This Room Explains a Great Deal: Virginia Woolf's Renovative Modern Fiction of the 1920s

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A major thesis submitted for the qualification of

Doctor of Philosophy

Maynooth University

Department of English

31 October 2022

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Virginia Woolf realises her vision for what she called a 'modern fiction' over the course of the 1920s. Late twentieth-century scholars have discussed this stage of Woolf-ian aesthetics in a variety of political and aesthetic contexts and recent readings have turned to integrated and cross-disciplinary approaches, establishing modern fiction's historicity and dialogic intent. This study contributes to advances in time- and space-conscious modernist studies of Woolf, examining the influence of the gendered, domestic, and public spaces of turn-of-the-century England on Woolf's modernist writing.

As a cultural observer of Victorian and Edwardian social structures, Woolf synthesises her personal experiences of both traditional and modern life to create a new literature, capable of capturing the modern individual, as she perceives her/him, in relation to the complex cultural shifts of the period. Woolf's somewhat conservative modernist aesthetic means that she draws from both pre-existing and new social and literary practices — Woolf's modernist techniques mean that she is, in effect, a renovator of established literary forms.

The chapters of this thesis are arranged via three milestone novels in Woolf's development of a "modern fiction". Each reading of the novels unpacks a specific narrative strategy, as Woolf moves towards a fulfilment of the ideas outlined in her essay 'Modern Fiction' (1919). The first chapter explores *Jacob's Room* (1922) as Woolf's critique of Edwardian culture, through the spatial politics of private and public institutions which Woolf derived from growing up in a suffocating Victorian home. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) mends the cracked relationship of the fragmented individual in a shattered post-war society by adapting a post-impressionist sense of order and self-

completion rooted in rhythmic composition. *Orlando* (1928), through the layering and satirising of past and present literature, which Woolf filters through developments in modernist parody and biography, marks Woolf's outgrowing of the novel form which, in turn, enables Woolf's experimental fiction of the 1930s until the end of her life.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Colin Graham for being the primary advisor of this work. I am also deeply indebted to Prof. Emer Nolan, who ensured that this work ultimately came into fruition and provided great advice in an hour of need. I am also truly grateful to the Research Ethics Committee for granting me the MU COVID-19 Extension Fund during the pandemic. A special thanks goes to my friend Dart, whose excellent proofreads and edits in the early years of my stay in Ireland built my confidence in academic writing.

My thesis explores the importance of our experiences and the rooms in which they take place. Looking back, I cannot help but remember the years of this thesis through the places which shaped them. I want to thank Mary and her family who graciously welcomed me to her home and offered me a place of joy and laughter. I want to thank Ross and Ari who cheered me up on bad days and cheered with me on good ones; the warmth of your home and the smell of your excellent breakfasts will always be a part of this story. I also want to thank my friend Levi, who showed me that a true friendship can grow stronger even when physical distances grow farther apart. A special thank you goes to Uli, in whose place with a great view I found sanctuary, for the countless memories through our many years of friendship.

Finally, I would like to thank those closest to me: my girlfriend Sandra, who too often endured the many moods of a frustrated Ph.D. student and managed to guide us through this journey with resilience and strength; my father, whose curiosity and passion for the arts lives on in me; my brother, Theo; and most of all my mother, whose unrelenting belief in and support for her sons made all of this possible.

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Introduction

> My first assertion is one that I think you will grant — that every one in this room is a judge of character. Indeed it would be impossible to live for a year without disaster unless one practised character-reading and had some skill in the art. Our marriages, our friendships depend on it; our business largely depends on it; every day questions arise which can only be solved by its help. And now I will hazard a second assertion, which is more disputable perhaps, to the effect that on or about December, 1910, human character changed. (BB, 4)

When Woolf articulates this fundamental social transition, she describes not only a change of generations (from Edwardians to Georgians, as she describes it in this essay), but a change in the relationship between the individual and society. As the excerpt above indicates, to “read” character is, for Woolf, akin to understanding the environment which produced the individual. For Woolf, the novel was a mode of recording, critiquing and renovating society — this is why her life and art, her discussion of social norms and her literary criticism, are all intimately intertwined. Woolf felt part of a new, intermediate generation, shaped by a Victorian and Edwardian culture, but compelled to invent their own mode of life and their own literature to record it. Hence her famous, and deliberately overstated, declaration about the revolutionary nature of “December, 1910” (BB, 4), which Woolf uses to challenge her Edwardian predecessors on generational and stylistic grounds:

> Can it be that, owing to one of those little deviations which the human spirit seems to make from time to time, Mr Bennett has come down with his magnificent apparatus of catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side? Life escapes. (MF, 187-8)

The nature of this alienation is essential to understanding the values which inform her pursuit of modern fiction. If we consider the personal, cultural, and political events around that time it becomes clear why Woolf's novels are concerned with change and renewal.

Woolf's biographical self-understanding, as an inter-generational author, derives from the dramatic shift of lifestyle which took place in 1904, when she was 22 years of age. Up until 1904 the Stephen family lived in an upper-middle-class row house at 22 Hyde Park Gate, London. The Stephen children experienced a conventional, even stereotypical, late-Victorian upbringing in a well-connected, upper-middle-class London household. Woolf was denied formal education and her social contacts outside of the Stephen family were very limited (Annan, 120). As a philosopher, critic, and chief editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* their father, Leslie Stephen, constituted a highly respected figure in the English intelligentsia and was to all appearances a model Victorian patriarch. As Annan points out: "Nearly all the major mid-Victorian novelists, poets and critics contributed and Stephen could claim to have nursed Henry James, Hardy, Symonds and Robert Louis Stevenson to fame" (Annan, 67). The Stephens maintained friendly relations with some of the most prominent figures in English society of the nineteenth century. Leslie's first wife was daughter of William Makepeace Thackeray. Furthermore, the Stephen family exchanged dinner invitations with guests such as Edward Burne-Jones and William Holman Hunt (Giachero, 170) and the Chamberlain family (Dunn, 59). Hence, the Stephen home became a micro-representation of London's upper-middle and upper-class intellectual circles, through which Woolf experienced Victorian behaviours and expectations.

The death of her father in 1904 resulted in the move of Woolf and the remaining members of the Stephen family — her brothers Thoby and Adrian and her sister Vanessa — to a new house at 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. Vanessa assumed leadership over the household and Woolf and Bell[1] were practically relieved from all oppressive factors of the past. It was after 1904 that Bell and Woolf began to actively pursue their vision for a modern life and the modern art and fiction to represent it. In her memoirs, Woolf emphasises how meaningful the transition from their old house to the new was:

> But it is the house that I would ask you to imagine for a moment for, though Hyde Park Gate seems now so distant from Bloomsbury, its shadow falls across it. 46 Gordon Square could never have meant what it did had not 22 Hyde Park Gate preceded it. (OB, 182)

As my thesis will explore, this paradoxical social decline into liberation, as experienced through the change of house and neighbourhood (and the death of the father figure), informs the style of Woolf's modern fiction significantly. Bell and Woolf renovated the house in order to accommodate a new, bourgeois-bohemian lifestyle which was antagonistic to the gender and class norms of their father's Victorian home. The new house quickly became a meeting place for progressive thinkers, writers, and painters which is recognised today as the beginning of the Bloomsbury Group (Q. Bell, *Bloomsbury*, 28).

When Woolf announces an epochal change from Edwardian to, as she saw it, a still-forming Georgian literature, she justifies the experimental nature of English modernism against a perceived dead-end of Edwardian literature. Her modern fiction is directly opposed to social realists such as Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and John

[1] Vanessa Stephen married Clive Bell in 1907. For ease of identification, I use her later married surname to refer to her from this point on.

Galsworthy. Woolf understands herself as part of a cast of experimental writers alongside the likes of James Joyce, E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, and T.S. Eliot. Her dissatisfaction with what she refers to as “Edwardian” literature and criticism is rooted in the idea that the generational progression from Victorian to Edwardian style took a wrong turn. Woolf centres this transition in the relationship between literary character and world.

For instance, in her opinion, Victorian character tropes and the emerging portrayal of society constitute the point of origin for Edwardian style:

> And so it goes on from character to character all through the splendid opulence of the Victorian age. They love, they joke, they hunt, they marry; they lead us from hall to cottage, from field to slum. The whole country, the whole society is revealed to us, and revealed always in the same way, through the astonishing vividness and reality of the characters. And it was perhaps on that account that the Edwardians changed their tactics. (BB1st, 117)

Woolf argues that writers such as Wells, Shaw, and Galsworthy are perpetually deconstructing the Victorian literary legacy under the guise of reform while simultaneously adhering too closely to its genre and style conventions:

> So the young novelist became a reformer, and thought with pardonable contempt of those vast Victorian family parties, where the funny man was always funny, the good woman always good, and nobody seemed aware, as they pursued their own tiny lives, that society was rotten and Christianity itself at stake. (BB1st, 117)

Edwardian literature has bent out of shape and lost touch with the actuality of the individual and contemporary life it was meant to depict. Woolf perceives Edwardian literature as failing to capture this perceived on-going shift: “Is life like this? Must novels be like this? Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being ‘like this’” (MF, 189). At the heart of Woolf’s attention is the relationship between the individual and the

realities of life: “Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments [the Edwardian novel] as we provide” (MF, 188).

Hence, the foundation of Woolf’s decade-long pursuit of a new literature rests on the notion of a necessary reconstitution of the novel as a mode of authentic representation; representation of authentic modern characters, and new modes of representation. Woolf articulates the initial goal of modern fiction:

> To bring back character from the shapelessness into which it has lapsed, to sharpen its edges, deepen its compass, and so make possible those conflicts between human being which alone rouse our strongest emotions — such was their problem. It was the consciousness of this problem, and not the accession of King George, which produced as it always produces, the break between one generation and the next. Here, however, the break is particularly sharp, for here the dispute is fundamental. (BB1st, 118)

The reality of this supposed dividing line has been criticised by Woolf’s contemporaries and modernist studies alike.

For instance, in his critique of the English Avant-Garde *Men without Art*, Wyndham Lewis, “himself a representative of the embattled standards of prewar Englishness,” (Sherry, *War*, 299) criticises the narrow and oversimplified opposition against which Woolf constructs her Mrs Brown:

> Anyone would suppose from what she says that at the time in question Trollope, Jane Austen, Flaubert, Maupassant, Dostoievsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, etc., etc., etc., etc., were entirely inaccessible to this poor lost "Georgian" would-be novelist: it is as though she, Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy had been the only people in the world at the time, and as if there had been no books but their books, and no land but England. (Lewis, 137)

The term “Georgian” itself, as Lewis hints, became a term of contention between the supposed factions of writers. For one, there is no major generational difference either side of Woolf’s line: there are merely 15 years between Woolf and Joyce and their Edwardian counterparts Bennett and Galsworthy.

Second, the defining features of Georgian literature are by no means obvious. Diepeveen traces the battle for a Georgian canon in the form of traditionalist anthologies by J.C. Squire and Harold Monro, which tended to exclude modernist texts, and outlets of modernist literature exemplified in the editorial work of John Middleton Murry and T.S. Eliot:

> For many involved in forming the modern canon, the issues were sharply defined, and there clearly was a public battle going on. It was a battle between those who saw themselves as serious artists, who realized that the unique conditions of modern life demanded cultural artifacts uniquely shaped by those conditions—represented by the proponents of difficult modernism—on one side. On the other side were those who considered themselves as the defenders of tradition, who thought that modern art had abandoned the universal qualities of great art—represented by Squire and others. (Diepeveen, *Difficulties*, 13)

However, as Baldick reminds us, modernist writers did not hold a monopoly on literary innovation and neither did descendants of Victorian and Edwardian literature hold a monopoly on tradition:

> We must not expect to find, then, any clear separation between camps of traditionalists and experimenters. In part this is because there were various kinds of experiment, and more than one kind of tradition as well. The literary trend that we call Modernism was not dedicated, as too often assumed, to overthrowing or discarding Tradition as such, but rather to finding alternative traditions from which to work in new conditions. The Modernist quest for usable

> traditions most often involved some by-passing of romantic and Victorian canons and a retrieval of earlier writers as rediscoverable models. (Baldick, 33)

Woolf's construction of a generational and stylistic divide is more of an expression of a felt alienation and a radical declaration of intent.

The clearest generational divide which appears in Woolf's criticism is perhaps more accurately placed around the beginning of WWI. As Baldick notes, the post-war disillusionment of many of its younger witnesses, such as Siegfried Sassoon, Osbert Sitwell and Richard Aldington, is frequently marked by "the enraged finger-pointing at the bloodthirsty Old Men" as an expression of "a wider generational antagonism that deformed the culture of 1920s Britain" (Baldick, 36). For many, the social cataclysm created a real sense of difference between pre- and post-war England which came to define the Edwardian against the Georgian period. Sherry suggests that Woolf's modernist aesthetic consciousness, in part, took shape through this elevated self-realisation of historic transition:

> She needs to unmake and remake the model of imaginative temporality in which the novel is set by precedent convention. This task defines the crisis that other writers of prose will have identified, but failed to use as an opportunity. … The enterprise represents nothing less than a recognition that older modes of historical and narrative time have ceased to cohere. This intensified awareness of time, of her own moment in history in particular, establishes the modern*ist* consciousness of her work, where this suffix designates a heightened sense of temporal specificity, a condition coinciding as well with some fundamental rupture in the previous structure of time. (Sherry, *War*, 269)

Thus, for Woolf, the marker "Edwardian", constitutes "an important device by which she can consign her antagonist to a closed episode of the pre-War past, while she and her contemporaries claim possession of the present day" (Baldick, 36). As this thesis

will show, Woolf's experimental journey progresses through the 1920s with a changing understanding of this literary and social landscape.

If Woolf depicts much of the Edwardian legacy in *Jacob's Room* (1922), England has visibly leapt into a post-war modernity in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). *Orlando* (1928) then depicts 350 years of English history, divided by a linear progression through various eras in English literary history, so that, as a novel, it moves comfortably towards the contemporary present of 1928 where Orlando achieves a kind of self-actualisation. As Woolf addresses these periods in her novels, finding ways to reach towards an authentic mode of representation, she adjusts her style in perpetually *renovative* ways. There is an observable change of attitude towards the literary influences of the past from the initial rejection and subversion of Victorian and Edwardian structures to the embrace of and emancipation from its legacy.

Woolf's Architectural Modernism

Woolf titled her first iteration of a 'modern fiction' *Jacob's Room*. The novel contains a reference to a window, door, or room on nearly every single page. In her next novel *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf developed a method which she called "tunnelling": "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters. … The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (*Diary* 2, 263). Her subsequent, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), is structured in three parts: "The Window", "Time Passes" and "The Lighthouse". *Orlando: A Biography* primarily depicts centuries of English history through the rooms of Orlando's family mansion. And Woolf's seminal essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), thematises the significance of domestic spaces in socio-political

contexts. All this indicates a consistent concern with the relation of the individual to his/her social and private spaces.

Chapter One of this thesis will investigate how Woolf uses spatial politics for her narrative strategies in order to build, critique and renovate the Edwardian structures of Jacob's world. The origin of this engagement with architectural themes is found in her real-life domestic spaces. Her childhood home as a physical and social space defined how Woolf understood late-Victorian society. I argue that this association between domestic spaces and societal discourse eventually became one of the driving concepts of Woolf's aesthetic expression and, further, that modernism of this period, in both written and visual forms, understood that the reconfiguration of domestic space and how it is perceived were central to the modernist project.

Eleven members of the extended Stephen family lived at 22 Hyde Park Gate, together with seven servants (OB, 183). The servants lodged in the level above, with a narrow sitting room of their own in the level beneath the Stephens. For Woolf, the home became a place of conflict and division. In her memoirs, she describes the generational and ideological chasm that had formed in the Stephen household:

> Two different ages confronted each other in the drawing room at Hyde Park Gate. The Victorian and the Edwardian age. We were not his children; we were his grandchildren. There should have been a generation between us to cushion the contact. Thus it was that we perceived so keenly, while he raged, that he was somehow ridiculous. … But while we looked into the future, we were completely under the power of the past. Explorers and revolutionists, as we both were by nature, we lived under the sway of a society that was about fifty years too old for us. It was this curious fact that made our struggle so bitter and so violent. For the society in which we lived was still the Victorian society. Father himself was a typical Victorian. George and Gerald were consenting and approving Victorians. So that we had two quarrels to wage; two fights to fight;

> one with them individually; and one with them socially. We were living say in 1910; they were living in 1860. Hyde Park Gate in 1900 was a complete model of Victorian society. If I had the power to lift out of the past a single day as we lived it about 1900, it would give a section of upper middle class Victorian life. (SP, 147)

The home, therefore was a micro-representation of society as Woolf understood it. Woolf experienced a particularly strong connection between Victorian living and Victorian ideology. For one, her father did not believe in formal education for women which was not an uncommon notion among Victorians of the upper-middle-class (Dunn, 14). Woolf was denied a formal education and this severely limited her social experience. Secondly, city living, as exemplified by the Stephen family, echoed the conventions of the landed gentry. As Rosner points out, upper-middle-class London houses can be understood as a concentration of the Victorian housing ideal:

> The Victorian home was ordered above all by its room divisions. These divisions found their fullest expression in the elite environs of the Victorian country houses, with their innumerable rooms, but were represented on a reduced scale in the urban row houses like those where the Stephen and Strachey families lived. (Rosner, 63)

Appropriate living in the house was firmly policed by Julia Stephen, matron at Hyde Park Gate, since the Victorian home determined a family's reputation and rank. As Nicholson notes:

> Such a house had nothing to do with fashionable interiors and everything to do with immutable standards by conventional society. The gentleman's establishment was expected to be correct in all details, for it was the plain duty of every middle- and upper-class household to set an example of its interiors. (Nicholson, 104)

This connection between domestic spaces and social hierarchy had derived from a middle-class admiration for upper-class living. For instance, Nicholson describes Edwardian living:

> High society under Edward VII was a tottering display of extravagant magnificence – huge meals, huge houses, huge balls. Lower down the scale the middle classes went as far as they could in emulating their betters. Social presentation was considered vitally important; the bourgeoisie was not prepared to stint on housemaids and laundered tray-cloths, embossed calling-cards and kid gloves. (Nicholson, 7)

The extensive use of servants by the middle-classes, seven, in the case of the Stephens, introduced class issues into the Victorian home which, in turn, shaped its architecture.

Woolf observed the class differences in her own home. She criticised and later renovated the spatial separation between servants and home owners. In her childhood home, Woolf disliked the disparity between Julia Stephen as her loving mother and as class-policing matron to the servants. In her memoirs Woolf shows herself acutely aware of the class and room-division within her own home:

> The basement was a dark insanitary place for seven maids to live in. 'It's like hell,' one of them burst out to my mother as we sat at lessons in the dining room. My mother at once assumed the frozen dignity of the Victorian matron; and said (perhaps): 'Leave the room'; and she (unfortunate girl) vanished behind the red plush curtain which, hooped round a semi-circular wire, and anchored by a great gold knob, hid the door that led from the dining room to the pantry. (SP, 116-7)

Woolf highlights the hiddenness and insanitary nature of servant spaces with a great deal of sympathy for the "unfortunate girl" and distinctly remembers the interior design which enabled the room divisions.

In order to create and maintain class division, Victorian architecture typically sacrificed efficiency and open space in favour of separating staircases and rooms. For instance, the kitchen and its working-class association with odours and manual labour was typically in the back or the basement of the house and only accessible via staircases in remote parts of the house (Langland, 42-3). Servants were best unseen at all times and thus their quarters were frequently relegated to the attic or the basement, similar to the layout of the Stephen household. As I will show later, visibility and a less hierarchical private life was paramount for Woolf's artistic vision for the home. However, the hierarchical design of Victorian living also had a strong gendered element:

> Rooms were designated by gender, by class, and by function; these designations helped to model relationships between the house's major constituencies, the family and the servants. The house plan assigned varying levels of convenience, space, privacy and importance to different members of the household according to their age and station. (Rosner, 63)

Gendered divisions of space were determined by function and thus outline gender role expectations. For instance, the ideal Victorian housewife is a bringer of comfort and a keeper of order within the home. Accordingly, "women's spaces extended from the drawing room to sitting rooms and boudoirs" (Langland, 43).

In contrast, the domain of the Victorian gentleman as public representative of the family ranged from semi-public spaces like the more formal dining rooms to smoking rooms and billiard rooms. Since this architecture frames the housewife as social and domestic, and the gentleman as a more public figure, privacy was traded as a domestic currency reserved for men. In her memoirs Woolf describes her and Vanessa's lack of privacy. Woolf was frequently waiting and listening to the sounds of

the household while writing stories or reading only to be interrupted by the intrusion of one of her brothers or her father (SP, 123).

Woolf did not enjoy growing up at Hyde Park Gate. There was a consistent struggle for Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell to fulfil their roles as Victorian daughters and upper-class ladies. “Vanessa and I were both what was called tomboys; that is, we played cricket, scrambled over rocks, climbed trees, were said not to care for clothes and so on” (SP, 68). Naturally, the Stephen daughters were expected to follow the strict rules of the household, behave appropriately in the company of high-calibre circles, and eventually marry appropriate to their class. As the youngest women in the house, Bell and Woolf found themselves at the bottom of the Stephen family hierarchy which meant that they shared a room, their only place of relative privacy in the house (Dunn, 28).

When their mother died (Bell aged 16, Woolf aged 13), their private space was destabilised. Their grief-stricken father’s mental health deteriorated, resulting in increasingly tyrannical behaviour. Worse, as Woolf describes in letters and in ‘22 Hyde Park Gate’, their personal safety and privacy was compromised by the sexual abuse of their step-brothers, Gerald and George Duckworth (22 HPG, 177), behaviour which Woolf had been subjected to as early as six years old (Dunn, 20). If the domestic situation was oppressive and invasive for Woolf and Bell, their adolescence increasingly forced them out of their private space into male-controlled public spaces which consisted of dinner parties and dances with potential suitors.

Exposed to Victorian modes of socialising, the sisters were incapable of meeting gender and class expectations. After the death of Julia Stephen, their half-brother George Duckworth had assumed the task of establishing the Stephen sisters

among London's upper class in order to maintain or elevate the social rank of the Stephen family. Woolf's memoirs describe numerous attempts to introduce Bell and herself into Victorian society, with terrible results. As Dunn describes the aftermath of Julia Stephen's death:

> Her daughters, tentatively approaching womanhood themselves, were left with this remote, unappeasable icon as their only initiatrix into the mysteries of their sex. Virginia's most poignant piece of unpublished autobiography writing described the sense of being cast prematurely into a hostile world. (Dunn, 56)

Bell, although not immune to the excitement of dinner parties, increasingly withdrew from George's efforts "largely due to her inability to converse lightly and amusingly on a catholic range of subjects, a result largely of temperament, natural disinclination, social inexperience and a very sketchy education" (Dunn, 56). Woolf highlights the disparity of Bell's internal life and societal expectation:

> Unfortunately, what was inside Vanessa did not altogether correspond with what was outside. Underneath the necklaces and the enamel butterflies was one passionate desire — for paint and turpentine, for turpentine and paint. But poor George was no psychologist. … He was completely at a loss when Vanessa said she did not wish to stay with the Chamberlains at Highbury; and would not dine with Lady Arthur Russell. (22 HPG, 171)

Woolf shared her sister's experiences with societal rejection. Quentin Bell describes the attempts that had been made to make Virginia and Vanessa adequate in female virtues such as drawing, dancing, and singing. Virginia, as one such anecdote goes, was banished from the room when she mocked her religious singing teacher about the crucifixion of Christ (Q. Bell, *Woolf*, 27).

The growing tension between Bell and Duckworth eventually escalated into a complete falling out. When Duckworth then began to introduce Woolf to notable

families, she frequently embarrassed him by speaking freely and inappropriately. Duckworth confirms the unfamiliarity of the Stephen sisters with Victorian conventions. After another failed evening with Woolf, he remarked: “And I think you want a little more practice in how to behave to strangers. It’s not your fault of course, but you have been out much less than most girls of your age” (22 HPG, 174).

Hence, for Woolf, Victorianism as experienced and enforced in the home was oppressive and abusive. I argue that this constant frustration gave birth to a rebellious, modernist outlook. The Stephen sisters regarded the social mores left over from high and late Victorianism with scepticism and contempt. Firm class and gender hierarchies (and, as we shall see, their architectural expression) became concepts against which they plotted.

Woolf’s alienation with Victorianism becomes increasingly visible after her mother’s death. For Virginia, the inauthenticity of Victorian society became particularly profound in the ways in which it placed emotional restrictions on her mourning:

> We were made to act parts that we did not feel; to fumble for words that we did not know. It obscured, it dulled. … Yet there was a struggle, for soon we revived, and there was a conflict between what we ought to be and what we were. (SP, 95)

Out of their shared alienation with the societal expectations put onto them, Woolf and Bell turned to each other.

The two shared a room which they tried to protect to the best of their abilities as a mutual private space of security and open exchange. In her memoirs, Woolf describes the moment she and her sister articulated an ideological break:

> It thus came about that Nessa and I formed together a close conspiracy. In that world of many men, coming and going, in that big house of innumerable rooms,

> we formed our private nucleus. I visualise it as a little sensitive centre of acute life; of instantaneous sympathy in the great echoing shell of Hyde Park Gate. … Together we shaped our own angle, and from it looked out at the world that seemed to both of us much the same. Very soon after Stella's death we realised that we must make some standing place for ourselves in this baffling, frustrating whirlpool. Every day we did battle for that which was always being snatched from us, or distorted. The most imminent obstacle, the most oppressive stone laid upon our vitality and its struggle to live was of course father. (SP, 144)

This paragraph is a remarkable insight into the source of Woolf's modernist energy. Woolf places the alliance to her sister distinctly in a "world of many men" signifying the male dominance which had pertained in their home after the death of Julia and her half-sister Stella. The "sensitive centre of acute life" is placed in "the great echoing shell of Hyde Park Gate." Their perspective, their "own angle", is centred in their personal room, the outside world posed a challenge to "make some standing place" for themselves. This theme of Victorian architecture as housing meaningful interiors, spaces that need to be occupied and renovated, is a pillar in my reading of Woolf.

A Brief Overview of Woolf's 'Modern Fiction' in Woolf and Modernist Studies

The development of Woolf studies has a long history. From the first wholistic readings of Woolf's oeuvre like David Daiches's *Virginia Woolf* (1942) to now, several generations of thought have defined and re-defined how we understand Woolf's modern fiction. Since the late 1970s, mainstream modernist criticism, exemplified in works such as Malcolm Bradbury's *Modernism* (1978) and David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977), places Woolf's theoretical and critical engagement with a "modern fiction" and its concern with social and literary influence in the large cast of English literary innovators at the turn-of-the-century. For instance, John Fletcher and

Bradbury describe "a distinguishable English brand of Modernism, founded in the sense of transformation, often liberation, affecting those who believed the era of Victorianism was ending, a new phase in society, art and thought beginning" (Bradbury, 'London 1890-1920', 178). Along with Woolf they include Victorian, Edwardian, and Georgian writers such as Thomas Hardy, Samuel Butler, George Gissing, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster, Ford Madox Hueffer, Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, T.E. Hulme, Lytton Strachey, and Dorothy Richardson. Their argument assumes a modernist energy: "what, despite their extraordinary differences in temper and intention, unites them is a prevailing sense of dislocation from the past, and a commitment to the active remaking of art" (Bradbury, 'London 1890-1920', 178).

More specifically, in this version of modernism, Woolf's novels tend to be classified as a particular, parochial branch of English modernism, the novel of "fine consciousness" or the "introverted novel", which explores experience through new literary forms. These discussions of Woolf's style frequently centre on the relationship between literary realism and Woolf's vision for a new aesthetic. For instance, Woolf's introverted novel "transcends the vulgar limitations and simplicities of realism, so as to serve a higher realism. The modern novel is the freer novel, and its freedom is the freedom not only to be more poetic, but also truer to the feel of life" (Fletcher and Bradbury, 408). This pursuit of a closer, more subjective approximation of accurate life recording is typically understood as a deconstructive effort against established modes of realism. For instance, Lodge describes the ways in which Woolf's novels of the 1920s work in opposition to realist form:

> It is obvious how the structure of the traditional novel, with its rounded characters, logically articulated plot, and solidly specified setting, melts away;

> how the climaxes of plot are progressively pushed to the margins of the discourse, mentioned in asides and parentheses; how the author's voice, narrating, explaining, guaranteeing, fades away as the discourse locates itself in the minds of characters with limited knowledge and understanding; how the unity and coherence of the narratives comes increasingly to inhere in the repetition of motifs and symbols, while the local texture of the writing becomes more and more densely embroidered with metaphor and simile. (Lodge, 177)

However, these aesthetic readings of Woolf's development tend to ignore the obvious, outwardly-turned perspective on Woolf as a social and political observer. For instance, Fletcher and Malcolm remind us that Woolf's modernism is to be understood as "a kind of poeticized, subjective vision in which we all (though especially women) live" (Fletcher and Bradbury, 408). My thesis will provide a reading which understands Woolf as a social critic who observes the changing relations between the individual and society in the early twentieth century. Woolf frequently describes defining factors such as gender and class norms on the individual as inherent in society and an important influence on the character-society dynamic. Therefore, the inward turn in Woolf's novels, as observed by those critics of modernism noted above, is part of a renegotiation of the self in relation to material and social realities of the world.

