started on 31 January 1933, two days before she decided to omit the essays, and also eighty three pages of galley proofs from March and April 1936, galley pages of the ending from April 1936 and twelve pages of the 1917 section from December 1938. The Additions quickly become revisions, after the genre change, and we see
Woolf revising so as to incorporate what she omitted by leaving out the essays. In the first additional scene Woolf has Eleanor contemplate that money and love are the two motivating forces behind human behaviour, an idea taken from the Second Essay, one which Woolf wanted to retain at this point, but which disappeared by *The Years*.

Woolf’s only change to the initial scenes in the Pargiter home was to add a new scene with Eleanor which includes two further points on the theme of women’s lack of education, both of which are carried through to *The Years*. In this new scene, Eleanor, sitting at her mother’s desk, feels ‘condemned to be at in that place, in that position, at her mother’s writing table, with the whole home on top of her, forever.’

The implications of the writing table are less overt in *The Years*, where she thinks ‘It’ll be my table now’ (Y, p.33) and the reader is left to infer what the ownership implies. Also new is the episode in which Morris posts Eleanor’s letter to Edward, and she watches him as she used to when he went off to school. The letter posting reinforces the restrictions on Eleanor’s freedom, but Woolf cleverly links the restriction to education, Eleanor watching Morris’s freedom to be educated from within the boundaries of the home. This scene is also retained in *The Years*.

At this point Woolf was revising by adding episodes which would replace the expository arguments of the essays. In order for the work to remain a novel of fact, Woolf had to provide fictional analogies for her research. The transition from the galleys to *The Years*, at the end of the six year process, however, shows Woolf pruning back certain references linked to the arguments of the essays. A description of a piano in the Pargiter home appears in the galleys, but not in ‘The Pargiters’ or *The Years*, as does a description of Delia putting away her violin. Delia’s musicality is not

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found in *The Years*; she is not shown to have a specific educational goal which is being denied her. Her cry of frustration which in ‘The Pargiters’ leads to an unambiguous discussion about how she wants to study music in Germany, in the galleys is "No, no, no, [...] It’s hopeless...There’s all Edward’s bills", 34 without reference to Germany, and in *The Years* is a cry that an unidentified something is ‘hopeless’ (Y, p.19). The six year process is a constant negotiation. At the last minute Woolf erased the traces of Delia as a serious violinist, one aspect of educational discrepancy between the sexes, while retaining the powerful image of inequality represented by Eleanor being caught within 56 Abercorn Terrace while Morris enjoys freedom and education. The arguments of the novel-essay remain, what varies is the amount of detail used to support them. Although none of Woolf’s source texts are actually quoted, as they are in ‘The Pargiters’, I would argue that her exposition of the discrepancy between the education of male and female children in the nineteenth century and the rift which this causes between siblings remains. Since ‘The Pargiters’ was based on texts such as *A Victorian Childhood* and *The Life of Mary Kingsley*, they remain an implicit foundation in *The Years*. Just because Woolf leaves out direct references does not mean their influence on the text is dissolved, or that *The Years* ceases to be a novel based on public fact.

Another educational issue is Woolf’s attack on the education system, particularly the public school system, for its effect on young men. What Woolf saw as a male realm of competition, aggression and arrogance is best shown through Edward, the Pargiter son who studies Greek at Oxford. Introduced in the Third Essay, Edward, we are told, went to Winchester, obtained a scholarship to Oxford where he is expected to get a first, and subsequently a fellowship. Edward is said to have

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34 Virginia Woolf, Galley Proofs, Berg Collection, New York Public Library, p.11.
'premature symptoms of pride' which should be stifled until the awarding of the fellowship, 'a very real test of a man’s merit’ (P, p.56). As with Bobby, monetary reward awaits Edward if he receives either the first or the fellowship. Male tradition, and by extension expectation, exists in that Canon Pargiter, Colonel Pargiter’s father, was a fellow of All Souls in his day. In the Third Chapter which follows, Edward, studying in his room in Oxford, thinks back to his time at what is now Morley rather than Winchester (there are many discrepancies in names at this early stage of the novel). What he remembers most is the sense of belonging to a ‘great & famous fellowship’ (P, p.60). He remembers the words of the headmaster, Dr. Bealby: "No other influence [...] has produced so great a growth of the sterner & more robust virtues - fortitude, self-reliance, intrepidity; devotion to the common weal: readiness for united action & self-sacrifice" (P, p.61). For Woolf, it is this sense of a male world of privilege which makes men dislike the idea of female intrusion and causes the competitiveness and patriotism which lead to war. As she writes in the Fourth Essay, a woman, ‘not only from ignorance but from modesty and convention [...] would have been almost as ignorant as a working man’ of the tradition present in the public school (P, p.78). For this reason Woolf turns to other texts for her information. She uses Jackson’s account of the effect of the ‘dreadful "public-school spirit"’ 35 which encouraged bullying and competition as well as making the boys into a ‘member of the herd.’ 36 Jackson is definitive in her critique: ‘The average man would have been a better creature had he never been to school.’ 37 Woolf also uses a first hand account of public school life, a book entitled Oars, Wars and Horses by Major

35 Jackson, p.21.

36 Jackson, p.163.

37 Jackson, p.23.
The second chapter of this autobiography is headed 'Eton in the ’Eighties.' Woolf's notes, again in the first of the three notebooks, come from page twenty-eight of the text where she finds a description of sadism and bullying. Nickalls writes, 'Jimmy Joynes was Lower Master at that time, and he delighted in swishing the "naughty boys," as he called them [...] Three times, or sometimes six, we would hear his squeaky voice saying, "Take that, you naughty boy!" Swish! "And that, you naughty boy!" Swish!' Although Woolf does not use this directly in 'The Pargiters', the beating of pupils by masters parallels Bobby's bullying of Rose and 'the usual forms of bullying which he [Edward's friend Gibbs] had found effective with dirty little smugs [at school were] like Jevons at his public school' (P, p.72). The idea of discipline also relates to Edward's fear of sexual arousal when thinking of his cousin Kitty, and his wish to be able to 'conquer' himself (P, p.67).

Woolf rewrites this scene in the Additions, leaving out the description of public school, but increasing the notion of the pressure on Edward, this being one of her reasons for disliking the male education system. Pressure from the commands of his tutor, pressure resulting from his being his headmaster's favourite pupil and pressure from the dependency of his future on the fellowship are made more explicit than in 'The Pargiters.' In the margin Woolf writes 'he supposed an examination was like a battle' (ADD, p.95), emphasizing the competitiveness and presaging Three Guineas in which male upbringing and militarism are linked.

In the galley proofs, Woolf raises the level of Edward's self-doubt, which heightens the sense of pressure. In this version Edward admits he is not a first rate scholar and the 'clever little Jew-boy from Birmingham' (Y, p.48) mentioned once in

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39 Nickalls, p.28.
The Years is a threatening figure of competition who is mentioned several times. Individualism is emphasized in the later versions over the idea of male fellowship in ‘The Pargiters.’ In the galleys and The Years the scene takes on a desperate note and the arrogance and confidence of ‘The Pargiters’ and the Additions, exemplified in ‘he had warmed his brain up, to the sense of his own dexterity, his own efficiency, the beautiful play of his mind’ fades (ADD, p.93).

Woolf’s reading on the male public school, found in both A Victorian Childhood and Oars, Wars and Horses makes its way only marginally into The Years. She keeps the idea of competition and tradition but omits Edward’s meditations on Morley, so that the comment is on Oxford rather than the pressure being traced back to school. Woolf retains Colonel Pargiter’s visit to his father’s old rooms, signifying the male tradition and pressure which that creates. Again Woolf makes the idea more explicit, here through the lines, appearing first in the 1936 galleys, ‘His father would be frightfully cut-up if he failed. His heart was set on it’ (Y, p.48). She also keeps in the reward of port from his father, but omits the financial rewards from ‘The Pargiters.’ Woolf maintains the idea of male privilege, tradition and competition without linking it explicitly to the public school system, as she had in ‘The Pargiters.’

The latter half of the novel-essay version of ‘The Pargiters’ deals with Kitty Malone, whose mother is Mrs Pargiter’s sister, and her life at St Katharine’s, Oxford where her father is the Master. Kitty must act as hostess at numerous gatherings, and the only education she receives is history lessons from Miss Craddock, a female academic very much marginalized from the Oxford scene. The fourth and fifth chapters, and the fifth and sixth essays bring up not only Kitty’s discontent, but also the question of male reactions to women and education. When Kitty helps her father with his history of St Katharine’s and mixes the names of two men, he replies ‘" You
[are not] share the inability of your sex, my dear, to grasp the importance of historical [truth] facts" (P, p.93), reminiscent of Morris saying to Eleanor, "The female [...] hasn’t got a legal mind”” (P, p.26). Kitty remembers her father’s comment when she dreams of becoming ‘a learned woman, an historian herself” (P, p.103) and is discouraged as well by his dismissal of Miss Craddock’s work on the Angevin Kings. Mrs Malone supports her husband on the education of women, giving a ‘little shrug of impatience’ and saying “Oh these learned women!” (P, p.103) when Miss Craddock visits her home. Mrs Malone was ‘not at all in favour of the women’s colleges that were just coming into existence’ (P, p.103).

Kitty senses the attitudes of the professors, she so often is required to socialise with, towards her intelligence. She is told ‘not to talk nonsense’ (P, p.119) by Professor Lathom when she makes a comment on Henry the Eighth. Rather than being indignant, Kitty dismisses her own comment as ‘silly’ (P, p.119) and in general finds the academics laughable rather than being jealous of their position. ‘What she saw was simply an ugly, ill-mannered man who pinched her knee and spilt the soup into his beard’ (P, p.124). The narrator makes clear Dr Andrews and Professor Lathom’s views on the intellectual inferiority of women and the ‘absolute necessity of keeping them out of the University at all costs’ (P, p.124). Although Kitty does not hear these views she senses them in the treatment of Miss Craddock and the opposition raised by the founding of women’s colleges.

In her notebooks, Woolf collected many quotations to support the views of Andrews and Lathom, some of which are quoted directly in ‘The Pargiters.’ We know that Woolf read Lionel A. Tollemache’s Recollections of Pattison (Mark Pattison being the Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford). 40 This text was not recorded in the notebooks

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40 Lionel A. Tollemache, Recollections of Pattison (London: C.F.Hodgson & Son, 1885).
but was quoted directly in ‘The Pargiters.’ Woolf quotes several of Pattison’s comments on the discrepancy between male and female conversation. Pattison felt that “When I, an old man of seventy, am talking on intellectual subjects to a young girl of seventeen, she and I are on quite different planes of thought.” The narrator of ‘The Pargiters’ explains this by the educational discrepancy between men and women and links Pattison’s predicament directly to Dr Andrews’ with Kitty. Pattison, like Andrews, ‘had rather strong views as to the intellectual inferiority of the average woman to the average man’ (P, p. 124). Andrews’ bluntness with Kitty’s remark parallels Pattison’s remarks, such as when the latter tells a young woman, “Your conversational utterances are feeble” and then his comment that, “I told her that she was the most ignorant girl I ever met! But I took care to say so in such a way that she couldn’t mind it.”

In the first of the three notebooks is a quotation from a letter from Walter Bagehot to Emily Davies, the founder of Girton College;

> I assure you I am not an enemy of women. I am very favourable to their employment as labourers or in other menial capacity. I have, however, doubts as to the likelihood of their succeeding in business as capitalists. I am sure the nerves of most women would break down under the anxiety, and that most of them are utterly destitute of the disciplined reticence necessary to every sort of cooperation. Two thousand years hence you may have changed it all, but the present women will only flirt with men, and quarrel with one another (TO, p.377).

Woolf had access to this extract through her friend, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Emily Davies’s niece. It appears as a note in Three Guineas and is referred to twice in ‘The Pargiters’ although never actually included. In the Second Essay, the narrator refers to

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41 Tollemache, p.20.

42 Tollemache, p.21.

43 Tollemache, p.22.
Bagehot’s prejudice against women’s colleges in connection with Captain Pargiter’s refusal of his daughters’ requests for education (P, p.34). The narrator remarks that as Girton opened in 1873, Eleanor, Milly or Delia could have attended university, and leaves a blank space for Bagehot’s comment.  

Not in the notebook, but referred to directly in ‘The Pargiters’ is Thomas Wright’s The Life of Walter Pater. 45 Woolf mixes fact and fiction here as Kitty is told of an incident at one of the new women’s colleges when Pater, ‘whose views upon women were too well-known’ (P, p.126) treads on a woman’s glove instead of picking it up, saying “it was an insinuation of the devil that caused this woman to drop her glove.” 46 Here, the fact is not merely used by the narrator as corroborative evidence, but is incorporated directly into the fiction, Kitty thinking to herself, ‘for surely, if you held Mr. Pater’s views on women, it would have been easy to stay at home’ (P, p.126).

In February 1932 Woolf was reading the manuscript of her friend Ethel Smyth, the composer’s, book Female Pipings in Eden. 47 Woolf had met Smyth in 1930, and became intrigued by her increasingly public role as a famous musician, her lesbianism and her devotion to the Suffrage cause. Smyth’s writing being for the most part autobiographical, Female Pipings in Eden deals with the difficulty facing female musicians. Undoubtedly this text and Smyth herself influenced Woolf’s portrait of Delia, who wants to study music in Germany, but is forced to make do with Signor

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44 Woolf writes in her review ‘Two Women’ of Emily Davies and Girton College by Barbara Stephen and The Letters of Lady Augusta Stanley of Davies’ fight against male prejudice, ‘tough as roots but intangible as sea mist’ (E I, p.421).


47 Ethel Smyth, Female Pipings in Eden (London: Peter Davies Ltd., 1933).
Morelli who 'hated teaching young ladies the violin. It was a sheer waste of time' (P, p.29). Morelli asks the question Smyth answers in her book: "How is it you women can be so musical; and yet, why is it that no woman has ever been a great composer?" (P, p.29). 'As things are to-day', Smyth writes, 'it is absolutely impossible in this country for a woman composer to get and keep her head above water.'

Also in Smyth’s book is an account of her altercation with Einstein, who made a comment in a New York interview aligning him with Bagehot, Pattison and Pater. "In Madame Curie," said the Professor, "I see no more than a brilliant exception. Even if there were more woman scientists of like calibre, that would serve as no argument against the fundamental weakness of the feminine organism." Smyth wrote to Einstein to challenge this comment, and he replied on 8 June 1931 with "I never said anything of the sort; on the contrary I have always contended that women have every right, and should be granted every opportunity, to take part in all branches of intellectual endeavour. I must confess that in my own experience passionate and lasting devotion to a purely intellectual cause is rare among women. Should one wish it were otherwise?" Woolf quotes this response in the first notebook, evidence of its indirect use in ‘The Pargiters’ as part of her depiction of male resistance and essentialist reactions to women’s education.

From the Additions onwards, the Kitty section becomes much less polemical since the quotations from Pattison, Bagehot and Pater are lost with the essays. Woolf decided to tone down her critique of male attitudes towards women’s education. At the

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48 Smyth, p.4.
49 Smyth, p.23.
50 Smyth, p.23.
same time however, in the Additions, Kitty’s dislike of her position as hostess and ornament becomes more explicit. ‘Kitty felt more & more convinced that she loathed Oxford, that she was not no good at her it: that she must, that she must, that she must, get quit of the whole thing’ (ADD, p.108). Kitty appears more self aware in the Additions since in ‘The Pargiters’ the harshest critique comes through the narrator’s exposition rather than Kitty’s own thoughts. The passage in ‘The Pargiters’ on Dr. Andrews’ attitude towards women’s education, in the Additions becomes Andrews snubbing a remark of Kitty’s about Henry VIII, prompting her to say to Miss Craddock, "He doesn’t talk about history to me" (ADD, p.118) and remembering a damp hand on her knee. Sexual impropriety is emphasized here over the academics’ disregard of Kitty’s ideas, and this representation remains in The Years. Yet again, Woolf makes a significant addition as a partial replacement for her omissions. Although Kitty’s discontent is less explicit in The Years than the Additions, in the final version, on her return from the Robsons, Kitty, sitting in her room, dreams that she ‘plucked up courage and said to her father: “Father...” [...] "I want...”’ (Y, p.72). As with Delia, in The Years, the exact desire is left unidentified, but here Kitty, like the Pargiter women, dreams of escape, of having her own voice. Radin argues that since Kitty’s dream of being a farmer, which is important in ‘The Pargiters’, is almost left out of The Years, her ‘discontent seems rather pointless.’ However, with this and Delia’s exclamation of despair, both of which are left open-ended in The Years, the emphasis is put on their dissatisfaction with their present surroundings rather than a wish for a specific alternative. Kitty’s discontent is not at all pointless in The Years; we see how she is prisoner to a rigid schedule of parties and gatherings, subjected to arrogant undergraduates and condescending academics.

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51 Radin, p.30.
Finally, mention must be made of the extensive research Woolf did into the founding of women's colleges, some of which was incorporated into 'The Pargiters' and in particular into the character of Miss Craddock. Among the books that Woolf read, two deal with Dorothea Beale, who became the principal of Cheltenham, a women's college, in 1858. F. Cecily Steadman's In the Days of Miss Beale: A Study of Her Work and Influence, 52 is quoted in the first notebook and Elizabeth Raikes' Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham is quoted directly in 'The Pargiters.' 53 Again fact and fiction are intertwined because Miss Craddock is said to have been a student at Queen's College, London, a women's college opened in 1848, and then 'Miss Beale had asked her to teach at Cheltenham' (P, p.102). Woolf had a personal link with the school in that her Greek teacher, Jane Harrison, was a student there from 1867, before going on to Newnham.

Also in the first notebook is a quotation from Blanche Athena Clough's A Memoir of Anne Jemima Clough, the first principal of the first women's hall at Cambridge, which became Newnham College. 54 The entry is one page headed 'Women's eloquence' and consists of a quotation from one of Clough’s students: 'What could have been simpler than the words in which she summed up the good of a three years' training at college: "My dear, you will be able to amuse them better when you go home."' 55 No doubt Woolf picked out this passage to refute the quotations from Mark Pattison about the inadequacy of women’s conversation, which appear in


54 Blanche Athena Clough, A Memoir of Anne Jemima Clough (London: Edward Arnold, 1897).

55 Clough, pp. 331-332.
‘The Pargiters’ through Dr Andrews. Also, however, Woolf must have felt she differed from educationists such as Clough and Beale in that these women to a large extent viewed higher education as preparation for home life. They very much divided male and female experience, female experience remaining largely domestic. In some notes Woolf made on Clough’s biography, she wonders why Clough did not tackle the reasons behind men’s antagonism towards women’s education. She writes, ‘What conclusions are we to draw? did she wish women to be like men? did she think degrees of the highest importance?’ , realising that their opinions differ, but not quite being able to take Clough’s separatism at face value. 56 Clough did not want women to be like men and she did not think degrees of the highest importance. Blanche Clough writes of her aunt, A. J. Clough, ‘It is already sufficiently clear that she attached great importance to home life, and she was also decidedly an advocate for marriage.’ 57 This would not have been Woolf’s view of the reason behind higher education for women, shown by her advocating in Three Guineas that the daughters of educated men earn their living in the professions. Dorothea Beale, also a prominent educationist, wanted to better prepare women for their duties as wives and mothers. In the Fourth Essay of ‘The Pargiters’ Woolf writes: ‘But a glance at Miss Beale’s life is enough to prove that the aims which inspired the founders of that famous Ladies’ College were radically different from any that could have been in the minds of the ancient worthies who were responsible for the founding of Eton and Harrow and Winchester and Westminster’ (P, p.78). Here she quotes from Raikes’s book on Miss Beale about how Cheltenham was intent on “preserving the modesty and gentleness of the female character” in order that the female student could be the “natural companion and


57 Clough, pp.255-256.
helpmeet for man." Further evidence of Beale's separatist ideas is her antagonism towards male and female students sitting the same exams. She felt this would lead to competitiveness, obscuring the moral training which was the aim of the school. Here, we see the difference from Edward's training at Morley, the fifteen 'silver cups on his mantelpiece' (P, p.60), and his competitive desire to win the fellowship at Oxford. Beale's view is also different from Miss Craddock's, who values her education for its own sake, is not content to run a family and wants to be a part of the world of academia. At an address in Bristol in 1865, Beale stated that she intended to train women "so that they may best perform that subordinate part in the world to which, I believe, they have been called." As there is no female character who attends a women's college during the course of 'The Pargiters', Woolf uses her research here for contrast both with Miss Craddock's views and the aims and codes of male schools.

Woolf also uses the idea of female students worshipping their female teachers, which arises in both the books by Raikes and Steadman, and in 'The Pargiters' with Kitty and Miss Craddock. In the Fourth Essay, Woolf quotes Raikes on Beale's 'horror of the unhealthy attachments which are often a source of danger in girls' schools.' Steadman gives a similar account, quoting a student: "'They both, " writes Mrs Mitchell, "discouraged hero-worship, and though we foolish girls suffered tortures at times at having our offerings rejected, on looking back I am sure it was a wise rule.'

Woolf also quotes Mrs Humphrey Ward's _A Writer's Recollections_ in the Fifth

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58 Raikes, p.87.
59 Raikes, p.138.
60 P, p.80 and Raikes, p.255.
61 Steadman, p.22.
Essay. The text is an autobiography, the initial section of which deals with women’s education. Ward, a schoolgirl in the 1850s and 60s, laments the poor standard of women teachers as well as the narrow range of subjects offered. She compares her nine years of learning ‘nothing thoroughly or accurately’ with her brother William’s six year extensive training at Rugby. At the age of seventeen, her father moved to Oxford and she taught herself in the Bodleian, most likely the source of the narrator’s saying of Kitty in the Fourth Chapter, ‘She could take up a subject if she liked & work in the Bodleian. <Some girls did do that.>’ (P, p.90). Most importantly, however, Ward also contributes to the many accounts of girls in love with their teachers. She writes, ‘What I learnt during those years was learnt from personalities [...] and from a gentle and high-minded woman, an ardent Evangelical, with whom a little later, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, I fell headlong in love, as was the manner of schoolgirls then, and is I understand frequently the case with schoolgirls now.’ This is the quotation Woolf uses in the Fifth Essay (P, p.112).

Miss Craddock discourages such affections from Kitty who ‘loved Miss Craddock - perhaps she loved her better than anybody in the whole world’ (P, p.100). Kitty tells Miss Craddock of her resentment towards Oxford but Miss Craddock refuses such confidences from Kitty. ‘She felt, having had experiences in such matters, that Kitty loved her, as so many girls love older women who teach them’ (P, p.103). In the Fifth Essay Woolf expands on this phenomena, explaining that since Kitty has been deprived of company her own age, Miss Craddock becomes the recipient of all her affections. Kitty also romanticizes Miss Craddock’s struggle to educate herself, to

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63 Ward, p.96.

64 Ward, p.97.
complete her book on the Angevin Kings and gain a bedsitting room in Oxford. Kitty is ‘falling in love with something which seemed to her wonderful, new, exciting’ (P, p.112).