Over the course of the 1980s feminist criticism challenged the notion of Woolf as a "negligible Bloomsbury aesthete" (Moi, 1). Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) ignited a lasting feminist debate about the nature of Woolf's aesthetics. Showalter places Woolf as a failed feminist mother figure whose engagement with a century of female literary legacy culminated in the non-confrontation of patriarchal structures in favour of a self-illusory androgenous style. As Showalter puts it: Woolf's "adoption of a female aesthetic … ultimately proved inadequate to her purpose and

stifling to her development" (Showalter, 264). The early years of feminist Woolf criticism took its shape via responses to Showalter's critique of Woolf.

Works such as Jane Marcus' *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf* (1981) sought to rectify Woolf as a pioneer of a feminist voice and a distinctively female narrative style. Caughie explains that, in order to distance Woolf from the modernist critical association, "Marcus compares Woolf with Kafka, Brecht, Proust, and Benjamin based on their position *outside* the society — as Jews, homosexuals, Marxists, women, for whom language, literature, and culture belong to the 'other', that is, the state or patriarchy" (Caughie, 19). This re-reading of Woolf's aesthetics as the championing of a patriarchy-opposing female, literary tradition generally focuses on the relationship between Woolf-ian politics and her aesthetics. However, as later, post-structuralist critics pointed out, these early feminist readings of Woolf tend overemphasise the strong political aspects of Woolf's oeuvre and neglect the multi-facetted, sometimes ambiguous, or indeed conservative sides of her writing. For instance, Caughie suggests that Marcus tends to "reduce the complex stylistic form to the appropriate container for Woolf's political remarks," while Beverly Ann Schlack's method is to "sort out the political comments from the obscuring stylistic context" (Caughie, 9).

Hence, the resultant stand-off between modernist and feminist critics renders Woolf's stylistic development as either "attempting to free the novel from the conventional forms prescribed by nineteenth-century writers and still adhered to by Edwardian materialists" or "as attempting to free the novel from the patriarchal forms established by mainstream male authors, and even unconventional ones such as D.H. Lawrence" (Caughie, 9). This critical impasse made a significant step forward in the

wake of Toril Moi's call for a deconstructive mode of reading Woolf in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985):

> Woolf … seems to practise what we might now call a 'deconstructive' form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse. In her own textual practice, Woolf exposes the way in which language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning. (Moi, 9)

Moi's theory aims at a non-essentialist Woolf criticism which embraces the deconstructive tendencies of Woolf's aesthetics as a part of her feminism, therefore integrating her modernism with her politics. Several critics have read Woolf in ways similar to Moi. For instance, Susan Stanford Friedman's *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998) argues for locational feminist readings which are based "not upon static or abstract definition but rather upon the assumption of changing historical and geographical specificities that produce different feminist theories, agendas, and political practices" (Stanford Friedman, 5). More specific to Woolf criticism, Kathryn Benzel's reading of *Orlando* in "Reading Readers in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*: *A Biography"* (1994) explores how Woolf "purposefully deconstructs biography and narrative" in order to "redefine the relationship between reader and writer" (Benzel, 169).

However, the most thorough and expansive work in this area is Pamela Caughie's *Virginia Woolf & Postmodernism: Literature in Quest & Question of Itself* (1991). Caughie follows in the footsteps of Moi and promotes a deconstruction of feminist and modernist oppositions in Woolf criticism. She seeks to "free Woolf's writings from the cage of modernism and the camps of feminism without denying these relations in her texts" (Caughie, 2). One of Caughie's primary principles in dealing with

Woolf criticism is the deconstruction of the reading dichotomies on which feminist and modernist streams build their arguments:

> Both modernist and feminist approaches to Woolf present us with restrictive readings, not because they separate her art and politics (as many feminist critics claim modernist readings do) or because they reconcile the two (as many feminist readings claim to do), but because they insist on the same problematic dichotomies. (Caughie, 5)

Instead of choosing between dichotomies such as form/content, art/politics, classical novel/modern novel, masculinist form/feminist form, modernism/postmodernism, Caughie

> offer[s] alternatives to a choice between two alternatives by pointing out the changing contexts in which certain distinctions can function and the changing conceptions of language and narrative in Woolf's writings that work against these dualistic approaches. (Caughie, 194)

Reading Woolf without placing her work in a particular modernist or feminist tradition opens up the possibility of reading Woolf in relational and functional ways. Woolf's idea of a modern literary criticism is centred around the reader and modes of reading. In considering elements of the text with regard to different relations, the aesthetic and political mechanics of Woolf's modern fiction can be made visible without having one excluding the other. For instance, a portion of the text can be read in relation to its narrative strategies and how they inform the reader. The same text can also be read in relation to its content and what kind of culture work it performs. The resultant panoramic view of Woolf's methods represents the double-nature of Woolf's social and literary renovation.

In this thesis, I argue that Woolf's experience with Victorian and Edwardian domesticity constitutes a significant influence on her conceptions of pre-existing social

and literary structures and her methods of social and literary renovation. Hence, my thesis operates within the inter-disciplinary research area of gender, class, and space dynamics in relation to modernism which emerged over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. Interest in domestic spaces as points of cultural negotiation derived from feminist criticism in the 1970s which explored the female private life in a male-dominated history writing process. Woolf's seminal work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) in particular has drawn much critical interest as a study of the politics of public and private spaces in Woolf's time. Works such as Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1989) and Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) have established strong connections between the advent of modernity, social change, feminist progress and its representation in art and literature. As Armstrong points out:

> One cannot distinguish the production of the new female ideal either from the rise of the novel or from the rise of the new middle classes in England … the modern individual was first and foremost a woman. (Armstrong, 8)

Significant factors in this understanding of the social history of femininity are class hierarchies and class discourse as experienced in domestic settings. Notable books in this area are: Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels: Middle-class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (1995); Christopher Reed's *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture* (1996); Victoria Rosner's *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (2005); and John Tosh's *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (2007), all of which explore the impact of the highly class-conscious structures of Victorian domesticity on modernity.

Domesticity has traditionally been considered antithetical to the outgoing, internationalist traits of English modernism, which in part has denigrated Woolf's status as a female introvert. In contrast, Rosner understands domestic spaces as a generative source of modernism. She argues that "in order to fully understand the psychology of the modernist subject it must be allowed that interiority has spatial as well as cognitive dimensions" (Rosner, 12). As we will see, Woolf conceptualises society through its architectures and, accordingly, devises her aesthetics on architectural grounds. Similar arguments have been made by Sara Blair in her "Local Modernity, Global Modernism: Bloomsbury and the Places of the Literary" (2004). Blair reads modernism as: "a determined response to the specific places in which it takes shape, advertises its cultural value, and contests for social power" (Blair, 814). In this way she reads the Bloomsbury circle through "the specific circuits of production and exchange in which its work and works participate, the geocultural landscape in which they unfold" (Blair, 814).

Since the millennium modernist studies have experienced a period of substantial growth which transformed how Woolf is generally understood. As David James describes it: "expansionism" (James, 4) is the "lodestone for twenty-first-century scholarly advancements and curricula reforms" (James, 4). Generally known as "New Modernist Studies", this new generation of scholarship distinguishes itself through cross-disciplinary thought from diverse academic fields. The inclusion and cross-pollination of advancements in fields such as feminist and gender studies as well as post-colonialist studies and beyond, pushed the margins of modernism's temporal and spatial dimensions to a transnational understanding of modernist core texts in response to and informing of a wider range of non-Western texts.

New Modernist Studies revised what Melba Cuddy-Keane calls the "entrenched preconception" of "modernism's ahistoricity" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 147). As Tyrus Miller explains, the sharpened focus on a wider range of influencing factors in modernism includes "particularities of nationality, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality; questions of political engagement; concrete experiences of wars and other important historical events; developments in technology; and religious beliefs" (T. Miller, 4). This is, in part, what Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz describe as the "vertical" dimension of New Modernist Studies:

> in which once quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered; in which canons have been critiqued and reconfigured; in which works by members of marginalized social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears; and in which scholarly inquiry has increasingly extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception. (Mao and Walkowitz, 737-8)

A comprehensive list of important contributions would go beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the anthology structure of Vincent Sherry's *Cambridge History of Modernism* (2016) provides a more general list of prominent areas of expansion in New Modernist Studies: modernism in relation to time, space, genre, and community. My thesis draws from various critics concerned with these areas.

In Chapter One I am engaging with recent readings of modernism through influences from advances in science and technology. For instance, Stephen Kern's "Modernist Spaces in Science, Philosophy, the Arts, and Society" and Laura Marcus's "Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Rebecca West", both part of Sherry's anthology, explore the impact of technological innovation on the collective understanding of space and time and its effect on modernist literature. As my thesis will show, Woolf's

aesthetic considerations have been touched by these developments in significant ways.

In Chapter Two I draw material from the communal focus of New Modernist Studies. Woolf's standing as a cultural observer of WWI, and anxious anticipator of WWII has gained in strength in recent times. My reading provides a thorough grounding in the social background of *Mrs Dalloway* in the context of WWI. Texts like Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (1999), Sherry's *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003) and Paul Saint-Amour's *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopaedic Form* (2015) explore the significance of war trauma and awareness for inter-war modernism.

The genre-expanding aspect of New Modernist Studies constitutes an important recurring theme of my thesis. My reading of *Orlando* as a layered blending of literary forms in Chapter Three, uses Max Saunders's *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2010) which explores the inter-connections between fiction and biography in modernism. Especially parody, as a mode of negotiation between modernists and non-modernists, critics, and authors, the public and the elitists, has become a point of interest which is relevant for my thesis. I am drawing from state-of-the-art research relating to parody in modernism. Works like Leonard Diepeveen's *Mock Modernism: An Anthology of Parodies, Travesties, Frauds, 1910-1935* (2014) and *Modernist Fraud: Hoax, Parody, Deception* (2019), as well as Sarah Davison's *Modernist Parody: Imitation, Origination, and Experimentation in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (2023), enable me to accurately place *Orlando* in a New Modernist context and to unravel the book as a genre-defying work of modernist fiction.

In general terms my reading uses these sources, as well as a wide range of relevant contributions in earlier Woolf studies, to trace Woolf's aesthetic development as centred in the relationship between the individual and society. The material realities of Woolf's depiction of private and public architectures are defined by and defining of a variety of cultural and political contexts. This, in turn, informs the literary and social renovation of her modern fiction. This thesis traces Woolf's pursuit of a "modern fiction" by addressing specific arenas in which Woolf developed her fictional techniques — through spatial thinking, through new thinking of the visual representation of 'reality', and by thinking through new forms of biography. This thesis thus presents Woolf as a renovator, working within the 'old' to create the 'new', opening out the space for 'modern fiction' by revamping the novel.

Post-Impressionist Living Informs Woolf's Methods

Woolf confirms the connection between her modernist, architectural poetics in literature and her private life at Hyde Park Gate: "I suppose that, if one of them [family members] had read *To the Lighthouse*, or *A Room of One's Own*, or *The Common Reader*, he or she might say: 'This room explains a great deal'" (SP, 124). Staying with Woolf's metaphor, the second pillar in my reading of Woolf's aesthetic development is concerned with *how* rooms explain a great deal in her writing. Woolf integrates her spatial conception and rebellious outlook, as derived from the Victorian home, with avant-garde art and living. The move to Bloomsbury in 1904 heralded deep connections to London's art scene, and this was, in turn, to inform her methods for modern fiction. Woolf describes the move from Hyde Park Gate as a kind of dismantling: "She [Vanessa Bell] had sold; she had burnt; she had sorted; she had

torn up. Sometimes I believe she had actually to get men with hammers to batter down — so wedged into each other had the walls and the cabinets become" (OB, 184).

Gordon Square, although lower in price and prestige than Hyde Park Gate was built together with the neighbouring Tavistock Square in 1820 and therefore similar in age and lay-out to Woolf's previous home. However, the real difference between the two Stephen residences were Bell's interior design choices:

> At Hyde Park Gate one had only a bedroom in which to read or see one's friends. Here Vanessa and I each had a sitting room; there was the large double drawing room; and a study on the ground floor. To make it all newer and fresher the house had been completely done up. Needless to say the Watts-Venetian tradition of red plush and black paint had been reversed; we had entered the Sargent-Furse era; white and green chintzes were everywhere; and instead of Morris wall-papers with their intricate patterns we decorated our walls with washes of plain distemper. We were full of excitement and reforms. We were going to do without table napkins, we were to have (large supplies of) Bromo instead; we were going to paint; to write; to have coffee after dinner instead of tea at nine o'clock. Everything was going to be new; everything was going to be different. Everything was on trial. (OB, 185)

The paragraph demonstrates how Woolf connects lifestyle with aesthetics. Interior design is indicative of their generational transition. Their effort to create a modern living space is distinctly motivated by a scepticism of all previous norms under the spirit of reform, much like Woolf's modernist aesthetics as a writer. For instance, the first big decision was light. Hyde Park Gate had a gloomy, strangling atmosphere.

> The windows were hung with creepers on the outside and heavy curtains within, the paintwork was black, the overcrowded rooms stuffed with light-absorbing furnishings; there was no view, no horizons, only the layer upon layer of family associations, many of them unhappy, all of them retrogressive. (Dunn, 77)

For Woolf:

> The light and the air after the rich red gloom of Hyde Park Gate were a revelation. Things one had never seen in the darkness there — Watts pictures, Dutch cabinets, blue china — shone out for the first time in the drawing room at Gordon Square. (OB, 184)

Things coming to light, thus extinguishing the shadow of Hyde Park Gate, is a consistent feature in Woolf's conception of moving from Victorianism into modernity. As Rosner notes:

> It was interior design — and not architecture — that articulated the visual and spatial vocabulary for describing the changing nature of private life. As the canons of morality and behavior shifted, the designed environment of the home both reflected and helped to give shape to what Woolf describes as the new tone of human relations. (Rosner, 9)

For instance, as discussed earlier, servants at Hyde Park Gate like the "unfortunate girl" Woolf recalls complaining about the basement "hell" that constituted the "dark insanitary place of seven maids to live in," usually "vanished behind the red plush curtain" (SP, 116-7). In contrast, her vision for the domesticity of modernity elevates the servants to light and equal social standing, as she proclaims in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown':

> In life one can see the change, if I may use a homely illustration, in the character of one's cook. The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room, now to borrow *The Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat. (BB, 5)

Therefore, Woolf's aesthetic vision of a social renovation is marked by transparency, exposure and inter-class and gender communication. However, Bell did not completely break with the past. As Rosner notes: "Bell recycled some of the Hyde Park Gate

household goods and integrated them into the new decorative scheme, resulting in some odd juxtapositions" (Rosner, 132).

An iteration of this symbolic re-arrangement of society can be found in the completed interior design of Gordon Square. Bell shared Woolf's sense of liberation and reform which her newfound self-determination and control over Gordon Square provided. Vanessa Bell describes the move:

> It was exhilarating to have left the house in which had been so much gloom and depression, to have come to these white walls, large windows opening onto trees and lawns, to have one's own rooms, be master of one's own time. (qtd. in Dunn, 78)

Bell ran the new home with a completely different set of values than those of her father. Bell prioritised open space, light, and community rather than gloom, secrecy, and class hierarchy. "All that seemed to matter was that at last we were free, had rooms of our own and space in which to be alone or to work or to see our friends" (qtd. in Reed, *At Home*, 148). As Stevenson points out:

> In rethinking the aesthetics of interior space, Woolf's Bloomsbury challenged conventional notions of home, and the room became a template for ideological transformation. (Stevenson, 113)

Bell in many ways reversed the gloom and social order of her childhood home. Painting the walls white was an idea Bell had picked up when she visited Charles Wellington Furse in 1903. Furse had painted his walls white in order to exhibit his paintings. Bell metaphorically and virtually turned her home into a gallery which exemplifies the merging lines of progressive art and progressive living which Woolf adapts in her novels.

For instance, with regard to the paintings on the wall, there is a remarkable instance of Bell expressing her vision for society through interior design. In the dark corners of Hyde Park Gate, Bell had once rebelled by removing a clutter of family photographs, causing a minor outrage in the Stephen household (Dunn, 78). In contrast, arrivals at Gordon Square would be greeted in the hallway with a symbolic arrangement of portraits and photographs. Bell writes to her sister:

> I have been hanging pictures in the hall. I hope you'll [Woolf] approve … On the right hand side as you come in I have put a row of celebrities: 1. Herschel – Aunt Julia's photograph 2. Lowell. 3. Darwin. 4. Father. 5. Tennyson. 6. Browning. 7. Meredith — Watt's portrait. Then on the opposite side I have put five of the best Aunt Julia photographs of Mother. They look very beautiful all together. (qtd. in Reed, *At Home*, 148-9)

Bell's aunt, Julia Margaret Cameron, happens to be one of the most renowned portrait photographers of the late-Victorian era. Just as Woolf had levelled the class hierarchy by bringing the servants and the dark corners of the Victorian home to light, Bell parallels Victorian male achievement with female achievement. The progressive art of her aunt, which celebrates Bell's mother at Hyde Park Gate was equally deserving of appreciation as were Victorian celebrities.

> Visitors to 46 Gordon Square, then, entered between the literally patriarchal legacy of this 'procession of educated men' (to take a phrase from Woolf's *Three Guineas*) and an alternative matriarchal heritage of artistry and beauty represented by the pioneering photographer Julia Margaret Cameron's misty pictures of her beautiful niece, Vanessa and Virginia's mother. This visualisation of the sisters' liminal position between traditions would become the hallmark of Bloomsbury's domestic spaces. (Reed, *At Home*, 148-9)

Perhaps the most important innovation in the Stephen home was social contact. Through Woolf's brothers Thoby and Adrian the house gradually became the meeting

place for their pre-dominantly Cambridge friends as, for instance, Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Duncan Grant, and Woolf's and Bell's future husbands Leonard Woolf and Clive Bell. The group, later recognised as the Bloomsbury Group in critical circles, began to meet on a regular basis in order to discuss a variety of topics ranging from philosophy to art (Lee, 259). Within these sessions Woolf and Bell met with their male counterparts on equal terms. It was the beginning of a progressive mode of living which found expression in many of the members' writings, paintings, and interior designs.

Woolf points at November 1910 as a watershed moment in cultural and generational change. The most imminent event at that time was Roger Fry's First Post-Impressionist Exhibition. Roger Fry began to join Bloomsbury meetings earlier that year. Woolf acknowledges the significance of Fry for the identity of Bloomsbury:

> If we take it for granted that Bloomsbury exists, what are the qualities that admit one to it, what are the qualities that expel one from it? Now at any rate between 1910 and 1914 many new members were admitted. It must have been in 1910 I suppose that Clive one evening rushed upstairs in a state of the highest excitement. He had just had one of the most interesting conversations of his life. It was with Roger Fry. … He had more knowledge and experience than the rest of us put together. (OB, 197)

Likewise, Bell describes Fry's addition to Bloomsbury "the most important of all" (V. Bell, *Sketches*, 109). The impact of Fry's appearance in the Bloomsbury meetings cannot be overstated. He not only added knowledge and experience to the group, he changed the focus of Bloomsbury discourse from philosophy to art. Bell, who always felt that art as a topic was underrepresented in the group, was naturally delighted in the new Bloomsbury:

> It was in these years, from 1909 or 1910 to 1914, that there came the great expansion and development of Bloomsbury, that life seemed fullest of interest and promise and expansion of all kinds. Most of the members were writers or civil servants, only two in the earlier part of this time, Duncan Grant and myself, were painters. But when Roger Fry came, bringing in his train of painters both English and French, the general interest was more directed to painting and less perhaps to the meaning of good. Other painters such as Sickert, Spencer Gore, Frederick Etchells, Henry Lamb and Francis Dodd, who were often in our company and on the friendliest of terms with everyone, without belonging to Bloomsbury, helped to encourage talk about the visual arts. (V. Bell, *Sketches*, 110-1)

Woolf emphasises the dominance of Fry's input. Post-Impressionism became the driving force of Bloomsbury discourse:

> Thursday evenings with their silences and their arguments were a thing of the past. Their place was taken by parties of a very different sort. The Post-Impressionist movement had cast — not its shadow — but its bunch of variegated lights upon us. (OB, 200)

The moment when Post-Impressionism truly reached the English mainstream was Fry's First Post-Impressionist Exhibition. Fry included his new Bloomsbury friends in the organisation process. Clive Bell's contacts to the Grafton Gallery facilitated finding a location. Desmond MacCarthy wrote the introduction for the exhibition catalogue and operated as the secretary[2] of the exhibition (Hynes, *Edwardian*, 327).

Originally, the exhibition was named "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" but quickly became known colloquially as the "First Post-Impressionist Exhibition". The name change which excluded Manet constitutes an indication how the exhibition was

[2] Leonard Woolf became secretary of the Second Post-Impressionist exhibition two years later. (Bullen, 359)

perceived by the public. As Hynes explains, Fry's original intention was to introduce modern French painting to the English public with a sense of continuity:

> It included eight canvases by Manet … to suggest a continuity between the generation of the great Impressionists and the painters who followed them, but the main substance of the show was work by the pioneer Post-Impressionists: 21 paintings by Cezanne, 22 by Van Gogh, 36 paintings and 10 drawings by Gauguin. The younger Post-Impressionists were also represented, but less copiously: Matisse showed 3 paintings, 12 drawings, and 8 pieces of sculpture, Picasso showed 2 paintings and 7 drawings and there were paintings by Derain, Friesz, Redon, Roualt, Signac, Seurat, and Vlaminck. (Hynes, *Edwardian*, 326)

Aside from a lot of ridicule, the response to the paintings was marked by controversy which severely damaged Fry's standing as reputable critic at that time. Hynes points out the reasons for this unusually strong reaction:

> These letters [of criticism] shared one common idea: all saw Post-Impressionism as a foreign threat to native English art and essential English morality. … The essential opposition was not to a new technique of painting, however primitive it might seem, but to the moral and social implications of the technique and its foreignness. (Hynes, *Edwardian*, 331)

In contrast, Bell describes the severity with which the exhibition exposed the backwardness of British painting compared to France:

> The world of painting — how can one possibly describe the effect of that first Post-Impressionist exhibition on English painters at that time? … London knew little of Paris, incredibly little it seems now, and English painters were on the whole still under the Victorian cloud, either conscientiously painting effects of light, or trying to be poets or neo-Pre-Raphaelites. (V. Bell, *Sketches*, 127-8)

The exhibition became a defining impulse in the careers of the Stephen sisters which elevated Bell to national fame (or infamy). The immediate impact of French Post-Impressionism on London's art world becomes visible in the following years. By the

time of Fry's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1912, English Post-Impressionists hung side by side with European Post-Impressionists, with Bell's and Grant's paintings among them. Clive Bell declares victory in his preface to the exhibition catalogue: "The battle is won. We all agree, now, that any form in which an artist can express himself is legitimate" (C. Bell, 'The English Group', 349). Hence, Fry and his Bloomsbury friends became household names in English Post-Impressionism and their fame set the stage for Fry's Omega Workshops.

It is easy to see why Bloomsbury quickly adapted the new styles and theories of Post-Impressionism. Many of the characteristics of the pictures of the 1910 exhibition resonated with the modernist private lives of Bell and Woolf. For one, Bell and Woolf's anti-Victorian tendency resonated with the political implications of these paintings. As Rosner points out: "Post-Impressionism came to Bloomsbury trailing clouds of French radicalism and sexuality that were played up by the British press. Its outré status made it a perfect vehicle of rebellion" (Rosner, 171). In contrast, Bell and Woolf's radicalised private lives had already begun to gain infamy among former upper-class acquaintances of the Stephens. Rumours of polyamorous and open homosexuality within the walls of 46 Gordon Square began to spread. Quentin Bell notes the increasingly radical life at Gordon Square compared to Edwardian norms at that time:

> In 1908 Bloomsbury had become licentious in its speech, by 1910 it was becoming licentious in its conduct, or rather, licence was no longer the privilege of its homosexual component. … As usual it was Vanessa who gave the lead; she proposed, I do not know how seriously, the creation of a libertarian society with sexual freedom for all. (Q. Bell, *Woolf*, 170)

At Gordon Square light, windows and open space constituted the expression of this socio-political change. For Bell and Woolf, their interior design was the visual

representation of a moral and generational shift. As Reed points out, the generational battle between Edwardian prudery and Georgian modernity was taken to the domestic space and fought out on aesthetic grounds:

> Challenges to aesthetic propriety were part and parcel of broader challenges to convention, and modern art became the visual expression of aspirations to new ways of life, most literally in the application of modernist aesthetic to the stuff of everyday life. (Reed, *At Home*, 157)

The Bloomsbury set who already lived their own form of social change at Gordon Square were not content to copy the new French styles of painting. In the Omega Workshops Fry, Bell, Grant took Post-Impressionism and applied it to the drawing-room as an expression of a new way of life. As Rosner describes it:

> Bloomsbury … took Post-Impressionism off the wall and put it into the objects of everyday life. This gesture raises the stakes of the aesthetic encounter suggesting that the new art will meet you not just in the lofty space of the museum or gallery but also where you live. (Rosner, 171)

For Woolf and Bell, the aesthetics of Post-Impressionism found a direct application in the renovation of Victorian interiors. Interior design thus emerged as Bell's and Woolf's expression for their modernist conspiracy.

For instance, Woolf took an immediate interest in the social and moral implications of Post-Impressionism and its depiction of private living. This is best exemplified in the work of Gauguin whose paintings arguably had the biggest immediate impact on the Stephen sisters. Thirty-six works by Gauguin were exhibited in the 1910 exhibition, more than by any other artist. The cover of the 1910 exhibition catalogue featured a reproduction of one of Gauguin's bare-breasted women who raises her hand in a blessing pose. The cover was decided upon collectively by Fry,

Grant, Etchells and Bell and drawn by Grant who, arguably, applied Bell's face onto the woman (Collins, 27).

The influence of Gauguin becomes most visible in one of the stand-out moments in the Bloomsbury ethos. At the end of Fry's second Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1912, Bell and Woolf caused a scandal by imitating Gauguin's Tahitian women. Both sisters describe the scene with a considerable amount of pride and amusement over the offense it caused. Woolf describes the event as follows:

> We bought poinsettas made of scarlet plush; we made dresses of the printed cotton that is specially loved by negroes; we dressed ourselves up as Gauguin pictures and careered round Crosby Hall. Mrs Whitehead was scandalized. She said Vanessa and I were practically naked. My mother's ghost was invoked once more — by Violet Dickinson — to deplore the fact that I had taken a house in Brunswick Square and had asked young men to share it. … It was a heartless, immoral, cynical society it was said; we were abandoned women and our friends were the most worthless of young men. Yet in spite of Logan, in spite of Mrs Whitehead, in spite of Vanessa and Maynard and what they did on the sofa at Brunswick Square, Old Bloomsbury still survives. If you seek a proof — look around. (OB, 200-1)

Vanessa also describes the event with evident pleasure:

> We got stuffs I had lately found at Burnetts' made for natives in Africa with which we draped ourselves, we wore brilliant flowers and beads, we browned our legs and arms and had very little on beneath our draperies and when we arrived in a body at Crosby Hall the dancers stopped and applauded us. … Our own pleasure in our appearance was such that we decided to paint ourselves or such of ourselves as weren't painters. (V. Bell, *Sketches*, 132)

Bell and Woolf became Gauguin's women in order to rebel against Victorian norms by showing the viability of the paintings as a lifestyle. Gauguin's women live freely and break with Victorian conventions of gendered space. The women are frequently

depicted naked in open air, their domestic spaces constitute semi-open, thus semi-public, huts. The women work manual labour which typically would be identified as male such as fishing. Even the intimate maternal act of breastfeeding becomes a social event.

The costumes[3] made a point of showcasing lived Post-Impressionism which, in turn, is reflected in Bloomsbury interior designs, enforcing the mutual connection between private life and domestic space. Thus, Gauguin's women offered an alternative femininity to Bell and Woolf.

There are numerous ways in which Woolf invokes these painterly methods for literary rooms. For instance, like Bell, who developed still-lives to expressive murals, Woolf repurposes the impressionist still-lives as meaningful building blocks of a greater design. Post-impressionist essentials, such as light, colour and rhythmic composition, are adapted to the page and express similar political implications. Woolf opens up new spaces through "tunnelling" (a method developed by Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway*) or cubist multiplication of perspectives. At Gordon Square the drawing room reflected how its people lived their lives, in the same way the rooms in her novels reflect the characters who inhabit them.

As Reed argues, there is an element of synthesis in the modern being applied to the old:

> Attempting to imagine ways of living appropriate to its determinedly unladylike women and unmanly men, Bloomsbury relied on imaginative recombinations of available conventions. The domestic focus of Bloomsbury's art along with its fondness for pastiche — both of which have been judged by critics as signs of artistic failure — might better be seen as strategies that acknowledge the reality

[3] It is noteworthy that Woolf had blackened her skin once before when she partook in the Dreadnought Hoax in February of 1910, disguised as Ethiopian royalty. (Stansky 17)

> that subordinate groups cannot recreate their situation outside or free from the constraints of the dominant culture. Rather, Bloomsbury represents an instance of subcultural negotiation of existing conventions in order to create an alternative space within the culture it inherited. (Reed, *At Home*, 148-9)

As the following chapters will show, the renovative approach of Woolf's aesthetics is rooted in a deeply felt need for connection with the paternal past which emerges in her novels in various degrees and states as for instance, critique in *Jacob's Room*, nostalgic yearning in *Mrs Dalloway* and emancipatory embrace in *Orlando*.

*

Chapter One of this thesis will read *Jacob's Room* through its highly experimental, architectural representation of social institutions such as marriage (as conceptualised in the marital home), religion (as conceptualised in the church building) and university education (as conceptualised in the university). The resultant social panorama constitutes a scathing critique of oppressive Edwardian structures, as inherited from the Victorian era. *Jacob's Room* is crowded with women in oppressive situations. Woolf depicts these dynamics of control and punishment in their spatial dimension. Women are displaced or immobilised by these social institutions.

If we think of Jacob as a metaphor for the modern individual in relation to society, as exemplified by his rooms, then in his social and literary form Jacob remains elusive and undefined. He is a ghost, a shadow, an ephemeral statue, yet he is the centre of the novel. Likewise, Woolf defies genre expectations attached to Jacob. The parodic Bildungsroman ends Jacob's life before he can produce any significant development. I argue that Woolf's denial of Jacob's shape and meaning constitutes her critique of the barren landscape of Edwardian literature and literary criticism as she describes it in her critical essays.

Jacob's rooms and the apparent struggle to "manifest" himself, constitutes a design which questions narrative norms and presents the reader with various alternatives without settling into a particular one. Woolf, as an architect of a new literature, articulated the challenge as redefining character from the "shapelessness" of the Edwardian character who Woolf perceived as an empty shell of Victorian tropes. Hence, Woolf's experimentation with various methods of character and world building explores potential shapes of modern fiction; staying with the architectural simile, it is a call to renovation of the Edwardian literary and social space.

In order to unpack the meaningful relationships between characters and their spaces in *Jacob's Room*, I will isolate the primary social institutions — marriage, religion, and the university — which represent Edwardian England as unsuitable to the modern character Jacob. As a work of profound experimentation, Woolf creates a dialogic design which communicates directly to the reader with a set of literary devices. Following reading models of Woolf-ian aesthetics as flexible modes of expression such as Caughie's integrated reading of aesthetic form and politicised content, and the readings of a "pedagogical Woolf" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 2) à la Cuddy-Keane and Susan Stanford Friedman, the complex narrative style of *Jacob's Room* represents a vision for a new literary discourse which aims to provoke a "pedagogical self-reflexivity" (Stanford Friedman, 'Pedagogical Scenes', 103) in her readers.

The second half of the chapter will focus on the character of Jacob and its enigmatic, elusive form. The novel culminates in a symbolic, failed manifestation of Jacob's ghost. Jacob stands in a mutually-defining relationship to his rooms which ultimately fails to capture Jacob as a tangible character. Rather, Woolf's mode of portraying him is marked by a lack social relations and cultural belonging. Jacob is critical of the patriarchal institutions. With Jacob, Woolf depicts the modern character

as a being in crisis. He is denied to take shape by the influential spaces of his upbringing and education which he rejects. He is a literary metaphor for what Woolf identified as the incomplete, Georgian renegotiation of character.

Chapter Two will read the design of *Mrs Dalloway* as an integration of Post-Impressionist principles of rhythmic design in the initial architectural/spatial-centred aesthetics of *Jacob's Room*. I will provide an art-historical grounding in English Post-Impressionism as understood through the Bloomsbury formalism of Clive Bell and Fry. Woolf describes devising *Mrs Dalloway* through a self-invented "tunnelling process" which, as I will show, is a synthesised version of what Fry describes as Post-Impressionist rhythm. Her design aims at a harmony of rhythms, a self-complete state in the aesthetic sense, which brings about a metaphoric solidity and order. Accordingly, I will decode the novel through its different rhythms. The harmony of rhythms culminates in the reconstitution of Clarissa as a character.

Woolf moves from her depiction of the pre-war era of *Jacob's Room* to a fragmented and modernising post-war London in *Mrs Dalloway*. There is a tangible state of disunity and search for stable, modern values which is also embodied in the fragmented state of Clarissa Dalloway. By integrating rhythmic design into the space-conscious mode of characterisation of *Jacob's Room*, Woolf expresses the metaphorical reconstitution of the novel form from within Clarissa Dalloway's rooms. The "tunnelling" design of *Mrs Dalloway* is spiritual and temporal. Like a network of caves, there is a hidden connectedness between the characters on the temporal and mental plane. Woolf uses rhythmic repetitions in order to revisit a shared pre-war past in order to inscribe the present with a new literary and social form. These rhythmic connections, which operate on different levels, enable the reconstitution of social and individual coherence.

The return to Clarissa's and Peter's late-Victorian past in order to come to terms with the complexity of the modern experience signifies the ever-present consciousness of social and literary influence in Woolf's modernist development. The climax of *Mrs Dalloway* signifies the arrival of Woolf's modern fiction with an updated set of social values and a now fully manifested and dominant modern literary character. Clarissa can come into her own in the privacy of her room where Jacob cannot. This is partially due to the social progress that has taken place since the pre-war years but also due to the advanced aesthetic methods of Woolf's modern fiction.

Woolf inverts Victorian and Edwardian tropes such as plotlines and patriarchal mythology as part of her critique of the novel form. The novel represents an alternative literary form which is capable of maintaining traditional elements arranged in a new design. Woolf devised a modernist aesthetic which is self-aware of its roots in an older literary tradition and nostalgic for its stability, now missing in the post-war context. Her approach to modern fiction therefore stays consistent in its renovative nature but shifts in its position to its literary lineage.

Aside from the research on war and modernism as mentioned earlier, my reading of *Mrs Dalloway* through its rhythms will be complimented by critics who have worked with the novel in similar contexts: J. Hillis Miller's *Fiction and Repetition* (1982) which explores *Mrs Dalloway* through its repetitions (or rhythms, in my reading) as a raising of the dead (which is not dissimilar to my method of reading the novel as a reconstitution), Susan Squier's *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City* (1985) in which Squier explores Clarissa's party as a renovation of social norms, and Elizabeth Abel's analysis of the feminist implications of Woolf's plot structure in "Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development: The case of Mrs Dalloway" (1983).

Orlando, as a third milestone of Woolf's literary pursuit, is concerned with the canonicity of modern fiction. If earlier iterations of modern fiction built their values against previous literary and social traditions, then Woolf felt that it needed to confront and emancipate itself from these influences. If modern fiction constitutes a continual renovation, then Orlando renovates Woolf's own literature.

In order to achieve the emancipation from literary history, Woolf synthesises elements of modernist parody and the "New Biography" as conceived by her friend Lytton Strachey. As English modernism begins to settle and lose some of its anti-Victorian ire at the end of the 1920s, Woolf begins to view modern fiction not as a reaction but as a legitimate part of the lineage of English literature. Filtered through the Bloomsbury discussions about the New Biography, Woolf begins to question the boundaries of biography and fiction in the form of a semi-fictional tour through English literary and social history. Woolf rewrites the lineage of English literary history through layering and satirising of Victorian, Edwardian and her own modes of narration and characterisation.

This transition into an emancipated modern fiction is reflected in Orlando's journey through different English eras until the contemporary present of 1928. Orlando, as a literary construct, gradually outgrows and self-consciously satirises the confines of Woolf's own style as developed in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*. Orlando travels through different eras including the, for Woolf, troublesome transition from late-Victorian England to the Georgian era. He/she experiences the literary shift of literary styles and criticism as a poet. Orlando's life is narrated by a fictional biographer who wrestles with the changing styles of the biography genre as Orlando's extraordinary life demonstrates the respective limitations of individual traditions.

Orlando does not require rooms anymore and turns his/her house into a museum. Woolf metaphorically acknowledges the outgrowing of modern fiction’s methods. Orlando does not need recognition for his/her poetry anymore and leaves his/her centuries-spanning poem behind. He/she can embrace the troublesome social and literary norms of the past in order to synthesise them for a new style.

Woolf depicts Orlando’s experience of changing literary and social norms through ironic layering of literary tropes. Woolf satirises a variety of Victorian, Edwardian, and Georgian ideas by exposing their limitations in changing eras. The climax of the novel constitutes the emancipation of the character of Orlando as his/her multiple, temporal, and ideological selves find a stable, pluralistic form. The result is the reconstitution of Orlando as an individual who lives in and outside of history — he/she is all his selves, yet one. His/her metaphoric liberation from restricting forms signifies the emancipation of modern fiction in the lineage of English literature.

I structure my reading of the novel through the parodic layers through which Woolf builds the novel: her parody of Victorianism, her parody of the biographer-narrator, and Orlando as a parody of the literary character or biography subject. If Jacob was created out of loose social relations and spatial framing, and Clarissa through the addition of rhythms, repetitions and internal or metaphysical “tunnels”, then Orlando emerges in and out of these modes of characterisation as a layered construct. I read Orlando as one of Saunder’s literary “composite portraits” to decode the many satirical layers of *Orlando*.

The chapters of this thesis will ultimately build a nuanced reading of how Woolf developed her vision of a modern fiction. Woolf embarks on a decade-long critical and creative engagement with the past in order to create a new literature. In order to

negotiate the individual in society, she synthesises a variety of methods from important personal and artistic influences in her life. These methods integrate to an aesthetic which is capable of repurposing and re-arranging its devices in order to record perpetually changing realities. Her social portraits indicate Woolf's shifting and maturing position with regard to the weight of influence on her writing. Ideologically, her modern fiction moves from sharp criticism over nostalgic desire to acceptance and emancipation. Viewed through these dynamics, her aesthetic emerges as a conservative strain of modernism which is always preserving a connection to English literary traditions and, at times, expressing doubt towards and resistance to more radical modernist aesthetics. Woolf's criticism and novels of the 1920s therefore constitute a renovative approach through which Woolf understands her time. Woolf's initial renovation of Edwardian literature ultimately enabled her literary innovation in the 1930s until the end of her life.

Chapter One: *Jacob's Room*

Placing Jacob's Room

As a site of extensive narrative and structural experimentation, *Jacob's Room* features many devices and themes which distinguish the book from what Woolf describes as Edwardian or "materialist" (MF, 186) novels. For instance, the fabric of *Jacob's Room* consists to a large degree of brief impressions and pastiches from the lives of well over 100 characters, many of whom only appear once. These intimate, internal, character impressions often shift erratically in time and space from one to another. The novel's supposed main character Jacob is hardly in the novel and appears in mostly enigmatic, ghostly ways. And the narrative voice (or as some critics claim, voices) appears to be unstable and limited in knowledge and authority. From her diaries we know that these innovations constituted a holistic design in Woolf's mind. Woolf felt that she had found a mode of expression which suited her vision for a modern fiction: "I have no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice; and that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise" (*Diary* 2, 186). However, beyond its status as radically different, Woolf's third novel is not only hard to place in Woolf's body of work but also in its literary contexts.

My reading of *Jacob's Room* explores its literary and social architectures and the resultant meta-commentary on the state of fiction writing as Woolf perceived it. As such, it is worth exploring how Woolf's vision for a modern fiction fits into her contemporary literary landscape and how the design of the novel became gradually understood as more complex and proactive — renovative in fact — as initially

presumed. As Parkes explains, this radically innovative design was met with baffled responses by its initial readers. For instance, the impressionistic style:

> produces a diffusion or effacement of personality that has often disturbed readers of *Jacob's Room*. The pattern that Woolf's falling atoms have traced on the pages of her novel has often seemed no pattern at all. (Parkes, 153)

Quite frequently, the alienation with the composition put the very status of the book as a novel in question.

For instance, the *Pall Mall Gazette,* in a review titled 'An Impressionist', recognised *Jacob's Room* as a mere collection of impressions and handed down a devastating verdict:

> Most deftly does she catch and convey the impression of a scene, an incident, a passing figure, or a relationship, but no true novel can be built out of a mere accumulation of these notebook entries. In *Jacob's Room* there is not only no story, but there is no perceptible development of any kind. ('An Impressionist', 99)

Another review titled 'Dissolving Views' attacked the perceived absence of structure:

> All this seems to us no more than the material for a novel, and Mrs Woolf has done hardly anything to put it together. *Jacob's Room* has no narrative, no design, above all, no perspective: its evolving views come before us one by one, each taking the full light for a moment, then vanishing completely. ('Dissolving Views', 107)

Gerald Gould, in *The Saturday Review*, remarked that Woolf's "dot-and-dash method leaves much to be desired" and "leaves the simple-minded reader guessing at connexions which might just as well be made clear for him" (Gould, 106). As Froula points out, these initial reviews misunderstood the novel's deliberate upheaval of traditional narrative techniques and genre structures:

> The novel's early readers, in short, mistook the dismantling of storytelling for neglect 'to put it together,' its strategic abandonment of storytelling for narrative failure, its paratactic analytic method for an impressionist rag-bag. (Froula, 69)

However, a few critics did recognise *Jacob's Room* as an alternative vision for the fiction genre and its reading experience.

The parallels between Woolf's methods and the visual arts, in particular, gained traction among critics. Titles such as 'Dissolving Views', 'An Impressionist', and 'The Enchantment of a Mirror' suggest a strong focus on the visual reading experience of Woolf's artistic vision. For instance, the *Yorkshire Post* complimented Woolf's command of impressionist imagery and fresh vision for the genre:

> Mrs Woolf has, indeed, discovered a somewhat new way of writing a novel — a way that is just a little like that developed by Mr James Joyce, but far more detached and far more selective. The method, briefly, is snapshot photography, with a highly sensitive, perfected camera handled by an artist. The result is a crowded album of little pictures. ('Dissolving Views', 107)

One of the most interesting perspectives on the novel came from the renowned British literary figure Rebecca West who embraced and promoted the re-thinking of the novel as a visual work of art:

> But take the book not as a novel but as a portfolio, and it is indubitably precious. A portfolio is indeed an appropriate image, for not only are Mrs Woolf's contributions to her age loose leaves, but they are also connected closely with the pictorial arts. Though she may have read Jane Austen and the Russians and James Joyce with more than common delight and intelligence, it is nothing in literature that has made her. (West, 101)

While West perhaps overstates the originality of the book, modern critics generally recognise the aspects of Woolf's novelistic design which place *Jacob's Room* firmly in a body of emergent modernist fiction in the pre- and post-war years.

For instance, as Baldick notes in his study, *Literature of the 1920s* (2011), Woolf belongs to “a number of writers who had already launched themselves in the previous decade” and “commanded growing critical attention as they adopted new tones and styles”, (Baldick, 10) including D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot. Further, Baldick identifies “a distinctive distrust of linear narrative sequence converted into highly original new techniques and forms” (Baldick, 98) among writers such as Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford and Woolf. Likewise, Levenson locates Woolf’s development from her more traditional second novel *Night and Day* (1919) to her experiments in short story form in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) in a general period of transition in English modernism:

> It was a time of incubation and suspension, when writers such as Eliot, Pound, and Apollinaire reformed the techniques of their verse, and projects like Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* and Joyce’s *Ulysses* found a space to grow longer, more intricate, and demanding. (Levenson, 128)

Further, the frequent identification with impressionism and stream-of-consciousness writing places Woolf alongside writers like Katherine Mansfield and Dorothy Richardson.

The parallels in style between Mansfield and Woolf are more than incidental. Through Woolf’s Hogarth Press[4] founded in 1917, Woolf was personally and professionally connected to Katherine Mansfield. After reviewing Woolf’s short story ‘Kew Gardens’ (1919), Mansfield wrote to Woolf as a literary ally: “We have got the same job, Virginia & it is really very curious & thrilling that we should both, quite apart from each other, be after so very nearly the same thing” (Mansfield, 327). As Marcus

[4] Among the Press’s first, hand-printed publications were Katherine Mansfield’s ‘Prelude’ (1918) and Virginia Woolf’s ‘Kew Gardens’ (1919). (L. Marcus, ‘Woolf Mansfield West’, 722)

points out, both writers drew inspiration for their short stories from Russian literature[5] and the advent of the cinema:

> Their shared ambition to remake the forms of literary fiction drew both writers strongly toward Russian literature, and each worked with the Russian émigré S.S. Koteliansky to produce translations of writings by Chekov, Dostoevsky, Gorky, and others, a number of which were published by Hogarth Press. The elements of Russian literature that proved particularly significant for both Woolf and Mansfield included its incompleteness. (L. Marcus, 'Woolf Mansfield West', 722)

As works like *Jacob's Room* and *Orlando* reflect, Woolf was inspired by the questioning, open-ended nature of these Russian texts. For instance, they challenged what Woolf perceived as rigid English character tropes. In 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' Woolf describes Russian literature as one of the catalysts of modern(ist) character innovations:

> But there was another force which made much more subtly against the creation of character, and that was Mrs Garnett and her translations from Dostoevsky. After reading *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, how could any young novelist believe in 'characters' as the Victorians had painted them? (BB1st, 117)

As we will see below, the many characters of *Jacob's Room* constitute a detailed engagement with the mechanics of characterisation and the modes of reading characters.

According to Marcus, then, the relatively new medium of cinema presented a fresh take on modes of representation for many writers of the era:

[5] *The Brothers Karamazov* appeared in English for the first time in 1911 thanks to the work of Constance Garnett. The publication of Dostoevsky, Chekov and Tolstoy in English led to a wide-spread engagement of England's literary world with Russian literature throughout the 1910s and 1920s. (Rubenstein, 196-7)

> Its strategies of narration, representation, and characterization indeed offered significant models for many modernist writers seeking to reform narrative structures. Women writers of the period, including H.D., Dorothy Richardson, and Elizabeth Bowen, in addition to Mansfield and Woolf, were particularly engaged with the cinema. (L. Marcus, 'Woolf Mansfield West', 725)

The frequently shifting scenes in *Jacob's Room* have a visual quality which are reminiscent of the sequences and cuts of film. In her 1926 essay 'The Cinema' Woolf admires film's capability to "unroll" the "past" and "annihilate" "distances" (TC, 272) and create unwritable architectures at will. It stands to reason that *Jacob's Room* is part of a moment of high experimentation in English fiction writing. The tendency of these related modernist works to attack pre-existing structures has earned *Jacob's Room* a, perhaps unjust, reputation as a deliberately destabilising force in its genre. Rather, I suggest *Jacob's Room* constitutes a dialogue about genre limitations and expectations.

As Woolf's second attempt at the bildungsroman after *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room* reflects a strong concern with the bildungsroman genre in English modernism at that time. In his study of development fiction, *Unseasonable Youth* (2011), Joshua Esty explains that there had already been a great concern with the bildungsroman form prior to the war:

> At the threshold of high modernism, we find not just the bristling, blustery emergence of the poetic "men of 1914," but also a strikingly high concentration of major novelists publishing stories of unseasonable youth, all in the same three-year span: Proust (*Côté de chez Swann* in 1913) Lawrence (*Sons and Lovers*, 1913), Alain-Fournier (*Le Grand Meaulnes* in 1913), Woolf (*Voyage Out*, 1915), Ford (*The Good Soldier*, 1915), and Joyce (*Portrait of the Artist*, 1916). (Esty, 30)

These early twentieth-century bildungsroman novels typically disrupt or cancel the development of its main character:

> The convergence on the figure of frozen youth by writers as dissimilar as Kipling, Schreiner, Conrad, Wilde, Wells, Woolf, Joyce, Rhys, and Bowen reveals, then, an interlocking set of effects: in this cluster of texts, the perpetuation of adolescence displaces the plot of growth; the inability to make a fortune or stabilize an adult ego displaces the fulfilled vocational and sexual destiny. (Esty, 13)

A prime example of this constitutes the death of Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out.* Rachel's coming of age and her outward "quest for an enlightened civilisation" (Froula, 25) is symbolically cancelled by a sudden illness. As Froula points out, Woolf's first bildungsroman shows many of the ideologically experimental approaches to the genre which we see fully developed in *Jacob's Room*, hidden behind traditional form: "Formally conservative though it may appear beside her later novels, *The Voyage Out* is a Woolf [pun intended by the author] in sheep's clothing — a leap beyond its probable readers' probable opinions towards a collaborative modernist art" (Froula, 24).

Baldick argues that the bildungsroman, in its nineteenth-century function as a metaphor for growth and development of nationhood, is repurposed in the post-war years as an expression of national disillusionment; *Jacob's Room* stands as a sort of climax of this development:

> More significant for this subgenre in the Twenties, however, is Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, which is a kind of anti-Bildungsroman in which the hero, Jacob Flanders, keeps disappearing. His ominous surname reminds us that the forward-looking momentum of ambition and the summoning destiny that governs this kind of novel had been, for his generation at least, abruptly

cancelled. To simplify, the novel of youthful expectation tends in the 1920s to give way to the novel of mature retrospection. (Baldick, 19-20)

As these relations indicate, *Jacob's Room* is firmly grounded in modernist contexts of early twentieth-century rethinking of the purposes and boundaries of core structures of literary production such as characterisation, plotting, genre, and canonisation.

Woolf's Conception of a Modern Fiction

Against this backdrop I will now explore Woolf's narrative strategies based on Woolf's detailed visions for a new literature. Her literary innovations were motivated by a set of ideas which she outlines in a number of essays. Woolf generally calls her vision "modern fiction". The most important essay on the topic is 'Modern Fiction' (1919).[6] 'Modern Fiction' constitutes one of the clearest descriptions of Woolf's vision for *Jacob's Room* and the future of her fiction as a whole. 'On Re-Reading Novels' (1922) and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1923), meanwhile, can be read as a post-*Jacob's Room* analysis of Woolf's method and form and how it relates to the generational shift from Edwardian to Georgian fiction. 'On Re-Reading Novels' indicates how the experience of writing *Jacob's Room* concretised Woolf's vision of modern fiction and revealed specific problems and pathways which she identified while writing the novel.

For Woolf, modern fiction is an elusive idea which has yet to be realised. It is a continuous search which Woolf projects over several generations, starting with her own. Woolf justifies the search for a new fiction by outlining a presumed failure of Edwardian literature to adapt to its time:

[6] The essay was written in early 1919, published in serialised form in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 10th April 1919, and eventually published in finalised form in Woolf's essay collection *The Common Reader* (1925).

> Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. (MF, 188)

Edwardian literature, for Woolf, has become an empty shell of literary conventions and genres. Literary convention dictates what novels should be; it is an "unscrupulous tyrant who has him [the novelist] in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest" (MF, 188). Importantly, Woolf conceptualises this shell as a building. For Woolf, the Edwardian house represents the Edwardian mindset. Hence, an intervention in the house challenges the inhabitant.

In thinking in space-aware concepts such as these, Woolf demonstrates a creative drift which has been explored in modernist studies only in recent years. For instance, Sherry's *Cambridge History of Modernism* (2016) dedicates an entire section to 'Modernism in Space' and another to the closely linked 'Modernism in Time'. This rethinking of space in relation to the modernist sensibility has been recognised by modernist studies as a dominant concern which paralleled advances in science, philosophy, technology, and architecture. As Kern points out, many of the Victorian's foundational understandings and experiences of time and space were challenged by early twentieth century thinking: Albert Einstein's "general theory of relativity (1916) demolished the conventional formal stability of the material universe" (Kern, 173). Technologies like the telephone, the automobile, and the airplane warped the perception of distance. The fluoroscope and advances in architecture, for example the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, challenged "traditional notions of inside and outside" (Kern, 174).

This engagement with space also emerges in the arts. As Sherry argues that "the recognition that space is not an empty 'container' for something else but, in itself,

a substantial and constitutive medium" (Sherry, 161), poses a central concern for the modernist sensibility. Cubism as devised by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque between 1907 and 1914 constitutes perhaps the most ground-breaking advance in this regard. As Kern explains:

> Whereas realist art distinguished clearly between subject and background or between positive space of the figure and the negative space around it, the cubists wiped out that distinction. In their paintings, objects do not have uninterrupted outlines, and in some places they open into the surrounding space. Parts of objects are broken off, colors bleed into neighboring objects, and translucent facets of space, with multiple light sources, cut shadows across bounding surfaces. (Kern, 175)

A similar re-modelling of space can be found in modernist literature. In particular, the duality of external and internal space as a mode of capturing the phenomenological experience of space as it is experienced, posed an alternative to 'realist' fiction as for instance in the works of Joyce, Proust, and Woolf. As Sherry notes:

> There is the space of the plastic, visual arts, including architecture. There is also the space within which — although the prepositional conception "within" involves a model of understanding that modernist thinkers are constantly modifying — the experience of urban modernity as well as political history take shape. (Sherry, 'Space', 161)

It is with this spatial awareness, and with the tools provided by 'literary impressionism', free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness that "the modernist sensibility reworked the physical as well as the conceptual foundations of experience" (Kern, 178).

As this chapter will show, in *Jacob's Room,* Woolf uses the duality of experience as felt internally and lived outwardly for her metaphoric social and literary critique. Her narrative style emerges in and out of Edwardian architectures, physical, literary, and

social. Woolf targets the relationship between literary tradition (the house) and character creation (the inhabitant). In her opinion, by overemphasising 'housebuilding', Edwardian literature has become out of touch with the characters these houses should represent. For instance, Woolf criticises Arnold Bennett:

> But Mr Bennett is perhaps the worst culprit of the three [Woolf frequently criticises Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy (also Shaw) as the key figures of Edwardian literature], inasmuch as he is by far the best workman. He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet — if life should refuse to live there? (MF, 186)

Her issue with Edwardian technique is not the descriptive and materialist world building (which she somewhat compliments), it is the lost relation to the individual and how the unchanged nature of the form creates characters which are not, in her view, reflective of modern life and existence.

Woolf sees the overemphasis on literary tradition as akin to the solidity of Edwardian architecture. "Solidity" is one of the primary ways in which Woolf conceptualises the architecture and culture of the Edwardian mindset, against which she directs her critique. Woolf explains:

> So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness of life, or the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception. (MF, 188)

Woolf understands the solidity of Edwardian technique (and the fictional houses it builds) as limiting to the creative process:

> But it is possible to press a little further and wonder whether we may not refer our sense of being in a bright yet narrow room, confined and shut in, rather than

> enlarged and set free, to some limitation imposed by the method as well as the mind. Is it the method that inhibits creative power? (MF, 191)

In contrast, Woolf builds her ideas of literary innovation on flexibility of content and form.