The Kitty/Miss Craddock scene changes during the Additions in that the sexual aspect of the relationship as well as the mutual admiration are played up, but the difficulty Woolf had in rewriting the scene is proven by the numerous crossings out of words and phrases. Much more stress is placed on Miss Craddock’s desire for Kitty, and her fascination with Kitty’s lifestyle. Woolf writes, in the margin, thereby a sign of her uncertainty, ‘Miss Crad. was only human. Kitty was to her very lovely’ (ADD, p.112). ‘Indeed, in her heart she loved girls who went to balls. She had never been to balls herself. She loved her. She loved the her youth, her beauty.’ (ADD, p.113) is unequivocal in its lesbianism, but Woolf obviously changed her mind as soon as the words were on the page. Miss Craddock’s envy remains in The Years and the teacher does think ‘how lovely she is’ (Y, p.63) but the overtness of ‘strong beautiful well mannered well built girl’ disappears (ADD, p.113).

Another change in the Additions is that Miss Craddock’s background is described, and she, like Sam Robson, becomes the figure of the self-made academic, working against tremendous odds. Miss Craddock had to teach herself Latin while she baked the bread, being one of a large family, so that she sees Oxford as a paradise and idolizes Dr Andrews, whom Kitty ridicules. Despite these revisions, Miss Craddock’s avoidance of closeness between teacher and pupil remains, the result of Woolf’s reading on women educationists.

In The Years the ideas are condensed, but it is clear that Kitty is overly fond of her teacher as she sees the ‘cheap red villas’ in which Miss Craddock lives ‘haloed with romance’ (Y, p.61). Her heart beats faster as she approaches her teacher’s home.
One change is that Kitty refers to Miss Craddock as Lucy in private only, indicating the intimacy which she has created in her head. The signs of idolatry are all there for the alert reader in the passage: ‘Lucy went up those steps and down them every day; that was her window; this was her bell [...] everything was ramshackle in Lucy’s house; but everything was romantic. There was Lucy’s umbrella in the stand; and it too was not like other umbrellas; it had a parrot’s head for a handle’ (Y, pp.61-62). Craddock’s unique umbrella stands, for Kitty, for the overall originality of her situation. Kitty feels a rush of excitement when climbing the steps, and even more when Miss Craddock tells her she has ‘quite an original mind’ (Y, p.62). We are given less of Kitty’s thoughts about her teacher, and have to infer them from Kitty’s description of her home. As in ‘The Pargiters’, Miss Craddock stops herself from listening to confidences - ‘Confidences were not what Dr Malone paid her for’ (Y, p.63) - and although she thinks Kitty lovely, she tells herself, ‘I will not be sentimental’ (Y, p.63). We are not given any direct reference to the general love of female students for their teachers, but the situation between Kitty and Miss Craddock is clear. As she leaves, Kitty promises to work harder, looking at her teacher with ‘eyes full of love and admiration’ and the stairs shine ‘bright with romance’ (Y, p.64).

In The Years the scene with Miss Craddock is depicted dramatically, whereas in ‘The Pargiters’ it consists of Kitty’s memories from various past meetings, which allows for more explanation and meditation on the relationship. The references to Cheltenham and Dorothea Beale, along with any information about women’s colleges, disappear, but the worshipping of female teachers remains, though in the specific rather than the general.

Undoubtedly Woolf omitted much fact and explanation when she moved from a novel-essay to a novel, but the factual groundwork remains the foundation of the
fiction. Since much of the 1880 section deals with education, and this was the only section ever to contain essays, it must be said that this is the aspect of the work for which Woolf used the most research. Having said that, the scene which is taken most directly from fact is Kitty’s visit to the Robsons, Mr Robson being based on Joseph Wright, the philologist. In July 1932, Woolf was reading his biography, written by his wife Elizabeth. Notes regarding this biography appear in three of Woolf’s reading notebooks, including a quotation in the first of the three notebooks compiled for The Years and Three Guineas. 65 Joseph Wright was born in 1855 in Yorkshire into a working class family. As can be seen from Woolf’s reading notes, her admiration went as much to Mrs Wright, Joseph’s mother, who taught herself to read at 45, left her husband and took in washing to keep her three sons alive. Joseph was working as a donkey boy at six years old, later at the mill and then as a wool-sorter. After attending night school, however, he opened his own school, then taught at Springfield School, Bradford. In 1878 he matriculated from the University of London, having learnt to read and write only eight years before. In 1882 he went to Germany, studied philology at Heidelberg and Leipzig, gained his Ph.D. in 1885 and became a member of the Junggrammatiker School. In 1888 he moved to Oxford, teaching German for the Association for the Higher Education of Women and in 1894 he received an M.A. from Oxford and became a non-Collegiate member. Wright is best known for his English Dialect Dictionary, from which Woolf most likely obtained the word ‘pargetter’, meaning ‘a plasterer’ from which she derived the family name the Pargiters. 66 Woolf not only admired Wright’s determination, but also his feminism. Wright’s admiration for J. S. Mill is evidence of his views. He wrote to Elizabeth: "I

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66 Radin, p.20.
shall also pack up Paradise Regained, and J. S. Mill’s The Subjection (!!) of Women. Don’t be frightened by the strange title; he takes entirely our views on the subject, and I am sure you will say it is one of the noblest books in the English Language.” 67 The quotation which Woolf wrote in her notebook typifies Wright’s views: “‘The world may talk of the ‘weaker sex’ as much as it likes, the whole idea is based upon a false conception; it is based upon the body and not upon the mind, soul, and heart. I have always held women far higher than man in God’s creation [....] St. Paul and the likes of him have much to answer for [....] It is due to them, and them alone, that woman has been such a downtrodden creature in the past.'” 68 Wright acknowledged his debt to his mother; ‘It was just our great devotion to each other that instilled into me the profound respect I have always had, since I grew up, for womankind.’ 69

In ‘The Pargiters’, Joseph Wright becomes Sam Hughes, later Brook, ‘one of those self-taught men, of working class origin who, in the eighties, by means of scholarships had succeeded in finding employment in Oxford in some rather nondescribable capacity’ (P, p.130). In the Fifth Chapter, Kitty goes to tea with the Brooks, and finds Mr Brook, ‘the nicest man she had ever met’ (P, p.132). Mr Brook, like Wright, is from Yorkshire, and Kitty knows that ‘he would listen to what she had to say about Henry the Eighth [without] just as seriously as he listened to what his daughter Nelly was telling Mum about her chemistry’ (P, p.133). Kitty notes the respect between Mr and Mrs Brook, how Mr Brook would never put his hand on her knee as Dr Andrews had done and generally ‘what a different way of treating women Sam’s was from Chuffy & Professor Lathom!’ (P, p.134)

68 Wright, p.315.
69 Wright, p.334.
Mrs Wright the elder, enters the story when Mr Brook shows Kitty a photo of his mother. ‘That old working woman [ha] whose husband had drunk who had gone out charing who had saved her pence to give her sons an education, [who had] & had lived to see her Sam a [gen] great man was at the back of [the] it all - Kitty meant, Sam doesn’t despise women; he doesn’t sneer at them, or tread on their gloves or press their knees under the table’ (P, pp. 146-147). The Brooks are quite clearly the Wrights and are placed in direct opposition to the Oxford professors and to the quotations from Pattison, Bagehot and Pater. In the Sixth Essay, Woolf separates out fact and fiction by writing: ‘Already, working-class men, like Mr. Brook, were coming to Oxford; and a few years later, she might herself have come to know Joseph Wright, the great dialect scholar’ (P, p.154). She went on, in the essay, to elaborate on Wright’s life, incorporating quotations from the biography.

In ‘The Pargiters’ Woolf writes two versions of the Robson/Brook scene, the second of which is very similar to the scene as it appears in the Additions except that less information about the Robsons’ background is given and Mr Robson’s difference from Dr Andrews and Professor Lathom in terms of his treatment of women is less explicit. To counter this reduction, in the Additions, Woolf extends the scene when Kitty leaves the Robsons, in order to show what an effect the visit has had on her. There is a long passage about how she does not want children and how she is being destroyed by the expectations forced upon her by her situation. She imagines defying her parents, ‘She would demand...she would be very brief, very sensible: she would say I want...I’ve had enough of Oxford - she would say "I want”’ (ADD, p.14), which is not in the galleys but in *The Years* in a reduced form.

In *The Years*, Wright is a man ‘who had done it all off his own bat’ (Y, p.64). Robson is still from Yorkshire and talks with respect to Kitty. Again, Sam Robson
shows Kitty the photo of his mother, but Woolf excises the description, only noting that ‘Kitty felt that admiration was expected’ (Y, p.70). The admiration remains without the factual reasons behind it. As with the Additions, although the difference between Robson and the other academics is not as fully elaborated, the main points remain and Kitty still feels that he is the nicest man she has ever met. Even without the lengthy explanations and the essay, the portrait of a self-made man, born of working class parents, teaching on the periphery of Oxford academia, who has great respect for women and who owes a lot to his mother, is clear.

Although Woolf decided not to combine public and private in terms of genre, since the essays impeded the flow of the novel, public and private did come together in terms of fact and fiction. ‘The Pargiters’ underwent huge revisions, but the factual influence remains; the work is a ‘novel of fact’ (P, p.9). As is clear from an examination of the various stages of revision, Woolf did not suddenly omit the essays and excise the fact. The Additions stage shows her enlarging the fictional sections to compensate for lost quotations and exposition. Several points, such as Kitty’s discontent at Oxford, become more explicit and therefore more polemical. When one reads the texts Woolf herself read, only a portion of which are represented here, their presence can still be felt in The Years. Having said this, it is important to remember that right to the end, Woolf emphasized the distinction between fact and fiction, and the ideas of contrast and oscillation which were raised by using public facts and private fiction in one work. Also, while acknowledging that The Years is its own text, it is clear how important it is that the entire process of evolution be considered, from the research, through the novel-essay, through the novel revisions, to the final version. An example of the danger of readings which do not make such considerations can be
seen in Alice van Buren Kelleys' book *The Novels of Virginia Woolf: Fact and Vision*. Without recourse to 'The Pargiters' or the notebooks, fact for Kelley does not mean politics or research, but the alienating, physical world. For Kelley, Woolf's 'vision' is pattern and unification in the face of empirical reality. There is no sense of Woolf's interest in feminism or politics, no sense of her having facts to convey, and no sense of the delight which fact gave her during the 1930s. Obviously, reading *The Years* without knowledge of 'The Pargiters', one would never be able to identify Woolf's sources, but once aware of and with access to them, it is essential that they enter the debate. Fact for Kelley is the concrete world, and is constantly opposed to, and ideally superseded by, what she sees as the unifying force of vision. Fact, for Kelley, in the Pargiter's world, is threatening, destructive of redemptive 'vision'.

Although Woolf separated the terms, she did not conceive of the factual or empirical world in the wholly negative terms which Kelley, Hoffmann and Leaska seem to suggest. Also, fact in *The Years* is much more than empirical reality; it is the political situation from 1880 to 1937, as well as the huge body of evidence which Woolf collected to corroborate her ideas on that situation. After all, without the politics, Woolf's purpose in writing the novel is completely ignored. Kelley starts, rather simplistically, dividing characters up as to 'those who bow to facts and those who sense the vision,'  when Woolf used the dichotomy with *The Years* to denote the distinction between real events and fiction, both of which were essential to her writing of *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. 'I am not a politician: obviously, can only rethink politics very slowly into my own tongue' (D V, p.114). *The Years* was her own experiment, her own way of conveying her feminism, preventing it from being propaganda, while incorporating the evidence which she had accumulated.

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70 Kelley, p.221.
The combination of public and private, or fact and fiction, can also be found in Three Guineas, although here the balance is reversed, since the work is largely factual with a fictional framework. The work was conceived of in February 1935 when Woolf was 'plagued by the sudden wish to write an Anti fascist Pamphlet' (D IV, p.282). The text, like The Years, went through many titles before its publication in 1938. Early on, Woolf sometimes refers to it as 'my Professions book' (D IV, p.323), evidence of its continuity with The Years, also inspired by her speech on professional women. In part, Three Guineas is the essay Woolf originally conceived of as The Years, although the shift moves away from women’s sexuality to women’s prevention of war.

Two of the three notebooks full of newspaper clippings and quotations were used for Three Guineas. The increase in articles on Hitler and the war is evidence of the notebooks’ role as fuel for the essay. The central argument in Three Guineas concerning the interconnectedness of public and private dictators is enacted in Notebook Two, in which two quotations share a page: ‘Sir E. F. Fletcher urged the House of Commons to "stand up to dictators" reported in D. H. Aug. 1st 1936’ and ‘"My husband insists that I call him ‘Sir’", said a woman at the Bristol Police Court’ (MHP, B16 f). Both literally and conceptually Woolf puts a private concern next to a public one, emphasizing the links between dictators in the public and private scene.

Woolf’s emphasis in Three Guineas on the ostentation of male public dress and her inclusion of photos in the text, can be seen germinating in these notebooks also. In Three Guineas Woolf writes, ‘for educated men to emphasize their superiority over other people, either in birth or intellect, by dressing differently, or by adding titles before, or letters after their names are acts that rouse competition and jealousy -
emotions which, [...] have their share in encouraging a disposition towards war' (TG, pp.180-181). Articles on dress codes at funerals, the plumage of male birds, the 19 lb costumes of the peers at George VI’s coronation, postmen wanting smarter uniforms and photos of the pope, and heralds are all part of Woolf’s research on male public display. Again, Woolf enacts opposition literally on the page, as for example when she juxtaposes an article about pacifism with the one about the 19 lb costumes, or a photo of ‘Count Ciano in flying kit’ with an article about one of Hitler’s speeches (MHP, B16 f). The triviality of excessive costumery is emphasized by the seriousness of the articles on war, as is the interconnectedness for Woolf of male display and arrogance with war.

*Three Guineas* asks how women can prevent war through their differing experience, which requires them to enter the professions and education in order to gain a voice, without slipping into the place which men have occupied. How can they make themselves heard without becoming part of the greed and competition of the public world? Woolf’s Outsiders’ Society resists labels, spotlights, definition in order to, in part, maintain privacy. In preventing war, Woolf believed that women have to negotiate between public and private, move out of the private house without gaining the public arrogance, egoism and lust for power of the male position. Woolf writes, ‘We must extinguish the coarse glare of advertisement and publicity, not merely because the limelight is apt to be held in incompetent hands, but because of the psychological effect of such illumination upon those who receive it’ (TG, p.322). In the same way, Woolf negotiates between public and private in terms of fact and fiction. The content of the piece is paralleled generically. She wants fact without propaganda, fiction with evidence. The crossover can be seen in the labels Woolf gave to the work. Although she wrote ‘its a fact I want to communicate rather than a poem’ (D V, p.148), a
fortnight previously she had written ‘I’m uneasy at taking this role in the public eye - afraid of autobiography in public’ (D V, p.141). It is both public fact, so she need not worry about reviews, and then private exposure, causing her anxiety. Although the large amount of quotation, evidence and statistics is undeniable, Woolf obviously felt that an element of the work was so close to her own experience, her own private thoughts, that it constituted autobiography. Again, as with ‘The Pargiters’, there is a generic combination. Leonard called it a ‘political pamphlet’, which of course matches Woolf’s first conception of the work, but she also shied away from blatant politics, being ‘suspicious of the vulgarity of the notes: of a certain insistence’ (D V, p.134). The work could be neither too public nor too private, combination was essential.

The fictional aspect of the work comes in the framing narrative and the character of the narrator. The speaker answers a letter asking her how to prevent war. In doing so she draws a fictional sketch of the writer of the letter, ‘a little grey on the temples’ (TG, p.154). The framework gives the essay a narrative, creates a fictional situation within which she can convey her facts and arguments. There is a definite addressee, a Barrister, who began his education ‘at one of the great public schools and finished it at the university’ (TG, p.154). The reader is constantly aware of the addressee’s presence through references such as ‘we must beg you, Sir, to look from our angle’ (TG, p.278). En route to answering the first letter, the speaker also answers a letter from a woman asking for £100 000 to rebuild a women’s college. The speaker enacts a debate with the woman, eventually deciding to give her a guinea, with no conditions attached. The same scenario occurs in Part Two only here the letter writer is the honorary treasurer for a society to help the daughters of educated men
into the professions. Again the speaker drafts a letter, engages in a hypothetical debate and ends by giving a guinea, this time with conditions attached. In Part Three, the man receives his guinea, and of course the entire text itself is the letter, the reply to the initial question, how to prevent war.

Fact abounds in the text; quotations, statistics, anecdotes and references appear in the text itself, but even more so in the lengthy notes. Woolf must have felt the need to relegate the bulk of the references to the notes, so as to prevent them from obscuring the fictional framework. Sources used in ‘The Pargiters’ appear in Three Guineas in unadulterated, unfictionalized form. The Life of Mary Kingsley appears four times in the text and twice in the notes (TG, pp. 155, 183, 184, 266, 368 & 410). Still used as evidence of the discrepancy in male and female education, what is foundation for fiction in The Years becomes quotation and exposition in Three Guineas. A Memoir of A.J.CLough is quoted three times in the text and once in the notes (TG, pp. 193, 264, 306 & 368). Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham is quoted directly in the notes and The Life of Joseph Wright is referred to in a note (TG, pp. 379 & 402). Three Guineas contains the overflow from The Years; Woolf could use directly what served as factual foundation in The Years. However, it is as important that the fact/fiction combination be acknowledged with Three Guineas as with The Years and ‘The Pargiters.’ The negotiation between public and private continues. Even with Three Guineas Woolf does not settle for pure fact, even though at the close of the text Woolf directs the reader to fix his/her ‘eyes upon the photograph again: the fact’ (TG, p.366), leaving the poet’s dream aside. Although it is the ‘crude statement of fact’ (TG, p.165) which drives the argument in Three Guineas, Woolf did not abandon fiction. With Three Guineas Woolf felt she had spoken clearly, this was the culmination of her research, representing the growth of her feminism. In 1938 she
wrote about *Three Guineas*, ‘I now feel entirely free. Why? Have committed myself. am afraid of nothing’ (D V, p.136) and then in 1940 she writes of her ‘growing detachment from the hierarchy, the patriarchy’ (D V, p.347). The negotiation between public and private continued, however, both in the content of *Three Guineas* and in the combination of fact and fiction.

It is in the 1930s that Woolf’s clear distinction between fact and fiction comes to the fore because it is then that she most consciously attempts to combine not only research and fiction but also public and private genres. She had mixed fact and fiction in *Orlando* and *A Room of One’s Own*, but her writing in the 1930s involved the most prolonged dialectic between the two. Unable to unite public and private genres, Woolf nevertheless found mileage in the combination of public and private in terms of fact and fiction. The process from the conception of ‘The Pargiters’ to the publication of *Three Guineas* and the way in which Woolf’s research found its way in and out of her writing during this period, provides abundant evidence of both her distinction between fact and fiction and the way in which she could and wanted to combine them in various ways.

Contrary to the critics who see the process as a constant battle between fact and fiction, external and internal, which ultimately failed, the process shows that whereas previously Woolf had separated fact and fiction more or less into separate genres, and continued to do so at the outset of ‘The Pargiters’, she instead combined fact and fiction in both *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. She is explicit about this combination in conjunction with *The Years*: ‘The discovery of this book, it dawns upon me, is the combination of the external & the internal. I am using both, freely’ (D IV, p.274). This is not to make light of difficulties she had in working out the right balance of
argument and fiction in *The Years* or her occasional sense that it was an impossible combination, but ultimately she found the conjunction necessary for what she wanted to convey; she needed the mixture in order to use her research but stay away from pure history or propaganda. Woolf wanted truth in fiction, and it was the separation of public and private concerns, in Rorty's terms the political and the individual, that allowed her to achieve this. It was the distinction that allowed her to be both writer and feminist in the same work; to write a political novel.

The analysis of public and private must go one step further, however, as labelling Woolf's research as solely public is simplistic, something Woolf herself realised when writing *Three Guineas*. The majority of texts which Woolf used to fuel 'The Pargiters' are biographies and autobiographies, largely but not exclusively written by women. Although these works deal with real public events and are public because published, they are also in part private. Elizabeth Wright's biography contains love letters between herself and her husband, the Beale biographies contain quotations from private conversations between Beale and various students. There is an aspect of biography and autobiography which deals not with the subject’s public achievements, but with his/her private life. The private is made public. Woolf is returning, then, to a question she raised as early as 1906 with 'The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn', namely the importance in women's history of private and individual experience, and of women’s recounting of that experience. Woolf values 'the partial light which novelists and historians have begun to cast upon that dark and crowded place behind the scenes' (SF, p.17). In *Three Guineas* Woolf writes, 'Now happily we need no longer depend upon biography, which inevitably, since it is concerned with private life, bristles with innumerable conflicts of private opinion. We have now to help us that record of the public life which is history' (TG, p.188). Although Woolf does use biography in *Three
Guineas, she widens out to almanacs, registers, Honours Lists and financial and ecclesiastical reports. With The Years, however, Woolf’s facts, although real events made public, also represent the individual lives of women. She turns to individual accounts rather than traditional historical texts, just as in the First Essay of ‘The Pargiters’ she rejects history saying ‘that method of telling the truth seems to me so elementary, and so clumsy’ (P, p.9). Like Rosamond Merridew, Woolf uses accounts of private life as well as public records. Woolf also continues the idea of fact and fiction from the ‘Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn’, as Merridew was criticized for her fictional recreations of daily life in the Middle Ages. Those recreations are based on her research, just as with Woolf, who in The Years, bases her fictional narrative on hours of research, preferring ‘where truth is important, to write fiction’ (P, p.9). As Ellen Carol Jones says of A Room of One’s Own, Woolf ‘redefines history in terms of fiction.’

Although there is much continuity between ‘The Pargiters’, The Years and Three Guineas, again contingencies must be taken into account, since Woolf’s conception of fact and the public realm and how she could incorporate that fact changes with each text. It is the difficult position of women’s history, its own negotiations between public and private in that much source material is found in private accounts, although published in this case, that complicates the fact/fiction public/private division in The Years. Rather than dismiss women’s accounts as subjective or non-historical, Woolf never ceases to view them as fact, as political evidence. Like Merridew she includes and values them and they play an important role in Woolf’s lengthy exploration of the conjunction of public and private, politics and

fiction, in the 1930s.
5. Public and Private in The Years

The existence of 'The Pargiters' and its importance in terms of Woolf's feminism has caused trouble for critics of The Years. The question of how to view The Years in relation to 'The Pargiters' and how to deal with its factual foundation causes many critics, notably Janis M. Paul and Madeline Moore, to avoid substantial analysis of the novel in studies which theoretically cover the oeuvre. Paul, in a study of the Victorian influence in Woolf's novels, only tackles The Years briefly in her conclusion, which is strange seeing as The Years is concerned with the situation of women in Victorian England. Likewise, Moore's study, which is about the division between the political and the spiritual (one configuration of the public/private division), omits The Years, when this is precisely the novel in which that division plays itself out. It is the combination of the political with the fictional which deters critics, but yet is at the heart of the work. The Years displays the complexity of Woolf's public/private division as it appears in her fiction. To use Rorty's terminology, the novel is concerned both with social reform, the happiness of society in general, and self creation, the contentment of the individual characters. The novel outlines certain types of oppression of women happening in nineteenth-century England, a historically contingent situation, as well as the situations of individual women, obviously influenced by the codes of Victorian society, but also with their own unique contingencies.