Three months into planning *Jacob's Room*, Woolf wrote in her diary in April 1920:

> I think the main point is that it should be free. Yet what about form? Let us suppose that the Room will hold it together. Intensity of life compared with immobility. Experiences. To change style at will. (qtd. in Bishop, 115)

Woolf frames individual experience through the solidity of Edwardian architectures. She hopes to achieve this renovation by shifting the focus, the accent, of fiction writing from the house to the inhabitant, from literary conventions to original and experimental character creation. As Levenson points out:

> These telegraphic phrases capture the ambitions of the twenties, with their emphasis on openness and variety, values that Woolf had been developing in her short fiction of the previous few years. (Levenson, 126)

Out of this idea, Woolf defines the mission of her literary generation:

> It seems as if an age of genius must be succeeded by an age of endeavour; riot and extravagance by cleanliness and hard work. All honour, of course, to those who have sacrificed their immortality to set the house in order. (HSC, 297)

It is this renovative spirit which distinguishes the design of *Jacob's Room* from the more revolutionary designs of modernist space. The point of modern fiction is not liberating imprisoned characters from their defining and confining Edwardian architectures. Woolf is more interested in exposing what and who lies behind the solid walls of Edwardian architecture instead of breaking down the walls. As Caughie notes:

> Woolf was more apt to expose concepts and conventions than to 'raid' them. She was more apt to affirm the tenuous and provisional status of literary forms than to replace one highly valued form with another. (Caughie, 4)

Hence, modern fiction aims to transform the architectures of prior generations from within. It imagines a new space which needs to be defined and furnished:

> And it is from the ruins and splinters of this tumbled mansion that the Georgian writer must somehow reconstruct a habitable dwelling-place; it is from the gleams and flashes of this flying spirit that he must create solid, living, flesh-and blood Mrs Brown. (BB1st, 119)

As Caughie points out, Woolf's 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' is not built on the dichotomy of wrong and right, and it is not about replacing one type of characterisation with another. After all, Woolf agrees with Bennett on character being at the core of fiction writing:

> But by accepting Bennett's premise, Woolf exposes his limiting and essentializing view of character. She changes not the terms of the debate but its import: what matters is what character does in the novel, not what character is in the world. She neither dissipates nor rejects character; rather, she foregrounds character by exploring its ontological and formal status. (Caughie, 64)

For Woolf, the ideal of the modern character is inextricably tied to its spaces. As we will see, *Jacob's Room* constitutes a theoretical discussion and proof of concept of this at once.

Reading Modern Fiction

A special consideration has to be given to how we read the novel. For Woolf's renovative project, how modern fiction is read is as vital as how it is written. As a

thorough revision of literary traditions, Woolf's concept for modern fiction aims at new ways of reading the novel. As Flint points out, Woolf's vision for modern fiction is also a vision for a new literary discourse:

> It would be a mistake to consider *Jacob's Room* only as an architectural model or anteroom. … The triumph of *Jacob's Room* lies in its suggestion of a new form of literary cartography: the mapping of a mind free to range over the recent past, laying bare the inadequacies of past conventions in both social, and literary, structures. (Flint, 'Introduction', xxviii)

This didactic side of Woolf's stylistic development is paralleled in her critical writing in the pre- and inter-war period. In discussing a wide range of topics on the relationship between literary production and modes of reading Woolf took part in a great public debate among writers of the 1920s.

As Carey notes in his indictment of English modernism, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), the early twentieth century produced an onslaught of popular newspapers and books which heralded a new climate of public debate. Carey argues that the growing mass literacy and education challenged the literary elite on correct ways to read, to write, and to canonize which produced a variety of modernist counter reactions to make literature "too difficult for them to understand" (Carey, 16). Since Carey, understanding of Woolf's rhetoric methods, beyond Woolf's undeniable but superficial snobberies, has generally moved to a pro mass education stance. Woolf's essays 'What is a Good Novel?'[7] (1924) 'The Common Reader' (1925) (eponymous of her two-part critical essay collection series) and 'How Should One Read a Book?' (1926) stand in line with texts like Ezra Pound's 'How to Read'[8] (1929) and I. A.

[7] In the summer of 1924, Arnold Bennett and Mrs. Woolf appeared together in a symposium, 'What is a Good Novel?', published in *The Highway*, a Socialist journal of adult education. (Hynes, 'Contention', 40)
[8] As Cuddy-Keane notes, debates on canonicity and meaning continued to evolve in the 1930s and 40s as for instance *The Great Tradition* (1948) by F.R. Leavis. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 61)

Richard's *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926) and *Practical Criticism* (1929), the latter of which Saunders locates as the birthplace of close reading (Saunders, 'Close Reading', 19). Woolf engaged in critical dialogue with writers who questioned and probed the purpose and limits of the novel. For instance, in 'On Re-Reading Novels' (1922), Woolf engages in a discussion of form with Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921). In her essay 'The Art of Fiction' (1927) she engages with E.M. Forster's seminal work, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Cuddy-Keane identifies a dominant feature of Woolf's critical style in her discussions with Lubbock and Forster:

> Woolf takes up positions in relation to the author she is discussing, never passively absorbing but always talking back. Also, rather than staying fixed in position, she shifts her own views between these essays, exposing what Lubbock and Forster in turn have left out. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 181)

As such, Woolf's critical style constitutes a pedagogic endeavour which aims at tracing structures and opening dialogues which has been recognised by a few critics in recent decades.

The first thorough investigation of Woolf's flexible, dialogic aesthetic is Caughie's *Virginia Woolf & Postmodernism: Literature in Quest & Question of Itself*. Caughie recognises Woolf's narrative technique as an integration of political content and aesthetic experimentation. This reading advanced Woolf studies by dissolving the debates of the 1970s and 1980s between modernist and feminist critics who tended to claim Woolf's works as purely aesthetic constructions or as a showcase of feminist voice and form. Caughie's perspective is based on Woolf's own vision for a new literary discourse. For instance, as Caughie points out, her own post-modernist, reader-centric approach parallels Woolf's set of paradigms:

> Woolf's critical essays suggest a contemporary outlook in that they redefine several concepts: the literary canon as a fixed tradition of enduring works; the literary text as a discrete object of analysis; and the literary critic as an interpreter of the text. In doing so, Woolf comes to consider the reader's participation in and response to the text; her criticism is more concerned with description than with explication. The kinds of questions she asks — for example, What assumptions and connections shape this text? What is the nature of the transaction between text and reader? — give rise to her narrative critical style. (Caughie, 170)

However, Caughie does not attempt to claim Woolf's criticism as prophetically post-modernist but points out the similarities which render her post-modernist modes of reading a valid context for Woolf's vision of a modern criticism.

Applied to *Jacob's Room*, Caughie provides a framework for my reading of Woolf's narrative architectures. As Caughie puts it: "Woolf distrusted fixed structures; she preferred to consider flexible relations. Society must be changed over and over, must never be allowed to settle into a position" (Caughie, 135). In order to stabilise and unravel the complex, experimental composition of *Jacob's Room*, Caughie suggests a reading of the novel on its narrative merits:

> For this novel, though, we need new questions, ones that ask not whether or not the novel has a plot but what it does with plotting, not whether or not it has a central character but what it does with characterization. We need to ask not what *Jacob's Room* is about (what it is saying on behalf of the author) but what it brings about (what it is doing on behalf of the reader). What does it tell us about the relations between narrative and self and world? (Caughie, 70)

Guided by these questions my reading will explore how Woolf's space-conscious aesthetics create and transform Edwardian spaces.

The role of the reader and reading in Woolf's work has become a subject of great critical interest. Texts like Susan Stanford Friedman's 'Virginia Woolf's

Pedagogical Scenes of Reading: *The Voyage Out*, *The Common Reader*, and her Common Readers' (1992), Kate Flint's 'Reading Uncommonly: Virginia Woolf and the Practice of Reading' (1996) and Beth Rigel Daugherty's 'Virginia Woolf's How Should One Read a Book?' (1998) have explored how Woolf writes about readers and reading for dialogical ends. For instance, Flint traces how Woolf's views on reading as cultural education develop over the course of the intensifying political sphere of the 1920s and 1930s. Through Woolf's essays and fiction writing, Flint identifies a:

> hardening of her attitudes: an increased emphasis on the reader's need for alertness and awareness of the importance of the activity in which they were partaking was coupled with an increased distrust of those who passively took 'culture' as some kind of given, and even a sense of despair at the effectiveness of books at all in the context of the European theatre of war. (Flint, 'Reading Uncommonly', 188)

Stanford Friedman reads Woolf's texts as designed to "invite, indeed to compel, pedagogical self-reflexivity" (Stanford Friedman, 'Pedagogical Scenes', 103) For instance, Stanford Friedman analyses the dissolving of the narrator / narrative voice in Woolf's work for pedagogical ends:

> The fragmentation and communalization of narrative authority in *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, or *The Waves*, for example, implicitly call into question a unitary reading experience, as well as a pedagogical model based on the teacher's transmission of what she or he knows into the students' receptively waiting minds. (Stanford Friedman, 'Pedagogical Scenes', 103)

Daugherty's research approaches the subject from a different angle. Her analysis focuses on Woolf's "participatory strategies" such as "minimizing her own authority; including possible audience reactions to what she's saying" and "identifying the various responses readers have to reading" which positions Woolf as "step[ping] into the role of a teacher" who stimulates intellectual appetite (Daugherty, 127). These

essays anticipated a new way of understanding Woolf which found their clearest expression in Cuddy-Keane's *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (2003).

By her own admission, "antithetical" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 198) to Carey's indictment of Woolf's snobbery, Cuddy-Keane's study of Woolf's work as an essayist und social critic liberates Woolf from "the border that would limit her sphere to Bloomsbury, or to high modernism, or to feminism" and locates Woolf's rhetoric style as profoundly "pedagogic and empowering" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 1) to the masses. Cuddy-Keane argues that Woolf's essays "scrutinize the process of reading, to locate reading in a context of historically and ideologically variable standards, and to outline a model for active, self-reflexive reading practices" which equip her readers with "penetrating tools" to gain access to critical modes of reading for themselves (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 1).

This emergence of "pedagogical Woolf" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 2) has changed the way we read Woolf's novels. Stanford Friedman reads Woolf's narrative strategies as signalling "the need for a self-conscious examination of our related reading and teaching practices" (Stanford Friedman, 'Pedagogical Scenes', 103). For instance, Stanford Friedman reads *The Voyage Out* as a

> parable about reading, one that reproduces the story of our resisting students and suggests an alternative pedagogy for us as readers and teachers. Like all Bildungsromane, the narrative of *The Voyage Out* is fundamentally pedagogical, motivated by the protagonist's education into the ways of the adult world. But at a metalevel, *The Voyage Out* examines the place of reading in the narrative of development. (Stanford Friedman, 'Pedagogical Scenes', 105)

In a similar vein, Froula classifies the experimental form of *Jacob's Room* as "a hybrid of the essay, the short story, and the novel, carried by a breakthrough in narrative

voice" (Froula, 74). It features a "newly invented essayist-narrator" who "carries a radically free fictional form that subordinates plot and character to the social forces that drive modern life and modern war" (Froula, 63). She argues, *Jacob's Room* is a cautionary tale of the great post-war disillusion with nationalistic myths of masculinity:

> In deconstructing Jacob's story — not offering his fate as a flame at which to warm one's shivering life but beckoning us out onto the narrow pavement over an abyss that is modern life — *Jacob's Room* unwrites the novel to pose the question of how to live, what to do, when illusions fail. (Froula, 69)

Following in these pedagogical readings of Woolf's "dialogic form" as a "reader-oriented approach that affirms a plurality of views" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 79), my reading will explore how Woolf uses architectural and spatial themes in her novels in order to build a picture of Edwardian society as she perceived it. My reading is concerned with how Woolf constructs Edwardian society through literary architectures in *Jacob's Room* and how these ideas feed into her cultural and socio-political critique of the novel.

In my introductory chapter I have discussed how Woolf came to define and understand her literary modernism initially via a reaction to the gender politics and social orthodoxy of her childhood environment in Hyde Park Gate. Woolf conceptualised the oppressive social mechanics which structured life at Hyde Park Gate through the architectures which enforce them, such as the uneven distribution of private and public living spaces. As we have seen above, Woolf transferred this spatial conception to her modernist critique of the solidity of Edwardian architectures. Her modern fiction aims to "set the house in order" (HSC, 297). As a formalist experiment with narrative forms, Woolf's innovative style expresses itself through close relationships between characters and their spatial environments. Woolf's concept of

the novel form does not discriminate between minor and major characters, rather it is an investigation into the mechanics of characterisation. Hence, the first half this chapter draws from the deliberately large pool of Woolf's "minor" characters in order to bring Woolf's treatment of character for her social and literary critique into view. By looking at a selection of characters who are defined by and defining of institutionalised spaces such as the marital home, the church, and the university, I will isolate the mechanics of Woolf's dialogic and essentially renovative narrative form.

Reading Woolf's portrayal of these Edwardian architectures, social and material, in this way invites a detailed reflection on the significance of Jacob and his rooms as a narrative (non-)focus. The second half of this chapter will explore Jacob as the symbolic harbinger of change. Jacob embodies a modernist social critique of an oppressive patriarchal machinery which stunts individuality and personal growth through its patriarchal myths of civilisation and glory which eventually consume him. As a modernist subversion of the Bildungsroman genre, the life of Jacob as told through absences, invasions, and frustrations upends literary discourse and represent an aesthetic of change which opens up the walls of Edwardian form as Woolf perceived them.

The Institution of Marriage

The following three samples of married women from different social backgrounds share the oppressive solidity of Edwardian spatial distribution. Wives are immobilised or displaced in order to expose the controlling systems of the institution of marriage. As I will show, Woolf opens up the rigid structures of marriage as conceptualised in the marital home by using experimental narrative strategies which inform the novel with a feminist and literary critique of Edwardian society.

Mrs Jarvis is the rector's wife and a woman in spiritual and existential crisis. She cannot find meaning in her life as the rector's wife and member of the church community. We learn that she regularly withdraws from the marital home to the dangerous moors of Scarborough for self-contemplation:

> Mrs Jarvis walked on the moor when she was unhappy, going as far as a certain saucer-shaped hollow, though she always meant to go to a more distant ridge; and there she sat down, and took out the little book hidden beneath her cloak and read a few lines of poetry, and looked about her. She was not very unhappy, and, seeing that she was forty-five, never perhaps would be very unhappy, desperately unhappy that is, and leave her husband, and ruin a good man's career, as she sometimes threatened. (JR, 31)

The scene points at Mrs Jarvis's self-denial and her feeling of entrapment in an unfulfilling marriage. She is mainly fixed in place by the social expectations and consequences attached to marriage and divorce.

The narrative voice describes a strange obsession with the moon:

> Had she again been pacing her lawn late at night? Had she again tapped the study window and cried: 'Look at the moon, look at the moon, Herbert!' And Herbert looked at the moon. (JR, 31)

It is noteworthy that the narrative voice opens a dialogue with the reader by affirming the regularity of her late-night walks as a question. Woolf is interested in inspiring critical reflection on Mrs Jarvis's situation. As Neverow points out, the scene reflects the disconnection between the couple:

> When Mrs Jarvis demands that her husband see the same moon she sees as she paces on the lawn, her urgency evidences her desperate attempt to connect with him in a meaningful way. (Neverow, 222)

However, "safely ensconced in his cozy study" (Neverow, 222) Mr Jarvis cannot understand his wife's feelings. This disconnect is reflected in the spatial dimensions of their marriage. Mrs Jarvis is displaced in physical terms to the wasteland of the moors where she spends her nights evading the marital bed. Mrs Jarvis's experience of Edwardian marriage is oppressive

and depressing. Her marital space is compromised by the disconnection to her husband who generates his understanding of functioning marriage from church conventions and his patriarchal role as rector. In other words, the solidity of the marriage institution immobilises and displaces Mrs Jarvis to uncomfortable and dangerous physical and mental places, her "saucer-shaped hollow" (JR, 31).

As with my reading of the novel, Ohmann reads *Jacob's Room* as about the renewal of "personal relationships, perhaps most obviously those between men and women." And characters like Mrs Jarvis "suggest the nature of the problem" (Ohmann, 163), the problem being, connecting to people, especially connections between men and women in the oppressive social structures of Edwardian England. Woolf keeps the suicidal state of Mrs Jarvis in suspense:

> Still there is no need to say what risks a clergyman's wife runs when she walks on the moor. Short, dark, with kindling eyes, a pheasant's feather in her hat, Mrs Jarvis was just the sort of woman to lose her faith upon the moors — but she did not lose her faith, did not leave her husband, never read her poem through, and went on walking the moors. (JR, 31)

As we will see, this intimate rendering of the marital experience stands in relation to the other impressionist glimpses into marriages which we gain over the course of the novel. In her portrayals, Woolf arranges different themes — spiritual displacement in this example and social immobility in the following — around the core experience of female oppression.

The Plumer family only appears over the course of roughly four pages and critical discussion usually revolves around Mr Plumer due to his status as one of Jacob's notorious Cambridge dons. However, in the context of Woolf's impressionist design, minor characters like Mrs Plumer exemplify how *Jacob's Room* questions the notion of a "minor character" itself. Mrs Plumer, as one of several brief sketches of married women, constitutes a meaningful character who contributes in narrative form and content to the dialogic expression of the novel.

Woolf pairs the couples of *Jacob's Room* in thematic juxtapositions of female desires and patriarchal control. For instance, Mrs Jarvis who is in spiritual crisis and married to a church authority. Mrs Plumer is married to a professor of physics and, accordingly, her crisis is the lack of education and career opportunity for women. We learn that Mrs Plumer's development was heavily influenced by her economic background. She was born into the middle or lower classes which forced her into a marriage and obliged her to prioritise her husband's career for the sake of social advancement:

> It was none of her fault — since how could she control her father begetting her forty years ago in the suburbs of Manchester? And once begotten, how could she do other than grow up cheese-paring, ambitious, with an instinctively accurate notion of the rungs of the ladder and an ant-like assiduity in pushing George Plumer ahead of her to the top of the ladder? (JR, 42)

Mrs Plumer is a smart, career-oriented woman who understands the gendered system of social advancement. She sacrificed her time and ambition to push her husband to a position of rank and wealth. The experience has left her bitter and in paralysis:

> What was at the top of the ladder? A sense that all the rungs were beneath one apparently; since by the time George Plumer became Professor of Physics, or whatever it might be, Mrs Plumer could only be in a condition to cling tight to her eminence, peer down at the ground, and goad her two plain daughters to climb the rungs of the ladder. (JR, 42)

This prioritisation of male economic advancement is enforced within her home as well. Mrs Plumer laments the apparent arrogance with which her husband treats her since his ascension to professorship. For instance, Mr Plumer actively silences his wife. When Mrs Plumer finds a moment of silence at the luncheon party, she seizes the opportunity to express her views:

> 'I think,' said Mrs Plumer, taking advantage of the momentary respite, while the young men stared at the garden, to look at her husband, and he, not accepting full responsibility for the act, nevertheless touched the bell. (JR, 41)

With Mrs Plumer, Woolf traces the Edwardian power system of class and gender inherent in the institution of marriage. Mrs Plumer's ascension to the upper-middle-class, partially enabled by marriage, comes with the trade-off of becoming mute and immobilised in her own home.

Woolf raises the tragedy of the situation through Mrs Plumer's role as mother. Her plight extends to her daughters: "It was none of their fault either [her two daughters]. In they came to the drawing-room, in white frocks and blue sashes. They handed the cigarettes" (JR, 43). The scene foreshadows the daughters' future as servants to men, thus, repeating the cycle of gendered injustice despite their elevation to the middle or upper-middle-class.

Hence, on the content level, Woolf uses the marital home in order to expose the glass ceiling for women in society. The social advancement of the Plumer family might elevate their esteem and status in society but does not include the Plumer women in terms of career. However, Woolf's narrative strategy aims at a dialogue with the reader. As Caughie notes: "Woolf is more interested in how a reader responds to and shapes a text than in elucidating an author's thematic statements or characterizing forms" (Caughie, 12). For instance, with the Plumers, Woolf repeatedly raises the question of responsibility for Mrs Plumer's situation. "It was none of her fault" (JR, 42), the narrative voice explains and, with regard to her daughters it "was none of their fault either" (JR, 43). When her husband silences her he also is "not accepting full responsibility for the act" (JR, 41). Woolf deliberately leaves the question open and invites reflection over the power dynamics at hand.

The third wife is Mrs Pascoe, a farmer's wife who spends her days imprisoned and isolated in her marital home in the Cornish countryside. Mrs Pascoe is almost twice as old as Mrs Jarvis and Mrs Plumer who are in their forties. Her husband is helping a neighbour farmer, her daughter is married and has relocated to America, her oldest son is also married and the

"Wesleyan[9] minister came and took the boy" (JR, 68). Left to herself, Mrs Pascoe spends her days staring at the sea "for the millionth[10] time" (JR, 69) while she is scouring pans. Mrs Pascoe has outlived her purpose except for housekeeping.

However, Woolf characterises Mrs Pascoe in a distinctly ambiguous way. For one, Woolf introduces the character by drawing attention to shifting perspectives. As Caughie points out, the scene of Mrs Pascoe staring at the sea surprises the reader in order to make him/her aware of the reading process:

> Here the narrator seems to modulate unobtrusively into Mrs Pascoe's perspective. We seem to look through Mrs Pascoe's eyes at the steamers and the sailing ship, at the gulls on the log and the gulls on the waves, at the reflection of the moon on the water, only to be told in the next sentence that "Mrs Pascoe had gone indoors long ago." (Caughie, 65)

Woolf uses narrative perspective in order to merge and disconnect with the view of character without telling the reader about the disconnect.

Woolf, then, expands this perspective play further. We get to know Mrs Pascoe from an outsider perspective. Life in the cottage renders her somewhat of an anachronistic tourist attraction. She has to draw her water from the well outside which makes her a curiosity to London-based visitors (JR, 69). Woolf makes a point of distinctly delineating her from the "sophisticated people" in higher classes for the "talkative, nimble-witted people have taken themselves to towns" (JR, 70). We learn that Mrs Pascoe dreams about a more privileged life in the city:

> The picture papers were delivered punctually on Sunday, and she poured long over Lady Cynthia's wedding at the Abbey. She, too, would have liked to ride in a carriage

[9] Wesleyan Methodist education programs provided free education for the poor in 1800s England and focused on instilling religious values in children. Hence, this reference might reflect the poverty of the Pascoes or a wrong-doing of Mrs Pascoe's son which required reformative action of sorts. At the time of this scene, Wesleyan programs were already largely scaled back (Smith, 187) which is consistent with Woolf's theme of decline and the loss of institutional authority in the novel.
[10] The manuscripts specify 60 years of married life. (JR, 255)

> with springs. The soft, swift syllables of educated speech often shamed her few rude ones. (JR, 70)

Further, the narrative voice points out, that there is no reason anyone would want to visit Mrs Pascoe:

> Although it would be possible to knock at the cottage door and ask for a glass of milk, it is only thirst that would compel the intrusion. Yet, perhaps Mrs Pascoe would welcome it. (JR, 68)

Hence, this characterisation perpetuates a cultural narrative of inferior farmers and superior city-dwellers which comes with a negative value judgement attached to Mrs Pascoe's life.

As Froula notes, there is an observable cultural perspective from which Woolf's detached narrative voice tends to present the impressions of the novel: Her "essayist-narrator frames a kaleidoscopic array of private and public scenes with a city-dweller's anonymity and freedom (Froula, 63). However, Woolf self-consciously challenges this perspective by also providing an alternative mode of framing Mrs Pascoe. By turning inward to explore her emotional space, the narrative voice highlights the humanity and emotional intelligence of Mrs Pascoe in contrast to the isolation which was imposed upon her by a society which sees no value in her:

> Her face was assuredly not soft, sensual, or lecherous, but hard, wise, wholesome rather signifying in a room full of sophisticated people the flesh of blood of life. ... The wise old woman, having fixed her eyes upon the sea, once more withdrew. (JR, 70)

The narrative voice expresses deep sadness over Mrs Pascoe's fate:

> Like a miser, she has hoarded her feelings within her own breast. Not a penny piece has changed all these years, and, watching her enviously, it seems as if all within must be pure gold. (JR, 70)

This juxtaposition of perspectives on Mrs Pascoe demonstrates how Woolf's modern fiction underlines and resists cultural narratives. It exemplifies the difference of modern fiction to, as Woolf describes it, the "materialist" character creation of Edwardian literature.

In *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* Woolf mockingly imagines how Bennett and Galsworthy would render the character of Mrs Brown sitting in a carriage. Woolf explains that Mr Bennet:

> would observe every detail with immense care. He would notice ... how Mrs Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth's bazaar; and had mended gloves — indeed the thumb of the left-hand glove had been replaced. And he would observe, at length, how this was the non-stop train from Windsor which calls at Richmond for the convenience of middle-class residents, who can afford to go to the theatre but have not reached the social rank which can afford motor-cars, though it is true, there are occasions (he would tell us what) when they hire them from a company (he would tell us which). And so he would gradually sidle sedately towards Mrs Brown, and would remark how she had been left a little copyhold, not freehold, property at Datched, which, however, was mortgaged to Mr Bungay the solicitor. (BB, 13-4)

In other words, for Woolf, the Edwardian character is outlined by economic relations. Mrs Brown is defined by the value of her brooch, the state of her gloves, the class implications of her chosen mode of transportation and by the value and details of her inheritance. The way Mrs Pascoe is constructed in relation to outside observers, economic features of her home and the introspective of the narrator, juxtaposes Edwardian characterisation with Woolf's ideas as laid out in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'.

But Woolf adds a third method of characterising Mrs Pascoe. The interior of Mrs Pascoe's cottage serves as an externalised representation of this cultural and literary negotiation. Bishop's research on the manuscripts of the novel concludes that "Woolf is using rooms as an index of characters; Jacob's is not at first singled out" (Bishop, 116). As Bishop determined, Mrs Pascoe was originally one of three major characters whose rooms were meant to define different aspects of self:

> Woolf is, among other things, exploring the interpenetration of psychic and physical space, and one can perhaps see a pattern emerging — Jacob's room contains hints of his intellectual self, Angela's room reflects a social self, Mrs Pascoe's room captures the physical self, and each has implications for what constitutes life and being. (Bishop, 118)

Mrs Pascoe's physical self is defined by its age and immobilised status in the marital home. This is also reflected in the interior of her cottage. Woolf describes her room:

> Behind her on the wall hung a large dried skate. Shut up in the parlour she prized mats, china mugs, and photographs, though the mouldy little room was saved from the salt breeze only by the depth of a brick, and between lace curtains you saw the gannet drop like a stone, and on stormy days the gulls came shuddering through the air, and the steamers' lights were now high, now deep. Melancholy were the sounds on a winter's night. (JR, 70)

This is an example of what Woolf planned when she said "the Room will hold it together. Intensity of life compared with immobility. Experiences" (qtd. in Bishop, 115). Mrs Pascoe and her cottage stand in a mutually defining relationship to each other. She feels the intensity of loneliness and immobility compared to vivid movement outside. Birds are flying dramatic manoeuvres. Lights shift from the boats shining through the curtain-shielded windows and the whole scene is marked by melancholy.

Woolf introduces Mrs Pascoe's room through a dried skate, which is what Mrs Pascoe represents. Mrs Pascoe lives in a state of desiccation, confined to her cottage, as a remnant from a different time with little to no value that is recognised in an urbanised, class-conscious context. It is a mouldy little space only protected by bare bricks. By drawing on space-conscious symbolism to create an externalised, physical interiority of Mrs Pascoe, Woolf provides a method which is both world and character building.

Thus, Mrs Pascoe constitutes a meta-discussion of modes of characterisation. Woolf constructs a multi-perspective contrast between Mrs Pascoe's valuelessness from a societal point of view, the high value ascribed to her by the narrative voice and a detached, metaphoric description of Mrs Pascoe's interiority. Woolf does not promote one perspective over the other. Rather, the reader is challenged to consider modes of reading and writing character. It is also a call for reflection on what society deems valuable and for what reason. Hence, the culture work of Woolf's patterns of meaning is primarily to provoke discussion about established norms and the constructedness of character defining concepts, both, socially and literary.

Through the eyes of Mrs Jarvis, we get a rare direct statement on marriage by one of the women of the novel. Jacob's mother, Mrs Flanders is an impoverished widow who chooses not to remarry despite two potential suitors. The situation leaves her impoverished and lonely. Contemplating Mrs Flanders with her children, Mrs Jarvis acknowledges the punishing alternative to marriage:

> Mrs Flanders bent low over her little boys' heads, that marriage is a fortress and widows stray solitary in the open fields, picking up stones, gleaning a few golden straws, lonely, unprotected, poor creatures. Mrs Flanders had been a widow these two years. (JR, 4)

The depiction of marriage as a "fortress" sits at the core of Woolf's space-conscious impressions of the female experience. The most defining characteristic of the metaphoric fortress are its dividing walls. For one, marriage appears to divide couples into insiders and outsiders, like Mr Jarvis in the rectory and Mrs Jarvis on the lawn / the moor. Second, a fortress can protect or imprison. For instance, married couples like the Plumers enjoy the protective privileges of social security and respect which are denied to Mrs Flanders. At the same time, Mrs Pascoe is imprisoned by the same social norms.

At face-value Woolf arranges and re-arranges scenarios of oppressive husbands and oppressed wives in different circumstances. Woolf's portrayal of marriage renders a society filled with depressed and suicidal women. For instance, Mrs Flanders is crying three times per day for no visible reason (JR, 15), Mrs Plumer has become bitter and Mrs Pascoe has completely withdrawn from the world. Mrs Jarvis contemplates suicide on the moors, just like Jacob's lover Fanny who threatens to drown herself in the Thames (JR, 192). Woolf assembles stories of marriage in cohesive, politically charged clusters.

As Flint argues, Woolf's gendered critique of marriage is part of her larger social critique of Edwardian society as a whole:

> Woolf came to organize her text around a more generalized perception of difference between the sexes. Such differences, she demonstrates with regard to attitudes, opportunities, and values, were crucial to the maintenance of the dominant ideology of

> a society which was capable of sending 'young men in the prime of life' off to their death on battlefields or under the sea. (Flint, ‘Women and Language’, 362)

As I have shown, Woolf likens the “solidity” of Edwardian literary form to the rigidity of the Edwardian mindset. The marriage fortress is an example of how Woolf’s space-conscious poetics conceptualise the dynamics of Edwardian society, in this instance the “solidity” of its boundaries, in architectural terms.

However, Woolf is not only an architect but also a renovator. Her spatial thinking is not only aimed at recording but also re-negotiating these rules. She uses experimental narrative strategies in order to get “in-between” these structures and renovate them from the inside. For instance, Woolf invokes the reader to participate in the renovation process. As Caughie explains:

> Through her use of characters and narrators in these novels, Woolf draws attention to narrative strategies and thus to the ways in which characters and, by implication, notions of identity are produced. (Caughie, 64)

Woolf uses devices which point at the reading process. She aims to wake up the reader to question the foundation upon which the core beliefs of Edwardian power distribution in the marital space rest.

For instance, as Woolf maps out the different levels and connections of the socio-economic limitations for married women with Mrs Plumer and her daughters, she also opens an indirect discourse with the reader about responsibility for the status quo. We learn that Mr Plumer does not accept full responsibility for silencing his wife and perhaps for more than that. Woolf points out that “it” is not Mrs Plumer’s fault and neither is “it” the fault of her daughters. As Froula notes, Woolf’s persistence on this point “punctuates a quest for causes that leads beyond individual responsibility or conscience. Something is wrong, someone must be accountable, yet no one is; social forces move people to think and act unconsciously, without knowledge or will” (Froula, 70-1). Woolf challenges the reader to think about whose fault it is;

what it is exactly. These scenes of marriage invite to think critically and question presumed norms.

McGee argues Woolf's excessive use of character sketches arranged in patterns of meaning is the writing and rewriting of identities in ever changing relations in order to disable established patterns of reading.

> She [Woolf] comes to herself in the place of the Other, the place of the indefinite social identity. The effect is not simply to defer difference by insisting on its difference from itself, but to reverse it, annul it, in an act of symbolic exchange. Such an act does not put an end to difference as the incommensurable or irreducible in social processes but rather annuls value and resists the absorption of differences into social hierarchies which distribute value through the mediation of a system or code. (McGee, 229)

These dynamics demonstrate how Woolf's overt feminist tones blend with her experimental narrative strategies. Woolf traces and negotiates processes of defining and judging characters in different social relations in order to open the institution of marriage up for criticism. As Caughie explains: "Woolf's experiments with narrative forms and functions engender certain ideological assumptions and political strategies, and thereby enable a feminist ideology to take shape" (Caughie, 19). It is this testing of possibilities and crafting of ever-changing patterns which open up the solid walls of the Edwardian marriage fortress for renovation. But the institution of marriage is a private one and only one building block of Woolf's portrait of Edwardian society. I will turn to the Church as a site of institutionalised power next in order to explore Woolf's depiction of gendered space distribution in Edwardian England.

The Church as Institution

Woolf takes the reader to three churches in *Jacob's Room*. In the following pages I will examine the political and structural implications of Woolf's space-conscious poetics applied to the institution of the church. As Knight notes: "Woolf appears to have been especially suspicious of religious sentiment as it found itself institutionally housed"

(Knight, 28). Her panorama of Edwardian Christian culture is comprised from a variety of spiritual and unspiritual, institutionalised, and marginalised churchgoers. The ambiguities of Woolf's depictions of mystical elements, Christian belief and institutionalised religion have been explored by a number of critics such as Knight and Lackey. As Knight points out:

> While Woolf may well have grown quite disenchanted with doctrinal Christianity, the religion's representations pervade her fiction, be they in the form of church buildings, clerical lives, faith-identified characters, scriptural allusions, sacred music and so forth, to the point that however detached Woolf might have become regarding the Church as institution, it still survives as a very significant vestigial force in her fiction. (Knight, 33-4)

For instance, Woolf chose London's most famous church, St. Paul's Cathedral as a recurringly important place in the novel. The cathedral constitutes a symbolic location of centralised power for the Anglican Church, the established church in English society. Here is how Woolf renders St. Paul's Cathedral:

> Dim it is, haunted by ghosts of white marble, to whom the organ for ever chaunts. If a boot creaks, it's awful; then the order; the discipline. The verger with his rod has life ironed out beneath him. Sweet and holy are the angelic choristers. And for ever round the marble shoulders, in and out of the folded fingers, go to the thin high sounds of voice and organ. For ever requiem — repose. Tired with scrubbing the steps of the Prudential Society's office, which she did year in year out, Mrs Lidgett took her seat beneath the great Duke's tomb, folded her hands, and half closed her eyes. A magnificent place for an old woman to rest in, by the very side of the great Duke's bones, whose victories mean nothing to her, whose name she knows not, though she never fails to greet the little angels opposite, as she passes out, wishing the like on her own tomb, for the leathern curtain of the heart has flapped wide, and out steal on tiptoe thoughts of rest, sweet melodies … Old Spicer, jute merchant, thought

> nothing of the kind though. Strangely enough he'd never been in St Paul's these fifty years, though his office windows looked on the churchyard. (JR, 86-7)

Woolf presents three perspectives of St. Paul's Cathedral. For one, the narrative voice describes the solidity and preservation of the church's interior. There is a tone of mocking exaggeration, perhaps sarcasm, in the way the "sweet and holy" choristers are presented. Then Woolf describes two characters at the scene; Mrs Lidgett, who seeks a moment of rest from cleaning work, and Old Spicer who visits the church out of curiosity.

Woolf creates an ironic duality between the church as a space of eternal "repose" and Mrs Lidgett as completely exhausted from cleaning the stairs of the Prudential Society's Office. She contemplates her own tomb and dreams of rest which implies a suicidal state, similar to many of the women of the novel. For instance, Mrs Jarvis's thoughts recur around the same theme: "'I never pity the dead,'" said Mrs Jarvis … 'They are at rest'" (JR, 181). Woolf contrasts Mrs Lidgett's internal life and her working-class suffering with the oblivious, upper-middle-class merchant Old Spicer.

His experience of the cathedral is perfectly sober: "'So that's all?' Well, a gloomy old place … Where's Nelson's tomb? No time now — come again — a coin to leave in the box." St. Paul's is a tourist attraction for him — he wants to see Lord Nelson's tomb. He is disappointed by the experience and adheres to social expectation by leaving a coin in the box automatically. Woolf identifies St. Paul's as a place for the privileged like Old Spicer. We learn that:

> Nothing could appear more certain from the steps of St. Paul's than that each person is miraculously provided with coat, skirt, and boots; an income; an

> object. Only Jacob, carrying in his hand Finlay's *Byzantine Empire*, which he had bought in Ludgate Hill, looked a little different. (JR, 87)

There is a great deal of irony in Woolf's multi-perspective rendering of St. Paul's Cathedral with which she negotiates the gendered, spiritual, and economic components of the institution which is the established Church.

The pristine, celestial interiors evidently are meant to touch on an underlying profoundness of meaning and experience inherent in the cathedral. However, Woolf contrasts this with actual experiences. Woolf depicts St. Paul's Cathedral as a "dim" place of "order" and "discipline" where the choristers sing for the "ghosts of white marble." People, it is insinuated, are not welcome for "if a boot creaks, it's awful" and the "verger with his rod has life ironed out beneath him." The scene reminds of her description of the Edwardian house: "There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet — if life should refuse to live there?" (MF, 186) Woolf describes this decay *through* preservation and solidity in her critique of Edwardian representation as rooted in Victorian tropes in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'. For her, the blind preservation of literary and religious tradition undermines its core qualities and values:

> So the young novelist became a reformer, and thought with pardonable contempt of those vast Victorian family parties, where the funny man was always funny, the good woman always good, and nobody seemed aware, as they pursued their own tiny lives, that society was rotten and Christianity itself at stake. (BB1st, 117)

Hence, Woolf's portrait of St. Paul's cathedral, as an inhospitable space, constitutes a criticism of the Church as institution and, as reflected in her narrative strategies, of Edwardian writing practices.

Woolf visits St. Paul's through Old Spicer's perspective. He approaches the building from a tourist's point of view. His expectations are disappointed. He recognises the dim, unspiritual nature of the place and takes interest in Nelson's tomb as a site of historic fact. For Old Spicer, the cathedral is a site of historicity and social convention, as his mandatory donation indicates. The ironic contrast of Mrs Lidgett as an exhausted believer with real spiritual concerns and the cathedral as an inhospitable place of supposed rest, reflects the in-and outsider patterns of the novel. Once more, Woolf points at the solidity of Edwardian institutions which rest on gendered and economic walls.

If we use Stanford Friedman's "new geographics" as lined out in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998) and view the church as a space of intersecting cultural narratives then we need to ask which narratives "are privileged and which ones are marginalized by the writer or the text as a whole? Do they function progressively or regressively?" (Stanford Friedman, *Mappings*, 29) Woolf overtly mocks the supposed, inherent authority of the church over the actual spiritual experience which is localised in the cathedral. Old Spicer undermines this idea by being downright disappointed by the experience. Rather, Old Spicer's mechanical coin donation and visit to Lord Nelson's tomb prioritise a narrative of the church as a site of inherited historicity and value rooted in an economic and social tradition.

The second church of the novel takes us to another major institution, King's College. As I will explore in later pages, Cambridge serves primarily as the architectural embodiment of a male-dominated education system. It houses Jacob and his fellow students and a host of Cambridge dons. However, King's College also has a famous chapel. Woolf portrays a congregation of men and women side by side in sermon:

> But this service in King's College Chapel — why allow women to take part in it? Surely, if the mind wanders (and Jacob looked extraordinarily vacant, his head thrown back, his hymn-book open at the wrong place), if the mind wanders it is because several hat shops and cupboards upon cupboards of coloured dresses are displayed upon rush-bottomed chairs. Though heads and bodies may be devout enough, one has a sense of individuals — some like blue, others brown; some feathers, others pansies and forget-me-nots. No one would think of bringing a dog into church. … a dog destroys the service completely. So do these women — though separately, devout, distinguished, and vouched for by the theology, mathematics, Latin, and Greek of their husbands. Heaven knows why it is. For one thing, thought Jacob, they're as ugly as sin. (JR, 39-40)

Woolf parodies institutionalised misogyny as inherent in these institutions through a direct comparison of women and dogs in the chapel. The women "may be devout enough" and are licensed to attend the sermon through their professor husbands. However, the male perspective takes issue with their individualised appearance which contrasts the uniform Cambridge robes. She invokes the shops of the city to individualise the women through hats and dresses.

The scene juxtaposes the closed unity of Cambridge students with the individuality of women. In contrast, the students enter the church marching, like soldiers:

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

There are parallels between the lifeless rendering of St. Paul's Cathedral and the empty gowns and "sculptured faces" of the students. The chapel should be a space of gender-neutral communion but the space, like marital homes, is compromised due to self-protective male institutions. Women, like dogs, are not welcome to the sermon.

With this scene Woolf explores the inter-relation of church and university, of religion and education. Woolf points at the unifying qualities of a shared education and shared religion. As Stanford Friedman points out: “Identity depends upon a point of reference; as that point moves nomadically, so do the contours of identity, particularly as they relate to the structures of power” (Stanford Friedman, *Mappings*, 22). In this particular instance, the uniform perspective of the male students turns the individuality of the women into a collective judgement against them. There is a shared understanding that Cambridge students enjoy unity and reject diversity. The uniformity of marching students is underlined by the religious expectation of monotonous tradition and ceremony as described in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

However, there is doubt about the true beliefs among the students. We learn that Jacob is not a believer. His thoughts drift from the sermon to the women, his hymn-book is on the wrong page. As Lackey notes:

> In *Jacob's Room*, though Jacob and Timmy Durrant make jokes about God, we find the two in church … Jacob responds negatively, not just because bringing a woman into the Chapel is like "bringing a dog into church," but also because the women who would come would be "as ugly as sin". The pattern is consistent: Woolf's early male atheists reject God, and yet there are subtle hints (church attendance) that suggest a fidelity to God, a gesture that makes many of her males "atheists perhaps", but not really atheists. (Lackey, 73)

Woolf uses her parody of church attendance in order to question the sincerity of religious practice. Jacob stands out as a juvenile atheist.

In the grand scheme of things, Woolf traces connections between the education system and the Church institution as building blocks of the machine that sends men like Jacob into war. This uniformity is achieved, in part, against a supposed outsider role of women in the church. However, as Caughie points out: “Woolf does not promote

outsiders over insiders; instead, she shows us that such terms are bound up with the very kind of thinking that perpetuates the social-economic system she explores" (Caughie, 134). This is why Woolf's church scenes always contain economic and or class-conscious elements. The Church as institution cannot be separated from the material realities of society. Hence, Woolf's portraits of church spaces critique not only its gendered aspects, or the state of religious practice but the conformist, masculine Edwardian mindset which perpetuates these institutions.

The third church of the novel brings us back to Scarborough and lies in direct vicinity to the moor. As we have seen, the moor constitutes a place of contemplation and danger for Mrs Jarvis. It is a symbolic exile where women like her and Mrs Flanders can enjoy privacy and intimacy in contrast to the marital spaces of the novel. For instance, we learn that ”the moor accepted everything” (JR, 184). Woolf juxtaposes Mrs Flanders and Mrs Jarvis roaming the moors together with the nearby churchgoers. Their walk is interrupted by the church tower: "Motionless and broad-backed the moors received the statement 'It is fifteen minutes past the hours,' but made no answer, unless a bramble stirred" (JR, 183). Woolf draws quite a stark contrast between the two realms.

Once more we see an institutionalised community in contrast to the female experience of Mrs Flanders and Mrs Jarvis. Woolf renders the ceremony:

> Often, even at night, the church seems full of people. The pews are worn and greasy, and the cassocks in place, and the hymn-books on the ledges. It is a ship with all its crew aboard. The timbers strain to hold the dead and the living, the ploughmen, the carpenters, the fox-hunting gentlemen and the farmers smelling of mud and brandy. Their tongues join together in syllabling the sharp-cut words, which for ever slice asunder time and the broad-backed moors. Plaint and belief and elegy, despair and triumph, but for the most part good

> sense and jolly indifference, go trampling out of the windows any time these five hundred years. Still as Mrs Jarvis said, stepping out on to the moors, 'How quiet it is!' (JR, 183-4)

There is a noticeable theme of aggressive expansion which emanates from the church. For instance, the church bell rings out into the moor which symbolises a will to dominance over even the last space of female liberty. The uniform voices of the distinctly male churchgoers ring out of the window and "slice" the moors.

Woolf draws on similar imagery as we have seen in St. Paul's Cathedral. For instance, she describes the church building and the foundations of its authority:

> The moonlight falls like a pale page upon the church wall, and illumines the kneeling family in the niche, and the tablet set up in 1780 to the Squire of the parish who relieved the poor, and believed in God — so the measured voice goes on down the marble scroll, as though it could impose itself upon time and the open air. (JR, 183)

Once more, Woolf endows the church with historic relevance and a super-imposed, ironic holiness. The cultural narrative of the place, it is implied, can conquer time and space. As Lackey notes: Woolf's "religious rhetoric is more a conceptual imposition than a spiritual invitation, so the church can be seen as a ubiquitous tyrant rather than an earthly sanctuary" (Lackey, 65-6). Her portraits of churchgoers are consistently pointing at its spiritually bankrupt traditions.

It is noteworthy that it is predominantly the women in *Jacob's Room* who have genuine spiritual concerns. Florinda has rosaries hanging in her room (JR, 103). Mrs Lidgett folds her hands in a kind of serene moment of rest and contemplation. Mrs Jarvis seriously contemplates her faith on the moors. They experience the institution of the Church as a solid structure of cold, petrified tradition. It is an authoritative force of male unity which runs through all layers of society. If we consider the gender

dualities of Woolf's depictions of the church experience there is an undeniable criticism of religion. Like the marital space, religious space is unequal and dividing people through its gendered, economic, and cultural walls into various constellations of in- and outsiders. As my reading has shown, the Church as institution constitutes a major building block of Woolf's portrait of Edwardian society.

Woolf's rendering of churches like St. Paul's Cathedral parodies the established cultural narratives of the religious experience from the inside. Woolf achieves this through ironic juxtapositions such as Mrs Lidgett's suicidal exhaustion and the idealised promise of "repose." However, Woolf's ironic depictions of religious space carry a critical, rather than comical core. As Knight points out:

> In Woolf 's fiction, the anti-religious voices are offset by their counterparts … Like the former, the latter require our taking them seriously, for they are serious characters, enhancing the novels' dialogic character. (Knight, 30)

Woolf dismantles church authority by showing the emptiness of its preserved traditions. The emphasis on opulent, sterile church interiors and the methodical execution of its sermons is either received with complete indifference or, with regard to women and the poor, downright hostile and exclusive. Hence, Woolf's biting parodies of misogynist structures aim at a reconsideration of the Edwardian experience of religion.

As I have shown, this theme of rigid tradition and "empty" houses constitutes a social and literary critique which is defining of Woolf's initial vision for a modern fiction. Rather than opening up oppressive space, Woolf traces the status quo in order to draw attention to the dynamics which perpetuate it. As Caughie explains: "The text questions the world as given (the 'same' world), seeing it instead as a construct" (Caughie, 75). This is why Woolf renders scenes from different points of views. Woolf's

aesthetic demonstrates the empty solidity of the Edwardian house while provoking a dialogue about literary and social renovation. Hence, Woolf builds the Edwardian church, the metaphorical religious mindset, while destabilising it through different narrative strategies; she builds and renovates Edwardian structures.

Woolf's rendering of King's College Chapel shows how Edwardian institutions such as the Church and the education system are inter-connected and operate in similar ways. Woolf's divide between masculine uniformity and female diversity has its roots in an unjust, patriarchal system. Woolf's churches become intersecting axes of economic, social, and spiritual interests which show a pattern of anti-female hostility. As Caughie notes: "Woolf explores prose discourse as an aesthetic phenomenon and a social product. In so doing she tests out the complex relationship between writing styles and material circumstances" (Caughie, 120). Woolf criticises the expanding and dominating cult of tradition which shapes the masculine uniformity of church and university which enables the war machinery which ultimately grinds up Jacob and his generation of Cambridge students.

She frequently equates the marching of church goers or the comradery of Cambridge students in their dorms with militarism. The battlefields "together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancelleries, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward, they say" (JR, 216). Woolf compares the ignorant churchgoers to the statues inside the churches. The strokes which oar the world forward "are dealt by men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policeman at Ludgate Circus" (JR, 216). Woolf's space-based poetics use the institution of the Church as a centre of power in relation to other centres such as the university which perpetuate cultural narratives and economic realities.

The University as Institution

So far, I have examined how Woolf builds impressions of society through the institutionalised spaces of marriage and religion. Woolf renders the former with a strong focus on the female experience of the oppressive maternal home while showing alternative modes of characterisation. The latter shows how religious spaces as a site of spiritual encounter have been compromised by the rigidity of Edwardian architectures and question Edwardian authority on social and literary forms and traditions. I want now to turn to the institution which is the university. As an all-male experience, Woolf explores a generative centre of patriarchal Edwardian education.

Woolf's narrative strategies are designed to spark a critical discussion about influential teachers as represented in the Cambridge dons and a system of learning which grooms students to perpetuate Edwardian mindsets. However, how we view Woolf's relationship to this, for her, inaccessible institution, has changed since the publication of the novel and we need to reconsider how Woolf's dialogic unravelling of the university walls informs the reading experience today. As McGee points out, Woolf has moved from the outside to the inside of academia:

> It could be argued that Woolf's position cannot be situated completely outside the university any more than it can be isolated from the determinations of Western male-centered culture; but that need not deter us from the recognition that Woolf's historical experience of that culture and the institutions of its reproduction is marked by a difference. That difference is determined as much by sex as it is by education. Woolf reminds us that, though we may and should continue to meet the challenge of social transformation from inside the institution, there is a historical outside — the university neither monopolizes the

> principle of reason nor can claim its reason as the only foundation for thought broadly defined. (McGee, 234)

Hence, the novel has gained a historical quality which renders its renovative discourse an anticipation of the social shifts to come. Cuddy-Keane explains that there is a redirection of academic discourse which approximates Woolf's ideals of reading as a mode of learning:

> One effect is that a concern for the common reader and common reading is coming to be seen as integral to the university's mission, instead of being cast, as Woolf positioned it, in an oppositional role. And, in consequence, it is becoming increasingly appropriate for Woolf's literary criticism to be housed inside the academy rather than outside it. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 195)

Hence, *Jacob's Room* perpetuates modern fiction's mission, as posed by Woolf, to question the academic critical landscape and its tendency to create the in- and outside from between these positions.

Woolf constructs the university as a microcosm of its own. Its solid walls protect the generational cycle of male success and power. Jacob is not immune to the appeal of this institution. He struggles in various moments of the novel to establish a meaningful and lasting connection to women such as Sandra Wentworth, Florinda, Clara Durrant, and, arguably, his mother Mrs Flanders. For instance, when he fails to bond with Florinda his dysfunction drives Jacob into the safety of the university: "He had a violent reversion towards male society, cloistered rooms, and the works of the classics" (JR, 110). Woolf indirectly suggests the university system is a product of masculine inability to cope and connect with the multiplicity of society. Rather, Woolf depicts the university as a refuge from reality. In doing so, Woolf criticises the detrimental effects of the private, self-indulgent, intellectual haven of the college

institution. The male experience of society is blinded and distorted by college education which, in turn, is part of the problem between gender and class relations.

Woolf's portrayal of the college dons is cynical. Her criticism of male-dominated institutions is particularly aggressive. As Groover points out:

> The dons reside in a rarefied world of boys, men, and ideas; they are vaguely sinister in their authority and influence over young men. Woolf satirizes the dons' use of language to create an illusion of wisdom. (Groover, 50)

Woolf conceptualises the male monopoly over college education, as a "special cake", controlled by its "sole purveyors", the college dons (JR, 50). For instance, Sopwith is a self-indulgent don who maintains close connections to his students. Woolf describes his influence:

> Sopwith went on talking. Talking, talking, talking, — as if everything could be talked — the soul itself slipped through the lips in thin silver disks which dissolve in young men's minds like silver, like moonlight. (JR, 51)

The relationship between dons and students has ceremonial qualities. Like Jesus shares bread with his twelve apostles, we see Sopwith sharing the cake with his twelve students: "Until midnight or later there would be undergraduates in his room, sometimes as many as twelve, sometimes three or four" (JR, 51).

Sopwith represents the appeal, the trap, of comfortable, conformist patriarchal education. Cambridge students are raised by teachers like disciples of a religious cult which reinforces the connection between church and university as seen in King's College Chapel. Its students, like its teachers, cannot be challenged within the university's walls and due to the centres of institutionalised power on the outside like marriage and the Church, men do not have to assume responsibility for the state of women, the poor or those who violate the moral codes of society.

Woolf's portrait of the college experience is particularly interested in modes of thinking, reading, and learning. This is reflected in old Huxtable. Woolf satirises his intellectual capabilities and knowledge: "Strip a whole seat of a railway carriage of its heads and old Huxtable's head will hold them all" (JR, 50). Woolf explores how Huxtable's headspace looks like and how it operates. For instance, she shows him reading in his chair:

> Yet sometimes there he'll sit for hours together, gripping the arm of the chair, like a man holding fast because stranded … Strange paralysis and constriction — marvellous illumination. Serene over it all rides the great full brow, and sometimes asleep or in the quiet spaces of the night you might fancy that on a pillow of stone he lay triumphant. (JR, 50)

Huxtable is trapped by the magnitude of his own mind. Woolf renders the professor a statue similar to the marble statutes inside St. Paul's Cathedral. Huxtable is paralysed by the reading experience. Further, Woolf describes what happens in Huxtable's mind as he reads:

> Now, as his eye goes down the print, what a procession tramps through the corridors of his brain, orderly, quick-stepping, and reinforced, as the march goes on, by fresh runnels, till the whole hall, dome, whatever one calls it, is populous with ideas. Such a muster takes place in no other brain. (JR, 50)

Woolf describes his intellect as an architecture similar to the novel's university and church buildings. She applies her architecture-based poetics to the internal space of Huxtable in order to demonstrate the interrelation between the Edwardian mindset and its institutions. Huxtable's ideas "march" uniformly in runnels in order to assemble in a great edifice.

These scenes draw attention to the masculine, conformist mode of reading which is taught by men like Huxtable and ultimately produces the militarised uniformity of marching students like Jacob. As McGee points out:

> Woolf's anti-patriarchal rhetoric, though it may employ figures drawn from the culture it opposes, does not simply repeat that culture. It appropriates the rhetoric of patriarchy and turns it to radically different ends. (McGee, 232)

Woolf's portraits of the dons, Mr Plumer, Sopwith and Huxtable, undermine the authority of college professors by depicting their traditions and behaviourisms as self-aggrandising, childish, and disconnected from the real world. As Flint notes: "Partly, men are hampered, it is suggested, through thinking too much according to pre-existing cultural assumptions" (Flint, 'Introduction', xxiv). Woolf creates a model of the education system which is perpetually incestuous, ill-guided and ultimately a paralysing machinery which is indifferent to societal change at best and repressive at worst. As we have seen, she likens the architecture of the university to the internal architecture of the Edwardian brain. The metaphoric marching of thoughts in preconceived traditions of reading translate into marching students and eventually marching soldiers.

Woolf's portrayal of the teaching body traces the perspectives and underlying modes of learning which perpetuate the institution and their appeal to young men. As we have seen with the paralysed Huxtable and the self-aggrandising Sopwith, Woolf assumes the Edwardian mindset is perpetuated, in part, by modes of reading, writing, and teaching. The following scene shows the academic mode of learning as students read in their dorm rooms:

> There were young men who read, lying in shallow armchairs, holding their books as if they had hold in their hands of something that would see them

> through; they being all in a torment, coming from midland towns, clergymen's sons. Others read Keats. And those long histories in many volumes — surely someone was now beginning at the beginning in order to understand the Holy Roman Empire, as one must. (JR, 55)

The young students mirror the old Huxtable, sunk in his armchair. Woolf reiterates the assumption that male education is a support or refuge of sorts; it will "see them through." More importantly, the scene constitutes a meta-critique of the Edwardian learning experience. In order to understand the Roman Empire, one must begin in the beginning and read history in its entirety. Woolf's ironic criticism is two-fold. One, Woolf challenges history books as the perpetuators of the male-centric history writing practice. Second, her approach to the novel, her vision of "modern fiction" constitutes the opposite of "beginning at the beginning in order to understand." This resounds Woolf's attack on the Edwardian critic who evaluates the present through the past; who is "for ever lecturing the young and celebrating the dead" (HSC, 295). In contrast, the many lives and impressions in *Jacob's Room* have no beginning or end. They are a soft cluster of indefinite sketches. It is their bigger whole and its innumerable patterns of meanings which provide varieties of knowledge rather than fixed truths or tropes which, in Woolf's opinion, inform Edwardian reliance on genre expectations. *Jacob's Room* is itself a defiance of the education system to which Jacob is subjected.

Woolf's institutions add up to a social portrait which traces many of its injustices. For instance, one of the underlying assumptions of *Jacob's Room* is that institutionalised unity of church and college and commerce, is the same apparatus which grounds up men like Jacob in war. Woolf sketches a battlefield:

> Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save that, through field-glasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like

> fragments of broken match-stick. These actions, together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancelleries, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward, they say. And they are dealt by men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policeman at Ludgate Circus. (JR, 216)

Woolf challenges the Edwardian mind and world as defined by its own, self-indulgent authority. As Froula describes it, *Jacob's Room*:

> re-forms the novel not by sacrificing historical consciousness to formal concerns … but by inventing a form to bring to the light of day the illusions a "botched" civilization imprints on the collective unconscious. (Froula, 69)

In the case of her rendering of the university, Woolf directly addresses the imprinting mechanism.