Both of these layers need to be acknowledged, but invariably critics of The Years either over politicize the novel, making everything symptomatic of social oppression, or they ignore the strong factual, political and feminist aspect of the novel.

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Jane Marcus, although justifiably eager to politicize Woolf, heralds *The Years* as an 'opera for the oppressed' and reads it purely as a tribute to those who are victimized: to women, socialists, immigrants, anti-fascists, the working class, Jews and homosexuals. For Marcus *The Years* is a 'red flag', a memorial to 'reformers and radicals.' This, however, is the sum total of the book for Marcus; all aspects of the novel can be politicized and radicalized, all aspects are a condemnation of the patriarchal family. Laura Moss Gottlieb reads the novel as one of Woolf's 'most political novels', a novel which critiques patriarchal society as well as pointing towards a radical feminist 'utopian vision' based on 'intimacy and a sense of community.' Gottlieb is right when she argues that Woolf locates the basis of women's oppression in the private: the private is therefore the political. However she ignores the fact that there are aspects of the characters' private lives which are not the result of patriarchal oppression. For Gottlieb the characters are 'so solitary, so repressed, and so frustrated'; for Woolf, by contrast, neither the critique of the society nor the vision of change is simple or all-encompassing. Behind the fragments lies a unified, coherent whole, in Gottlieb's eyes, an answer, when Woolf is explicit that only questions and possibilities remain at the end of the novel: "'There is going to be no peroration'" Nicholas exclaims at the final party, just as in *A Room of One's Own* Woolf's narrator resists a peroration by saying, ironically, that such phrases will be 'left to the other sex, who will put them, and indeed have put them, with far greater

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2 Marcus, 1987, p.57.

3 Marcus, p.54.


5 Gottlieb, p.219.
eloquence than I can compass’ (Y, p.410 and ROOO, p.145). In The Years there is no summing up, the song of the caretaker’s children, rather than a being a decipherable code, as some critics suggest, contributes to the ambiguity and openness of the ending. Without signification, the song can be heard only for the sound of the words themselves and for any individual reaction it evokes. Critics, however, want to see the song as some kind of ‘pure revelation’: ‘something beyond, outside history, some unknown and more authentically divine spirit borne in through a speaking in tongues.’

They want it to serve as an answer, a final vision, rather than an extension of the variety of language present in the novel, here language which can only be understood in terms of its sound. The guests do not know whether to laugh or cry and Eleanor, unable to find a one-word description, turns to Maggie for help: ‘“Beautiful?”’ (Y, p.409). The reader is left with the question ‘“And now?”’ (Y, p.413). Woolf was not writing a feminist tract and was afraid that the novel was ‘dangerously near propaganda’ (D IV, p.300).

On the other hand, some critics underpoliticize The Years, either ignoring Woolf’s feminist critique completely or seeing the political element as disappearing with the essays. Janis Paul, in her brief concluding analysis of the novel, decides that the novel questions, but ultimately affirms, the necessity of social conventions. Woolf’s Victorian heritage in The Years, is, according to Paul, distilled down to her use of externals and the presence of social convention. Paul does not treat the issue of the pressure of Victorian convention on women. The novel is depoliticized when the central concern of patriarchal oppression is avoided altogether. Sharon L. Proudfoot achieves an even more deliberate depoliticization based on her opinion that Woolf’s feminism went against her ‘natural’ feelings. Proudfoot writes: ‘In Three Guineas

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6 Lipking, pp.145 & 144.
Virginia Woolf assumes a voice which is unnatural to her, the masculine voice of the fighter she abhors.’  

Essentialist in its assumption of confidence and anger as masculine, Proudfit’s view implies that Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* against her will, an absurd notion given her diary comments regarding the liberation it afforded her.

Moving on to *The Years*, Proudfit feels that it conflicts with *Three Guineas* (another misjudgment given the evidence provided in my previous chapter) because Woolf really admires the femininity and ‘graciousness’ of Victorian women.  

In *The Years*, Proudfit suggests, the women with ‘causes’ are unhappy and instead freedom of thought is all that is needed. Although Proudfit is right to complicate Woolf’s feminism - Woolf presents a variety of women with a variety of priorities rather than equating freedom with the suffrage cause - she then simplifies the argument by reducing each character’s destiny to the pursuit of a single idea. In Proudfit’s eyes, Peggy is dissatisfied simply because she is a doctor, for Kitty ‘marriage was the only profession that would enable her to be her free and true self’ and she ‘would not have been able to cope with complete liberation had she been given it’ and ‘Eleanor’s life is active, and she seems to desire little outside of it.’ These characterizations ignore other reasons for Peggy’s dissatisfaction, the effect of Kitty’s time at Oxford and her disinheritance and Eleanor’s restricted and oppressive upbringing. Proudfit dismisses the important changes which the women go through, focusing only on the outcome. Lastly, Proudfit’s implication that a free mind should compensate for other restrictions is surely misguided. ‘Clarissa Dalloway has her little room with her narrow virginal bed and her private tragedy. But within that room she can become one with Septimus

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7 Proudfit, p.60.

8 Proudfit, p.63.

9 Proudfit, pp. 72, 71 & 69.
Warren Smith [...] Mrs Ramsay in To The Lighthouse can escape from the demands of her husband, her children, and her house-guests into a "wedge-shaped core of darkness" or into the words of a sonnet. Proudfit is definitely selling women short and misrepresenting Woolf’s feminism. With her oftentimes materialist feminism, Woolf would be the first to argue that imaginative freedom, although important, is by no means enough.

To understand Woolf’s negotiation between fact and fiction, as outlined in Chapter Four, both levels of the novel must be acknowledged. The text combines political indictment with the unique contingencies of the fictional world of the Pargiters. On one level the novel deals with issues which can be generalized, and theorized, issues which posit inadequacy and call for social change. Although Woolf does not outline solutions, she is presenting fictionally the restrictive situation of women. On another level the novel deals with the experiences of the characters, experiences which are not necessarily theorizable, and which require a language unique to that individual. These two levels work on another public/private dichotomy, since the political level deals with general, public issues, and the individual level deals with the private realization of identity, which will always be experienced and expressed in different fragmented ways, and for which there is no natural state or final goal. Obviously these two levels intersect, since the individuals constitute the society which in turn influences their happiness, but not all the actions of the Pargiters are determined by or symptomatic of patriarchal oppression. In interpreting the novel, then, there needs to be a balance between what can be politicized and what is the result not of Victorian oppression but of an individual’s unique situation.

Although I have divided these two levels into public and private (the political

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10 Proudfit, pp. 72-73.
and the individual) each in turn has its own public/private division. On the political level, the indictment centers around the way in which public and private spheres were gendered in the nineteenth century. Woolf is advocating more public freedom for women in that women are literally and metaphorically trapped within the private sphere, while men dominate the public world of the city, the university and the courts in *The Years*. Although Victorian society’s linking of women with the private, domestic sphere obviously has an impact on the individual women in *The Years*, the individual or private aspect of the novel contains characters who have to work out their own, unique division of public and private. The novel is full of characters questioning and attempting to articulate their identity in conjunction with social networks and the many failures are not necessarily signs of repression or symptoms of the need for social change. These attempts are not necessarily theorizable: identity is contingent, the ways in which characters think about themselves and their fulfilment cannot always be translated into a group larger than the individual.

The distinction between the political and individual aspects of the novel coincides with Rorty’s division between public and private: the division between social reform and self-creation. As Rorty outlines, these two categories operate in different ways in that there is no inherent human trait which would justify a particular political system. Also in *The Years*, on the political level there is a definite implication that the division, in general terms, is inadequate. Public areas are not public for women, therefore the private sphere becomes not an alternative, but a necessity. However, on the level of self-creation there will always be private and public selves, reform is not necessarily needed. The individual demonstrates the contingency or individuality of the terms public and private, since characters experience private moments in public spaces such as crowds or parties; private moments can be both triggered and halted by stimuli
from the public sphere. These are not signs of social oppression, but the idiosyncrasy of the characters' own experiences of public and private.

The often rather extreme criticism on *The Years* seems to parallel microcosmically the general tendency of critics either to depoliticize Woolf, or, following her feminist revival in the 1980s, to overpoliticize her work. Indeed, *The Years* was 'discovered' by feminist critics in the 1980s who thought that it, along with *Three Guineas*, was evidence of the hitherto repressed political side of Woolf. One critic, Victoria Middleton, even concludes that through the use of excessive repetition, clichés, lack of structure, ambiguities and disruptive time sequences, Woolf creates a flawed novel in order to prove that art and politics cannot work together. This seems rather an arduous way for Woolf to make that point, even if it is the case. Again, Middleton focuses on politics in terms of Woolf's political concerns of the late 1930s rather than looking specifically at the political content of the novel: the feminist critique of Victorian society. Furthermore, the search for unity (and consistency within Woolf's oeuvre) means that stylistic techniques of all kinds become symptoms of social disintegration. Instead, it is the *combination* of the political and the individual, the public and the private which is so important in *The Years*. The fact/fiction, novel-essay origin of *The Years* which is still present in the final, published version, must be acknowledged by critics in order to do the work justice. Although either of these aspects could be considered in an infinite number of ways, I am going to examine the way in which the public/private division works within both the political (public) and individual (private) levels.

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Given that *The Years* is a city novel, the literal division of public and private spaces is extremely important. London, as a public environment, is traversed by all the characters and the novel is full of references to specific locations in London, particularly in the opening sections of each chapter. As in *Mrs Dalloway*, the public world of London is presented through its interaction with the consciousnesses of the various characters, in this case most of them women, who inhabit both text and city. The numerous descriptions of street scenes and parks, as well as the references to the deaths of Parnell and Edward VII, serve to place the novel in a fixed spatial and temporal environment.

The openings of each chapter, added only in the final months before publication, give a poetic element and a unifying structure to the novel, similar to the lyrical chapter openings in *The Waves*. In *The Years* these sections always describe the weather, but also offer a sweeping description of England before narrowing in on London and a specific character. In 1891, ‘[t]he autumn wind blew over England’ and in 1913 ‘it was January [...] The sky spread like a grey goose’s wing from which feathers were falling all over England’ (*Y*, pp. 86 & 204). The panoramic views are all-encompassing, presenting a collective vision of unification: ‘[t]housands of shop assistants made that remark’, ‘[a]ll the windows were open’, ‘[i]n London all was gallant and strident’ (*Y*, pp. 3, 124 & 213). The pervasiveness of the descriptions is broken as the narrative moves in to focus on the specific situation of an individual character. This movement parallels the movement which the critic or reader needs to make from the political or general to the specific and individual.

These descriptive openings are public both in their anonymity and generality.
and in that they describe public places: streets, shopping districts, parks and churches. The question is what position do women hold in these public scenes? In most of the chapter openings, women are not absent from the public areas, but are separated within those areas. In the opening of the novel ‘ladies in flounced dresses’ are equated with the ‘[i]nterminable processions of shoppers in the West End’ as distinct from the ‘business men in the East’ (Y, p.3). They both ‘paraded the pavements’ but the division of east and west maps onto the separation of their respective tasks. Similarly, in Hyde Park, the men ‘lay flat on the grass reading newspapers with their shirts open’ while nursemaws watched them ‘vacantly’ (Y, p.153). Women in the park are either nursemaws or mothers, defined by their social roles, while the men are defined by their common humanity: their bodies and their pleasures. The severe wind which opens the 1908 section drives the old men ‘further and further into the leather smelling recesses of clubs’ while elderly women ‘sit eyeless, leather cheeked, joyless among the tassels and antimacassars of their bedrooms and kitchens’ (Y, p.140). Men retreat into public places while the women have only the private spaces of their own homes. At the beginning of the novel, Colonel Pargiter moves from the male environment of the gentleman’s club to private spaces of waiting women, first his mistress Mira, and then his daughters. Women are not absent from the public spaces of London, but there is a division, indicating the codes which deny women free access to the city as a whole.

Although men and women are not referred to in every opening passage, it is important that only in the ‘Present Day’ opening section does Woolf refer to ‘[f]aces of people’ (Y, p.290). In the public world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, men and women occupy divided spaces and roles.

As outlined in Chapter Four, in ‘The Pargiters’ the emphasis on the nineteenth-century, middle-class woman’s restriction was on her lack of education, but in The
Years, the emphasis moves to her physical restrictions, her entrapment inside the home or domestic space. Particularly in the 1880 section, women need to be escorted or given permission to venture outside the home. Rose’s disobedience in sneaking out to Lamley’s when her brother refuses to accompany her is punished through her confrontation with a flasher. The restriction, intensified in Rose’s case by her young age, stems from a mixture of danger and convention. Obviously the division between day and night figures largely in the restriction, since women do walk the streets of London in the daytime, but again only in areas such as shopping districts, conventionally read as women’s spaces. As soon as the gas lights come on in ‘their glass cages’, the women too must lock themselves behind doors (Y, p.4). Much is made of Crosby drawing the curtains: ‘a profound silence seemed to fall upon the drawing room. The world outside seemed thickly and entirely cut off’ (Y, p.19). The image of women watching from within a private space occurs several times in the novel. Milly and Delia watch through a slit in their drawing room curtains as a young man arrives at a house two doors down. Hostility and sexual curiosity has been triggered earlier in the day when Colonel Pargiter announces that he can only take one daughter to a party to which he has been invited, and then here, the women hope the young man is arriving at their door. Eleanor warns ‘”Don’t be caught looking”’, understanding their curiosity but reminding them that women’s sexual interest must never be overt (Y, p.18).

In the 1891 section Eleanor travels to Peter Street as part of her work for a housing charity. In the deprived neighbourhood ‘a woman leaning out of the windows searched this way, that way, up and down the street as if she were raking every cranny for something to feed on’ (Y, p.93). The woman’s literal and metaphorical hunger echoes Milly and Delia’s gaze out of the window, especially since this woman watches
a man get out of a trap. The similarity between the two episodes also emphasizes the difference in class, in that unlike the ‘woman of the lower classes’ who wheels a perambulator on the streets after dark when the Pargiter women have been locked indoors, it was the middle and upper classes who felt the pressure of Victorian codes of behaviour for women most strongly (Y, p.18).

Later, near Trafalgar Square, Eleanor again notes that ‘women leant from the upper windows, raking the street with a rapacious, dissatisfied stare. Rooms were let out to single gentlemen only’ (Y, p.111). The abundant images of trapped women searching with ‘indolent dissatisfied’ stares for something to occupy them speaks for their lack of freedom and autonomy (Y, p.93). Denied a room of their own, they must be content with merely being spectators.

Woolf not only portrays women’s alienation from the public streets of London, but also from the public spaces of the working world. In the previous chapter, Eleanor’s distance from and ignorance of Morris’s work was outlined as it appeared in ‘The Pargiters.’ In The Years, Woolf shows Eleanor’s alienation from the court house, the public building which embodies the legal system. Woolf critiques the ceremony and sterility of the legal system, focusing on the extravagance of ceremonial dress as she had in her reading notebooks and as she would do in Three Guineas. In their robes and wigs, the barristers look frozen like portraits, creating a ‘solemn sallow atmosphere’ (Y, p.105). It is the division between public and private that emphasizes this frigidity for Eleanor. When Morris speaks, she recognizes some of his gestures, but others ‘belonged to his public life, his life in the Courts. And his voice was unfamiliar. But every now and then as he warmed to his speech, there was a tone in his voice that made her smile; it was his private voice’ (Y, p.106). Morris’s public world is his work, emphasizing the connection between men and the public sphere,
women being absent from the professional world. Eleanor moves from one public space to another, from the courts to the Strand, but much prefers the ‘uproar, the confusion, the space of the Strand’ to the solemnity of the courts (Y, p.108). Woolf also addresses this issue in her essay, “‘This is the House of Commons.’” Woolf bemoans the loss of individuality, or ‘wit, invective, passion’, how the politicians are ‘plain, featureless, impersonal.’ 12 The proceedings are ‘anonymous’ just as Eleanor finds the legal proceedings in The Years ‘forbade personalities’ (LS, p.42 and Y, p.105). The ‘abnormal’, ‘the particular’, ‘the individual’ have been obliterated; the private erased by the public (LS, p.44).

Woolf’s critique of male physical domination of the public sphere extends into male vocal domination of public spaces. By and large it is the men who speak publicly, whereas although women’s thoughts dominate the novel, they are thinking privately or speaking intimately to a friend or relative. Male exposure and publicization, taken to the extreme with the flasher, is set against female veiling and indirection. The most striking incident of this occurs in 1914 when Martin and Sara stop at Speaker’s Corner, a place where anyone can have the opportunity to speak publicly. The one woman who is speaking has an ‘extremely small’ audience and is ‘hardly audible’ (Y, p.229). The woman’s voice ‘tapered off into a thin frail pipe’; she is symbolically drowned out by the loud, male voices around her (Y, p.229). This scene recalls a description in Woolf’s diary of a woman speaking out at a meeting saying ‘it is time we gave up washing up’: ‘A thin frail protest, but genuine. A little reed piping, but what chance against all this weight of roast beef & beer - which she must cook?’ (D IV, p.345) Another female voice overpowered, the strength of male

voices symbolizing the weight of power and authority behind the voice.

Eleanor, a woman in the novel who does have a public role through her charity work, has to speak publicly at meetings. At one particular committee meeting she ‘pulled herself together and gave him her opinion. She had an opinion - a very definite opinion. She cleared her throat and began’ (Y, p.93). Despite this certainty, however, Eleanor is not convinced of her authority. She has to remind herself ‘if Duffus thinks he can bully me [...] he’ll find he’s mistaken' (Y, p.92), Duffus being the man who does the housing repairs for her. Also, in the meeting, after thinking ‘[h]ere we all are again’, she thinks ‘[b]ut she meant "them", not herself. She did not exist; she was not anybody at all’ (Y, p.92). She feels alienated because of her own lack of self esteem and the class differences. She has to be prompted into the discussion, asked for her opinion by Major Porter, who is ‘of the same social standing’ (Y, p.93).

Female voices are also stifled in the home in compliance with the Victorian expectation that women are the guardians of the home. Eleanor, for example, switches vocabulary and behaviour when she returns home. In place of her dying mother, she must be the self-sacrificing Victorian matriarch. To this end, when she starts daydreaming about her day with Mrs Levy, she ‘checked herself. She ought to try to say something to amuse her sister’ (Y, p.30). Through indirect interior monologue, the narrator shows how Eleanor censors her own thoughts about herself in favour of worrying about her sisters’s well-being: ‘how roomy, how airy it was after that bedroom where old Mrs Levy - But Milly and Delia were both silent. It was the question of the dinner-party, she remembered’ (Y, p.17). Again, later in the chapter: ‘she stopped herself. She must wait till she was alone - till she was brushing her teeth at night. When she was with the others she must stop herself from thinking of two things at the same time’ (Y, p.31). Rose, entering the room to ask Eleanor’s
permission to go to Lamley’s, is said to have ‘interrupted’ Eleanor, even though no one was speaking (Y, p.16). Rose breaks into the indirect interior monologue which is Eleanor’s thoughts about the room and the sunlight. Words are fluid, even though silent: her mind, like the sun, moves rapidly ‘lighting up now this’, now that, but the women are never left to their own thoughts for long (Y, p.16). Eleanor’s evening in her own drawing room is not entirely a private time; she must be alone before she can give her thoughts freedom. The presence of servants lessens the privacy of the home. Delia breaking off her “It’s hopeless” when Crosby enters and Celia ‘adapting her voice to the presence of servants’ are only two examples of the formality of the home, the private sphere does not always allow privacy (Y, pp. 19 & 197). In addition, as Mary M. Childers points out, the division breaks down further if one comes at it, as Woolf did not, she argues, from the point of the servants, for whom another’s private house is a public space of work, as well as supposedly their own private space. Furthermore, while the Pargiter women are oppressed by the men in the family, their servants are oppressed by men and women alike, in actual fact more likely by the women who deal with the domestic affairs.  

In contrast, The Years is full of men telling stories and speaking publicly at parties and gatherings. Male exposure is contrasted with the ‘something hidden’ of the women (Y, p.159). The stories told by some of the male characters are not only public, but clearly articulated, perfected public performances. They are an assertion of power and authority, as shown when Eleanor visits Morris and Celia and Sir William Whatney asserts his presence through his storytelling. ‘His voice boomed out. He wanted an audience. He was telling a story’ (Y, p.191), but Eleanor wants her brother to assert himself, in competition, through storytelling: ‘[s]he wished that Morris would

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13 Childers, pp.72-73.
tell stories too. She wished that he would assert himself instead of leaning back and passing his hand - the hand with the cut on it - over his forehead’ (Y, p.192). Not only is Morris being silent, but he’s exhibiting his wound, or deformity. Sir Whatney’s stories are contained, linear and logical, ‘as if there were a ring around them’ (Y, p.191). The stories sail ‘serenely to his own advantage’ (Y, p.192).

At the final party, Peggy is told a story by Uncle Patrick: ‘[g]ently, methodically, like a man setting in motion some still serviceable but rather weary nag, he was off remembering old days, old dogs, old memories that slowly shaped themselves’ (Y, p.334). Here, the stories are practised through repetition. Patrick is comfortable with speaking in public. Whether it be Major Elkin in the opening scene who gathers his gentlemen friends round him with a story, or Colonel Pargiter who entertains his children with ‘crisp’ stories of India tightly centered around a ‘huge silver trophy’, it is the men in the novel who speak captivatingly and confidently to an audience (Y, p.35).

On a political or public level, then, the novel critiques the gender division that occurs along public and private lines, women being alienated from both public spaces and public utterance, due to the Victorian association of women with the private, domestic sphere. Having said that, Woolf does indicate change in that by the end of the text Eleanor has travelled to India, Peggy is a doctor, Sara lives alone and Rose has been jailed for her work for the Suffrage cause. As Susan Squier points out, Woolf’s conception of the politics of the city is a changing rather than a static one. Squier uses the pillar box to explore women’s banishment from the public world back into the private one (Rose’s experience with the flasher occurs by a pillar box and Morris posting a letter for Eleanor after dark reminds her of the education he had and which she was denied) and the bridge, representative of the connection possible
between the two spheres. The Years is a novel which explores transition; Woolf shows the beginnings of change in the patriarchal oppression she portrays.

(2) Private/Individual

Not all aspects of the novel are attributable to Woolf’s political critique, however, and not everything in the novel is symptomatic of the need for change. Whereas the political element of the novel advocates women’s increased access to the public sphere, another part of the novel explores the difficulty in making the private self public, not as a result of political oppression, but because the self is experienced individually, contingently, in fragmented ways. Also, for the individual, there will always be a private self, not everything will be made public.

Although the Pargiter women do have to silence some of their desires due to certain Victorian taboos, the dynamics of human interaction are responsible for some of their behaviour or ways of speaking. Some critics read The Years as a novel solely about repressions, notably the failure of communication. Gottlieb is one such critic, arguing for the ‘overwhelming sense of impotence and constraint in the novel. Repression, rather than expression, is the novel’s emphasis.’ Leaska moves from a list of the ambiguities and fragmentation caused by the omission of the essays and the editing of The Years, a seemingly accidental or circumstantial failure of communication on Woolf’s part, to suggesting that ‘the novel eloquently communicates the failure of communication’, a seemingly deliberate project on her part (P, p.xviii).