I want to give some thought to Woolf's use of form on basic novel structures such as chapters, spacing and typography which is particularly interesting in the university chapter and representative for the whole novel. From the outside, *Jacob's Room* is organised in an episodic structure. The novel consists of 14, originally unnumbered, chapters of inconsistent length. However, the chapters rarely reflect closed episodes. There are not many conventional features that connect the chapters in general such as plot, space, and time. The smallest common denominator is that the chapters very loosely follow Jacob's development in a, more or less, chronological order. However, the chapters only loosely build on each other and could very well stand independently and / or swap places with each other; as do the countless impressionistic digressions to other places, times and characters that accompany them. This inevitably provokes the question why the book has chapters at all since it is evidently not content that dictates their framing logic. Woolf initially theorized:

> Suppose one thing should open out of another … doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want; doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything? (qtd. in Zwerdling, 'Jacob's Room', 894)

This leads me to an analysis of the transition points between chapters. A clear indication that the chapters exercise a formal function is the way chapters slide into one another. Woolf tends to initiate the chapters in the midst of action, conversation, or thought-process: chapter one begins in the middle of Mrs. Flanders composing a letter, chapter five begins mid- conversation with "'I rather think', said Jacob" (JR, 84). Similar phrases initiate chapter two, eleven, thirteen and fourteen. Hence, the chapters tend to use flying starts and develop context and setting afterwards.

However, this immediacy and abruptness is not how chapters in *Jacob's Room* typically close. Woolf frequently uses three-time echoes to fade out the last scene of a chapter as for instance "'Goodbye', said Jacob. 'Goodbye,' he repeated. 'Goodbye,' he said once more" (JR, 83) in chapter four. Woolf also uses an echo to close the university chapter:

> *Back* from the Chapel, *back* from the Hall, *back* from the Library, came the sound of his [Jacob] footsteps, as if the old stone echoed with magisterial authority: "The young man—the young men—the young man—back to his rooms. (JR, 59)

By arranging a sequence of three "man" units connected by dashes, Woolf arguably simulates a military formation. She creates a subtle variation from "man" to "men" which forms a sort of bemoaning cry for the soon to be lost young men: The echoing effect is one of several methods with which Woolf manipulates typography and spacing to create an emotionally expressive form which engages with traditional structures of the novel genre.

For instance, in the following paragraph Woolf uses the spacing for her dialogic style of social critique. Woolf evokes a female ghost which roams outside of the college, in contrast to Jacob and his friend on the inside:

> So, if the veiled lady stepped through the Courts of Trinity, she now drowsed once more, all her draperies about her, her head against a pillar.
>
> 'Somehow it seemed to matter.'
>
> The low voice was Simeon's. The voice was even lower that answered him. The sharp tap of a pipe on the mantlepiece cancelled the words. And perhaps Jacob only said 'hum', or said nothing at all. True, the words were inaudible. It was the intimacy, a sort of spiritual suppleness, when mind prints upon mind indelibly. (JR, 59)

This is another instance of Woolf's strategies to wake up the reader and become attentive to the reading and interpreting process. Woolf uses spacing to put the "Somehow it seemed to matter" sentence at a central, isolated position between two scenes, one inside, one outside of the college walls. The reader has to decide what matters. In forcing the reader to reflect on the priorities of the text, she undermines the self-appointed importance of the student and teacher body.

The scene above exemplifies Woolf's approach to literary experimentation and Edwardian renovation. She does not relocate what "matters" from one side to the other. Rather Woolf draws attention to alternative readings and choice. As Cuddy-Keane explains based on Woolf's critical writing:

> The dialogic form constitutes Woolf's greatest separation from the academic article as it was developing at this time. Beyond the hostilities, beyond the pitting of one view against another, academic discourse rested on the common assumption that one view — generally the view of the speaker — should prevail. Against this model, Woolf developed a reader-oriented approach that affirms a plurality of views. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 79)

As a prosaic version of Woolf’s criticism, *Jacob’s Room* adapts a wide range of formal elements and manipulates them for the renovation of Edwardian structures. Her literary architectures constitute a discussion about Edwardian values between the outside and the inside. She transcends the solid walls of Trinity college which constitutes a renovation from within. As Hollander suggests, the Cambridge chapter opens up a chance for a change in the way Edwardian discourse operates.

> Jacob's time at Cambridge also represents a complex consideration of the questions of knowledge, receptivity, and ethics that saturate the novel as a whole. In particular, Woolf distinguishes between an economic pedagogical mode, in which knowledge is defined as a commodity to be passively ingested, and one that values a mutual exchange of ideas and understanding. (Hollander, 55)

Hence, *Jacob’s Room* constitutes a call for rethinking and rewriting education and observing how we construct and transmit knowledge. Woolf’s literary architectures form an interconnected panorama of institutionalised power which explores how the different *apparati* perpetuate their oppressive systems.

Jacob’s Rooms: The Modern Character Denied

Jacob as a character, as most critics point out, is elusive, sometimes ghost-like, sometimes petrified to a statue or locked behind impenetrable walls. This seemingly contradicts the Bildungsroman type narrative of novel. For instance, as Kazan notes: “Inevitably the question arises: is *Jacob’s Room* about Jacob at all? If it is, it fails the usual expectations of biographically inclined narratives, even modernist ones” (Kazan, 711). Jacob struggles to manifest in the novel in more ways than one. Woolf strictly limits the access the reader has into Jacob’s internal processes. She does not give

him an internal voice. Instead, Jacob is constructed out of three rooms: his childhood room, his student pad, and his adult apartment. As Bishop points out: “Jacob (the public, the private, and the perceived being) and his room (the domicile, the psychic space, and the text itself) progressively define one another” (Bishop, 133).

The little information we have about Jacob’s feelings is conveyed through a semi-omniscient narrator. If Jacob’s rooms represent his internal space, then the narrator is metaphorically and literally locked out of Jacob’ rooms. For instance, the narrator cannot penetrate his room when Jacob loses his virginity to Florinda (JR, 124). As Zwerdling argues, these limitations serve to maintain Jacob in a state of shapelessness:

> It is possible that she wants to give us the sense of a character still so unformed that even the relatively chaotic record of interior monologue seems too defining. … It is possible that Woolf refused to record Jacob’s deepest feelings because such a transcript comes too close to presenting a finished product rather than a consciousness in process. She wanted to give the sense of someone who remains a permanently unknown quantity. (Zwerdling, ‘Jacob’s Room’, 900-1)

As the following pages will show, Jacob represents the “shapelessness” (BB1st, 118) of the Edwardian character out of which Woolf intended to reconstitute the modern character. I argue that Woolf conceptualises the reconstitution of Jacob as a modern character in a similar way to how she constructed Edwardian society: through public and private architectures.

Jacob is a ghost haunting his own world. He does not appear to be fixed in time and space. Instead, he constantly stabilizes and destabilizes. As Levenson notes:

> When Woolf writes that the novel will be held together by the “Room,” she refers not only to the physical spaces that the fiction constructs; more significantly,

> she means the varying contexts that mediate selfhood: we all come encased in surroundings. (Levenson, 126)

As we have seen, the novel traces Edwardian architectures which cannot "encase" Jacob. For instance, Jacob's elusive state reflects his inability to connect with people. In the following scene his bodiless shadow falls on the people with whom he connects: "A shadow fell across Evelina's window — Jacob's shadow, though it was not Jacob" (JR, 167). At other times, he manifests out of the shadows like a statue:

> Jacob came out from the dark place by the window where he had hovered. The light poured over him, illuminating every cranny of his skin; but not a muscle of his face moved as he sat looking out into the garden. (JR, 80)

As these samples indicate, Woolf nearly always frames Jacob with a window, especially in the rare moments when he communicates with people. As Freedman notes: "Woolf appropriates the concept of window as a symbolic passage from the inner to the outer" (Freedman, 225). Through his windows, Jacob frequently observes his environment from the inside of his rooms. However, they also represent the isolation of Jacob as a character who fails to emotionally connect with his world.

Woolf understands Edwardian literature as out of touch with its own time. In order to house the modern character, a modern space needs to be (re)-created first. This ideological homelessness is reflected in Jacob's inability to connect to the world and its people. Jacob is constantly in transition from one stage to the next, travelling shores on boat trips and completing his grand tour from one European country to the next. He fails repeatedly to establish a relationship with his multiple love interests, like Clara Durrant, Florinda, and Sandra Williams.

A similar case can be made for Jacob's position between the patriarchal institutions which try to convert and consume him, and the female perspectives

through which Woolf criticises them. If we consider the criticism in Woolf's portrayal of Mrs Jarvis under the theme of religion and displacement, then Jacob is part of the underlying misogyny, as seen in my reading of King's College Chapel: Jacob is among the students who take offense at the presence of the women. If we consider Mrs Plumer as part of Woolf's critique of the exclusion of women from education and social advancement, then Jacob is beneficiary of the system. As Groover notes:

> The text criticizes him, at times, as a thoughtless and uncritical inheritor of the privileges that his culture affords to young men of a certain social class. He casually occupies rooms in Cambridge that the female narrator cannot enter; he deplores women in the chapel service; … Yet the narrator repeatedly reminds the reader that Jacob's perspective derives largely from his youthfulness and inexperience. (Groover, 48)

However, Jacob, as the prototype of the modern character is at odds with these patriarchal structures. He is insider to and outsider of the system.

For instance, we learn that Jacob is not religious. In the chapel he does not follow the sermon (JR, 39). Likewise, Jacob partially rejects some of the Cambridge teachings. He writes an essay with the title "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" (JR, 48) which challenges fundamental aspects of Victorian/Edwardian historiography. (This will be explored in great detail in my chapter on *Orlando.*) Further, Jacob criticises Leeds professor Bulteel as a "damned swine" (JR, 93) due to his censoring of indecent words in the works of William Wycherly (1641-1716) which Harris reads as Jacob's "defense of intellectual freedom" (Harris, 427).

Jacob cannot connect to people or inherited ideologies. Instead, he clings to the glorified ideal of ancient Greece, as taught at the university, which compels him to visit Greece. His trip to Greece leads to a crisis in his views on civilisation: he grew up romanticising the "Greek spirit" (JR, 189) but he now realises the "ramshackle

condition” (JR, 190) of the country. For him, Greece once constituted the pinnacle of civilisation, now “the whole of civilisation was being condemned” (JR, 190). Despite the chasm between ancient and modern Greece, its ruins, particularly its statues, exercise considerable gravity on Jacob. For instance, we learn that:

> Jacob had little sense of personal association; he seldom thought of Plato or Socrates in the flesh; on the other hand his feeling for architecture was very strong; he preferred statues over pictures; and he was beginning to think a great deal about the problems of civilisation, which were solved, of course, so very remarkably by the ancient Greeks, though their solution is no help to us. (JR, 207)

Jacob realises that his crisis of being cannot be solved by imitating the ancients. Woolf creates a world that simultaneously exists in two states. For one, Greece is modern with its “highly advanced … electric tramway system” but also shabby. Second, it is ancient and eternal: “Athens is still quite capable of striking a young man as the oddest combination, the most incongruous assortment. Now it is suburban; now immortal” (JR, 190). Woolf turns the academic, Greek ideal into a blend of the modern complexity and glorified, ancient solidity. The experience leads to Jacob’s awakening to the reality of Greece.

There is an architectural representation of Jacob’s relationship with the Greek ideal as well. We find Jacob seeking solitude in the quarry of Athens, “where the Greeks had cut marble for the theatre” (JR, 200). Jacob positions himself “on the exact spot where the great statue of Athena used to stand” (JR, 206). At the Erechtheum, Jacob imitates the caryatids: “There are still several women standing there holding the roof on their heads. Jacob straightened himself slightly; for stability and balance affect the body first” (JR, 209). Jacob evidently seeks a connection to the marble figures of ancient Greece; he attempts to become a statue of ancient Greece. I would suggest,

that Woolf, in this scene, is trying to connect Jacob to the literary and artistic influences of the past, as he is taught by patriarchal institutions, and as it is perpetuated by the Edwardian critic.

However, Jacob is cut from a different stone. He is a character of a different kind and he cannot follow in the tradition of his fellow, conformist, Cambridge students or the ancient world. Rather, Jacob transcends his role as a literary character and oscillates between states of being. As Kazan notes:

> Jacob occupies a liminal space, a border country between subject and object, life and art: he functions as a kind of corporeal icon. Rather than reflecting on what he is not — fully developed character, interesting speaker and so on — we can instead read Jacob as the orchestrator who briefly breaks down the divisions between art and life. In those spotlit moments Woolf creates an enigmatic figure who reverses the familiar literary topos of the statue that comes to life through speech and movement. (Kazan, 714)

All of these factors: Jacob's inability to engage in relationships, his rejection of the inherited religious and education apparatus, his failure to connect to the idealised past and the limited insight into his internality, keep Jacob in a state of anticipation and shapelessness which represents the position of Woolf's modern character in relation to Edwardian and Victorian literary conventions.

As a protagonist, he does not fit into the world of his own novel. Yet, Jacob constitutes the loose centre, the "Jacob-shaped hole" (Wall, 306) around which the large cast of characters revolve. Instead of tracing the development of Jacob as would be expected from a Bildungsroman, Jacob draws attention to the character and genre-defining factors by subverting these expectations. As Caughie explains:

> So what's the point? In its title, *Jacob's Room*, and in its movement of digression from and return to Jacob, this novel calls attention to the notion of centers in

> narratives: the center of attention (main character), the center of vision (point of view), and the center of meaning (theme). If the first two are unstable and shifting, then we must ask what happens to the third. (Caughie, 67)

I would suggest, Jacob's unstable identities constitute Woolf's critique of and alternative to Edwardian literary conventions. Jacob's development from childhood to adolescence is a sketch at best, instead, the novel is moving towards a climax of character of a different kind.

Woolf expresses this in great detail through her meta-discussion of character, embodied in the narrative voice. Much of Woolf's criticism of Edwardian and Victorian literary practices is reflected overtly in the novel. For instance, the following paragraph constitutes a thorough rejection of the English literary lineage of which Jacob, as a literary critic and student is fully aware:

> But what brought Jacob Flanders to read Marlowe in the British Museum? Youth, youth — something savage — something pedantic. For example, there is Mr Masefield, there is Mr Bennett. Stuff them into the flame of Marlowe and burn them to cinders. Let no shred remain. Don't palter with the second rate. Detest your own age. Build a better one. And to set that on foot read incredibly dull essays upon Marlowe to your friends. For which purpose one must collate editions in the British Museum. One must do the thing oneself. Useless to trust to the Victorians, who disembowel, or to the living, who are mere publicists. The flesh and blood of the future depends entirely upon six young men. And as Jacob was one of them, no doubt he looked a little regal and pompous as he turned his page, and Julia Hedge disliked him naturally enough. (JR, 145-6)

Jacob is drawn to the reading area of the British Museum, a symbol of preservation and patriarchal control over canonicity and criticism. The narrative voice, arguably Woolf's real voice in this instance, denounces the "trust to the Victorians" which has misguided the Edwardians. Further, she condemns John Masefield and Arnold Bennett as representatives of the Edwardian school. She concludes that the current

age is detestable and that “one must do the thing oneself,” in this context, meaning the reconstitution of modern fiction. Woolf then stresses the key role of Jacob, as representative of the modern character. As Hollander points out:

> Woolf suggests that the role of "character in fiction", so central to her understanding of the modern novel, may finally be to stimulate not by sympathy but rather responsibility, to enact the complex relationship between alterity and insight, inaccessibility and intimacy. Exceptional for the depth of its post-war pessimism, *Jacob's Room* nonetheless establishes new possibilities for defining an ethics of modernist form. (Hollander, 62)

Jacob as a structural element, as centre, and as an example of modern values at odds but also derived from traditional social order, constitutes a statement of literary and social renovation. Woolf traces the structures of Edwardian society as well as the struggle of the, yet, shapeless, modern character to inhabit Edwardian space.

When Jacob visits the Plumers, he notices their reading habits which consist of Woolf’s usual examples of Edwardian literature: Wells and Shaw. Corbett reads this selection as a deliberate position of Woolf’s modern fiction against the “right-or-wrong, good-or-bad way of thinking” (Corbett, 47) as Woolf perceived the Edwardian reformer mindset:

> The more dogmatic books by Wells and Shaw that line the shelves of the Cambridge don George Plumer in *Jacob's Room*, vigorously indicting Victorian (hetero) sexual mores and thus offending literary respectability, fall … into the moralizing category. (Corbett, 47)

Rather, Woolf re-enforces her conviction to find a new form, a new space for the modern character beyond these dichotomies. The following scene can be read as one of Woolf’s conclusions about her new style:

> Anyhow, whether undergraduate or shop boy, man or woman, it must come as a shock about the age of twenty — the world of the elderly — thrown up in such black outline upon what we are; upon the reality; … upon the obstinate irrepressible conviction which makes youth so intolerably disagreeable — "I am what I am, and intend to be it," for which there will be no form in the world unless Jacob makes one for himself. The Plumers will try to prevent him from making it. Wells and Shaw and the serious sixpenny weeklies will sit on its head. (JR, 44)

Jacob is, and must be, unapologetically himself, which in the literary sense is, as of yet, unfinished, as Woolf describes it in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown.' Woolf combatively anticipates the resistance of Edwardian readers.

The novel also contains several clues on how to pursue the modern character. For instance, the essence, if there should be one, appears to lie in the uncertain and the vague:

> It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done. Some, it is true, take ineffaceable impressions of character at once. Others dally, loiter, and get blown this way or that. … There is also the highly respectable opinion that character-mongering is much overdone nowadays. (JR, 214)

Woolf cheekily compares her provisional mode of characterisation with other types. She self-references her own "highly respectable" opinion on different types of characterisations.[11] Morgenstern argues that Woolf uses the narrator (35 years old, female, feminist), who resembles Woolf (about 40 years old) as a mask in order to communicate the problems of her literary pursuit and her position as historical outsider. As Morgenstern concludes: "Speculation, then, is one of her methods of historical thought since she [the narrator] is admittedly unprivileged" (Morgenstern,

[11] Woolf anticipates her detailed extrapolation of "character mongers" in 'Phases of Fiction'. (1929)

356). Woolf, and / or the narrator, firmly believes that Jacob is closer to "the spirit of life, life itself" (BB, 24) than any of the preconceived methods. The elusive nature of Jacob demonstrates the new-found solidity of modern fiction. Woolf explains:

> In any case life is but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And why, if this and much more than this is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair is of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us — why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him. Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love. (JR, 96)

True to Woolf's vision of modern fiction, she projects the knowledge and detail of the character into the future. Modern fiction constitutes a pursuit and, as the chapters of this thesis will show, develops over the course of multiple renditions, and multiple manifestations of the modern character.

Woolf also projects her quest for a modern fiction in architectural terms. She acknowledges nature and society as the prevailing spaces of character creation which prevent chaos:

> In short, the observer is choked with observations. Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. The moulds are filled nightly. There is no need to distinguish details. But the difficulty remains — one has to choose. … But no — we must choose. Never was there a harsher necessity! Or one which entails greater pain, more certain disaster; for wherever I seat myself, I die in exile; Whittaker in his lodging-house; Lady Charles at the Manor. (JR, 91)

Woolf informs the literary mission of her modern fiction with a great deal of urgency. She promotes the breaking of the "moulds" which shape the Edwardian character. It is noteworthy that she presumes that the pursuit of modern fiction will condemn her to

exile, or a literary homelessness for the modern character. As I will show, this rhetoric of aggression and pessimism will change as Woolf develops her methods over the course of the 1920s.

The climax of the novel plays out the perceived status quo. As I have discussed above, Jacob undergoes a development which breaks his trust in patriarchal systems. Instead, Jacob begins to come to terms with his independence and his own individual form. For instance, in the case of his disillusion with Greece, he begins to embrace the complexity of the old, the new, the advanced and the dirt of Athens. As Flint explains:

> Jacob realizes the importance of living in the present rather than resting in the assumption that the classical architecture of columns and temple can actually hold still, hard and durable, the perpetually renewable 'emotion of the living'. The chance to do something with this revelation is, of course, denied him. (Flint, 'Introduction', xxv)

Jacob returns to London a changed man. However, before these changes are revealed or acted out, Jacob's life is cut short.

There are multiple ways to read the unexpected end of *Jacob's Room*. For instance, if we consider the novel a literary critique of the Bildungsroman genre, then it parodies traditional tropes such as the gradual building and developmental culmination of the protagonist. As I will explore in more detail in my reading of *Orlando*, Woolf's modern fiction questions the boundaries of genre themselves by subverting or satirising literary tropes. But *Jacob's Room* can also be read as a cautionary tale. As Froula notes, the experimental representations of Rachel Vinrace from *The Voyage Out* and Jacob point at the dangers of patriarchal belief systems:

> Through the deaths of their young protagonists, these companion pieces of the modernist bildungsroman [*The Voyage Out* and *Jacob's Room*] suggest that to learn to read the modern novel is to become aware of the hidden forces that

> drive modern lives; that to witness the life and death of the puppet or ghost its pages pursue may be in some sense to save one's own. (Froula, 64)

The apparent pointlessness of Jacob's life and death constitutes the point. It opens an undefined space for modern values to take shape.

There is an interesting moment of self-reference, "the only real knee-slapper in *Jacob's Room*" as Knowles describes it, where "the narrator reads her own novel" (Knowles, 106). Woolf describes her search for Jacob and a modern fiction quite literally:

> Rude illustrations, pictures in a book whose pages we turn over and over as if we should at last find what we look for. Every face, every shop, bedroom window, public house, and dark square is a picture feverishly turned — in search of what? It is the same with books. What do we seek through millions of pages? Still hopefully turning the pages — oh, here is Jacob's room. (JR, 132)

Woolf equalises the panorama of all the Edwardian windows and rooms of the novel with the pages of (Edwardian) literature. Hence, Jacob's rooms constitute a symbol for the relationship between the individual and society expressed through Woolf's literary architectures. As Caughie points out:

> The syntax presents Jacob's room and *Jacob's Room* as both the answer to the question and a distraction from it. Whether Jacob's room is what we seek or what we find, whether it is the space that Jacob encloses (the room in Woolf's fiction, critics tell us, often represents the self) or the space that encloses him (his society or culture or novel) is not the issue. The point is the textual and contextual relationship between the self and the world, between the character and the narrative, between the desire and the expression. (Caughie, 68)

Woolf makes her point in the final scene of the novel. It ends with Jacob's mother and his friend Bonamy who visit Jacob's room after his death. Once more, Jacob is reflected through the contents of his room: "Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn

about for anyone to read" (JR, 246). All that remains of Jacob are bills, letters from Sandra, invitations from Lady Rocksbier and Mrs Durrant and an old pair of shoes. Bonamy admires the architecture of the house:

> The eighteenth century has its distinction. These houses were built, say, a hundred and fifty years ago. The rooms are shapely, the ceilings high; over the doorways a rose or a ram's skull is carved into the wood. Even the panels, painted in raspberry-coloured paint, have their distinction. (JR, 246)

Woolf contrasts Jacob's mundane belongings with the imposing architecture of the eighteenth century. It is another instance of the metaphorical space of inherited tradition and form and the shapeless, seemingly empty modern character. However, Jacob makes one last appearance as a ghostly apparition:

> Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there. Bonamy crossed to the window … And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves. 'Jacob! Jacob!' cried Bonamy, standing by the window. The leaves sank down again. 'Such confusion everywhere!' exclaimed Betty Flanders, bursting open the bedroom door. Bonamy turned away from the window. 'What am I to do with these, Mr Bonamy?' She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes. (JR, 247)

The novel ends with the spirit of Jacob trying to manifest one last time. However, this is denied because Jacob has been consumed by the patriarchal system which he inherited and was shaped by to some degree. Jacob as an in- and outsider of Edwardian social structures was powerless in the face of war either way. His realisation and his development towards rejecting Edwardian values is cut short. Instead, Jacob remains shapeless, he is the loose sum of his relations which is represented in the social letters placed in a room in which he cannot manifest. The

scene dissolves the room-character bond by opening the doors and the window. Bonamy's searching cry for Jacob is answered by a last attempt to manifest.

This representation of a stunted attempt to modernise and rethink Edwardian life resembles comparable works of modernist fiction such as Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920). As Levenson notes, Lawrence, too, spans his social depictions across a wide range of institutions:

> It offered an unstinting critique of human dissolution, the loss of self in machinery and cold mental life, a decay manifest at every level of experience: in the coal mines, in the art world, and in the most intimate relations of men and women. A long demonstration of catastrophe, *Women in Love* struggles to imagine an alternative form of life. (Levenson, 131)

With regard to the representation of the female experience in *Jacob's Room*, Marcus points out that the works of West and Mansfield match Woolf's as they theorise about alternative living and its experimental depictions in the face of Edwardian traditions:

> All three were in the early stages of establishing their literary careers when war was declared… Their experiments with prose forms took the essay, the short story, and the novel in new directions, and were intimately bound up with their imaginings of new possibilities for women's lives and identities. (L. Marcus, 'Woolf Mansfield West', 717)

As I will show in the next chapter, it was not until *Mrs Dalloway* that Woolf's modern character fully manifests. The sterile and oppressive structures of *Jacob's Room* give way to a confused and modernising post-war London. Within its modernising spaces the modern character, in form of Clarissa Dalloway, reconstitutes itself out of the fragments of Jacob's pre-war society. Woolf achieves this by synthesising and integrating avant-garde methods from the world of painting into her poetics of literary architecture.

Hence, *Jacob's Room* constitutes a double renovation of literary and social norms. Woolf portrays an oppressive solidity of architectural and mental Edwardian structures which creates division and misery in society. At the same time, Woolf's ironic, often cynical renderings of dominant institutions is accompanied with a moral decay and emptiness. Woolf insinuates that marriage is a patriarchal fortress, the churches are spaces of meaningless ceremonial repetition, and the university is a self-absorbed safe-haven of patriarchal control and reproduction. As Knowles points out: "Woolf's remark that her book will contain 'no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular,' implies that a building is there. That building is the last page" (Knowles, 103). Woolf's space-conscious poetics build these structures in order to challenge them from between the walls of division.

Woolf's modern fiction uses a variety of devices in order to open up the rigidity of Edwardian architecture for debate and criticism. For instance, Woolf explores multiple, simultaneous perspectives with characters, like Mrs Pascoe, and buildings, like St. Paul's Cathedral, in order to put the very notion of their defined position in society in question. Woolf also renders society with a great deal of humour in order to bite at obvious injustices or to destabilise Edwardian self-importance as apparent in the messianic Cambridge don. Jacob is rendered with a similar irony by the narrator. For instance, Nelson-McDermott reads Woolf's depiction of Jacob as a critique of the Edwardian apparatus which imprints itself on him:

> *Jacob's Room* is an extremely pessimistic and caustic text; its humor is angry, even eviscerating. The book's central character is unflatteringly presented by the narrator because he is in training to be a patriarch. Jacob is a youth who never could fulfil his "promise" because neither he nor his society has any. (Nelson-McDermott, 84)

Hence, one of the primary goals of the novel is, to de-centralise and re-align institutionalised centres of Edwardian authority, both social and literary, in order to create a space for new forms to take shape. Woolf, in part, achieves this re-alignment of perspectives through the reader. Her narrative strategies repeatedly aim at waking up the reader to certain issues or to draw attention to reading processes themselves and how they lead to certain cultural narratives.

As we have seen, Caughie's and Friedman's spatial and geographic readings make the invisible inter-relations of patriarchal architecture and gendered spaces of encounter traceable. As Wisner points out, Woolf uses unexplored, gendered spaces of female intimacy such as the moors and a Roman camp in Scarborough where Mrs Flanders and Mrs Jarvis meet, in order to compete against the patriarchal ethos of the ancient sights of Athens or Rome: "Using these spaces as gendered geographies, Woolf establishes an alternative model to validate the history and knowledge of women and the pivotal role they play in any culture" (Wisner, 16). Woolf typically does not aim to replace one narrative or space with another, rather she is interested in dissolving or re-constructing its walls by providing debate and alternative.