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15 Gottlieb, p.218.
He conflates structure with content, also, like Gottlieb, finding repression everywhere, but, as with Gottlieb, not locating that repression in the specifics I discussed in Chapter Four, but attributing it to vague social degeneration. Margaret Comstock, on the other hand, sees the novel as moving from the linguistic repressions of the Victorian era towards a freer mode of speech; ‘a hopeful movement that gathers strength as the novel advances.’ The oppressive language of fascism is opposed to the language of ‘ordinary’ people, a language ‘free from deference or condescension. It resists the oppressive currents that degrade talk.’ On the contrary, Woolf is showing that there is no ‘free’ or natural language and that the language of the ordinary people, Colonel Pargiter, for example, can be just as oppressive as a political tyrant’s. Woolf presents the variety of language and its reliance on its changing contexts for meaning. Secondly, the movement through the years is not a progressively positive one, there is not a goal in sight as shown by the lack of summation, and the questions which remain.

The character of Sara, with her poetic, slightly elusive language, is often seen as symptomatic both of the gaps caused by the revision process and the sense of disintegration in the content of the novel, two very different aspects of the novel which seem to be elided by critics such as Leaska and Grace Radin. Radin reads Sara as ‘more a presence in the novel than a character.’ In Radin’s search for unity, she finds Sara unmanageable; unrealistic as a character and a failure as a ‘vehicle for the author’s poetic vision’. In contrast to the linear, polished stories told by Uncle

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16 Comstock, p.260.
17 Comstock, p.256.
18 Radin, p.63.
19 Radin, p.63.
Patrick and William Whatney, Sara’s speech and her stories are impressionistic and non-linear. Sara tells Maggie about a meeting she attended, but Maggie only has ‘a general impression of a room full of people; sticks rattling on the railings; clothes hanging out to dry, and someone coming in with beetles’ wings in her hair’ (Y, p.179).

When Sara tells North about her search for work, he cries ‘“Stop!”’ because her abstract narrative has eluded him (Y, p.324). He wants facts, pertinent details, but she refuses to name places. A letter becomes ‘”a talisman, a glowing gem, a lucent emerald“’ and as Sara tells of ‘”worn-out frying-pans“, ‘”the bowler-hatted“’ and ‘”the unstained hand“’ North asks her ‘”How much of that was true?“’ (Y, pp.323 & 325)

Sara’s stories, like her character cannot be fixed or nearly summarized.

To a certain extent, Sara’s manner of speaking is a gendered issue; her stories are not contained and polished because she has not had the audiences or the practice of the male storytellers. Her poetic, non-linear language contrasts most blatantly along gender lines with Edward, whose Greek translations must be ‘clean and entire’, ‘precise; exact’ (Y, p.48). Unlike Sara, he must let ‘nothing dwindle off into vagueness’ (Y, p.48). Like the male storytellers, his work must be ‘cut out in a sharp circle of bright light from the surrounding dimness’ (Y, pp. 47-48). As Martin remarks about a story told by a guest at Kitty’s party, ‘it held its meaning without spilling a single drop’ (Y, p.241). These images contrast with Sara’s linguistic variety and expansion. Part of this contrast has to do with Woolf’s ideas on male and female socialization; Edward is trained to be exact, ambitious and disciplined whereas Sara’s education relies on her own imagination. However, there is more at issue here, since this reading implies that Sara’s character and manner of speaking result from patriarchal oppression, her narrative style becomes a result of her lack of freedom and education. This in turn implies that there is a manner of speaking which is free and
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natural. The critics who see the speech patterns in the novel as symptoms of social
disintegration (i.e. political critique) are implicitly positing a possible state of
unimpeded communication. Rather, Sara’s speech is her own unique method of
speaking and of storytelling. It is not value-laden one way or the other, but is evidence
of the variety of expression, the possibilities of language.
Martin thinks of his childhood: Tt was an abominable system [...] family life;
Abercorn Terrace [....] there all those different people had lived, boxed up together,
telling lies’ (Y, p.212). On one level, Victorian codes restrict the Pargiter women’s
freedom of speech: Rose cannot speak about her experience with the flasher and Delia
and Milly must repress their interest in Robin Burke. On another level, however,
M artin’s thoughts indicate that ‘family life’ has its own contingent codes, repressions,
dynamics. Family interaction, and indeed human interaction in general, will never exist
without such codes. W oolf’s critique of Victorian society only goes so far then; not
everything in the novel is symptomatic of her critique.
Overpoliticization of the novel also causes critics to ignore the exceptions
W oolf provides which are reminders of the contingencies which arise when public
issues are applied to individuals. Eleanor, for example, thrives in the public spaces of
London. As with W oolf herself, the public world of buses, shops and people gives her
energy and purpose: ‘This was her world; here she was in her element’ (Y, p.91). In
the 1917 section, Eleanor, leaving Maggie and Renny’s house at night, walks to the
bus stop saying ‘"I like walking in London"’ (Y, p.284). On the bus, an old man
shows her ‘a slice of cold meat or sausage’, echoing Rose’s flasher experience, and
even though Eleanor is on a bus and is not a child, her confidence shows that she, like
Woolf, asserted her individual right to public freedom. In one of the sections which
W oolf excised from the novel in 1936, Eleanor does express fear about walking home


through Hyde Park alone at night: ‘She was afraid - even now, even I, she thought...afraid’ (Y, p.465). Eleanor is affected by the dangers for women, but even here she acknowledges herself as somewhat of an exception in her confidence in walking alone in public London. On a private level, the public issues are experienced idiosyncratically.

Another exception is the character of Peggy, in that by the end of the novel she is a doctor, thereby showing the entry of women into the professions, but she is still dissatisfied and disillusioned. Although things have changed from 1880 to 1937, Woolf shows that there is no one solution, sexual equality does not mean universal happiness. As Rorty outlines, private self-fulfilment works on a different level from social reform. Private repressions and dissatisfaction such as Peggy’s will always exist. ‘Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them.’ Woolf also shows that not everything can be politicized, by complicating the public/private division on an individual level. By making the division much more fluid and by exposing individuals’ contingent and varied reactions to it, she gives a more complex account of the question of increased public access for women.

The 1914 scene where Martin and Sara have lunch together takes place entirely in public spaces; the steps of St Paul’s, a City chop-house, a bus and Hyde Park, yet the dynamic shifts between public and private since some places are too public for private conversation while others are not. While in the restaurant they both say, “‘Hush! [...] Somebody’s listening’” (Y, p.218), restricting the intimacy of their conversation because of the public nature of the place. On the bus, however, Martin urges “‘now, Sally, you can say whatever you like’” (Y, p.225). Waking in Fleet

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Street, Martin starts to hum, forgetting 'that he was with someone' (Y, p.222): a public place momentarily becomes private. In Hyde Park, Martin sees a woman talking aloud to herself after he has just done so himself, mixing private behaviour with a public setting (Y, p.226). Similarly, Maggie looks unfamiliar when they meet her in the park because 'she had the unconsciousness of a person who is unaware that she is being looked at' (Y, p.231). The gap between private and public behaviour results in a change in her appearance.

In the party scenes guests find moments of privacy suddenly in the crowded setting. In ‘1917’, Eleanor and Nicholas enjoy moments of privacy in their conversation at Maggie and Renny’s dinner party. Nicholas turns ‘to her privately’ (Y, p.279), although there are others in the room, and later ‘[t]hey seemed to be talking, privately, together’ (Y, p.281). At the final party Maggie and North, although surrounded by others, sit ‘silent, for a moment, alone together, in private’ (Y, p.360). Woolf shows how the division between public and private on an individual level is subjective and fluid, constantly redefined.

Although Woolf can argue in The Years that women need increased access to the public sphere, on an individual level she also shows that the articulation of identity, the bringing of self from private to public, is a process which cannot be theorized or generalized. Just as the individual’s experience of the public/private spheres is unique, so is the individual’s experience of identity and the publicization of that identity. Many times in the novel, characters attempt to summarize either their own or another character’s identity. The difficulty they have extends Woolf’s lifelong exploration of the expression of identity, seen most notably in Jacob’s Room, Orlando and ‘A Sketch of the Past’.

Reading her Uncle Digby’s obituaries, Eleanor decides ‘“he wasn’t like that
[....] Not in the least” (Y, p.146). Her memory of her uncle is contingent, based on his trips with her to the National Gallery; ‘how could she describe him?’ she wonders (Y, p.146). Woolf emphasises the relativism of identity: ‘[i]t was odd how different the same person seemed to two different people’ (Y, p.147).

Unlike the man on the bus who can sum Eleanor up as ‘a well-known type; with a bag; philanthropic; well nourished; a spinster; a virgin; like all the women of her class, cold; her passions had never been touched; yet not unattractive’ (Y, p.98), Peggy finds that Eleanor eludes her. She tries to make a portrait, but decides, ‘I’m no use at describing people [....] They’re too difficult...she’s not like that - not like that at all’ (Y, p.317).

In the same way, North tries to contain both Sara’s story and her identity: ‘Yes, he thought, there’s the voice; there’s the attitude; and the reflection in other people’s faces; but then there’s something true - in the silence perhaps’ (Y, p.324). He wants her to ‘solidify into one whole’ (Y, p.325). As Peggy thinks at the final party: ‘I’m good [...] at fact-collecting. But what makes up a person -, (she hallowed her hand), the circumference, - no, I’m not good at that’ (Y, p.335). The idea of a boundary, or container (represented by her hand) echoes the precision and coherence of the male stories in the novel. Edward’s translations are restricted by a literal and metaphorical circle of light, but identity eludes such containment.

Rose, when dining with Sara and Maggie, wants to talk about her past. The memory of ‘something hidden’ (Y, p.159) makes her want to speak, to confess, to break out of the role of ‘old fool’ (Y, p.160) in which they see her. Rose has ‘lived in many places, felt many passions, and done many things’, but the multiplicity of stories makes her unable to relate any (Y, p.158). Also, aloud the memories are an inventory of people and objects, a repetition of names, but privately they are intense and alive.
In the move from private to public Rose’s stories would lose their vitality. Identity and memories are best grasped for Rose in a private language of isolated, fragmented moments and sensations.

Images of containment and cohesion abound in the novel. Rose looks at a blue knot on a vase as she thinks, ‘What’s the use [...] of trying to tell people about one’s past? What is one’s past?’ (Y, p.160). Eleanor, at the final party, is surprised to hear people talking about her life. Her past comes back to her in isolated memories; Kitty’s engagement, snow falling, a yellow omnibus. Feeling the hard, circular coins in her hand, she thinks, ‘Perhaps there’s "I" at the middle of it [...] a knot; a centre’ (Y, p.348). She tries to put her thoughts into words but decides, ‘I can’t find words; I can’t tell anybody’ (Y, p.348): the terms in which she conceives of herself do not seem adequate for public articulation. As Suzanne Raitt writes: ‘The coincidence of self (body? mind? soul?) and description can only ever be momentary.’

Although the public articulation of identity proves difficult, the majority of female characters experience an intensely private, almost revelatory moment concerning their own identity. On a public level, then, Woolf is suggesting necessary political reform, but on a private level, Rorty’s idea of self-creation is played out in the women’s individual, contingent moments of transformation. Kitty, after leaving her party in London, arrives in the early morning at her house in the north of England. Alone, she walks in the woods, throwing herself on the ground, listening to ‘the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased’ (Y, p.265). This passage, with the descriptions of Kitty striding out, ‘in the prime of life’, ‘vigorous’, ‘strong and flexible’ (Y, p.265), echo

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Woolf’s descriptions of Vita Sackville-West as ‘all fire and legs and beautiful plunging ways like a young horse’ and ‘stalking on legs like beech trees, pink glowing, grape clustered, pearl hung.’ 22 Kitty, like Vita with Knole, is disinherited because she is a woman, which raises the element of critique, but on another level the moment is Kitty’s own private moment of self-autonomy. Similarly, Delia’s moments of contentment come when she is daydreaming about Parnell. The moments can be politicized in terms of Irish Home Rule and the eroticization of liberty for Delia. The ‘delicious starts of flattering and exciting emotion’ she experiences when daydreaming about her political involvement with Parnell are obviously sexual, but must only be entertained in daydream, in secret (Y, p.22). The women ‘eroticise liberty because for them liberty is sexuality. The oppression of the former results in the denial of the latter.’ 23 However, Delia’s creation of her own identity is also private, part of her own idiosyncratic rituals.

(3) Public/Private Conjunctions

i) The question of the relationship between public and private happiness is dealt with directly in the text. Nicholas introduces the theory, which is repeated several times, that ‘“if we do not know ourselves, ordinary people; and if we do not know ourselves, how then can we make religions, laws, that […] fit”’ (Y, p.268). The idea that the personal or private must be understood before appropriate social systems can be implemented, is exactly what Rorty is arguing against. For Rorty, public and private questions must be kept distinct, because ‘[s]uch metaphysical or theological attempts to


unite a striving for perfection with a sense of community require us to acknowledge a common human nature.' Nicholas’s theory assumes that there are certain qualities that we all possess. For Rorty, Nicholas is looking in the wrong place for his ideas on how to make the world a better place, because although public and private spheres are not opposed, they are not unifiable under a single vision.

The theory is mentioned several more times in conjunction with Nicholas and then at the final party North brings up the idea. In thinking about the difference between the preceding generation and his own, North decides against ‘marching in step after leaders, in herds, groups, societies’ (Y, p.389). He is against ‘posing in the public eye’ and wants to ‘begin inwardly’ (Y, p.389). He wants to preserve individuality as well as unite the world in general. He wants to be ‘the stream and the bubble - myself and the world together’ (Y, p.390); to have both a public and a private impact. ‘How can I’, he thinks, ‘unless I know what’s solid, what’s true; in my life, in other people’s lives?’ (Y, p.390) Here he follows Nicholas by not feeling he can unify society in general unless he has got to the core of his own identity. Even in the course of his speculations, however, North doubts his theory as he recognizes his own marginalization; how can he unify a community when he does not ‘fit in anywhere’ (Y, p.390). Indeed, both Nicholas and North, who raise this theory, are outsiders in the novel: Nicholas because of his homosexuality, North because of his time as a rancher in Africa. Woolf’s demonstration of the inability to ‘know ourselves’ and the contingency and variety of identity acts as an implicit negation of Nicholas’ theory. ‘Provided only with broken sentences, single words, with which to break through the briar-bush of human bodies’ (Y, p.391), neither Nicholas nor North can ever know what is solid or true in identity. Also, Woolf rejects the idea that there would be

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anything solid to know about identity even if language were not an obstacle: ‘Directly something got together, it broke’ (Y, p.373). In The Years she demonstrates the way in which identity is conceived contingently, and fragmentedly. Unlike the political aspect of the novel, which does gesture towards possible changes, there is no goal when the self is taken from private to public, just as self-creation cannot be generalized.

ii) Rose’s encounter with the flasher is one example of an episode which needs to be read on a political and an individual level. The political issue is the restrictions imposed on women and children in terms of public freedom on the streets, in view of the possibility of sexual assault. Rose’s safety and the repression of her sexual curiosity as it is roused by the flasher can be politicized (made into a public issue) but the way in which Rose deals with her adventure is unique to her and part of her individual characterization in the novel.

In the Third Essay of ‘The Pargiters’, Woolf outlines the political nature of the incident. ‘The actual fact - that children of Rose’s age are frequently assaulted, and sometimes far more brutally than she was - is familiar to anyone who reads the Police Court news’ (P, p.50). Woolf acknowledges the split between public fact and private psychology: ‘though the fact of Rose’s adventure is easily verified, to give a faithful account of its effect upon her mind is by no means easy’ (P, p.50). Woolf does,

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25 In ‘A Sketch of the Past’ Woolf inverts the question of how we are to change society unless we know ourselves, to how is she to write her memoirs (i.e. know herself) unless she can describe society: ‘the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think’ (MB, p.89). Identity hinges on external influences and contingencies and without those Woolf cannot describe herself. To describe the ‘immense forces society brings to play upon each of us’ Woolf again uses a stream metaphor: ‘I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream’ (MB, p.90). The bubble metaphor used in The Years implies a much more contained, closed sense of self, as compared to the more active, participatory simile of the fish.
however, to some extent generalize the psychological effect on ‘Rose, in common with many other little girls’ (P, p.51) in terms of the fear of sleeping, nightmares, desire to hide and blame herself, and eventual self-harming behaviour common among abuse survivors, which Woolf herself knew so well (Y, p.340). 26 Louise De Salvo notes also that: ‘It is within the context of her mother dying (very much like that of Virginia Woolf’s own life) that Rose becomes traumatized by seeing the man exposing himself.’ 27

On an individual level, however, Rose becomes ‘"Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse"’ and her purse and Nurse’s latch key become ‘ammunition and provisions’ (Y, pp.26 &25). In her own private storytelling Rose gives herself a powerful family role, breaking out of her traditional feminine one. In the fictional account of this episode in ‘The Pargiters’, Rose becomes the ‘daughter of Colonel Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse’, thereby keeping her female role and adding the idea of paternal approval: ‘he would also be very proud if he knew that she was defying all the spies who were in ambush in order to deliver his message’ (P, p.42). In The Years, however, she is on a mission to deliver a secret message to the British General at Lamley’s, a role which gives her purpose and importance, as well as fictionalizing the danger of the situation so that any obstacles she meets will become components of that fiction. The unknown is familiarized by becoming ‘"the enemy"’ in a typical adventure story, so that Rose can look the man ‘full in the face’ (Y, p.27). When the man tries to grab her, the reality

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26 In The Voyage Out, after Richard Dalloway kisses Rachel ‘so that she felt the hardness of his body and the roughness of his cheek printed upon hers,’ which is, like Rose’s experience with the flasher, her initiation into sexuality, her first experience of sexual desire, Rachel, experiences similar nightmares to Rose (VO, p.80). Even though she, unlike Rose, feels ‘exalted’ as well as ‘uncomfortable’ by what has happened, Rachel, like Rose, dreams she is ‘alone 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’ (VO, p.81).

27 De Salvo, 1989, p.185.
overrides her storytelling and she is herself again ‘flying for safety’ (Y, p.27).

As the novel progresses, Rose’s choice of role model is developed. In the 1908 section, Eleanor thinks that Rose should have been a soldier and that she is ‘exactly like the picture of old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse’ (Y, p.150). Sara describes Rose on horseback and then at the final party Martin remarks: “Isn’t she the very spit and image [...] of old Uncle Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse?” and finally toasts her as such (Y, pp. 161 & 395). Rose’s lesbianism and militant support of the Suffrage Cause create these links with Uncle Pargiter, shown in the novel to be a childhood identification. The use of militarism, as well as connecting to Rose’s work as a suffragette, is also part of Woolf’s critique of empire and imperialism. Rose’s defense of a British garrison fits in with Colonel Pargiter’s service in India, Martin’s in India and Africa and North’s money-making exploits in Africa. Again, these events need to be read as part of a generalized political critique as well as for their significance to each individual character. Similarly, although the flasher episode in general can be read as a public issue, Rose’s specific strategies of dealing with public danger are both individual and unique to the contingencies of the novel.

iii) Writing about Vladimir Nabokov, Rorty discusses the tension between books which deal with self-creation and books which help us become less cruel, either through critique of the cruelty of social institutions or the cruelty of an individual. For Rorty, Nabokov’s Lolita demonstrates the cruelty which one person’s pursuit of private bliss can inflict on another person. Nabokov, himself, however, denied that there was any moral to be found and prioritized aestheticism over politics. This is seen most

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clearly, as Rorty points out, in Nabokov's treatment of Dickens's *Bleak House*.

Nabokov writes:

> The study of the sociological or political impact of literature has to be devised mainly for those who are by temperament or education immune to the aesthetic vibrancy of authentic literature. 29

Nabokov saw Dickens's greatness in his literary style, his imagery; 'it is the artist that attracts us', not the social reformer. 30 Rorty, on the other hand, disagrees with the 'incompatibility' which Nabokov sees in these two aspects of Dickens's work. 31 Rorty wonders why Nabokov does not 'just say that these are two distinct, noncompetitive, goods?' 32 During the course of the chapter, Rorty comes to the conclusion that although in his theorizing, Nabokov claimed that aestheticism was of sole importance, in reality, his texts, particularly *Lolita*, demonstrate the need to watch out for cruelty, or suffering, while pursuing 'one's private kind of sexual bliss, like Humbert, or one's private aesthetic bliss, like the reader of *Lolita*.' 33 Nabokov shows us that aestheticism and kindness do not necessarily go hand in hand. Rorty shows Nabokov's inability to create pure aestheticism and argues that his 'best novels are the ones which exhibit his inability to believe his own general ideas.' 34 For Rorty, literary language will always work in conjunction with moral language, or in other words the politics of *Lolita* goes hand in hand with its aesthetics; neither one can be prioritized or isolated.

Woolf, in *The Years*, like Dickens, is writing both about social reform and

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30 Nabokov, p.70.

31 Rorty, 1989, p.147.

32 Rorty, 1989, p.147.


individual self-creation. In Nabokov’s terms she is also a skilled writer (pursuer of aesthetic bliss) writing about politics. As Rorty points out, it is important not to see either distinction as inherently competitive. Neither the individual level nor the fictional element need be prioritized over the political. They can exist side by side, indeed they need to exist concurrently as Rorty shows with Lolita. James Hafley sees this conjunction when he describes Woolf’s treatment of ’a becoming society as well as becoming individual beings’ in The Years, but he cannot maintain a separation or distinction between the social and the individual, arguing that The Years ‘formalizes a more comprehensive idea of ”life itself,” and it does this [...] by transforming and assimilating public, with private values into a harmonious whole.’ 35 Hafley unites public and private, rather than seeing their irreconcilability, while other critics concentrate only on one of the two terms. By over politicizing The Years, critics are positing its main importance to be the critique of Victorianism, ignoring the contingencies and idiosyncrasies of the individual characters and by ignoring the politics they are doing what Rorty argues Nabokov did both with Dickens and with his own novel. To make an analogy with Rorty’s initial distinction between public and private concerns, Woolf is writing about the cruelty of social institutions and calling for social reform (although she extends this cruelty to the private home) in conjunction with the pursuit of private autonomy. Although of course these two elements are linked within the content of the novel, they need to be separated by the critic, given their own vocabularies as Rorty puts it, in that on the public or political level the questions can be theorized, generalized, whereas individuals and individual identity operate under their own unique set of contingencies. The difficulty critics have with The Years is in acknowledging fully, and with all its implications, that Woolf is concerned both with

35 Hafley, pp. 145 & 146.
feminist politics as well as the creation of individual, fictional characters, and that she can do both these things in one novel.
6. ‘With this odd mix up of public & private I left off’:
War, Audience and Artist 1938-1941

An analysis of the last three years of Woolf’s life, 1938 to 1941, is essential to a mapping of her division of public and private, because the imminence and eventual onset of WWII brought the tension between the two realms to the fore. As public events literally and metaphorically intruded on Woolf’s life and writing, she became increasingly conscious of the terms public and private, what they implied and how the definitions were altered by the intensification of the public concern of war. The new conflict between her writing and the events of WWII caused a heightened awareness of and interest in the role of the audience, or public, in the creative process. The representation of the audience is crucial in Between the Acts, and the last two essays Woolf wrote, ‘Anon’ and ‘The Reader’, deal with the question of the participation of the audience in a work of art. The war also highlighted the influence of the contingencies surrounding the production and presentation of a text, in that the event of WWII made Woolf aware of the tenuousness, or contingency, of her own situation, as her lifestyle and reading public changed so suddenly. The situatedness of art became the preoccupation of much of her work at this time. It is in this period that there is most overlap between ideas developed in her public and private writings, indicating the extent to which that overlap preoccupied her.

(1) Invasion of the Private by the Public

The Woolfs spent less and less time in London in the late 1930s, but their final move from 37 Mecklenburgh Square came in September 1940, the height of the Battle of Britain and the beginning of the Blitz. Monk’s House, which had been a private
realm to London’s public scene, was no longer a haven, though, in that the sound of air raids, and the occasional crashing of German airmen in the nearby fields was a public invasion, a constant reminder of the war in what had been a place of private retreat. The hitherto distinct realms blurred, as public events not only impinged on Monk’s House itself, but made their way into Woolf’s writing in an unprecedented manner. WWII was the public event with which Woolf engaged most in both her fiction and her non-fiction. Public events suddenly became a substantial presence in her diaries (another private space broken in upon by public concerns).

This metaphorical recurrence of invasion in the writing mirrored the literal fear of invasion felt, particularly in Sussex, in 1940. With the Belgian surrender, defeat of the French and the evacuation of British and French troops from Dunkirk in May and June of 1940, England prepared for a German invasion, either by sea or air. Woolf’s diary entries show her continually anxious. On June 7, she writes: ‘French are to be beaten; invasion here [...] K. M. gives us about 5 weeks before the great attack on Engld begins’ (D V, p.292). Then a month later the tension increased again: ‘The French fleet has been seized & sunk. All Lewes listening to the wireless [...] In London K. M. decreed that Tuesday, or today, Thursday, was fixed for invasion’ (D V, p.300). The next prediction was for August 16: a constant deferral of what was felt to be the inevitable, which generated the paralysing uncertainty Woolf was to portray in Between the Acts (D V, p.307). Then in late August and September, the Battle of Britain was thought to be a prelude to invasion, and again Woolf wrote ‘Invasion, if it comes, must come within 3 weeks’ (D V, p.313). Almost every entry in September mentions the fear of invasion: one cites Churchill’s statement that ‘invasion is prepared’, while others record ‘[a] strong feeling of invasion in the air’, ‘[a] sense of invasion’, and ‘[n]o invasion yet’ (D V, pp. 317, 318, 319 & 321). The fear was
constantly in Woolf’s mind, intensified by Leonard’s and her decision to commit suicide in the event of an invasion (D V, p.284).

This preoccupation with invasion, particularly on the south coast of England, can be seen in the regional newspapers of June to September 1940. Headlines such as ‘No "1914" This Time, Hitler’s Plan to Invade England’ and ‘Invasion This Month or Next’ reflect the panic. 1 Villagers were advised how to react in the case of invasion. They were told not to ‘give any German anything. Don’t tell him anything. Hide your food and your bicycles. Hide your maps.’ 2 Invariably the articles convey either a calm or confident attitude towards invasion, obviously to counter the fears of the British people. An article of 19 July 1940 assures the reader that ‘Hitler plans to invade Britain. If his Nazi hordes succeed in crossing the sea they will be rolled back and smashed.’ 3 Mr. A. V. Alexander, First Lord of Admiralty promises England that ‘if the enemy should ever gamble on a seaborne invasion he would get such a reception that he would wish he had never tried it.’ 4 The numerous articles about invasion found in the Sussex newspapers of this time provide striking evidence of the widespread nature of the fear found in Woolf’s diaries. The feeling of invasion, literal and metaphorical, played itself out in many aspects of Woolf’s life during her last three years: it can be understood in all those aspects as an invasion of the private by the public.

This radical intermingling of public and private caused Woolf’s conception of the dialectic to change. The more the public invaded Woolf’s privacy, the more she

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1 Sussex Daily News, 15 May 1940 and 18 June 1940.
felt the need to keep the two realms separate, as can be seen in the repetitive use of the words ‘public’ and ‘private’ in her diary of this time, as though she felt an obsessive need to define and classify each issue as it arose. Woolf wanted to be able to escape from the war, and the concern it caused her, and so attempted to carve out a private space, both literally at Monk’s House and metaphorically in her writing. It was at this time that she started writing ‘A Sketch of the Past’, but even this work, her private memoirs, was invaded by the war. The more Woolf insisted on the distinction, the nearer its terms came to merging.

Woolf’s pacifism and fear of fascism meant that she could not ignore the events of the Spanish Civil War, or the imminence of WWII. Despite her desire to preserve a private realm, her diaries indicate the guilt she felt about cutting herself off from the details of war. Her writing, a private pursuit, seemed at times meaningless in the face of war, but on the other hand writing was her only weapon against fascism. As Woolf wrote in ‘The Leaning Tower’: ‘the poet in the thirties was forced to be a politician’ (M, p.119). In order to use her writing to express her pacifism, either explicitly, as in Three Guineas, or implicitly, as in Between the Acts, Woolf had to incorporate public events and facts into her writing, causing another crossover between public and private. The events of the 1930s necessitated a turn from the private to the public: ‘the poet introduces communism and fascism into his lyrics; the novelist turns from the private lives of his characters to their social surroundings and their political opinions’ (M, p.180).

An additional complication was that Woolf also felt that the war had diverted the attention of her readers. However much Woolf feared publication, her readers were essential to her process of writing. Mention is made several times in Between the Acts of the replacement of books by newspapers. ‘What remedy was there for her at her age
- the age of the century, thirty-nine - in books? Book-shy she was, like the rest of her generation', thinks Isa as she surveys the library shelves at Pointz Hall (BA, p.18).

'For her generation the newspaper was a book' (BA, p.18), particularly as news of the war became a priority. Although the sale of newspapers had increased substantially, so in fact had the sale and borrowing of books. The founding of Penguin Books and the Left Book Club, in 1936 by Allen Lane and Victor Gollancz respectively, meant that books were cheap (6d). The figures of books issued by British public libraries rose from 85.7 million in 1924 to 247.3 million in 1939, hardly evidence of book-shyness.  

As the war set in and movement was restricted, pleasure activities became more focused in the home, the private sphere. However, even though the figures tell a different story, Woolf undoubtedly felt that her public's attention had been distracted and that there was less of a place for her writing.

Woolf writes to Ethel Smyth in September of 1940: 'Its odd to feel one's writing in a vacuum - no-one will read it. I feel the audience has gone. Still, so oddly is one made, I find I must spin my brain even in a vacuum' (L VI, p.430). This is one of many similar comments made at this time: an extreme reaction perhaps, given that Three Guineas and particularly The Years and Roger Fry had enjoyed substantial success and had produced much reaction from the public in terms of letters and reviews. The Years, published in 1937, was Woolf's bestselling novel. In April 1937 it had sold 10, 250 copies in England and in June 1937 Woolf reports that she has sold 25, 000 copies in America and that the novel is head of the bestseller list (D V, pp. 84 & 90). On the 12th of July it was still top of the list and by August 23rd had reached nine editions in America. By September, sales reached 40-50, 000 in America and the

Woolfs were considering buying a new house to hold the Press (D V, p.111).

Three Guineas had sold 7,017 in September 1938 (D V, p.173), 8,000 by December (D V, p.193) and letters were flooding in from the public. Woolf notes that there was 'much less unanimity than about Room of Ones Own' (D V, p.193), but nevertheless the reaction was there. In the Monk's House Papers there are fifty-eight letters from readers regarding Three Guineas, and the praise is overwhelming. It seems impossible that at this point Woolf could have felt the lack of a reading public. With a few exceptions, the letters are from women, of varying class and educational background, corroborating Woolf's account of patriarchal discrimination against women. Several letters from Quakers link Woolf's Society of Outsiders to the Society of Friends. Other women describe their own experience on the train or at university as evidence of Woolf's description of male fear of female power. One reader, Agnes Potter, writes, 'Your vision is so direct. Your analysis is so just. I would say, from the point of view of this ordinary reader, that you have tackled a new field'; a quotation typical of the praise and thanks found in these letters. Many of the letters are from America, although Woolf writes in February 1940, that Three Guineas is 'a dead failure in USA' (D V, p.269).

With Roger Fry, published 25 July 1940, Woolf began to feel a silence. On August 2, she writes: 'Complete silence surrounds that book. It might have sailed into the blue & been lost' (D V, p.308). Gradually reviews began to appear, in the Sunday Times, the Spectator, the Observer, the New Statesman and Nation and The Listener. Only a few days later, on 6 August, Woolf writes, 'R. sells well. Talk of reprint' (D V, p.310); a third edition was ordered ten days later and Leonard reported that the

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6 'Letters From Readers About Three Guineas'. Monk’s House Papers. Sussex University Library.
biography was "'booming'" (D V, p.311). Even a year after the war began, her books were still selling and being reviewed. Suddenly, on 23 August 1940, Woolf writes: 'Book flopped. Sales down to 15 a day since air raid on London' (D V, p.312). With the so-called Phoney War ending in May 1940, the Battle of Britain raging from July to October 1940 and the Blitz from September 1940 to May 1941, Woolf felt her public disappear; from August 1940 to the end of the diary she does not mention book sales again. On 1 January 1941, working on 'Turning a Page', Woolf writes: 'To add in private: I think I will be less verbose here perhaps - but what does it matter, writing too many pages. No printer to consider, no public' (D V, p.351) - an unambiguous statement of her feelings. The newspaper reading public imagined in Between the Acts, in June 1939, somewhat misrepresents the substantial sales of Woolf's books well into 1940. However, it foreshadowed what she perhaps precipitately was feeling in 1939 and would justifiably feel in 1940.

The word 'public', in terms not of politics or events, but of audience, both of her work and the war, also came under scrutiny at this time. Woolf questioned the idea of the 'public' as a consensus or a coherent body. During WWII, she was relatively alone in her staunch pacifism, as many Bloomsbury Group members who would have supported her stance during WWI felt that fascism must be resisted. Leonard Woolf wrote War for Peace in 1940, David Garnett joined the R.A.F. and in 1940, E. M. Forster gave broadcasts defending the war. In general then, Woolf could not ally herself with the 'public'. Public opinion was not hers. The British public supported appeasement until 1939, but Hitler's invasion of Prague in March 1939 turned the tables and the majority of British people saw the necessity of war. Suddenly Chamberlain's dealings with Hitler over Czechoslovakia and at the Munich Conference

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7 Zwerdling, p.288.
seemed naive. The appeasement policy which Benny Morris, in his study of the British weeklies during the thirties, regards as having resulted largely from fear of an air invasion, suddenly changed. 'The occupation of Prague and the ensuing Polish crisis brought the British nation substantially closer to reconciling itself to a new war against Germany. What had been unthinkable to the vast majority of the nation in September 1938 was now accepted.' 8 Perhaps initially hopeful concerning the avoidance of war, Woolf felt distanced from a public and a press who from 1939 onwards, in general, did not share her beliefs. Morris also notes the blindness of the weeklies, namely the Spectator, the Economist, the New Statesman and Nation and The Listener among others, papers with which Woolf had many connections, to the threat of Nazism. Out of thousands of articles on Germany in the weeklies during the 30s, only twenty-five 'set out to define, explain or analyse Nazi ideology.' 9 Morris puts this down to the blindness of liberalism, which could not conceive that race doctrine would actually be taken seriously. Nazism was portrayed basically as nationalism in many of the weeklies. Public demand and finances also governed the papers' attitude towards the Nazis: 'both financially and intellectually it was unwise or impossible for the British Press to adopt a strongly critical line towards Nazi Germany: the readers did not want to read it, and the intellectuals did not want to write it.' 10 For Woolf, who was well aware of the implications of Nazism for both Jews and women, and included both quotations from Hitler and newspaper articles on his speeches and his race theory in her three volumes of cuttings, this must also have put further distance between herself

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9 Morris, p.6.

and the public. Although the media theoretically represents a communal, public voice, Woolf's disagreement with that voice caused her to question the ways in which 'we' should be represented.

Although Woolf's notion of the 'public' as a consensus of opinion was being questioned, at no time in her life was the notion of public events clearer. For Woolf, the public crisis was compounded in and represented by the figure of the Fascist dictator. In Three Guineas she presents him as a symbol, a photographic image: 'He is called in German and Italian Führer or Duce; in our own language, Tyrant or Dictator' (TG, p.364). He is the representative not only of militarism, but also of patriarchal oppression at home, in the private house. Public politics and public tyrannies are linked to the tyrannies encountered privately, silently, on a daily basis. The narrator explicitly links the battle of feminists with that of pacifists: feminists 'were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state. The enemy is the same' (TG, p.303). The dictator is male, for Woolf, because it is men to whom society teaches aggression and competition, a view reinforced by Hitler's assertion that it is in man's nature to fight. Women's role is in the home, and as Hitler writes in Mein Kampf, 'The goal of female education must invariably be the future mother.' 11 Women are breeders. 'The German girl [...] only becomes a citizen when she marries.' 12 Their purpose is to produce a 'highly bred racial stock.' 13 Mussolini, speaking at the Women's Fascista Congress in 1923, made it clear that politics was for 'men, not masses', women's influence came through their maternal

12 Hitler, p.401.
13 Hitler, p.368.
duties. Woolf makes clear in *Three Guineas* that it is women's difference which can help prevent war (TG, pp. 305-306). This difference has meant that men experience 'some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting' which women have not experienced (TG, pp. 158-159). Similarly, the inequality of women's legal, economic and social situation in England has meant that it is 'extremely difficult for her to understand his definition of patriotism and the duties it imposes' (TG, p.162). "What does 'our country' mean to me an outsider?" (TG, p.311) Given these differences, women, Woolf argues, do not advocate war as men do, therefore they can perhaps be instrumental in prevention. First, however, they must gain the education and employment opportunities which will give them the influence to make their views known, which is why the speaker in *Three Guineas* gives a guinea to the building fund for the women's college and to the society for helping women enter the professions, before she can give a guinea to the society for the prevention of war. Woolf has been criticized for suggesting that middle class women 'are, in fact, morally superior' and basing her argument in *Three Guineas* on 'a sharp cleavage between male/female psyches, consciousness, politics, morality, and purpose.' For Woolf, however, this difference is not essential but socialized, a result of the undeniable differences in women's educational, economic, legal and professional status. Her Society of Outsiders is not a 'vision of secret Lysistratas who have made a separate peace', for Woolf urges women to become educated and join the professions and the pacifism she hopes for is not for women alone. However, in Woolf's view the dichotomy of men/public, women/private needs to change before either public or private tyrannies will cease. The

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16 Elshtain, p.326.
war and the threat of fascism became an impetus for Woolf’s feminism, in that it gave an urgency to her desire to change the situation of women. When asked by Princess Bibesco to support an anti-Fascist exhibition, Woolf answered by asking why the “woman question” had not been included, further evidence of the crucial link she made between sexism and fascism (D IV, p.273). Writing to Lady Aberconway about Bibesco’s request Woolf says: ‘Oh dear me, what a bore politics are! And why should I sit on a Comttee between Lord Ivor & the Princess Antoine?’, evidence of her dislike of the mechanics rather than the essence of politics. 17

Woolf’s concern with fascism and how best she could react to it is documented in Volume Five of her diaries: not just her preoccupation with the facts of the war, but her oscillation between public and private realms, between the war and daily life. The amount of space taken up by war matters in Volume Five is further proof of the concern war caused her. Zwerdling rightly notes that ‘[t]his persistent intrusion of public life into her private diary was unprecedented in her career’, but the way in which those intrusions occurred reveals much about how the war affected Woolf and how it altered her perception of the difference between public and private. 18 Although descriptions of Hitler’s movements and Woolf’s social engagements stand side by side, often in the same paragraph, it is interesting that she needs to signal the shift, as if she were justifying any concentration on her own affairs directly after war news. She separates her comments into public and private realms, as though by indicating the difference she can prevent any kind of guilty overlap. In March of 1939, Woolf comments on Hitler’s march into Prague, quoting the Prime Minister’s reaction, and then writes: ‘My comment anyhow is superfluous. We sit & watch. Yesterday in Bond

18 Zwerdling, p.302.
Street where I finally did lay out £10 on clothes’ (D V, pp. 208-209). She makes the transition to talking about her daily events by passing her comment off as irrelevant. A similar transition is happening in an entry for September 1938: ‘Meanwhile the aeroplanes are on the prowl, crossing the downs. Every preparation is made. Sirens will hoot in a particular way when there’s the first hint of a raid. L. & I no longer talk about it. Much better to play bowls & pick dahlias. They’re blazing in the sitting room’ (D V, p. 167). The record of their decision to abandon discussion of the air raids allows her to switch topics in the diary entry. Justification is needed before making the troublesome shift from public to private matters. In this quotation also, by comparing them to wild animals, the aeroplanes are placed naturally in the countryside, lessening their strangeness, similar to a later reference to ‘wild duck flights of aeroplanes’ (D V, p. 289).

Often, merely the word ‘privately’ signals a change in realm, therefore a justifiable change in content, as in ‘The strength of the ray emitted from Vienna can therefore be judged. Privately I’m, as usual at the proof stage’ (D V, p. 130) and ‘When the tiger, ie Hitler, has digested his dinner he will pounce again. And privately, I have no letters’ (D V, p. 132). In March 1936 Woolf writes: ‘It all seems in keeping: my drudgery; our unsociability; the crisis; meetings; dark - & what it all means, no one knows. Privately...no, I doubt that I’ve seen anyone, or done anything but walk & work’ (D V, p. 17). The war alters the terminology compared to the public events of war, her social life is private, whereas prior to the war, her social engagements had been public, compared to private writing time.

Whatever form the shifts in Woolf’s diary between the war and her own life take, more important, perhaps, is the prevalence of such shifts. From 1938 onwards, the entries are constantly oscillating between public and private realms, which gives a
sense of rapid movement to the last three years of entries. Woolf changes gears suddenly, from Chamberlain’s tactics to the state of her garden. This textual oscillation is analogous to the mental agitation and concern which the war caused Woolf. She writes, ‘With this odd mix up of public & private I left off,’ (D V, p.110) evidence of the distraction she felt at this time. Her diary had been a place in which she could record her private thoughts and activities, but the war, with the accompanying bombardment of information and updates, now demands a place in the diary.

Private peace is not accessible. Miss Robins tomorrow. Then Charleston. Then L.P. here. Maynard, even Maynard, cant find much that’s hopeful now that Italy has nipped off Albania save that there’s a unity of hatred. The men women children dogs &c. are solid for war if war comes. But privately - how one rockets between private & public - his eyes are bluer, his skin pinker, & he can walk without pain (D V, p.213).

In this passage, Woolf notes the disappearance of a haven, a private space; a space which she has described earlier in her diaries. The way in which her social engagements, Maynard’s health and the annexation of Albania by Mussolini intermingle in the space of several sentences is a microcosm for the larger pattern of this volume of the diaries. The focus on Maynard, and his reaction to Mussolini’s attack, moves to a direct concern with war, and the public’s preparation. This means that ‘privately’ is needed to return the focus to Keynes and his own personal, physical well being. Also in this passage, Woolf notes her own awareness of the movement between realms, typical of a general increased selfconsciousness of her division of public and private realms.

Woolf sees this oscillation, this rocketing between public and private, in the general public’s reaction to the war. She describes it as follows: ‘Then there comes too the community feeling: all England thinking the same thing - this horror of war - at the same moment. Never felt it so strong before. Then the lull & one lapses again into private separation-’ (D V, p.215). This coming together and dissipation of the public is
a movement which she represents in the audience in Between the Acts. The quotation breaks off as shown and then on the next line is written ‘But I must order macaroni from London’. Whatever the troubles caused by the war, the ‘but’ signifies the priority afforded to the private matter of cooking. Life continues, for Woolf, in fact more than satisfactorily, as ‘We privately are so content. Bliss day after day. So happy cooking dinner, reading, playing bowls’ (D V, p.231) indicates. ‘Just as in violent personal anxiety, the public lapses, into complete indifference. One can feel no more at the moment’ (D V, p.171). She describes the public’s reaction by analogy to private experience; Woolf copes with the enormity of the war and her helplessness in the face of it by comparing it to personal experience.

Woolf felt constantly intruded upon by the threat and presence of aeroplanes and the possibility of air raids. The noise of the guns invades her diary: ‘How near the guns have got to our private life again. I can quite distinctly see them & hear a roar, even though I go on, like a doomed mouse, nibbling at my daily page’ (D V, p.17), written as early as March 1936, is typical of Woolf’s feeling that her world has in some sense been broken apart, and that her writing has been made irrelevant. The noise of the guns represents literally the metaphorical invasion of the war on her life. The choice of metaphor here, a tiny, domestic animal, reveals her sense of insignificance in the face of war and emphasizes her links with the home, the private space, in contrast to the battlefield, the site of war. The image of the mouse nibbling the page suggests that she is sustaining herself through her writing. Comments such as ‘The public world very notably invaded the private at MH. last week end’ (D V, p.131) making her writing like a ‘moth dancing over a bonfire - consumed in less than one second’ (D V, p.142) show Woolf’s feeling of instability at this time. The simile emphasizes the fragility and tenuousness she associates with her writing; she is running
the risk, by writing, that invasion will make her writing irrelevant and destroy her readership. However, her attitude to the place of her writing in a time of war did change, as it was sometimes a solace ‘thinking of Roger not of Hitler’ (D V, p.167). At other times, the war prevented any concentration on writing. Woolf’s diary of the period is invaluable in that it enacts textually the movement between public and private matters, between writing and war, between privacy and the bombardment of the public media, the bizarre dichotomy figured by Woolf’s letter of 15 September 1940: ‘Twice while playing bowls raiders have come over and been shot down in full view’ (L VI, p.431). As Patricia Laurence writes, in an essay which is the only work of criticism to highlight and fully acknowledge the ‘rhythm of alternation’ between public and private in Woolf’s thinking at this time, ‘[n]otions of the public, communal voice (the counting, accounting, and recounting of “facts” by the news media) and the private, human, artist’s voice (the presentation of individual vision in "fiction") are distinctions which Woolf questions, collapses, and redefines during this period.’ 19 The 1930s saw a boom in mass communication, in particular the last years of the 30s when the newspaper became a major manufacturing industry with 19, 460, 000 newspapers a day bought in 1939 as opposed to 14, 670, 000 in 1920. 20 The radio also enjoyed a boom, as in 1932 43% of households had a radio but by 1939 75% of households had the wireless, and with it, war news. 21 At the very beginning of the war programming was superseded by news bulletins. ‘The BBC monotonously repeated news which was in the morning papers and which it had itself repeated an hour earlier.’ 22 The

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19 Laurence, pp.245 & 229.

20 Thorpe, p.108.

21 Thorpe, p.108.

increased importance of the media added to Woolf’s sense of the invasions of the public realm. She writes about the influence of the media on writers during wartime, comparing her situation with that of Scott and Austen: ‘Neither of them heard Napoleon’s voice as we hear Hitler’s voice as we sit at home of an evening’ (M, p.107).