Woolf shows a panorama of random people across all layers of society which are defined and sorted in relation to physical and moral institutions. The self in relation to society, as centred in Jacob's example is the subject of Woolf's scrutiny. As Snaith observes:

> With *Jacob's Room*, Woolf sets out to explore the problematics of the idea of stable identity. She is examining the difficulty in representing identity and the difficulty of summarizing identity while 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 center. (Snaith, 143)

Jacob's perpetual state of shapelessness reflects Woolf's statement of an imminent arrival of a modern fiction which defines itself against but not in denial of the Victorian and Edwardian legacy. With *Jacob's Room*, Woolf's renovation begins.

Chapter Two: *Mrs Dalloway*

A New Renovation

Woolf began writing *Mrs. Dalloway* immediately after the publication of *Jacob's Room*. With *Jacob's Room*, Woolf felt that she had found a mode of expression which suited her vision for a modern fiction: "I have no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice; and that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise" (*Diary* 2, 186). This confidence in her method and voice fostered her ambitions for her next novel. As she recorded in her diary: "In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (*Diary* 2, 248).

However, the social system as depicted in *Jacob's Room* has changed in *Mrs Dalloway*. There are only four years between the publication of *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* but Woolf makes a temporal leap from the world of her childhood to the present. If *Jacob's Room* explores the private and public institutions which compose the fabric of the Edwardian mind (while presenting various renovative approaches to these institutions), then *Mrs Dalloway*'s London portrays a modernising Georgian England which struggles for stable values in the aftermath of the Great War.

The impact of WWI on English modernism and Woolf became a point of great interest to critics in the 1990s and 2000s. Books like *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth* (1991), edited by Mark Hussey, and *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* (1999) by Karen L. Levenback established WWI as a central concern in Woolf's life and writing. Hussey's collection of essays compelled Woolf studies to reconsider

earlier notions which had primarily placed Woolf's modernism in the context of a domestic, feminine aesthetic. These earlier readings of Woolf typically evaluated her direct and indirect engagement with the two world wars as incidental or purely theoretical. In contrast, this evolution of Woolf criticism viewed the wars as central to Woolf's experience and, in turn, to her artistic expression; Woolf's novels, even those not directly concerned with the war, such as *The Voyage Out* and *The Waves*, became understood as reflective of and engaged with the realities and myths of war as experienced by Woolf.

For instance, Levenback's study explores Woolf's portrayal of "civilians who became combatants and combatants who returned to civilian life", such as Jacob in *Jacob's Room* and Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, as indications of a growing "war-consciousness" in Woolf's writing:

> Woolf demonstrates a progressive awareness of the ways in which the situations of soldiers and civilians are linked by the very realities of war that are ignored both by history and theory. (Levenback, 7)

In modernist studies there was a similar trajectory to reconsider modernism in relation to the wars. For instance, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts between the World Wars* (1999) by Tyrus Miller reconsiders the modernist canon by approaching the period through its latter years. His selection of "late modernists" like Djuna Barnes and Samuel Beckett provides an "alternative depiction of modernism" which "has much to teach us about the broader shape of twentieth-century culture" (T. Miller, 7). This renewed focus on the modernist canon maintains a strong interest in modernist form. For instance, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003) by Vincent Sherry links the breakdown of established pre-war, liberal rhetoric as a historic opportunity for literary innovation as exemplified in the works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound

and Virginia Woolf. Sherry describes the transformation in Woolf's development which becomes visible after her first two, more conventional novels *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day* as "her response to the main provocation the war has constituted for her." Sherry writes that*:*

> The new writing does not feature event and consequence, or sequence and eventuality, as its main attraction. Woolf organizes it at first, accordingly, in the form of the short story. … By contrast, the novel she undertook to write in these same years — the now little-read *Night and Day* — situates its fictional action before the war. It reverts to those devices of linear plot and romance interest that her war-forged sensibility could no longer countenance with any degree of intellectual responsibility, let alone imaginative interest. (Sherry, *War*, 266-7)

In recent years there has been a rekindled interest in the impact of war in relation to modernism as part of advances in the New Modernist Studies.

For instance, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopaedic Form* (2015) by Paul Saint-Amour, reads inter-war modernism with regard to "different kinds and intensities of literary encyclopedism" as a mode of writing which is recovering from the effects WWI while taking shape through an inherent "anticipatory syndrome" (Saint-Amour, 10) as WWII emerges as a probability. The idea of trauma and anticipation between the wars as a shaping factor of modernism has, relatedly, become an important feature of New Modernist Studies. Nanette Norris's essay collection *Great War Modernism: Artistic Response in the Context of War 1914-1918* (2015) dedicates a great deal of attention to the "shock of war" as experienced through non-combatant modernists like Woolf, H.D. and D.H. Lawrence.

Over the course of these reconsiderations of English modernism, *Mrs Dalloway* has gained relevance as a core text of Woolf's engagement with war. As Baldick observes in his study of 1920s literature, "the most talented writers of the decade

largely failed to immortalise their own times” (Baldick, 17). As a result, *Mrs Dalloway* holds a prominent position as a rare, early 1920s novel documenting its June 1923 setting. As Baldick points out: “modernist fiction on an international scale is indeed in great part a literature of retrospect and historical reconstruction” (Baldick, 14). Its major works, such as Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Ford’s *Parade’s End*, typically write about the long turn of the century leading up to the end of the war. In contrast, *Mrs Dalloway* stands together with a small selection of novels such as D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) and Henry Green’s *Living* (1929) which write about the contemporary world.

Woolf captures a delicate moment in which English history is still wrestling with the aftermath of the war. She repeatedly and overtly points at this situation. For instance, through the mind of Clarissa’s old friend, Peter Walsh, we experience a non-combatant perspective on post-war London. Peter has only recently returned from India which is likely why he did not experience the war first hand. He observes the duality of London’s public life, split between civilian and military presences such as attractive girls on the sidewalk or young soldiers laying down a wreath at the Cenotaph.

Peter acknowledges that the city has changed since he left it as a young man: “Those five years — 1918 to 1923 — had been, he suspected, somehow important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different” (MD, 108). For Peter, as an outsider, the war is remote and the city’s collective consciousness is already in recovery: “Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle” (MD, 174). Peter’s outward observations and inner reflections blend into each other. Woolf achieves this in part by destabilising narrative form. For instance, it is often unclear if these city scenes are received through the narrative voice or Peter’s

mind. As Beaumont points out, this is representative of a modern(ist) mind experiencing modern life: “This mutual interpenetration of inner and outer comprises an exemplary experience, in the urban imaginary limned by modernist art and literature, of the reciprocating relationship between spectacle and introspection” (Beaumont, 226).

We see another version of this dichotomy in the character of Septimus Warren Smith. If, for Peter, the dead are “half-forgotten” in London, they are omni-present for Septimus Warren Smith. As Baldick explains:

> Here we have encapsulated the central paradox of historical self-awareness in the 1920s, of which the literature of the time is the principal record: that the War is now over, except that it is not over. Woolf builds into the novel an important secondary character, Septimus Warren Smith, a traumatised war-veteran whose harrowing hallucinations of dead comrades remind us that the War is not over for him or for many others — and they would include a good share of the novel’s first readers — in similarly war-haunted states of mind. (Baldick, 14)

Like Peter, Septimus roams the streets of London. But in his shellshocked mind, the war experience pushes forward into reality in random intervals. When Septimus sees Peter he recognises him as a fallen comrade and this triggers a post-traumatic vision. As Beaumont suggests, for Septimus, the streets of Whitehill lead back to the site of war:

> It is to this horrifying hinterland, the territory of brutal military conflict, that Whitehall leads in *Mrs Dalloway*. Septimus’s hallucination is the symptomatic expression of the imperial city’s unconscious. It reveals the horror on which the grandeur of the capital is built. (Beaumont, 230)

Hence, *Mrs Dalloway* suspends the war in this post-war moment of social trauma and recovery and integrates war into the modern experience of the many voices of the

metropolis. Further, Saint-Amour traces the grounding of *Mrs Dalloway* in Woolf's personal accounts of the war experience.

Woolf describes two instances which describe the mental association between the sound of explosions and bombs. Many months before the first raid on London in February 1915 Woolf describes how there was already a fearful anticipation of the public:

> In St James Street there was a terrific explosion; people came running out of Clubs; stopped still & gazed about them. But there was no Zeppelin or aeroplane—only, I suppose, a very large tyre burst. (*Diary* 1, 32)

By March 1918, Woolf documents an inversion of the experience:

> I'd taken my third & final roll in bed, when there was an explosion. For half a minute a raid seemed so improbable that we made out it was one of the inexplicable outbursts of motor omnibuses. However, next minute guns went off all round us & we heard the whistles. (*Diary* 1, 124).

As Saint-Amour points out, there is a literary transformation of Woolf's traumatic experiences with the German air raids on London[12] from her diary to Woolf's fictional renderings of the airplane scene in *Mrs Dalloway*:

> That the events recorded in the diary have been shorn of their air raid referent in the novel, or rather split into an explosion and the subsequent appearance of a sky-writing plane, attests not only to the postwar moment of *Mrs Dalloway* but also to the fact that the raw material — and the raw nerve — of that postwar moment is still the war itself. (Saint-Amour, *War*, 112)

[12]In her diary, Woolf anxiously anticipated the German air raids on London months before they commenced in late 1915 (Saint-Amour, 111). Woolf was haunted by the experience throughout her entire career. For instance, she gives an account of the experience in the 1917 section of *The Years* (1937) and she revisits the topic as she experienced the WWII air raids in 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid' (1941).

In 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' (1923) Woolf formulates a core problem of the emerging modernist literature as she perceived it:

> It is an age of fragments. A few stanzas, a few pages, a chapter here and there, the beginning of this novel, the end of that, are equal to the best of any other age or author. But can we go to posterity with a sheaf of loose pages, or ask the readers of those days, with the whole of literature before them, to sift our enormous rubbish heaps for our tiny pearls? (HSC, 296-7)

For Woolf, modern fiction has yet to arrive in a completed form. She identifies this goal in a critical moment after the completion of *Jacob's Room* and during the writing of *Mrs Dalloway*. As Baldick points out, this self-understanding is not unique to Woolf at that time:

> If there was one thing upon which writers of the Twenties could agree, it was that their very disagreements arose from the collapse of some formerly coherent order of civilisation that had recently been left in ruins by the Great War of 1914-18. (Baldick, 11)

For instance, D.H. Lawrence writes in the opening of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "Ours is essentially a tragic age, so we refuse to take it tragically. The cataclysm has happened, we are among the ruins, we start to build up new little habitats, to have new little hopes" (Lawrence, 1). This parallel sense of fragmentation in the social and literary context perhaps finds its best expression in the deliberately shattered content and form of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).

I argue that *Mrs Dalloway* constitutes a renovative effort to bring back stability to the confusing dichotomy of the military and civilian, the traumatised and recovering and the remembering and forgetting experience of modern life in early 1920s London. As I have shown in Chapter One, Woolf translated the modern(ist) idea of the private life into spatial and architectural themes as the means of its literary representation. In

Mrs Dalloway, she continues to think in these terms in order to depict her version of 1920s London. Woolf describes her writing and thinking process for the novel in architectural terms: "I like going from one lighted room to another, such is my brain to me; lighted rooms; and the walks in the fields are corridors" (*Diary* 2, 310).

Woolf transfers this concept of connecting and relating meaningful spaces to the design of the novel. For instance, Woolf planned the grand finale of *Mrs Dalloway*, the dinner party, as a vertical tour through the house:

> There I am — at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, and climb slowly upstairs. It is to be a most complicated, spirited, solid piece, knitting together everything and ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa. Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard and Sally Seton perhaps. (*Diary* 2, 312)

Her concept indicates that Woolf continued to think about her narrative style in similar ways to how she had conceptualised *Jacob's Room*. Woolf's exploration of depicting connection and relation became one of the novel's most important developments for her narrative technique. This is what she defines as her "tunnelling process":

> I've only been feeling my way into it — up till last August anyhow. It took me a year's groping to discover what I call my tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it. This is my prime discovery so far. (*Diary* 2, 272)

As I will explore in the pages below, "tunnelling" is a crucial part of a larger development in her modern fiction and central to her renovation project.

In *Mrs Dalloway,* Woolf modifies her space-conscious poetics into a clearly defined design which is based on repetition and rhythm. For instance, as Daiches points out:

> In *Jacob's Room* experience is not patterned by plot; plot is simply the by-product of the record of the flow of experience. In her next novel, however, Virginia Woolf introduces a new conception of plot. *Mrs Dalloway* is much more carefully patterned, and here the significance of the whole is not the sum of the significance of the different parts but depends on the shape and disposition of the completed story. (Daiches, *Woolf*, 60)

In concrete terms, the novel is arranged in repeating themes and structural elements which form a rhythmic composition. Woolf adapts these methods and ways of thinking about composition from the prevalent Bloomsbury formalism as exemplified by her close friends and pioneers of formalist aesthetics, Roger Fry and Clive Bell. In this chapter I will trace how Woolf integrated formalist and primarily Post-Impressionist ideas from the world of painting into her on-going quest for a distinctive style of modern fiction which is capable of capturing and metaphorically mending the fragmented post-war reality. My reading of *Mrs Dalloway* will decode the rhythms and motifs and their various functions in relation to the perpetual renovation of literature and its representation of modern human experience in Woolf's modern fiction.

If Chapter One outlined Woolf's critical and stylistic model for a modern fiction which could renovate the Edwardian literary and social space in order to produce a modern character and a modern literary criticism, then this chapter will trace how the transition of modern fiction from spatial to painterly themes informs the renovative qualities and the changed values of a modernising England. My reading understands *Mrs Dalloway* as an evolution from *Jacob's Room* in stylistic and socio-political terms which, in turn, enable the expansion of modern fiction from the novel to the biography genre in *Orlando* which I will explore in chapter three. Writing about her plans for *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf appears to have a strong focus on patterns and order. I would suggest it is not a coincidence that the writing process, 1922 to 1925, coincides with the peak

of Woolf's engagement with Post-Impressionist painting and the formalist theories of Roger Fry and Clive Bell (and associate of the Bloomsbury group, Charles Mauron) as well as avant-garde ideas of rhythmic composition.

Roger Fry and the Avant-Garde

In order to understand the climate of social change as depicted in Woolf's post-war London in *Mrs Dalloway*, we need to go back to events leading up to 1910 when "human character changed" (BB, 4) as Woolf described the advent of English modernity. In comparison to artistic centres of continental Europe like France and Germany, modern art arrived in England decades late. Prior to the cultural quake of Roger Fry's First Post-Impressionist Exhibition, there were a few efforts to establish French impressionism in England. The New English Art Club was the earliest force of stylistic variation in avant-garde terms. As Wees explains:

> The efforts of the New English Art Club (founded in 1886) to make English art contemporary with French art had pushed things forward only as far as the Impressionism of Walter Sickert and a few others … for a while the N.E.A.C. had shown younger artists ways of liberalizing their conservative, academic training, it had not made the radical break with tradition that the times demanded. (Wees, 10)

Among the early advocates of modern European art in England was art critic Frank Rutter who founded the Allied Artist Association and other projects in order to establish progressive art in the English mainstream. Looking back, he remembers the English resistance to Impressionism, let alone Post-Impressionism: "There was really no time to think much about Cézanne in 1905. We

were far too busily occupied trying to persuade the pundits of British art to accept Manet, Monet, Degas and Renoir” (Rutter, ‘My Time’, 41).

However, when Post-Impressionism exploded into public perception in 1910 with Fry’s exhibition, it highlighted a previously — largely — ignored English avant-garde scene. A variety of subgroups of “modern” artists organised and worked in different styles and with varying degrees of radicalism — including Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant as part of Fry’s Omega Workshops, the Bloomsbury-associated Camden Town Group who were similarly influenced by French Post-Impressionism, associated with Walter Sickert and Spencer Frederick Gore, and perhaps most notably the Vorticist movement associated with Wyndham Lewis and Frederick Etchells. As Edwards explains, England’s avant-garde art scene developed from imitating European influences such as the French impressionists and Post-Impressionists to producing its own English aesthetic of Vorticism in a few short years:

> The exhibition organized by Roger Fry in December 1910, “Manet and the Post-Impressionists”, is conventionally taken as the starting-point, while the climax came in the late spring of 1914, with the emergence of a genuine avant-garde movement having its own identifiable form of geometric abstraction and its own vibrant and aggressive magazine, *Blast*. (Edwards, 9)

The resultant charged atmosphere of passionate communication and disputation of ideas enabled English modernism to thrive.

Roger Fry constitutes a central character in this development, not only for Woolf and the Bloomsbury group to whom he introduced Post-Impressionist aesthetics. As Edwards points out, Fry, and by extension the Bloomsbury Group, were at the pulse of the time:

> All the future Vorticists, with the exceptions of Lawrence Atkinson and Jessica Dismorr, were associated in one way or another with Roger Fry, some through the Friday Club, some through the Grafton Group, and others later through the Omega Workshops. Of the "non-vorticists", David Bomberg and C.R.W. Nevinson also exhibited with the Friday Club; Epstein kept aloof. As the organizer of the Post-Impressionist exhibition, Fry was an important influence on public taste and was able to raise the profile of artists he patronized. (Edwards, 11)

Aside from networking and organising exhibitions, Fry's primary contribution to the advent of English modernist art is his development of a theoretical, formalist framework which occupied much of his work over the following decades. Fry hoped the Avant-Garde would become recognised as a serious iteration in English art history. In reality, the advent of modern art was initially rejected by the critical mainstream as anything ranging from ridiculous to criminal.

This is not a surprise considering that Lewis and his vorticist allies gained notoriety for their attacks against a wide range of political and cultural topics. They published their blunt social critique in the Lewis-edited magazine *Blast!* which has become a seminal text of English modernism. The selection of "blasted" topics was intimately connected to the rebellion against Victorian and Edwardian norms and institutions. Wees summarises:

> When the Vorticists got their chance, they shouted 'damn' and 'blast' in public, ridiculed everything their elders took seriously, and made a virtue of perversity by blasting the Bishop of London and blessing the Pope; blasting Sidney Webb and Annie Besant, and blessing Sir Edward Carson and Lillie Lenton; blasting the Post Office, Beecham's Pills, and the British Academy. (Wees, 42-3)

In contrast, Fry and the Bloomsbury Group, although resolutely modernist, maintained a moderate mode of discourse. For instance, Fry had asked fellow

Bloomsbury-ite Desmond MacCarthy to write the introduction for the exhibition catalogue of the First Impressionist Exhibition (Hynes, *Edwardian*, 327). MacCarthy's introduction describes the point of the exhibition as a familiarisation of the English public with the development of continental modern art. He achieves this by re-negotiating the history of "naturalist" representation in order to create a space for the Post-Impressionists. As he points out: "It was only in the nineteenth century that the close imitation of nature, without any conscious modification by the artist, has been proclaimed as a dogma" (MacCarthy, 8).

MacCarthy sketches a brief lineage from Manet as the father of impressionism to Cézanne as the "deliverer" (MacCarthy, 9) from the restraints of the impressionist attitude towards representing nature. He understands Manet as a "revolutionary in the sense that he refused to accept the pictorial convention of his time" (MacCarthy, 10). Instead, he argues that Manet returned to methods of representation from the 17th century. This return to alternative, "non-naturalist" modes of representation in order to re-establish personal expression of the artist constitutes the core of the Post-Impressionist mission. From this perspective, Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibitions promote Post-Impressionism as a course correction which has deep roots in European art history. As Fishman points out:

> Not that Fry would have balked at being called a conservative, for his espousal of Post-Impressionism is based on the contention that it represents a return to first principles, to a concern for formal structure which had been the chief glory of the Mediterranean tradition subsequently submerged in the degradation of painting marked by the aims of nineteenth-century illusionism and anecdote. (Fishman, 110)

I want to give some consideration of this Bloomsbury-an understanding of modern art through the, often overshadowed, work of Vanessa Bell.

As discussed in my introduction, the Bloomsbury set already lived their social reform at Gordon Square, which had been brought about through Bell's initial renovation of the new Stephen home. Bloomsbury was not content to copy the new French styles of painting. Fry, Bell, Grant (and Woolf in her rendering of the fictional homes) took Post-Impressionism and applied it to the drawing-room as an expression of a new way of life. This renders interior decoration a connector between art and live and between architectural conception and applied aesthetics. This shows nowhere more clearly than in Bell's interior designs which became popular among Bloomsbury members and London's art scene in the 1910s. Roger Fry employed Bell and Grant among other artists and elevated Post-Impressionist interior design to a professional branch with his Omega Workshops.

An exemplary room of her design work is the 1913 Children's Nursery designed for the Omega Workshops by Bell which is considered one of the earliest radical works of Bell's career. The nursery raised quite a few eyebrows upon release. On 20 December 1913, *The Daily Sketch* featured a photograph of the room on the frontpage with the headline: "Would you let your child play in this nursery?" (Olive, 29) Raising children of the Empire appropriately was very much a moral imperative of the Victorian nursery which is why it was the ideal target for Bell's renovation. As Olive explains:

> The Omega Workshops' aspiration was not merely to disrupt the status quo of the sober Edwardian aesthetic but rather to profoundly reform taste 'at home' — i.e. both in Britain and within the domestic space. (Olive, 27)

Renovating the nursery enabled Bell to plant modernist aesthetics in the minds of children who were not yet sensitised to the Victorian way of life. "By wilfully educating (corrupting?) children to a modernist aesthetic, Bell was actively undermining the existing rules of artistic norm and more critically of moral conduct" (Olive, 27). This

attempt was recognised by alarmed critics. For instance, P.G. Konody wrote in *The Observer* 14 December 1913: "No Royal Academy, no Louvre, no National Gallery, even will be tolerated … by the child who is brought up in the nursery of Omega Workshops Limited" (qtd. in Olive, 27).

Hence, Bloomsbury's engagement with Post-Impressionist design is of a transformative nature. In both Bell's work as interior decorator and Woolf's novels, Post-Impressionist styles invade but do not destroy Victorian architecture. The designs tend to blur the lines between life and art. Paintings step out of the frame onto the walls and doors, even blurring the lines between walls, ceilings, and doors themselves. Still lives become murals and physical objects of decoration like tables or pottery are painted onto the walls as if they had been sucked into the realm of art. As Reed describes it:

> Entering a room furnished by the Omega was like stepping into a modernist painting. Picasso faces looked out from the paper fans, while jagged cubist figures danced across inlaid furniture. The workshops' signature red chairs, bright abstract rugs, exuberant paper flowers, and knick-knacks painted with nudes and goldfish seemed to realize the interiors Matisse's paintings depicted. (Reed, *At Home*, 154)

This renovative intent in the artistic expression of Woolf and Bell's "close conspiracy" (SP, 144) is reflected in and supported by Bloomsbury formalism which promoted continental modern art as a mode of restoration. Fry's formalist ideas carve out a place for modern art in English art history. His theories on Post-Impressionism connect modern art to older traditions which were more flexible and welcoming of digressions from established forms.

The resistance to the dogma of naturalist representation constitutes a consistent theme in most English avant-garde movements. The primary

embodiment of these values constitutes the Royal Academy which made the institution a powerful antagonising force, fuelling modernist energy. It is not hard to see why the Academy would become a primary target of the Avant-Garde. The shift away from naturalist representation as a desirable quality in art and a shift towards abstraction encountered fierce opposition by the Royal Academy. For instance, Bullen summarises the reactions of Royal Academy members to Fry's First Post-Impressionist Exhibition:

> During this period Wake Cook kept up his barrage of letters to the press about the "decadence" of Post-Impressionism; John Singer Sargent[13] wrote saying that he was "absolutely sceptical as to their having any claim whatever to being works of art"; Sir Alfred East at a dinner of the Author's Club gave his opinions on the "morbid art of the Post-Impressionists" and W.B. Richmond continued to fulminate at the Royal Academy, warning the students against the "intellectual, emotional and technical degeneracy" of the Post-Impressionists with their "wilful anarchy and notoriety hunting" which, he said, "verged on criminality". (Bullen, 20-1)

This sample of conservative critics encapsulates the main points of critique which were frequently raised against avant-garde strains of art such as degeneracy, anarchy, and mental illness.

For both the Avant-Garde and the conservative mainstream, Fry's exhibition, and the change it represented, was an artistic and social battlefield. The Royal Academy's fear of social decline was perhaps fuelled by the fact that

[13] Incidentally, Wake Cook was Bell's first teacher (Giachero, 167) and Singer Sargent was Bell's teacher at the Royal Academy. (Gillespie, 199)

its authority was already fading.[14] For both sides, naturalist presentation constituted a particularly strong point of contention. For instance, as a response to Fry's exhibition, William Blake Richmond, then 68 years old and a longstanding and highly ranking Academician, reminded the public of the necessity of naturalist representation in his angry letter to the *Morning Post* in November 1910:

> The greater the artist, … the more modestly he will subjugate himself to Nature … Nature is not only the stern mentor, but the confiding friend of the true artist, the friend that keeps him straight and sane. Should he in a moment of weakness seek to escape her chiding he will speedily cease to be an artist and become an egoist. (Richmond, 116-7)

In the avant-garde camp, the increasing abstraction of naturalist representation presented an opportunity to distinguish modernist form from established traditions and among each other. As Dasenbrock explains, via a discussion of Wyndham Lewis's arguments, exploration of modes of representation constitutes a common ground between the English and the European Avant-Garde:

> It must be admitted that Lewis, obstinately bent on defining Vorticism against the other *isms*, could be extremely reductive in his presentation of other movements. His discussion of Picasso's constructions, collages and *papier-collés* in … *Blast* 1 is an excellent case in point. These works were exploring an area of profound interest for Lewis and Vorticism, the possibilities of non-illusionistic representation. (Dasenbrock, 342)

[14] There is a recorded dip in popularity of the Royal Academy after 1908. For instance, auction prices of paintings of the older, living Academy members were falling rapidly (Bullen, 437). Hutchison's records indicate that there was also a steep decline of annual visitor numbers from roughly the 1890s to 1908 when the Royal Academy began to draw annual deficits and was forced to implement several budget-related changes over the following years in order to cope with the crisis. (cf. Hutchison, 133-41)

Hence, in the midst of this culture war over the character of English art and the nature of modernity, it became increasingly clear that modern art could not establish itself under the prejudices and values as advocated by the Royal Academy.

A New Criticism

The logical resolution of this impasse between Academy standards and aggressive experimentation was to develop a new critical language which was not suffering from, in the eyes of the Avant-Garde, biased concepts of traditional art criticism. The rigid pursuit of the orthodox nineteenth century principles of Royal Academy critics could not account for the detachment from and redefinition of representation in modernist painting. For instance, in his most often cited text 'An Essay on Aesthetics'[15] Fry points at the problem of an outdated critical language. He suggests that all these new modes of abstraction require a new definition of "beauty" or even an entirely new critical vocabulary. In his formalist model Fry distinguishes between sensual beauty and formal beauty. The former appeals to our instinctive senses, the latter to something more sophisticated and profound:

> The perception of purposeful order and variety in an object gives us the feeling which we express by saying that it is beautiful, but when by means of sensations our emotions are aroused we demand purposeful order and variety in them also, and if this can only be brought about by the sacrifice of sensual beauty we willingly overlook its absence. (Fry, 'Essay on Aesthetics', 20)

[15] Original publication 1909, anthologised in *Vision and Design* in 1920

This rejection of traditionalist, Royal Academy-sponsored art criticism, necessitates a new mode of evaluation. Fry suggests that this new criticism will be characterized by more objective modes of analysis.

This demand for a new art criticism is ubiquitous in the pre- and inter-war period. Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907) and Julius Meier-Graefe's *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics* (1908) are predecessors to Fry in this regard. Both works were widely read in European art circles, including by Fry, and by Picasso and artists associated with the Blue Rider school, among others. There is a noticeable effort to move critical discourse towards more objective language. For instance, Worringer divides art between the art of empathy, in which predominantly realist modes of representation seek to imitate, and the art of abstraction, which gives the artist license to follow a natural tendency towards personal expression. Worringer attributes equal value to both genres. As Donahue points out: Worringer "equates abstraction in art to its spatial form and formulates, with his own commanding style, an aesthetics of abstraction that, for his contemporaries, was necessary, overdue and received with enthusiasm" (Donahue, 16). Meier-Graefe's book constitutes one of the first critical works which understands Post-Impressionism as a treatment of formal problems and a logical development in art history. As Kenworth explains:

> Among the first critics to have their taste decisively shaped by the new painting were Meier-Graefe and two English critics, R.A.M. Stevenson and Roger Fry. Looking with the eyes of an artist … they concentrated on the pictorial unity of the whole picture as constituted by purely visual relationships. (Kenworth, 99).

The new school of art criticism was increasingly formal, in this context meaning unconcerned with external factors of art such as historic significance and biographical influences. Instead, the primary focus was on composition and method.