(2) Autobiography

The diary is not the only written context into which the war intrudes so blatantly. While working on Roger Fry in 1939, in April, Woolf also began to write ‘A Sketch of the Past’, which she worked on until November 1940. The war is a definite presence in this autobiographical retelling of the past. It is significant that Woolf chose to start work on a memoir, normally a relatively private genre, during the war years. The threat of death undoubtedly triggered a desire to immortalize herself, but she also saw the work as a chance to retreat into a private space. She acknowledges that ‘A Sketch of the Past’ was a respite from the public genre and mass of facts which was Roger Fry. It is interesting that, at this time when the public/private split created by the war was so pronounced, Woolf should choose to split her time between the two of her works most separated generically along the division between public and private. She oscillated between Roger Fry and her memoirs in the same way that she moved so suddenly in her diary between the war and personal affairs. As she oscillates, so the terms of reference shift. She regarded Roger Fry, by contrast with ‘A Sketch of the Past’, as a public utterance. But confronted by the even more public utterance of a declaration of war, she could ‘oppose this with Roger my only private position’ (D V, p.170). The public/private split between genres is collapsed by the public/private
division between war and writing, politics and art.

'A Sketch of the Past' is divided into dated sections like diary entries, and when the war appears it does so at the beginning of a section, obviously when Woolf has returned to writing after a break. The date in itself represents the present, and therefore the war, a present which needs to be acknowledged and dealt with before turning to the past. After the first break, however, Woolf writes the date, 2nd May, and then, 'I write the date, because I think that I have discovered a possible form for these notes. That is, to make them include the present - at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon. It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast' (MB, pp.83-84). Woolf is aware of the dichotomy, but all that she mentions of her present self is the relief 'A Sketch of the Past' brings her from Roger Fry and the state of the war. On 8 June 1940 she writes 'The battle is at its crisis; every night the Germans fly over England; it comes closer to this house daily. If we are beaten then [...] book writing becomes doubtful. But I wish to go on, not to settle down in that dismal puddle' (MB, p.111). The next paragraph begins, 'Jack Hills, I was saying, came back.' Her worries about the future of her writing must be exorcised before she proceeds to her memories. 'I was saying' suggests that a digression or interruption has just occurred and now she can resume the thread. Obviously the comments about the Battle of Britain will not flow with the narrative line, but Woolf does not try to provide continuity syntactically or thematically. They are invasions of the text. The nature of the content of the digressions and their brevity means that the reader senses a huge bulk of hidden material. Much is left unsaid. Also, the tone of anxiety and the sense of gradual encroachment give the brief comments much more significance and space than they are allowed literally. Woolf often speaks of her continuing of the memoir's past narrative as a turn away from something,
whether it be the war, the present, or Roger Fry. She has, in a sense, to ignore the present and physically turn from it to concentrate on herself and the past. She writes ‘The present. June 19th 1940 [...] Today the dictators dictate their terms to France. Meanwhile, on this very hot morning, with a blue bottle buzzing and a toothless organ grinding and the men calling strawberries in the Square, I sit in my room at 37 M[ecklenburgh] S[quare] and turn to my father’ (MB, p.119). 23 Here there are two turns; away from the dictators to the immediate public scene and then from the square to her past. She writes of returning to ‘this free page’ after the drudgery of Roger Fry (MB, p.127). ‘A Sketch of the Past’ is a ‘loose story’ compared with the accuracy required for the Fry biography (MB, p.137). The memoir offered Woolf freedom in her writing at a time when Britain was alone, France defeated and the issue of public freedom pending a German invasion was all important. However, there is a certain amount of guilt in these turns, as though it were a luxury to be writing her memoirs at such a time, which may have been why she stopped writing them in November 1940 and wrote in a letter to Ethel Smyth on March 10 1941, eighteen days before her death: ‘No: politics at the moment seem more pressing than autobiography’ (L VI, p.478).

Guilt, however, is mixed with an urgency, the comments must be brief because time is short, and she needs to use what time she has to write. ‘Yesterday (18th August 1940) five German raiders passed so close over Monks House that they brushed the tree at the gate. But being alive today, and having a waste hour on my hands [...] I will go on with this loose story’ (MB, p.137) suggests a fear of danger.

23 This is the beginning of the typescript BL 61973, discovered in 1980, which is a seventy seven page revised version of the MH/A.5d version as well as 27 entirely new pages. Schulkind’s 1989 edition contains the new material whereas her 1976 edition uses the MH/A.5d version.
closing in, intruding on her private peace and making writing not a guilty act but all the more essential. Especially with *Three Guineas*, Woolf was presenting a possible solution to ending war, therefore writing was not a frivolous avoidance of the public events. She writes, 'I feel I said what I wanted in 3 Gs. & am not to care if its l: made my own friends hostile; laid me open to abuse & ridicule; also praise where I dont want it' (D V, p.170). Ultimately, writing is still necessary and is her only weapon against the events of WWII. In response to Benedict Nicolson's charge that the Bloomsbury Group did little for the general public, writing only for their exclusive group, Woolf wrote in August 1940: 'I did my best to make them [her books] reach a far wider circle than a little private circle of exquisite and cultivated people' (L VI, p.420). It was essential for Woolf that her novels were read by the 'public'; whatever kinds of support the Bloomsbury Group offered her, and however much the opinions of her friends mattered, they were by no means the primary intended or actual market for her books. Her notion of the 'common reader' reinforces her idea the '[l]iterature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground' (M, p.125).

(3) **Biography**

Woolf started *Roger Fry* in March 1938 and finished it in July of 1940, as the Battle of Britain began, which is very close to the time span of 'A Sketch of the Past', April 1938 to November 1940, making clear her comments that 'A Sketch' was a relief from *Roger Fry*. Being a factual biography, Woolf does not record her own thought in *Roger Fry* and seeing as Fry did not live through WWII she cannot use the work as a space for her own meditations on war or fascism. However, Woolf does come several times to the issue of a public/private division as well as the effect which
WWI had on Fry. The following three passages are similar to those in Woolf's own diary or memoirs:

Roger Fry was a man who lived many lives, the active, the contemplative, the public and the private. The war affected them all. 24

The war years then, as these scattered and incongruous fragments show, broke into many of the lives that Roger Fry lived simultaneously (RF p.213).

The war had killed, or was about to kill, his own private venture, the Omega [....] And private happiness, though this lay beyond the reach of any war, had once again eluded him. He had no centre of private security in which to shelter from the public catastrophe (RF, p.213).

No doubt Woolf's own experiences of WWII were on her mind; her own invasion by the circumstances of war, as she wrote about Fry's experience of WWI. Woolf elaborates on Fry's division of his life into 'the hurried and distracted life' and 'the still life' (RF, p.214). She no doubt describes Fry's experience of the distinct realms of public and private life with an awareness of her own similar dialectic. She suggests that his survival of the war was due to his simultaneous maintaining of both realms. Perhaps part of the reason behind Woolf's suicide was an inability to keep both public and private at once related and separate in her life. In noting Fry's success at dealing with WWI, Woolf reinforces her own similar strategy. In the third quotation, again, behind Woolf's noting of Fry's lack of a secure private haven, is an awareness of her own need for such a space. The war not only crashed in upon Woolf's private sphere, as it had upon Fry's, but made her reassess the importance and possibility of maintaining an imaginative or private writing space: a place of private fulfilment as opposed to public duty.

It is during the late 1930s that Woolf's public and private genres - that is, at some times non-fiction as opposed to fiction, at other times anything written for publication as opposed to her diaries - parallel one another most closely in terms of content. *Three Guineas* and *The Years* are fuelled by the same research into feminist and pacifist concerns. Similarly *Between the Acts* and the final essay collection which Woolf started in 1940, called 'Reading at Random', and then 'Turning the Page', deal with similar issues of audience, history and public versus private voices. The war brought Woolf's feminism and her relationship to her public to the fore and such concerns crossed genre boundaries. Set on a day in June 1939, the eve of WWII, *Between the Acts* is infiltrated but by no means overwhelmed by the presence of the war. It seems almost inconceivable that Harper could write that *Between the Acts* 'turns away from the political' and that this then results in a 'more natural [...] mood.'

25 Aeroplanes fly overhead during and after the pageant, and the fragmented conversation of the audience turns to war several times. Phrases such as "'No one wants it - save those damned Germans'", and "'And what about the Jews. The refugees...the Jews'" make the war a tangible presence (BA, pp. 136 & 109). Woolf's reaction to the war itself, as opposed to her reaction to the situation of the writer during wartime, is found in the characters of Giles, Bart and Budge, whose versions of tyranny Woolf thought inseparable from fascism and the drive to war itself.

Undoubtedly, the last image, of Giles and Isa returning to the 'heart of darkness' to fight like the dog and the vixen (BA, p.197), is a reference to the barbarity and the catastrophe of war, although the image is unresolved since the curtain rises as the book

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ends. The final scene depicts a return to the primitive. 'It was night before roads were
made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high
place among rocks' (BA, p.197). It is in this night that they must fight and only after
that fight can they embrace. The link with the war here is supported by a fragment in
the Monk’s House Papers entitled ‘London in War’, in which London during the air
raids, in its silence, austerity and lack of society is compared to a move back into the
past, to the eighteenth century and then barbarism. ‘Nature prevails. I suppose badgers
& foxes wd. come back if this went on, & owls & nightingales. This is the prelude to
barbarism....There is no society, no luxury no splendour.’

In Between the Acts Giles and Isa are compared to the dog and the vixen, also a return to nature and the violence
of natural survival. Woolf’s despair at the impending war does not mean that the
whole of Between the Acts is a depiction of a degenerate society, as many critics
assume. Woolf was interested in the circumstantial intrusions upon the daily lives of
the villagers by the war rather than in the effects of war on civilization in general.
Woolf’s concern is with the home front rather than the combatants; furthermore, the
effect of war on Woolf herself made her turn here to questions of the representation of
audience rather than tackle the causes of war directly. It is important that the war has
not yet begun; it is the tension of waiting that pervades the book, being between wars,
as it pervades her diary. Comments on both the war and the tension between public
and private appear more often in Woolf’s diary before the war actually begins. It is the
imminence of change and the anticipation of what may happen that concerns Woolf in
Between the Acts. According to Judith L. Johnston, ‘Between the Acts conveys the
repressed fear of an impending catastrophe and the impatient desire for release from

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the tension of waiting.' 27 The fear is of change of any kind, not necessarily of
catastrophe. The weight of tradition and ancestry is under threat. ‘The old lady, the
indigenous, the prehistoric, was being wheeled away by a footman’ (BA, p.183).

In its awareness of change, the importance of the power of circumstance, the
novel is rife with contingency. In Between the Acts, Woolf explores the shifts in
circumstance which played such an important part in her own life. The novel is full of
interruptions and the intrusion of unforeseen circumstances, as well as the oscillation
mentioned many times in Woolf’s diary; the rocketing between public and private, the
feeling of public opinion coming together and then receding. This movement is related
particularly to the audience of the pageant. Miss LaTrobe wants to hold the audience,
unified, in her work of art, just as the audience members want to sum up or
encapsulate the pageant. Neither party is successful. The audience changes
continuously in its varying reactions, coming together and then differing. Similarly, the
fragmented nature and open-endedness of the pageant, as well as Miss LaTrobe’s
refusal to take responsibility for the play, mean that no such summary can be made
and the Rev. Streatfield is mocked for attempting a peroration. The key word here is
‘between’ since the focus constantly shifts from one thing to another, it is constantly
between states; not between two acts only, but between many.

The clearest example of this movement is the gramophone at the end of the
pageant which calls out as the audience leaves. ‘Unity - Dispersity. It gurgled Un...
dis....And ceased’ (BA, p.181). Woolf’s creation of the word ‘dispersity’ itself seems
to hover between ‘dispersal’ and ‘disparity’. The gramophone comes to no conclusion,
leaving the words incomplete; its oscillation between two incomplete states is an

27 Judith L. Johnston, ‘The Remediable Flaw: Revisioning Cultural History in Between
analogy for the movement of the audience throughout the pageant. Brief moments of unity, either between particular characters or within the audience as a whole, are replaced by dispersal. Earlier, the gramophone states, ‘Dispersed are we; who have come together’ (BA, p.176), again acknowledging the change of state. The voice is said to speak the words ‘Dispersed are we’ with both triumph and lamentation (BA, p.178), which implies an alteration in tone, an oscillation in meaning. Characters in the novel also oscillate between attitudes. When asked whether people are inherently the same, Isa replies: “Yes,” [...] “No,” she added. It was Yes, No. Yes, yes, yes, the tide rushed out embracing. No, no, no, it contracted’ (BA, p.193). Earlier in the text the narrator describes a similar oscillation in Mrs Swithin. ‘She left the sentence unfinished, as if she were of two minds, and they fluttered to right and to left, like pigeons rising from the grass’ (BA, p.68). The refusal to settle which is explicit in the text stems not only from Woolf’s own feeling of flux due to the war and its public intrusion into her private life and work, but also from her commitment to contingency, her refusal of finality. This commitment was strengthened at this time partly in resistance to the finality of fascism, but also because the onset of WWII drove home how the convergence of circumstances could affect her life; how vulnerable she was to contingencies. Thirdly, as she made explicit in Three Guineas, Woolf’s resistance to war came through feminism, a feminism which refused definition and labelling. However, Woolf’s commitment to pacifism allowed no oscillation. This is the one issue on which Woolf did not waiver; here, her reaction was not contingent, but constant, similar to Rorty’s hatred of cruelty. Zwerdling relates Woolf’s fixity on this issue to her other more equivocal opinions by arguing that her pacifism was ‘the closest thing to a religion her secular skepticism permitted.’ 28 When pacifism became

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28 Zwerdling, p.274.
unfashionable in the late 1930s Woolf remained firm, despite the threat of fascism. Several letters to the Sussex newspapers indicate the resistance to pacifism from the British people. One, in particular written by a resident of Lewes, a neighbouring town to Rodmell where Woolf lived, reads ‘I am very much perturbed by the activities of pacifists of this town [....] I would suggest that inquiries be made as to what is happening in this respect in our town, for we have those who are decidedly of the pacifist and defeatist school.’ Also, as Zwerdling points out, Woolf’s linking of the drive to war with male socialization was unprecedented among anti-war views. Although Woolf was definitive on this issue, however, she was not either in her depiction of and reaction to war, or in her ideas on the prevention of war. War takes many forms in Woolf’s texts, her views appearing directly in Three Guineas, indirectly in Between the Acts. In the latter text her concern with the audience and artist’s roles both during war and in general supersede a direct attack on war itself. In Three Guineas, although her loathing of war and her feelings about the preventative potential of women are clear, her actual methods and tactics for prevention are vague and elusive. In other words, the fixity of her pacifism did not translate itself into her writing.

Criticism on Between the Acts is extremely polarized because critics have difficulty reconciling Woolf’s hatred of war with her motive in writing the novel. They want to see her hatred of war represented transparently in the text. Critics often read the novel as Woolf’s indictment of society’s degeneration or discern an affirmative unity in the pageant, characterising Woolf’s faith in art as a unifying force in the face of war. They want the novel to be a statement, a coherent answer to war, rather than

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29 East Sussex News, 23 August 1940, p.4.

30 Zwerdling, p.299.
an exploration of the contingencies surrounding war: the issues which concerned Woolf herself most directly. Based on Woolf’s comment about *Between the Acts*, "I" rejected: "we" substituted’ (D V, p.135), Madeline Moore argues that the ‘aesthetic/political Utopia’ which Woolf originally conceived was overthrown by the egotistical 'I', the middle class individual. Moore feels that what she sees as Woolf’s attempt to portray a collective ‘we’ failed. Moore wants to see Woolf’s novel as a solution to war, but since she has to acknowledge that the novel is not a utopian vision, she has to see it as a failure on Woolf’s part, a capitulation to patriarchal dominance. Moore’s emphasis on utopia prevents her from acknowledging Woolf’s movement between community and the individual. Woolf was not intending to present a utopia, but to explore the notion of audience. Woolf deliberately presented Miss LaTrobe as an outsider, deliberately marked divisions of class and gender. These only become failings if the critic argues, as Moore does, that she intended to write a ‘novel where all of humanity could vicariously transcend its class barriers.’ Woolf’s portrayal of variety is deliberate, not a failed version of a ‘collective whole.’ Woolf included the egotistical ‘I’ in the characters of Giles and Budge so she could critique the assumptions of imperialism, patriarchy and fascism. *Between the Acts* undoes the term ‘public’ and discloses the heterogeneity it conceals. Rarely do critics either see the extent and importance of the oscillation between plurality and unity or see Woolf’s use of heterogeneity and refusal of closure as a stay against, rather than a symptom of, fascism.

Alex Zwerdling states that Woolf’s ‘confidence in the power of art to unify and

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31 Moore, p.147.

32 Moore, p.147.

33 Moore, p.147.
immortalize is almost entirely lost by the time we come to *Between the Acts*, and he reads the work as a tracing of loneliness, isolation and 'cultural disintegration.' This reading demands that one start with a standard of unity and closure and ignore the possibility that Woolf is celebrating the power of plurality and tolerance. When Streatfield is mocked for his attempt to unify the pageant's meaning and Lucy Swithin is mocked for her reliance on the unifying power of religion, it seems unlikely that Woolf would set such store by the unity of the audience, or the pageant itself. The approach of war made Woolf intensely conscious of heterogeneity and the make-up of terms such as 'public' or 'audience'; the nature of Woolf's portrayal of the community in *Between the Acts* is not a direct comment on Woolf's part about the causes or effects of war. Zwerdling remarks that 'there is no character in the book whose vision emerges as authoritative', as though this were proof of the message of alienation and disunity in the novel. Surely, at this point in her life, if not at any other, Woolf would be wary of authoritative characters. Zwerdling, like Streatfield, wants to unify the text, wants to end up with a coherent message, namely that *Between the Acts* is Woolf's depiction of the isolation and alienation of pre-WWII society. Both Zwerdling and Streatfield lament that there is 'no unity of response, no coherence of interpretation, no sense of minds moving toward a common goal.' It is interesting also that Zwerdling comments on the 'plaintive "dispersed are we"' of the gramophone, but misses the phrase 'triumphed, yet lamented' (BA, p.178), which indicates the movement between affirmation and regret. He calls the passages of

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34 Zwerdling, pp. 316 & 317.
35 Zwerdling, p.322.
36 Zwerdling, p.321.
37 Zwerdling, p.320.
audience reaction 'trivial, unconnected chatter', and thus evidence of Woolf's despair at loss of communication; but an audience's reaction is rarely if ever unified, either in content or in form. Woolf acknowledges the inevitable diversity of response. Some comments are sublimely irrelevant to the pageant - 'I shouldn't have expected either so many Hispano-Suizas...That's a Rolls...That's a Bentley' (BA, p.180), some pointedly relevant: 'and if one spirit animates the whole, what about the aeroplanes' (BA, p.178).

Aware that he is simplifying the case, Zwerdling deconstructs his own argument at the end of the chapter by admitting that '[t]here is in fact a carefully modulated balance, particularly in the final sections of the book, of mellifluous and discordant elements.' He acknowledges the moments of eloquence, but argues that they are demolished by the 'more cynical ones.' Granted, moments of unity are brief, but there is no reason to prioritize either the disconnected or the connected moments. The meaning lies in the movement between the two, the coming together and then dispersing, the oscillation which occurs constantly throughout the novel. Critics like Zwerdling or Sallie Sears, who read the pageant as being met with a 'barrier of misunderstanding, outrage, and blank resistance', overlook moments such as 'Folded in this triple melody, the audience sat gazing; and beheld gently and approvingly without interrogation' (BA, p.121). Sears launches into a litany of the manifestations of the desperate social condition in the novel -

meaningless life; the chaos of history, the omnipresence of the past, the obliteration of the present, the absence of the future, the dimming of perception, the evasion of feeling, the repudiation of responsibility.

38 Zwerdling, p.321.

39 Zwerdling, p.322.

40 Zwerdling, p.322.

human unconnection broken by brief moments of warmth, the paralysis of the will, the failure of action, the breakdown of communication - without exploring in any depth those 'brief moments' which can in fact be discerned within her avalanche of despair. In part, of course, Woolf is lamenting the diversity brought about by war, the disruption of village history. But she is also confronting the illusory nature of such dreams of unity. As she writes at the close of Three Guineas, 'your letter tempts us to [...] listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets, [...] assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only [...] But that would be to dream' (TG, p.365). In Between the Acts, Woolf faces not only the differences and factions created by war, but the daily tensions and misunderstandings between people, and her poet in Between the Acts, Miss LaTrobe, does not assure us of unity, but rather explodes that notion. The pageant parallels the interruptions, collisions and heterogeneity of the audience rather than acting as a consolation or compensation for it. Caughie writes: 'The very value of Woolf's narrative lies in its refusal to promote any one alternative history, narrative, or identity and to offer instead divergent histories, narratives, and identities; for it is such diversity that undermines totalizing narratives and normative conventions.' Woolf offers no solution, no unifying vision. She did not 'set out to distil life into an essence.' Merry Pawlowski should have paid more attention to this aspect of Between the Acts, rather than arguing that the novel was Woolf's final vision, the summing up of her 'textual practice as anti-narrative.' Woolf did not sum

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42 Sears, p.217.


44 Daiches, 1945, p.121.

45 Pawlowski, p.190.
up her novels in *Between the Acts*, which was not the ‘culmination of the lifework’; at the end of her life, she was working on a new book, and even in her last diary entry she mentions a new idea for a story. 46 *Between the Acts* is not a culmination, it is a text resulting from the contingencies of Woolf’s situation between 1938 and 1941. In as far as it is a reaction to WWII it is a contingent reaction, one possible reaction based on Woolf’s particular circumstances rather than any kind of final vision or comprehensive solution. *Between the Acts* is a novel filled with vacillation. In every scene, the pendulum swings to and fro between hope and despair, unity and fragmentation, determination and doubt’ 47: an ambivalence born from the oscillations between public and private, writing and politics, and the desire to represent an anti-authoritarian structure through a plurality of voices and opinions.

*Between the Acts* resists closure in many ways, notably in its final words: ‘Then the curtain rose. They spoke’ (BA, p.197). The implication is that what we have read is the interval, the pageant is a play between the acts, a play within a play. This contributes to the denial of any finality to the pageant. There are many more plays to come, since after the pageant Miss LaTrobe hears the first words of her next play. The play on which the curtain rises is LaTrobe’s, therefore the pageant is not her final masterpiece. The fact that the ‘they’ of ‘They spoke’ is Giles and Isa means that LaTrobe is writing a play about or including, rather than for, the Pointz Hall inhabitants, blurring the distinction between theatre and reality. This is seen also in the last scene of the pageant entitled ‘Ourselves’ which consists in the actors holding mirrors up to the audience. The audience become the cast; they make their own play. Just as Woolf herself was planning her next book as she wrote *Between the Acts*, the

46 Harper, p.283.
pageant is not a final and discrete piece of work. Stylistically, the lack of finality can be seen in the partial sentences used throughout the text. Ellipses abound since characters end their sentences midway and the paragraphs of audience reaction consist of snippets of different characters’ comments. A comment on Greek oracles is followed by a comment on crepe soles (BA, p.178). Since the pageant is outdoors, the wind often blows ‘gaps between their words’ (BA, p.125), sweeping many of them away from the audience. Also, the actors and actresses often forget their lines, leaving gaps in the text. Although the pageant is chronological, with a Medieval scene, a scene from the Elizabethan age, the eighteenth century, the Victorian Age and the present day, the interruptions caused by the weather, the audience, the inexperienced cast and the intervals mean that the audience’s experience of the play is partial and fragmented rather than linear and continuous. Furthermore, the narrative also incorporates long sections of audience reaction, as well as descriptions of stage movement or action. The play and the audience’s conversation are both presented in ‘scraps and fragments’, a phrase repeated several times in the novel (BA, pp. 36, 108, 169 & 173).

Woolf acknowledges the fluidity in an audience’s reaction to a work of art. She nevertheless also depicts its desire for summary, for definite meaning. Lucy turns to her brother, Bart, for the origin of the expression ‘Touch wood’. Bart wants to bring ‘the scattered bits together’ (BA, pp.22-23); he wants an answer. Similarly, at the end of the play the audience’s reactions contain phrases such as “And if we’re left asking questions, isn’t it a failure, as a play?” (BA, p.180), “I like to feel sure […] that I’ve grasped the meaning” (BA, p.180) and “Did you understand the meaning?” (BA, p.177) The Rev. Streatfield, who attempts to conclude the pageant by summarizing its ‘message’, is described by the narrator as follows: ‘What an intolerable constriction, contraction, and reduction to simplified absurdity he was to be sure! Of all
incongruous sights a clergyman in the livery of his servitude to the summing up was
the most grotesque and entire' (BA, pp.170-171). The audience feel embarrassed for
him but also recognize him as ‘their symbol; themselves’ (BA, p.171), part of their
own desire to encapsulate. He is interrupted by the planes overhead, which literally
break his sentence and figuratively mark a gap or silence in his attention to parochial
matters. It is not that Streatfield’s comment on unity is wrong or naive, so much as
that his diagnosis is only partial. It is not a summation because it is one reaction to
one aspect of the pageant. Summation is hindered further when Streatfield turns to
thank Miss La Trobe and she does not appear. ‘It was an awkward moment. How to
make an end? Whom to thank?’ (BA, p.175). The play remains unfinished because
there is no single person to whom to attach responsibility. It cannot be contained by
reference to its creator.

The intertextuality of Between the Acts also prevents either the pageant or the
novel from being a discrete, self-sufficient unit. Between the Acts is full of phrases
from songs and poems, as is the pageant itself, which draws on many different genres
and traditions. Both the pageant and the novel itself are a ‘historical and cultural
collage.’ Woolf weaves in both actual and fictional quotations from Byron,
newspaper articles, an Outline of History which Lucy is reading, Figgis’ Guide Book
(1833), nursery rhymes and songs. The pageant is a ‘medley’ (BA, p.84) of popular
tunes and nursery rhymes as well as the Restoration and Victorian playlets. The
episode in which all the cast recite fragments of their lines, thus collapsing the
chronology, destroys the notion of a contained or progressive narrative, as well as
adding to the dizzying effect of intertextuality, since the actors are creating a new
scene by rearranging quotations from their own script.

The intrusion of the present into the play, and the awareness of its theatricality also prevent any prolonged suspension of disbelief. Interruptions from the audience, actors forgetting their lines, Queen Elizabeth’s costume coming dislodged and the audience recognizing the cast as local villagers all contribute to interrupt and disperse the pageant. The overlap between theatre and reality, past and present is emphasized, creating movement or oscillation between the two. At times the audience seems to meld with the actors, as when Giles and Mrs Manresa copy and continue the words of a song in the Elizabethan scene (BA, pp.77-78) and then later in the same scene the narrator states that ‘Somehow she [Manresa] was the Queen; and he [Giles] was the surly hero’ (BA, p.84). The conventional boundaries of theatricality are broken. As with the intrusions of the present into ‘A Sketch of the Past’, here the present intrudes not only as the war into the text but also as reality into the play. The weather is another source of interruption. The mooing of the cows, the noise of the wind and a shower of rain are all part of the pageant. ‘Every sound in nature was painfully audible; the swish of the trees; the gulp of a cow; even the skim of the swallows over the grass could be heard’ (BA, p.175). Circumstances impinge on the work of art, the play has to be seen in the context of its surroundings, just as the cat of Pointz Hall is called Sunny in the kitchen and Sung-Yen in the drawing room, and the chapel at Pointz Hall became a larder after the Reformation (BA, p.29). The inclusion of nature in the pageant is yet another sign of resistance to closure and containment, since the natural surroundings are out of Miss LaTrobe’s control, as are the performances of her actors and actresses.

In opposition to change, the characters in Between the Acts are preoccupied with tracing their descent and heritage. Characters continuously mark the origin of people and objects. Isa, for example, is ‘Sir Richard’s daughter; and niece of the two
old ladies at Wimbledon who were so proud, being O’Neils, of their descent from the Kings of Ireland’ (BA, p.15). There is a chair which William Dodge knows to be ‘English, made perhaps at Nottingham; date about 1760’ (BA, p.55). Lucy Swithin is proud of the fact that ‘[t]he Olivers couldn’t trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years. But the Swithins could. The Swithins were there before the Conquest’ (BA, p.28). The pageant itself is a tradition, having occurred for the last seven summers, always provoking the same discussion ‘about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather’ (BA, p.20).

Although the characters search after a sense of history, the text itself undercuts natural progression and hints at imminent disruption. The ancestral families in Between the Acts are described so as to suggest decay and extinction. There are many references to the ‘iguanodon, the mammoth, and the mastodon; from whom presumably [...] we descend’ (BA, p.8). The Olivers, having purchased Pointz Hall over a hundred and twenty years ago, are unconnected to the old families, ‘the Warings, the Elveys, the Mannerings or the Burnets’ (BA, p.6) who lived there before them and who lie ‘in their deaths intertwined, like the ivy roots,’ (BA, p.6) because of intermarriage. The sense that these ancient families have run their course is echoed in the description of the ‘great lady in the bath chair’ whose ‘body, crippled by arthritis, resembled an uncouth, nocturnal animal, now nearly extinct’ (BA, p.84). Her ‘ungloved twisted hands’ (BA, p.85) suggest the atrophy of her line, in her case ‘obliterated’ by her marriage to a man with a ‘trashy title’ (BA, p.84). When Mrs Swithin is showing William Dodge around Pointz Hall she keeps forgetting names and details of historical importance, another sign of an increasing indifference towards ancestry and history. “Who was she? [...] Who painted her?”’, “Mr....” she murmured. She had forgotten his name’, “A bishop; a traveller; - I’ve forgotten even their names.
I ignore. I forget”” (BA, pp.63-64).

Mrs Manresa is in part the new blood, but she is thought by the Pointz Hall inhabitants to be ‘vulgar’ and ‘over-sexed’ (BA, p.37). They cannot get her ‘life history’ and have only ‘scraps and fragments’, ‘no strict biographical facts’ (BA, p.36): no more than rumours of her father being ‘exported’ for scandal, of her uncle the Colonial Bishop, (‘They forgot and forgave very easily in the Colonies’), and of her husband Ralph, (‘a Jew, got up to look the very spit and image of the landed gentry’) (BA, pp.36-37). Manresa, in her unconventional behaviour is a force of change in Pointz Hall, as are the new-comers to the village ‘bringing the old houses up to date, adding bathrooms’ (BA, p.68). Despite the obsolescence of the old, the new and unorthodox are still problematic. Figgis’ Guide Book, published in 1833, describes the area around Pointz Hall: ‘1833 was true in 1939. No house had been built; no town had sprung up [...] They looked at the view [...] to see if what they knew might perhaps be different today. Most days it was the same’ (BA, p.48). It is WWII which will bring change, which will disrupt landscape and tradition.

Although the pageant takes place as usual in June 1939, there are indications that things will never be the same again. Isa has just read a newspaper article about the rape of a young girl by a soldier. This rape actually occurred in April of 1938 and was reported in The Times on the 28, 29, and 30 of June 1938. 49 Although none of these newspaper articles actually appear in the three bound notebooks in which Woolf gathered articles and quotations during the thirties, this is an example of the significance for her writing of public events. Isa reads that the girl hit the trooper, so that when Lucy enters holding a hammer with which to nail a sign on the barn, Isa

associates the hammer, which is talked about every year, with the rape victim’s retaliation. Violence is then introduced into the routine: ‘Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words’, but ‘this year beneath the chime she heard: “the girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer”’ (BA, p.20). Change appears here in the form of destruction, a private rape echoing the public rape which will be WWII. Here Woolf is introducing into Between the Acts one of her theses from Three Guineas, namely that the drive to fascism and to war itself is linked to private violence against women by men. The tyrannies of the private household are connected to those of the public realm. The change in Isa’s reaction to tradition, represents the impending violence of WWII, a violence which for Woolf is an enlargement of private violence which occurs in the home, in the streets, and in the work place, to women. Woolf, like Miss LaTrobe, uses words, to resist male fear, virility and competition.

Woolf’s and Miss LaTrobe’s sharpest critiques are of the Victorian era. As in The Years, it is the strict codes of Victorian behaviour which prevent any deviation from the model family, in which, as Budge the constable recites, ‘Our Jane has brought the tea [...] Mama, your knitting, quick. For here [...] comes the breadwinner, home from the city’ (BA, p.154). Budge enforces ‘the laws of God and Man’ (BA, p.145) which define gender roles as well as Empire. Budge polices all races: ‘The Shah of Persia; Sultan of Morocco’ (BA, p.145). He polices all aspects of life, ‘thought and religion; drink; dress; manners; marriage too’ and particularly ‘wherever one or two, me and you, come together’, in other words he polices sexuality in order to maintain ‘purity [...] and respectability’ (BA, p.146). ‘If not, why, let ’em fester in [...] Cripplegate; St Giles’s; Whitechapel’ (BA, p.146), deprived areas of Victorian London in which immigrant and minority communities formed. Budge is adorned with
a row of medals, and his photo could very well be in *Three Guineas* along with the photos of the General, the Heralds, Judge and Archbishop, all laden with the costumery of pomp and circumstance. In Budge, Woolf is linking the dictatorial policing of women to the drive behind imperialism and in turn to the tyranny of fascism.

In the Victorian picnic scene, it is the men, Arthur and Edgar, who sing for ‘Our country’, who sing *Rule Britannia*, whereas the women sing ‘I’d Be A Butterfly’ (BA, p.153). Similarly it is Giles and his father Bart who are most closely associated with violence and fixity in the novel. Old Bart Oliver, retired from the Indian Civil Service, is a tyrant who terrorizes his Afghan hound and his grandson George, thinking him not man enough, and who is constantly at odds with his sister, Lucy. Giles follows in his father’s footsteps, the central image for his pent up violence being his crushing of the snake ‘choked with a toad in its mouth’ (BA, p.89): 50 ‘[a]ction relieved him’ (BA, p.89). Described as ‘the muscular, the hirsute, the virile’ (BA, p.95), he is ‘Man himself, the quintessence of virility’ (TG, p.364), the tyrant or dictator who must be resisted in *Three Guineas*. Furthermore, Giles is linked explicitly to Budge in *Between the Acts* by Dodge, who sees Giles approaching, ‘Armed and valiant, bold and blatant, firm elatant - the popular march tune rang in his head’ (BA, p.99). The tune which rings in Dodge’s head is the tune which introduces the constable. Woolf figured women as mirrors of male pride in *Three Guineas* and Mrs Manresa’s admiration of Giles in *Between the Acts* is part of this dichotomy. ‘Therein lay the germ of male dictatorship and female hero worship; of the fighting spirit of man and the war

50 This image was more than likely influenced by Woolf’s own similar experience: ‘We saw a snake eating a toad: it had half the toad in, half out; gave a suck now & then’ (D IV, p.338).
enthusiasm of woman.' 51

To place the novel in the context of the war is to bring into focus its preoccupation with the loss of community: a cohesive public voice. As Caughie argues, rather than reading the novel as 'a sign of despair or as Woolf's failure to envision a new social order' instead we might read the novel as, in part, 'a willingness to tolerate the incompatibilities and discontinuities that such collective concepts engender.' 52 The notion of 'public' is one such concept. 'The public fluctuates,' as she writes in September 1938 (D V, p.173), a comment typical of her descriptions of public feeling coming together momentarily and then dispersing. Between the Acts is an acceptance of that loss, an acceptance of diversity and heterogeneity. In notes Woolf made for Pointz Hall in September of 1938, she writes, 'The private feeling: the public': further evidence that the public/private split was in her mind and central to the conception of the novel and also evidence of her feeling of oscillation between the two. 53 She would depict both, the private and the public, the colon indicating the movement back and forth. Three months later, in December of 1938, she writes: 'The dispersal. The common mind broken up. What each thought privately' (MHP B2b p.6) - evidence that the emphasis has now been put on the private, and that the unified 'public' of the September 1938 note has dispersed. She has acknowledged the loss of a public voice, except in rare moments. Woolf recognizes the dispersity and variety within a collective concept of 'we'. She must relinquish Miss LaTrobe's desire to unite and hold the audience. Moments of unification do occur, but are brief, much as Eliza


52 Caughie, 1992, p.311.

Clark, as Queen Elizabeth, stands ‘For a moment [...] eminent, dominant’ before the breeze blows her headdress askew and the audience laughs (BA, p.76).

Miss LaTrobe has to be content with this momentary or partial unification and comprehension. ‘Still for one moment she held them together’ (BA, p.88). But the moment proves fleeting, as the crowd leaves. ‘It was a failure, another damned failure!’ (BA, p.88). During her conversation with Mrs Swithin, ‘their eyes met in a common effort to bring a common meaning to birth. They failed; and Mrs Swithin, laying hold desperately of a fraction of her meaning, said...’ (BA, p.137). Mrs Swithin must be content with a fraction, a portion of all Miss LaTrobe has been thinking. Miss LaTrobe’s desire to unite the audience is impeded by the diversity of reactions, the many readings of the same text: ‘they all looked at the play [...] Each of course saw something different’ (BA, p.192). Unity would obliterate the variety of response which occupies *Between the Acts*, just as a summation of the play would deny the various readings.

Miss LaTrobe is an ‘outsider’ in the world of *Between the Acts*. As a lesbian, an actress, a user of ‘strong language’, a smoker and a drinker ‘she was an outcast’ in the village (BA, pp.53 & 190). Importantly, her origins are unknown. ‘But where did she spring from?’ (BA, p.53) She escapes the villagers’ desire to know a person’s lineage. She cannot be judged on those terms. ‘Very little was actually known about her’ (BA, p.53). It is no coincidence that Woolf chose not only a woman, but an unconventional, marginalized figure as her artist. Although the pageant critiques such figures as Budge, LaTrobe is not presenting a final solution or even a solution of any kind, ‘for another play always lay behind the play she had just written’ (BA, p.58). Her pageant presents the variety, the multiplicity, the intertextuality of perception and representation. It opens up the linear, single-minded views of characters such as Giles,
Bart and Lucy. As Woolf writes in *Three Guineas*, the critique of Empire and patriotism must come from the outside. The character of Miss LaTrobe parallels Woolf's Society of Outsiders, who are aiming to prevent war through their experience of 'a different sex, a different tradition, a different education, and the different values which result from those differences' (TG, p.320). The society resists the glare of publicity, preferring to remain in obscurity, as does Miss LaTrobe (TG, p.322).

Although Miss LaTrobe's origins are unknown in *Between the Acts*, there is much evidence as to Woolf’s inspiration for the character. In 1977 Jane Marcus identified Edith Craig, daughter of Ellen Terry, as a source for Miss LaTrobe. Shortly thereafter, both Nina Auerbach and Joy Melville have linked Edith Craig directly to the character of Miss LaTrobe. Edith Craig, director, producer and sometimes actress, was involved in the theatre throughout her life. Edy, as she was known, produced many of Cicely Hamilton’s suffragette pageants as part of the Actresses Franchise League, founded in 1908. In 1911 she founded the Pioneer Players, with Ellen Terry as president, her longtime companion Christopher St John (born Christabel Marshall) as secretary and herself as managing stage director. In 1920, Woolf went to see *The Higher Court*, a production by the Pioneer Players, and wrote about it in the *New Statesman*. Gradually, Craig’s life began to centre around her mother’s home in Smallhythe, Kent, and her own neighbouring, Priest’s House, where she lived with Christopher St John and later Clare Atwood (Tony). As a lesbian actress and director, known for her eccentricities, such as wearing man’s clothes and conducting rehearsals in a smock or friar’s habit, the parallels with Miss LaTrobe are certainly clear. Woolf

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even captures Craig’s ‘abrupt manner and stocky figure’ (BA, p.58); Miss La Trobe is called ‘Bossy’ after Craig’s often dictatorial methods of directing. However, Craig’s conversion of Smallhythe into a memorial museum for her mother and of the barn into a theatre, strengthens the parallels. Craig produced an annual Shakespearean matinée in the Barn Theatre on the anniversary of her mother’s death, and five or six plays each summer. The Barn Theatre Society was established in 1931 and from 1931 to 1939 was a well known venue. Actors and actresses such as John Gielgud, Peggy Ashcroft and Sybil Thorndike came from London to perform. Vita Sackville-West, who in 1930 moved to Sissinghurst not seven miles away, wrote for the Society and Radclyffe Hall and her lover Una Troubridge came from Rye to the productions. In 1932 when Vita read her poem ‘The Land’ at Smallhythe, the Woolfs were present and in 1933, Woolf joined the Society and was taken by Vita to meet the three eccentric, lesbian feminist artists. 56

The image of Edith Craig presiding over all aspects of her historical pageants, using local villagers, in a barn in the Kent countryside, coincides exactly with the portrayal of Miss LaTrobe in Between the Acts, even down to the description of LaTrobe striding ‘about the fields in a smock frock’ (BA, p.53). Although fine weather permits LaTrobe’s pageant to take place outdoors, the barn is ready for the performance if needs be. Christopher St John writes:

There were holes in the thatched roof, gaps in the timbered walls; the audience invited to take part in the commemoration of a great actress, sat on rough benches on a beaten earth floor. But the improvised stage, because it was improvised by a Craig, did not look like a makeshift. The programme had been hastily arranged, but it was of rare quality. 57

56 Melville, p.256.

In *Between the Acts* the barn is described as ‘a hollow hall, sun-shafted’ and as with Craig’s theatre ‘benches were drawn across the floor of the Barn. If it rained, the actors were to act in the Barn; planks had been laid together at one end to form a stage’ (BA, p.24). No doubt Woolf’s visit to the Barn Theatre inspired her description of the venue itself, emphasized by her unconventional capitalization of Barn.

As WWII began, Craig was forced to lower her standards of acting, costumes and set and settle for ‘readings of the plays by local amateurs, symposiums, brains trusts, and other makeshifts.’ Similarly, LaTrobe is, on the eve of WWII, limited by her budget and the talents of the villagers who make up her cast. Just as LaTrobe’s pageant is presided over by women, Queen Anne and Queen Elizabeth, Craig lived and worked in a female community, increasingly removed from London and public life, but committed to the theatre and to the strength and autonomy of women.

Many of Auerbach’s descriptions of Craig’s productions also describe LaTrobe’s pageant, evidence of the connection in Woolf’s mind. Auerbach writes of the plays as ‘destroying the barriers between actors and audience to show the shapes of art that inhered in everyday life’ and describes ‘their ritual, their rootedness in the country, their tenderness towards a stately past.’ Woolf, through LaTrobe, conflates audience and cast in the ‘Ourselves’ scene and of course the participation of the cows and the weather in LaTrobe’s pageant emphasize its rural setting. Although Auerbach acknowledges that LaTrobe is much more of an outcast than Craig was, she draws the parallel too closely by comparing Craig’s often overtly political ‘collective vision’ with

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LaTrobe's pageant. Whereas Craig's suffragette pageants had the audience united and cheering, LaTrobe's moments of unification are rare, blown away like the words of the actors. Auerbach asserts:

Between the Acts, Woolf's last novel, is our most haunting and suggestive, if elusive, evocation of Edith Craig. Woolf's mannish, imperious Miss LaTrobe, whose pageants of women travesty England's history to exalt it, incarnates the eccentric determination with which the woman artist forges miracles. An outcast, half-seen and alone, hiding behind trees but furtively controlling the more visible players, Miss LaTrobe, like Edy, yields an antiprofessionalism that is triumphant and pathetic at once.

LaTrobe, like Craig, embodies the power of the female artist and both women are pushed further to the margins due to their lesbianism. In contrast to Craig's confidence, forcefulness and highly successful career, however, an essential part of LaTrobe's character mirrors Woolf's own need to reach her audience and fear that she may lose it. Rumours have it that LaTrobe 'had kept a tea shop at Winchester; that had failed. She had been an actress. That had failed. She had bought a four-roomed cottage and shared it with an actress. They had quarrelled' (BA, p.53). Any comparison of Craig and LaTrobe must contrast Craig's success and fame with LaTrobe's more marginal position. LaTrobe's projects are built up only to come apart and she represents artistic and struggle more than Craig, who although political in her theatrical pursuits, had the connections to create a receptive forum for her art. LaTrobe's assertion, 'I am the slave of my audience', echoes Woolf's feelings of 1939 more than Edith Craig's (BA, p.190). Also, the final image of LaTrobe escaping her home and the memories of 'the row with the actress' and 'the horror and terror of being alone' by seeking the 'oblivion' of the public house, contrasts significantly with the secure domestic life of Craig in Smallhythe (BA, p.190). Connections between text and

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60 Auerbach, p.427.

61 Auerbach, p.427.
biography never result in direct replicas in Woolf's novels; rather, the portrayal is tempered by the contingencies of the text itself and Woolf's own concerns.

The pervasive sense of Between the Acts, that of flux, oscillation and heterogeneity, is in part then a result of the oscillation and unsettledness which Woolf felt - moving between public and private, her work and politics - during the war. The awareness of contingency and resistance to closure is Woolf's acknowledgement of the change in her circumstance, her changed relations with her public and the act of writing, her changed conception of the public itself, but it is also a resistance to war itself. It is the outsider, the voice not bound by tradition, coupled with a forum which can allow multiplicity, which will counter the rigid oppression of fascism.

(5) The Last Essays: ‘No conclusions’

The book on which Woolf was working when she died highlights even more clearly the way in which the war caused her to concentrate her writing on questions of the artist’s relationship to his/her public as well as the importance of contingency in terms of historical circumstance. Her two final essays mark a distinct turn towards the public. She conceived of the new project on 14 October, 1938, wanting it to be ‘some kind of critical book [...] ranging all through English lit’ (D V, p.180). In February of 1939 it was described as a ‘grand tour of literature’ (D V, p.205) and in September 1940 a ‘Common History book’ (D V, p.318). Eventually on 24 November 1940 the work started life as ‘Reading At Random’, to become later ‘Turning the Page’. Woolf had written ‘Anon’, an introductory essay, and a fragment of ‘The Reader’, when she died in March of 1941. Woolf wanted to be free to ‘range at will’ (D V, p.318), in fact she considered using a diary form so as to allow her ‘to go from book to book’ (D V,
p.210), but worried that it might become too personal.

Clear from the initial notes Woolf made is her awareness of contingency, as in the comment 'Keep a running commentary upon the External.' As in Between the Acts where external circumstances and contexts are important, with 'Anon' Woolf wants to 'write lit the other way round. define the influences: the affect; the growth; the surrounding, also the inner, current all left out in text books' (A, p.374). The main external influence on the artist which Woolf traces in 'Anon' is the audience. She begins with pre-historic Britain, where the artist is anonymous, 'sometimes man; sometimes woman. He is the common voice singing out of doors, He has no house' (A, p.382). The figure of Anon, is rustic, inspired by nature; he is 'common belief' (A, p.384), and he is one with the audience. Woolf traces the death of this anonymous, communal, rural voice through the invention of the printing press by Caxton in 1477 and then through public pressure, and royal patronage, when the artist becomes 'no longer a wandering voice, but the voice of a man practising an art, asking for recognition, and bitterly conscious of his relation [to] the world, of the worlds scorn' (A, p.391). Woolf moves through Malory, Latimer, still writers who speak with a voice of 'reason, of humanity, of common sense' (A, p.387) to Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, where the external pressures have encumbered the artist, and he is unable to represent the voice of the common man, although 'the play is still in part the work of the undifferentiated audience, demanding great names, great deeds, simple outlines, and not the single subtlety of one soul' (A, p.394). Finally Woolf reaches Bacon, who uses the language of the individual. By this time, abstraction has disappeared and 'a]non is dead' (A, p.398).

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Anon’s voice is very much tied up with nature, folksong and peasantry. Anon’s status as an outsider allows him an anti-authoritarian role: ‘to mock the solemn, to comment upon the established’ (A, p.383). His anonymity gives him the freedom from responsibility necessary for subversion. ‘Anon’ is a tracing of the death of this communal, public voice, a death which Woolf has just acknowledged in Between the Acts. ‘Anon’ sees the move from a public voice, literally owned or acknowledged by no one, to the private voice of an individual author representing an individual character. Miss LaTrobe desires but cannot completely enjoy the anonymity of ‘Anon’. The audience search for her roots, gossip about her unconventional behaviour and want her to take responsibility for her play. The villagers, although they do often join in the pageant’s songs, do not share in the pageant as do Anon’s audience. Anon’s writing is impersonal and ‘[n]o one tries to stamp his own name, to discover his own experience, in his work’ (A, p.397), as they do with LaTrobe, and of course as critics have done ever since with Woolf.

The opening of the pageant in Between the Acts shares some of Anon’s characteristics. It is outdoors, rural, oral and the actress is generalized in that she represents England. The scene is Medieval England, but there are certain clues that it is not the world of Anon. In ‘Anon’ Woolf writes of the paths which are worn from ‘manor house to hovel, and hovel to church’ (A, p.383): literal equivalents of the metaphorical links of common belief. In Between the Acts Woolf includes reference to these paths, when during the pageant the Canterbury pilgrims sing “...wore ruts in the grass...built the house in the lane...” (BA, p.74). But the wind blows away the linking words, symbolizing the obsolescence of such paths in the present day. These connections are no longer to be made, just as to the audience ‘only a word or two was audible’ (BA, p.74).
In ‘Anon’ Woolf traces the pressure of external influences, economic, political and cultural. Nin, Crot and Pully are the ‘nonsense names’ (A, p.403) of these influences, and she explores their power to change the relationship between artist and audience from one in which the artist is anonymous, and the audience participates in his/her song, to one in which the artist is an individual, dependent on the audience. In her notes she writes of pre-1477 that there was ‘No public, in our sense’ (A, p.374) because there was no division between Anon and his audience. There was no public to cater for and please, and although the song was public in that it was not private; it was shared and created by all and was an expression of common rather than individual belief. In the sense that Between the Acts is public, because it is presented to an audience, it is a public voice which does not include or necessarily represent the audience. Although the pageant depicts England’s history, a communal concern, only momentarily do the audience feel it as such. ‘The audience gazed at her’ (BA, p.112) implies a certain amount of unity of response, but this inevitably moves into an individual response such as ‘[i]t was a mellay; a medley; an entrancing spectacle (to William)” (BA, p.84). Isa on the other hand feels that ‘there was such a medley of things going on [...] that she could make nothing of it’ (BA, p.82). The epitome of the distance of the pageant from the time of Anon is the ‘Ourselves’ scene, in which the audience might have conceived of themselves as a whole but instead are reflected in darting mirrors ‘not whole by any means’ (BA, p.167). Also, Anon’s lack of self consciousness is completely eradicated in the intense self conscious theatricality of the pageant. The actors and actresses continually make the audience aware of their real identities by forgetting their lines or mishandling their costumes.

The fragment of Woolf’s second essay, ‘The Reader’, traces the birth of the reader at the end of the sixteenth century and again we see Woolf concerned with the
audience: the writer’s, as opposed to the playwright’s, public. The unfinished piece of this last essay emphasizes the extent to which the term ‘public’ came under scrutiny in these final years. In tracing the notion of audience, the notion of collectivity, Woolf is perhaps seeking to understand her own sense of lack of audience. She underscores the importance of the reader in her comment that ‘[h]is importance can be gauged by the fact that when his attention is distracted, in times of public crisis, the writer exclaims: I can write no more’ (A, p.428). Writing herself in a time of public crisis, this is her own plea. Ultimately, writing was Woolf’s public voice, her weapon of resistance to the war and without a readership she must have felt that even that had been denied her.

The bombardment of the war, both literally and through the media, made her seek a private space, both at Monk’s House, and in her memoirs and diaries. Public and private realms intersected with each other, requiring Woolf to demarcate them even more distinctly than previously. Woolf’s reaction to war, the texts she wrote as WWII was imminent, was governed by the contingencies of her own situation and concerns, namely the concerns of an artist losing her audience. This, when more urgently than ever Woolf felt her ideas on women and fascism needed to be heard, led her to deliberate further on the artist/audience relationship in her final essays. Woolf’s preoccupation with the ‘public’ realm at this time, as well as her own difference with public opinion, resulted in her seeing even more clearly the problems with notions of collectivity and unity. In the face of the possible finality of WWII and as a result of her own sense of dispersal of opinion, Woolf’s sense of what I have called contingency is intensified. In the notes to ‘Reading at Random’ Woolf writes: ‘The virtue of our age that people dont rest on their laurels. Perpetually broken up. Renewing. No conclusions’ (A, p.374). Woolf finds inspiration in change, in the
avoidance of finality. Ironically, the final words of her last, unfinished essay, 'The Reader' are 'We are in a world where nothing is concluded' (A, p.429). The last words of Woolf's final essay are a paradox; her conclusion is a denial of summation.
Conclusion

In a thesis which attempts to illustrate the importance of contingency and context both to Woolf's thinking and to Woolf criticism, a conclusion which posited one overarching or teleological reading would undermine the thesis itself. My discussion of the division of the public and the private in Woolf's writing, both as she used it explicitly and as it can be read into her work, has shown that the connotations and contexts of the terms vary. Public and private in Woolf's work and life can be read in many different ways, several of which I have explored here, and none of which can be privileged as the 'last word' on the matter. Having said this, the distinction itself is clearly an important one for Woolf's life and work. It is one which she uses throughout her work, maintaining, as does Rorty, the irreconcilability of the terms themselves.

By way of a conclusion, then, I want to extend the discussion of Three Guineas found in Chapter Four, simply because Three Guineas is the work in which Woolf uses the terms public and private most explicitly and most often. It is also a work which exemplifies the variety of levels on which the public/private distinction operates. The nature of the sources of information used in Three Guineas is a constant concern of the work, and as discussed briefly in Chapter Four, works along public and private lines. The distinction between the private home and the public world is also central to the text, as is the rather different distinction between privacy and public display or ceremony. Within these three ways of conceiving public and private in Three Guineas the relationship between the two terms changes, sometimes marking a gulf between two realms or spaces, other times used to illustrate similarities between distinct spheres.
In *Three Guineas* Woolf draws on a wide variety of sources: newspaper articles, reports, statistics, letters, biographies, autobiographies, photographs and poems. The narrator distinguishes between biography and autobiography, which are records of private life and of individuality, and reports and newspaper articles which are 'history in the raw' and are concerned with public matters (TG, p.159). Biography and autobiography are records of private life, whereas public genres record the life of a consensus, a community. Although the distinction between private and public recording of information remains constant, her conception of each term is not static. She can collect 'facts from history and biography' just as public sources such as newspapers and reports can be opinionated (TG, p.193). ‘Even outsiders can consult the annals of those public bodies which record not the day-to-day opinions of private people, but use a larger accent and convey through the mouths of Parliaments and Senates the considered opinions of bodies of educated men’ (TG, p.188). These records are still opinion rather than fact, but they carry the weight of a body of voices. This quotation highlights the idea of public access, available to one not included in the body of voices, which shifts the public/private distinction slightly. Writing about the university, the narrator remarks that history and biography are ‘the only evidence available to an outsider’ (TG, p.199). She has to rely on sources that are publicly available as she has no recourse to private experience when it comes to universities. Here then, biography, in terms of access, becomes public, although in terms of content it deals with the private life. The point is stressed in *Three Guineas* that the narrator, and women in general, do not have to rely on their 'private noses' but can 'call in evidence from outside' such as the 'public press' (TG, p.225). The narrator’s feminist argument stems from various forms of publicly documented fact rather than her own private grievance: an important point for Woolf because of her fear that her work was informed by the
latter. The fact comes in the form of, for example, statistics about women’s wages and opinionated letters to the newspaper, since both constitute evidence of sexism. Also, as the narrator argues, ‘When you consider that these examples have all come to the surface of the newspaper you will agree that they represent a far greater number of private and submerged experiments of which there is no public proof’ (TG, p.329). Just as public tyranny mirrors private, public examples of sexism stand for the many more unpublished ones.

A more straightforward public/private division centres around the restriction of women in the nineteenth century to the private or domestic sphere, excluded from the public world of men. In *Three Guineas* this division works largely in terms of employment and economics:

> the world as it is at present is divided into two services; one the public and the other the private. In one world the sons of educated men work as civil servants, judges, soldiers and are paid for that work; in the other world, the daughters of educated men work as wives, mothers, daughters - but are they not paid for that work? (TG, p.230).

Rather than conceiving of the public world as the city itself, the economic and materialist thrust of *Three Guineas* causes Woolf to see the spheres as certain kinds of employment. The private realm is not opposed to the working world as, she argues, it too is a sphere of employment, but unpaid employment. Woolf describes women’s movement from the private home to the public realm in terms of access to employment and wealth. With the passing of the Sex Disqualification Removal Act and the opening of certain professions to women in 1919, ‘[t]he door of the private house was thrown open. In every purse there was, or might be, one bright new sixpence in whose light every thought, every sight, every action looked different’ (TG, p.172). It is employment which brings women from ‘the shadow of the private house’ onto ‘the bridge which lies between the old world and the new’ (TG, p.172). Prior to this
movement, this bridge between the two worlds, both spheres were restrictive to
women; the public in its exclusion of women and the ‘private house with its cruelty,
its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality’ (TG, p.208).

In addition to being a physical space, the home, the private sphere, is also a
way of perceiving, a ‘vantage point’ (TG, p.183). The deprivation and difference in
experience resulting from life in the private sphere colour women’s perception of the
public world. Schools and universities, while for men ‘the source of memories and of
traditions innumerable’, are for the daughters of educated men a ‘congregation of
buildings’ representing ‘a schoolroom table; an omnibus going to a class; a little
woman with a red nose who is not well educated herself but has an invalid mother to
support; an allowance of £50 a year with which to buy clothes’ (TG, pp. 156-157).

Looking at the male world of education and employment, the female narrator can see
only what male privilege and opportunity meant that she had instead: ‘the noble courts
and quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge often appear to educated men’s daughters
like petticoats with holes in them, cold legs of mutton, and the boat train starting for
abroad while the guard slams the door in their faces’ (TG, p.157). The connotations of
public and private realms are subjective, dependent upon one’s perspective, but also
Woolf is conveying the connection between the realms: the security and containment
of the male, public realm of education and employment depends upon its distinction
from and perpetuation of the private realm of the home. From the private home ‘the
world of professional, of public life [...] undoubtedly looks queer. At first sight it is
enormously impressive’ (TG, p.176). It is from the world of the City, the Law Courts,
Parliament, the Bank of England, St Paul’s ‘that the private house [...] has derived its
creed, its laws, its clothes and carpets, its beef and mutton’ (TG, p.176). The educated
man’s home is sustained, determined, both financially and ideologically, by the male
world of employment.

For Woolf, this difference in point of view is the key to the prevention of war which comes from the prevention of ‘prostituted culture and intellectual slavery’ (TG, p.292). Motives such as glory, vanity, fame, competition and greed are symptoms of a prostituted culture, which perpetuates the ‘glory of war’ (TG, p.295). If we knew the horror of war, as exemplified in the text by the photo of ‘dead bodies and ruined houses’ from the Spanish Civil War, we would work harder for its prevention (TG, p.296). The male education system promotes competition, fame and greed, which is why, Woolf argues, women, with their different experience, with their lack of patriotism caused by their marginalized position in society, can offer a different point of view. To do this, however, they must gain education and enter the professions so that their voice is heard, but on the other hand they must avoid ‘any of the forms of brain prostitution which are so insidiously suggested by the pimps and panders of the brain-selling trade’ such as fame, publicity, greed and glory (TG, p.291).

Here, then we have the third distinction between public and private: between the dangers of publicity and the liberation of privacy and secrecy. The connotations of ‘private’ shift here in that although women leave the restrictive entrapment of the private house, the father’s or husband’s house, they need to maintain a different kind of privacy, of flexibility, in order not to score the same ruts as men, in order to be able to help in the prevention of war. As discussed briefly in Chapter Four, Three Guineas, both the photos reproduced in the text and the text itself, exposes the ostentation of male ceremonial dress; how it ‘gratifies vanity’ and ‘serves to advertise the social, professional, or intellectual standing of the wearer’ (TG, p.179). The public/private division is important here in that the narrator remarks on the ‘comparative simplicity’ of men’s private clothing, in contrast to the ‘medals, ribbons,
badges, hoods, gowns' of their 'public attire' (TG, pp. 177 & 321). To preserve their difference, women need to abjure such forms of ceremony or publicity, to refuse 'medals, honours, degrees' as Woolf herself refused a Doctorate of Letters from Manchester University (TG, p.291 and D IV, p.147).

Whereas women need to enter the public world of employment, they can remain 'safe from publicity and its poison' (TG, p.297). Woolf links 'dictated, regimented, official pageantry' with the Fascist States and their use of the 'power of medals, symbols, orders' to control (TG, p.321). 'The coarse glare of advertisement and publicity' 'paralyses the free action of the human faculties and inhibits the human power to change and create new wholes' (TG, p.322). Privacy, secrecy and darkness are antidotes to the public ceremonies and traditions which go with dogma and tyranny. Here, the room of one's own, 'silent, private', becomes a liberation, a place from which women can speak without restriction, and from which the variety of women's experience can be spoken (TG, p.297). Remaining deliberately vague, the narrator writes: 'we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private' (TG, 321).

This ambivalence between joining and resisting the public realm is echoed in the shift in the text from the antithetical nature of public and private realms to the similarities found between them. The ellipses used so often in the text represent varying kinds of gaps or silences, but several times they denote 'a precipice, a gulf so deeply cut between us that for three years and more I have been sitting on my side of it wondering whether it is any use to try to speak across it' (TG, p.155). It has taken the narrator three years to attempt an answer to the gentleman's letter asking how 'are we to prevent war?' (TG, p.153) The incompatibility between the experience in the private as opposed to the public realm may make any answer impossible. Also,
although both realms are restrictive to women, the nature of the respective restriction is distinct: ‘Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with it nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed’ (TG, p.261).

Here, the narrator finds herself in the middle between two distinct realms, wanting to ‘plunge off the bridge’ rather than be part of either of them (TG, p.261). Several times the letter comes to a halt, temporarily unable to continue because of such discrepancies.

Another type of gulf between public and private is the way in which certain behaviour is treated differently in either realm: ‘What charms and consoles in the private house may distract and exacerbate in the public office’ (TG, p.225). Men’s resistance to women’s entrance into the public world, a resistance which is well documented in Three Guineas, means that what is accepted in the private sphere ‘has a certain odour attached to it in Whitehall which is disagreeable to the noses on the other side of the partition’ (TG, p.227). One quotation which Woolf provides from the Daily Telegraph, 1936, is clear evidence of this discrepancy, the feeling in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that women entering the work force were overstepping some natural boundary which should have kept them in the home:

I am certain I voice the opinion of thousands of young men when I say that if men were doing the work that thousands of young women are now doing the men would be able to keep those same women in decent homes. Homes are the real places of the women who are now compelling men to be idle (TG, pp. 226-227).

Similarly, familial relationships changed in the transition from private to public. For example, ‘the public, the society relationship of brother and sister, has been very different from the private’, an idea she explored in depth in ‘The Pargiters’ and The Years where the close relationship between Bobby (Martin) and Rose deteriorates as
soon as Bobby starts school (TG, p.307). Woolf also discusses the reaction of fathers to their daughters' desires to move outside the private home, noting that 'the fathers in private, it is true, yielded; but the fathers in public, massed together in societies, in professions' (TG, p.358).

On the other hand, Woolf argues that despite such discrepancies in behaviour or experience, that both public and private must be taken into account when tackling the prevention of war and the defense of liberty. 'Without private there can be no public freedom'; the voice of the political tyrant is linked to the voice of the father in the private home who denies his daughter education and employment (TG, p.331). 'The public and private worlds are inseparably connected; [...] the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other' (TG, p.364). We cannot immerse ourselves in our own private world, the narrator suggests (here private becomes the individual's concerns rather than the private home) and distance ourselves from public or political concerns; rather we must see the connections between them. Woolf brings war into the private realm, both the home and the realm of individual concern.

Throughout all the various connotations and shifting meanings of public and private in *Three Guineas*, however, the distinction remains. Although Woolf at times criticizes the restrictions which certain connotations of public and private reinforce, she is not looking for the unification or obsolescence of the distinction itself. The public/private distinction is integral to both her pacifism and her feminism, which of course are integrally linked themselves in the importance women can play in the prevention of war. The key to this linkage is the shift Woolf makes between the movement of women beyond the restriction of the private home to the liberation of privacy itself in its potential to maintain variety.
Three Guineas is also a useful example of the importance of contingency in discussing Woolf’s notion of public and private. Since the division has multiple meanings, each must be taken in context and an argument which tried to offer a single definition of public and private in Three Guineas would be necessarily simplistic. Three Guineas also serves as evidence of the contingency of Woolf’s own thinking in her constant awareness of perspective: the situatedness of the viewpoints and quotations which she offers. As already mentioned, she takes into account not only the different perspectives of men and women, but more specifically what the public world, for example the City or the university, looks like from the ‘threshold of the private house; through the shadow of the veil that St Paul still lays upon our eyes’ (TG, p.176). That perspective changes when women hold the possibility of employment, of economic independence: ‘everything she saw looked different - men and women, cars and churches’ (TG, p.172).

Woolf is sensitive to different interpretations. The word patriotism, for example, may have different associations to men and women, but also she makes clear that ‘the same sex holds very different opinions about the same thing’ (TG, p.161). She quotes both a soldier who advocates war, and Wilfred Owen who abhors it. Woolf undoes the idea that any view is ‘natural’ or ‘right’ except the view that the photos of dead men and ruined houses depict an abomination, in other words, like Rorty, the only finality is that cruelty is wrong. The photographs are also final in that they are not an argument or an opinion, always tinged with the contingencies of motivation, situation and audience, but are ‘a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye’ (TG, p.165). However, even the finality or objectivity of the photograph as a source of information is brought into question when the narrator lays before the addressee a photograph of, as she says, ‘your world as it appears to us’ (TG, p.176). The
photograph, here, is used to express subjectivity, one particular point of view, as opposed to crude fact.

The narrator of *Three Guineas* makes it clear that ‘there is a Grenfell point of view; a Knebworth point of view; a Wilfred Owen point of view; a Lord Chief Justice’s point of view and the point of view of an educated man’s daughter. All differ’ (TG, pp. 162-163). She searches for finality: ‘But is there no absolute point of view?’, turning to the Church, expecting to find an ultimate statement, in this case on war, but finding instead that the Bishop of London felt one thing, the Bishop of Birmingham another (TG, p.163). The only conclusion she can reach is that ‘there is no certainty in heaven above or on earth below’ (TG, p.163). As she writes later: ‘quotations then prove nothing that can be checked and verified; they merely cause us to hold opinions’ (TG, p.258). Only the photograph depicting the effects of war has any finality. Quotations only elicit responses which have the same subjective, contingent status as they have themselves.

While the contingency of opinion and information makes the narrator’s task difficult, the contingency of the women’s college which the narrator envisages is useful in that it prevents the fixity and dogma of tradition and patriarchy. The college must be ‘experimental’ and ‘adventurous’ (TG, p.199). Here Woolf shows her commitment to processes of change and variety: ‘Let the pictures and books be new and always changing. Let it be decorated afresh by each generation with their own hands cheaply’ (TG, p.199). The college building, its contents and its teaching will constantly be renewed, testing out new possibilities rather than becoming static and thereby being taken as ‘natural’ or the only way to do things. Similarly, Woolf’s Society of Outsiders resists rules, boundaries and labels. It resists the society within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially; where, daubed red and gold, decorated like
The Society of Outsiders, called thus for the sake of some kind of identification, will be 'anonymous and elastic' in order that it can change (TG, p.310).

The narrator of Three Guineas answers her three letters with a constant awareness of circumstance: of the economic, social, educational and legal situation of both women and men. Woolf's awareness of differing points of view is manifested in her recreations of the perspectives of the three addressees. Within the fictional context of Three Guineas the narrator allows for other opinions through quotation and the epistolary format. The difference which she claims women have from men is a result of these differing circumstances. Woolf situates the difference in the material: in the effects of differing education and financial circumstances, and of being 'so differently trained and [...] so differently influenced by memory and tradition' (TG, p.175).

Obviously the nature of the argument means that generalizations must be made, but Woolf qualifies her categories, writing for example about the daughters of educated men, knowing that her argument and the scenarios she provides are class specific and writing partly out of her own experience as the upper middle class daughter of an educated man, who was herself denied a formal education.

The ending of Three Guineas is a call for specificity and attention to detail. The narrator is tempted to listen to the voices of the poets 'assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only', but argues that 'that would be to dream' whereas what is needed is attention to the specifics of war: 'the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones' (TG, p.365). The photos of dead bodies and ruined houses represent the effects of the Spanish Civil War and the narrator suggests looking at, rather than erasing, the divisions and differences which cause war as well
as the specific differences between men and women which may help prevent war. The narrator does invoke unity in terms of the unified reaction of horror to the photos of dead bodies and the universal right to liberty, and she does suggest that the connections between public and private tyrannies for example, are important, but these unities are specific, as opposed to the poet’s generalized talk of ‘the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity’ (TG, p.365). Woolf wants to examine the facts of war, the contingencies of the situation rather than dream of unity. Also that unity would rub out the ‘different angles’ which are so important to her argument concerning the preventative measures of women’s difference (TG, p.366). It is this attention to specificity which is needed in Woolf criticism and which is important to a study of the shifting meanings and contexts of the public and the private in Woolf’s work.
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