These books undoubtedly had an impact on Fry's *Vision and Design* (1920) which is concerned with the same problems which he reframes in the duality of the visual and the formal. Fry describes the wide-ranging effects of a revised critical discourse:

> The new movement has, also, led to a new canon of criticism, and this has changed our attitude to the arts of other times and countries. So long as representation was regarded as the end of art, the skill of the artist and his proficiency in this particular feat of representation were regarded with an admiration which was in fact mainly non-aesthetic. With the new indifference to representation we have become much less interested in skill and not at all interested in knowledge. We are thus no longer cut off from a great deal of barbaric and primitive art the very meaning of which escaped our understanding of those who demanded a certain standard of skill in representation before they could give serious consideration to a work of art. In general the effect of the movement has been to render the artist intensely conscious of the aesthetic unity of the work of art, but singularly naïve and simple as regards to other considerations. (Fry, 'Art and Life', 8)

The excerpt describes an internationalist, open mindset which is typical of British modernism as opposed to earlier British artists. It is in line with Woolf's critical writing about modern fiction as a flexible literature which considers a variety of methods and styles. The new critical discourse undermines traditional tenets of conservative art criticism and its supposed capacity to categorize the "national character" of a painting or artist. The revision of "barbaric and

primitive" art inevitably affects the definition of "civilised" art. Thus, art criticism was inherently connected to the social changes which took place in England. Woolf, who captures a modernising England in *Mrs Dalloway*, adapts these tendencies in the art world, filtered through Fry's perspective. What this perspective entails requires further analysis before I can explore the formalist ideas that inform Woolf's modern fiction.

Bloomsbury Formalism as a Return to Expressive Art

One way to approach Fry's aesthetics is to examine the inter-relationship of subject matter and representation — acknowledging this to be the central concern of his most important works, such as *Vision and Design* (1920), *Transformations* (1926), and *Cézanne* (1927). As these titles indicate, Fry was continually rethinking how visual elements of painting and their perception (a *vision)* relate to formal elements like composition (a *design*). Fry works towards a semi-scientific approach to art criticism which is based on variables (subject of observation like line-drawing and colour) and values (degrees of application). In order to trace how Woolf adapts Fry's mode of reading art, I will focus on four key concerns of Fry's criticism: art as layered compositions, artistic autonomy, the role of the subject, and rhythmic design as the ideal of expressive art.

The first principle of this model is to consider an artwork as an aesthetic construction. Fry's mode of reading art is concerned with the elements that make up a painting, in themselves complex, as units of larger aesthetic constructions. For instance, in 'An Essay on Aesthetics' Fry divides a painting into five "emotional elements of design": the rhythm of the line, mass, space, light and shade and colour

(Fry, ‘Essay on Aesthetics’, 22). He refers to interactions between these elements as “transformations” as he outlines in the preface of his eponymous book: ”By the word ‘Transformations’ I wish to suggest all those various transmutations which forms undergo in becoming parts of esthetic constructions” (Fry, ‘Preface’, v). He investigates these constructions for evidence of balance between the visual and the structural which, in his theory, elevates the viewer’s experience of a painting. For Fry, the pioneer and master of this balance is Paul Cézanne. Fry studied Cézanne in great detail in his book named after the artist which constitutes a pillar in his argument for Post-Impressionism.

The second element in Fry’s formalist argument concerns art as self-complete and largely autonomous from the real world. It is noteworthy that Fry is not against representative elements of painting in general. It is rather certain aspects of baroque illusionist realism which Fry perceived as detrimental to the artwork as an independent expression of the artist as he explains in his essay ‘The Baroque’:

> The old “classical” art [High Renaissance], though capable of producing very bad stuff, never gave to its exponents this terrible power, a power which is at the root of all the pseudo or Royal Academic art of modern times. Now this tendency of the Baroque to tumble into “illusionism” must have always disgusted the finer natures among painters. (Fry, ‘Baroque’, 148)

Fry’s gripe with illusionism is two-fold. For one, it distinguishes itself through denying the frame of the painting. Illusionist paintings typically blur the boundaries of the painting and the real world, as for instance the illusion of baroque church ceilings which frequently integrate a view of the sky or heaven into the ceiling architecture. His second point of contention concerns the use of vantage points and geometry which create depth and volume “into” the canvas by imitating and manipulating human perspective. Fry’s ideal describes depth and volume which is derived from a different,

superior, approach to painting which communicates its depth on a higher sensory plane to the beholder.

If representation in the illusionist sense meant the denial of its own boundaries and the illusion of physical depth, then Fry's understanding of a "pure" representation moves from imitation and integration to a reinforced focus on the self-complete nature of an artwork; i.e., on the frame and, by extension, a complete structure within the frame. As McLaurin explains, Fry's aesthetic theories shifted critical focus to a mode of expression which creates representation and depth from within:

> It is Fry's contention that such illusionism is a distortion of the truth, for his truth is the fusion of vision and design and the creation of formal significance rather than the copying of something given. (McLaurin, 28)

The accomplished modern artist — in this context meaning the follower of formalist paradigms — can create a different kind of depth, which conveys its sense of volume to the spectator more powerfully.

This re-orientation of style and composition also leads to a reconsideration of subject matter. The primacy of form in avant-garde art renegotiates the significance of the subject. If imitation is no longer a priority in a painting and the value of its execution lies in its expressive power, then any subject becomes a significant object for representation. As Fry explains in *Vision and Design*:

> In such circumstances [reading a painting with "aesthetic vision"] the greatest object of art becomes of no more significance than any casual piece of matter; a man's head is no more and no less important than a pumpkin, or, rather, these, things may be so or not according to the rhythm that obsesses the artist and crystallises his vision. (Fry, 'Artist's Vision', 33-4)

Fry uses many terms and concepts to describe his formal ideals, such as purity, balance, having significant form or formal unity, and so on. For the sake of reading

Fry's aesthetics in relation to Woolf I want to simplify these concepts under another popular term in avant-garde criticism: "rhythm".

It is noteworthy that the popularity of rhythm as a term in literary criticism is part of the overall change in critical language in the 1910s and 1920s. Literary modernism was reimagining the literary discourse with vocabulary from other disciplines such as music and fine art. For instance, *Rhythm* was the name of John Middleton Murry's avant-garde magazine (1911-1913) which was inspired by Murry's friend and Post-Impressionist painter J.D. Fergusson (Kaplan, 4). E.M. Forster explains in his chapter on "Pattern and Rhythm" in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927):

> For this new aspect there appears to be no literary word — indeed the more the arts develop the more they depend on each other for definition. We will borrow from painting first and call it the pattern. Later we will borrow from music and call it rhythm. (Forster, 213)

As Brown points out, Henry James constitutes one of the earliest modernists to use vocabulary from different art forms indiscriminately:

> From the criticism of painting James took such terms as "values" and "lights," "foreshortening" and "perspective." … Since *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), how many novelists have used that word "portrait" in a title: Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Sir Hugh Walpole's *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925), Charles Morgan's *Portrait in a Mirror* (1931). (Brown, 34)

There is always a vagueness attached to the term which is why different writers give slightly different definitions of rhythms and patterns in literature. For instance, Forster gives perhaps the most common, and often cited definition of rhythm as "repetition with variation" (Forster, 240). Forster identifies one of the most common interpretations of the purpose of literary rhythm: a mode of creating cohesion. For instance, he reads Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* as "chaotic, ill-constructed, it has and will have no

external shape; and yet it hangs together because it is stitched internally, because it contains rhythms" (Forster, 236).

Brown expands on Forster's model and provides a more sophisticated definition of rhythm as a device for creating an "expanding symbol": "The expanding symbol is repetition balanced by variation, and that variation is in progressively deepening disclosure" (Brown, 57). Beyond rhythm's solidifying function as a mode of order or superimposing an intangible nucleus, Brown attributes another function to the device: Rhythm leads the reader "beyond the foreground" of the text and suggests that "beyond the verge of what he [the author] can express, there is an area which can be glimpsed, never surveyed" (Brown, 58-9).

For Fry, rhythm becomes the preferred terminology as he refined his theoretical framework over the course of the 1920s. Woolf herself notices the rising dominance of rhythm in Fry's critical writing after 1917 as she describes in her eponymous biography of Roger Fry published in 1940:

> Art and life are two rhythms, he says — the word "rhythm" was henceforth to occur frequently in his writing — "and in the main the two rhythms are distinct, and as often as not play against each other" … What this survey suggests to me is that if we consider this special activity of art we find it no doubt open at times to influences from life, but in the main self-contained. (RF, 214)

The excerpt constitutes a valuable indication of how Fry and Woolf understand rhythm and the notion of "self-contained" art in the formalist context.

As mentioned above, Fry's model of formalist analysis discusses art as aesthetic constructions. If we turn to Fry's later works, *Transformations*, and *Cézanne*, it becomes clear that he conceptualised the ideal of rhythmic, self-contained painting as a harmony of subordinate rhythms. For instance, Fry attributes to Cézanne, his

champion of Post-Impressionist balances, various rhythmic qualities. To begin with, Fry argues that Cézanne uses rhythmic lines; i.e., repetitions in contouring. As he explains, discussing Cézanne's landscapes:

> What is remarkable, too, in these landscapes, in which the eye takes in a vast stretch of undulating country leading up to the crowning pyramid, is the extraordinary power our artist shows of holding together in a single rhythmic scheme such an immense number of small and often closely repetitive movements. Usually this wide vista is framed by a *repoussoir* of pine branches leaning across the sky. At times with a daring which no longer surprises he will allow the curves of a pine branch to follow almost exactly the contour of the hills seen beneath it. (Fry, *Cézanne*, 75)

In other words, repetition of lines between objects in the foreground (tree branches) and of objects in the background (hills) blends both objects through a harmonious relation to each other which reconsiders the importance of space and the concept of foreground and background in painting itself.

Since Cézanne typically does not use methods of creating traditional three-dimensionality (for example, shadows), his use of colour becomes constructive rather than indicative. In the following excerpt Fry analyses Cézanne's use of rhythmic colour planes:

> We find here the same economy in colour that we are familiar with already in Cézanne's form — the colour also is 'geometric'. The impression of the infinity of nature is none the less re-established by the subtlety and vivacity of elements. This heightened vivacity is due in part to a change in Cézanne's handwriting, for that has become freer and moves with a more elastic rhythm. (Fry, *Cézanne*, 77)

What Fry describes as "elastic", I read as a degree of variation among repetitive patterns. In the following paragraph Fry describes his experience of how these

rhythms come together to produce volume and emotional expression for the beholder:

> Here the disintegration is pushed to such a point, the volumes are so decomposed into small indications of movement scattered over the surface, that at first sight we get the impression of some vaguely patterned carpet or embroidery. But the more one looks the more do these dispersed indications begin to play together, to compose rhythmic phrases which articulate the apparent confusion, till at last all seems to come together to the eye into an austere and impressive architectural construction, which is all the more moving in that it emerges from this apparent chaos. (Fry, *Cézanne*, 79)

Hence, Fry's concept of rhythm consists of repetition and relation between different elements of a painting within a clearly defined design. These rhythms, such as rhythm of line and colour, can harmonise together, producing an autonomy which replaces traditional expression of depth, perspective, light and shadow. As I will show next, Woolf translates these ideas into a literary form in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Woolf's Adaptation of Formalist Aesthetics

I argue that *Mrs Dalloway* constitutes an adaptation of Post-Impressionist design as read through Fry's formalist lens. Looking back, Woolf outlined the quest for a modern fiction through Fry's renegotiations of representation in *Roger Fry*. Woolf describes the Bloomsbury spirit:

> Literature was suffering from a plethora of old clothes. Cézanne and Picasso had shown the way; writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit. But he never found time to work out his theory of the influence of Post-Impressionism upon literature. (RF, 172)

Evidence of Woolf's engagement with Bloomsbury formalism is abundant in her essays, diaries, and letters. For instance, the following excerpt from a letter to her

sister Vanessa, indicates that Woolf began to evaluate furniture design and painting along the lines of Fry's theories as early as 1918:

> I'm now so lacerated by my chair covers and the carpet that I've got to take steps — I can hardly sit in the drawing room — but all this is very complicated, and I must write a special letter about it. It's a question of half developed aesthetic emotions, constantly checked by others of a literary nature — in fact it's all very interesting and intense. … [Woolf then changes the topic to unnamed paintings] Stone coloured smooth literary and yet falsely artistic pictures, pictures ashamed of being literary and yet crammed with suggestions of character and sublimity in every line. (*Letters* 2, 257)

It seems that Woolf contemplated a renovation of her own home which is connected to the aesthetic and critical change in her work. Woolf directly refers to Clive Bell's concept of the "aesthetic emotion," the heightened experience of a formally balanced work of art. Although Fry does not commit to the notion of the aesthetic emotion as a unique phenomenon, as Clive Bell did, he integrates the base idea of an "esthetic state of mind" (Fry, 'Questions in Esthetics', 1-2) and the "unity-emotion" (Fry, 'Art and Science', 55). The potential of an artwork to provoke this emotion constitutes the desired outcome of a formally balanced design. Viewed from outside formalist theory, it can be described as a design with highly expressive form, as I will explore in the pages below. The second part of the letter proves that Woolf's aesthetic considerations were occupied with questions of adaptation and how values such as "literary" and "painterly" transfer from one form of art to another. In particular, she focuses on the question of representing character.

Fry was not centrally concerned with developing modes of aesthetic evaluation across the arts. Reed points out that Bloomsbury formalism underwent a two-stage transition often neglected by scholars (Reed, 'Through Formalism', 22-3). This is

particularly relevant for Woolf's artistic development. Reed classifies the first stage of formalism from 1909 to 1917; during this period, Fry's and Clive Bell's essays were primarily concerned with painting. Furthermore, "formalism explicitly opposed itself to literature" (Reed, 'Through Formalism', 22). Clive Bell rejects literature as he could not imagine a text which prioritises formal elements over content. At the same time Fry proclaims: "I think literature is usually very little to do with art; I mean, it's so much mixed with intellectual curiosity so that an age whose intellectual outlook was familiar might yet be emotionally very remote" (Fry, *Letters*, 369). These problems of how or whether literature could constitute an emotionally expressive art — as the latter was understood by modern painters and theorists — is central to *Mrs Dalloway*.

The second phase of Bloomsbury formalism, beginning roughly 1918, was very interested in a cross-disciplinary criticism and Woolf was intensely engaged in this debate. One of the earliest indications can be found in a letter from 1920 (at this point Woolf is writing *Jacob's Room*). It reveals Woolf's intention to use Fry's mode of thinking for her own writing:

> I went to see the carvings [Woolf visited an exhibition of African sculptures] and I found them dismal and impressive, but Heaven knows what real feeling I have about anything after hearing Roger discourse. I dimly see that something in their style might be written. (*Letters* 2, 429)

Arguably, Woolf began writing "something in their style" in *Jacob's Room.* The novel plays with structure — for instance, chapters sometimes end in echoes or start in the middle of a conversation or event. Hence, the chapters are arranged in a loose rhythm which parallels the church bells which punctuate the novel.

Woolf found these first attempts at formalist writing fruitful and potentially leading the way to a new literature. Subsequently, she alludes to the world of

painting as a source of inspiration for her modern fiction on several occasions. For instance, in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' Woolf calls to her fellow Georgian writers for the adaptation of painterly methods:

> But in lodging such a charge against so formidable a library [of Edwardian literature] we must do as painters do when they wish to reduce the innumerable details of a crowded landscape to simplicity — step back, half shut the eyes, gesticulate a little vaguely with the fingers, and reduce Edwardian fiction to a view. (BB1st, 116)

Woolf evidently alludes to methods of simplification and reduction which are common in avant-garde abstraction. Woolf specifically suggested using Edwardian fiction as the object of this painterly treatment which indicates that she remained loyal to her renovative rather than revolutionary approach to literature.

Woolf progressively moved towards a formalist approach which is also reflected in Woolf's language. For instance, a letter to Fry from 1924 reads: "I'm puzzling, in my weak-witted way over some of your problems: about 'form' in literature" (qtd in Lacourarie, 68). Woolf accepted the problems of balancing form and content as posed by Fry and Clive Bell. By 1925, the year *Mrs Dalloway* was published, Woolf fully committed to the world of painting as central influence on literary production:

> Sculpture influenced Greek literature, music Elizabethan, architecture the English of the eighteenth century, and now undoubtedly we are under the dominion of painting. Were all modern paintings to be destroyed, a critic of the twenty-fifth century would be able to deduce from the works of Proust alone the existence of Matisse, Cézanne, Derain, and Picasso. (P, 140)

As the paragraph shows, Woolf viewed the arts as interconnected and attributes a leading role to painting. The integration of formalist aesthetics into modern fiction is complete with the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* and Woolf's position consolidated as she notes in her diary:

> I think writing must be formal. The art must be respected. This struck me reading some of my notes here, for if one lets the mind run loose it becomes egoistic; personal, which I detest. (*Diary* 2, 321)

It is easy to see why the highly flexible formalist approach appealed to Woolf. Ideologically Woolf's anti-Edwardian and Fry's anti-Academy criticism are closely aligned and part of the overall (re)turn to alternative traditions in art and literature in England.

As we have seen, over the course of the 1920s, during the writing of *Jacob's Room,* art criticism in London reached the point of sophisticated discussions of issues to do with literary adaptation; these subsequently informed Woolf's design concept for *Mrs. Dalloway.* Her continually renovative modern fiction was eager to integrate formalist and Post-Impressionist concepts since they deliver firm design principles while allowing for application and modification of existing methods. Hence, her modern fiction as developed in *Jacob's Room* and Fry's approach to modernist art through the formalist lens constitute an ideological and stylistic match which culminated in *Mrs Dalloway*. The novel reflects how Woolf's methods of representation and character-building shift to the formal level — in this context, signalling a shift to the structural patterns which define Woolf's narrative modes in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Giving Frame and Rhythm to Modern Fiction

In order to decode *Mrs Dalloway* through its formalist framework I will read it through the stylistic devices theorised by Fry and adapted by Woolf. In general, I understand the novel as an aesthetic construction of harmonised rhythms which add up to an expressive mode of literary and social renovation. For one, I will consider how Woolf establishes the design boundaries of the novel which work towards the autonomy or self-completeness of the book. Second, I will consider the rhythmic design of the novel and how rhythmic plot-structure shapes the literary methods of Woolf's modern fiction as modifications of pre-existing styles as derived from *Jacob's Room* and in completely new ways. The last part of this chapter will consider the harmony of these rhythms and how the novel expresses its symbolic reconstitution of the modern character and the modern novel.

As a starting point for my exploration of Woolf's rhythms I want to look at how Woolf conceptualised the representation of human experience in rhythmic ways. In 'An Essay on Aesthetics' Fry describes how a balanced design in the formalist sense transfers from painting to literature. Fry frequently uses the term "unity" to describe the cohesion or self-complete status of a composition. For simplification I refer to this phenomenon as rhythmic composition. Fry observes that a book is consumed page after page by a reader. In contrast, the viewing of a painting is an instant process. Therefore, a rhythmic composition in literature requires a "successive unity": "each successive element is felt to have a fundamental and harmonious relation with that which preceded it" (Fry, 'Essay on Aesthetics', 22). Briggs explains the problem:

> The characteristic that distinguished fiction from the plastic arts most sharply was that it operated within the dimension of time, rather than space — both the

> time taken to read it, and the time represented within it — and the novelist had somehow to accommodate time within any notion of literary form. (Briggs, 100)

Woolf builds on this idea. In Quentin Bell's (son of Vanessa and Clive Bell) biography of Woolf, he cites an exchange of letters between Woolf and her good friend and painter Jacques Raverat at the time of writing *Mrs Dalloway*.

The exchange shows that Woolf was intensely occupied with the problem of a successive but non-linear mode of narration in literature. She calls the Edwardian linearity of narrative "the formal railway line of sentence" and the "falsity of the past (by which I mean Bennett, Galsworthy and so on)" (qtd. in Q. Bell, *Woolf*, 106). Woolf argues that a more "true-to-life" form of representation could be found in painting which she describes as a radial simultaneity. Woolf compares human experience to throwing a stone into a pond: "There are splashes in the outer air in every direction, and under the surface waves that follow one another into dark and forgotten corners" (qtd. in Q. Bell, *Woolf*, 106). Raverat challenged Woolf's notion that a radial simultaneity could be translated to literature due to the linearity of the reading experience. Woolf acknowledges the difficulty of the challenge but *Mrs Dalloway* can be read as an example of this painterly approach to representation. As Quentin Bell explains:

> She is claiming for herself the ability, or at least the intention, to see events out of time, to apprehend processes of thought and feeling as though they were pictorial shapes. It is possible in *Mrs Dalloway* to find an attempt of this nature, a desire to make literature "radial" rather than "linear", to describe at once the "splashes in the outer air" and "the waves that follow one another into dark and forgotten corners". (Q. Bell, *Woolf*, 107)

Hence, for Woolf the key to breaking with the linearity of the traditional novel design constitutes temporality. This puts Woolf firmly in the realm of her modernist predecessors who experimented with narrative structures and memory space such as

James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Dorothy Richardson. For instance, *Mrs Dalloway* was released in the same year as Proust's penultimate instalment of *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927) and Richardson's eighth instalment of her thirteen-episode novel series *Pilgrimage* (1915-1938).

Baldick attributes temporal manipulations as a defining feature of modernist literature of that period: "The great Modernist discovery, in effect, was the literary potential of anachronism and anachrony", in the literary context meaning the "recount[ing of] events out of their original sequence" (Baldick, 79). As Baldick argues, Woolf's ideas for *Mrs Dalloway* draw from already established ideas and devices:

> The interpenetration of supposedly separate temporal realms is central to Woolf's fictional project. Its philosophical and literary backgrounds lie first in the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who had questioned the misleading division of conventional 'clock' time and called attention to the much more fluid real experience we have of living in time; and secondly in the work of the major French novelist Marcel Proust, himself an ardent Bergsonian, whose novel-sequence *A la recherche du temps perdu* mediates at length upon the vagaries and perversities of human memory and desire, and offers a model of 'involuntary memory' by which a trivial incident may open up vistas of a character's earlier life. (Baldick, 81)

However, Proust's negotiation of memory space and the present ultimately concludes in *Time Regained* (1927) which, as its title suggests, promotes the embrace of fluid temporality and its influence on our experience. In the same vein, Richardson renders the emotional experience of time as overall positive. As Paradisi notes: Richardson "described the same experience but with a serenity unknown by Proust or Woolf, to whom the beauty of regained time is always proportional to the tragedy of that which is lost" (Paradisi, 55). As I have shown in the beginning of this chapter, the world of *Mrs Dalloway* is profoundly affected by and commenting on the confused aftermath of

the Great War. The collective experience of 1923 struggles to find balance and closure with the memory of war.

Woolf's pursues her modern fiction with an anxious, questioning sentiment which sets her apart from the more confident conclusions of Proust and Richardson. As Levenson points out:

> For Virginia Woolf … we never master time or overcome anxiety, but we can learn to yield ourselves to the rhythm of its waves, accepting the onrushing move toward death that is also a movement toward art. All her work of the twenties brings such time-consciousness into the foreground. (Levenson, 135)

This time-consciousness is inseparably tied to the representation of the time-space framework of the novel.

Reviewing *Jacob's Room*, Woolf was unhappy about the looseness of the innumerable impressionistic sketches revolving around Jacob. She voices concerns about the structural integrity of the novel: "I was doubtful whether it did keep together as a whole" (*Letters* 2, 571). Woolf intended to avoid this perceived weakness through more detailed planning and a more precise design: "I want to foresee this book better than the others and get the utmost out of it. I expect I could have screwed *Jacob* up tighter, if I had foreseen; but I had to make my path as I went" (*Diary* 2, 210). As a counter measure, Woolf adapts the Post-Impressionist treatment of impressionism, as Fry understands it, to the impressionist style she had used in *Jacob's Room*: she gives impressionist vision a design.

Woolf establishes a variety of elements which serve as a frame to fix and order the novel's events. For instance, there is a solid time-space structure centred around Clarissa Dalloway. As Blackstone explains:

> It was in 1925, with *Mrs Dalloway*, that she first shattered the time-pattern within the space of a full-length novel. Here she made the bold experiment of restricting her scheme to the limits of a single day, a single district of London, a single in-the-round character … while employing the devices of memory and dramatic counter-point. (Blackstone, 15)

Within this frame, the novel then develops its rhythms of related and repeated elements which explore the past in relation to the present. As Baldick notes, “the temporal scheme of the narrative’s design is unusual if certainly not original, deriving as it does from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (Baldick, 82).

The parallels between both books go beyond the superimposed temporal structure. The significance of the modern city as portrayed in both novels constitutes a frequent point of interest for scholars. As Paradisi explains:

> If both time and text are perceived as space, you have to deal with them in the same way: moving freely. Not by chance then, Joyce puts the same idea of wandering at the core of *Ulysses*, a novel which is already structured like a city the reader has to cross. (Paradisi, 69)

Similarly, Cuddy-Keane reads the shifting “storymind” of *Mrs Dalloway* as it moves through London as working towards a “cartographic novel” (Cuddy-Keane, ‘Narrative Space’, 223). Woolf’s design renders a “multi-dimensional” reading experience which builds up a “pictorial map from London from 1923” while also revealing “the multiple dynamics of lived urban space” (Cuddy-Keane, ‘Narrative Space’, 221-2).

As we have seen there is a significant overlap of these ideas between art and literature. As Kern explains:

> The cubist artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque dismantled the uniform perspectival space that had governed painting since the Renaissance and reconstructed objects as seen from several perspectives. The novelists Marcel Proust and James Joyce used innovative narrative techniques such as

> impressionism, free indirect discourse, and stream of consciousness to capture varieties of space. (Kern, 166)

Woolf calls her method of working the different temporal and physical spheres of the novel into a rhythmic design, a "tunnelling process." This method constitutes one of the key borrowings from the world of painting and art criticism which Woolf uses to modify her narrative style in *Mrs Dalloway*. She compared this to an excavation:

> I should say a good deal about *The Hours* [later renamed *Mrs Dalloway*] and my discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment. (*Diary* 2, 263)

In a general sense, Woolf's tunnels lead from the present moment, the day of Clarissa Dalloway's party in June 1923, to a significant summer day in Clarissa's youth at Bourton approximately in the early 1890s. The cast of Clarissa's acquaintances are introduced over the course of the novel's linear progression from morning to night. Woolf builds the stories and relations of these characters by reverting to the 1890s, as experienced through different perspectives.

If we compare this to Fry's understanding of rhythms, we can see that repetition and variation are fleshing out the memory, or in painterly terms, that they create depth or volume from within, similar to Cézanne's geometric use of colour. Woolf establishes a sketch of Clarissa's life and gives the reader an insight into how the characters perceive and feel about each other. Therefore, tunnelling operates as a method of character creation merged with world-building. As Miller explains in his case study of *Mrs Dalloway* in *Fiction and Repetition* (1982):

> Storytelling, for Woolf, is the repetition of the past in memory, both in the memory of the characters and in the memory of the narrator. *Mrs Dalloway* is a

> brilliant exploration of the functioning of memory as a form of repetition. (J. Miller, 176-7)

Miller refers to the multiple returns to the day at Bourton as "repetitive". This is true in a general sense. However, the day at Bourton is not merely repeated; instead, the experience is retold from different angles with different interpretative foci. It constitutes a repetition with variation; a rhythm.

In this way, Woolf works time into a rhythm which is then twisted around the linear progression of the present day. The novel's present day begins in the morning and ends at Clarissa's party in the evening. Temporal shifts not only go from present to past and back but also from character to character. These relations inform the plot and build up to the final conclusion in Clarissa who poses as the central vantage point of the novel. Woolf describes an early idea of this concept during the writing of *Jacob's Room*:

> What the unity shall be I have yet to discover: the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance 2 weeks ago. I suppose the danger is the damned egoistical self; which ruins Joyce & [Dorothy] Richardson to my mind: is one pliant & rich enough to provide a wall for the book from oneself without its becoming, as in Joyce & Richardson, narrowing & restricting? (*Diary* 2, 13-14)

Woolf perceived the narrative voices in the works of Joyce and Richardson as too fixed on narrative perspectives. As a result, Woolf strictly limits the knowledge and authority of the narrative perspective which would undermine this interplay of character, plot, and world. As Kaplan notes: "Woolf's questioning of Richardson is related to her own struggles to discover a method that would allow her both to explore the stream of consciousness and to avoid 'the danger' of 'the damned egotistical self (Kaplan, 124). Hence, Woolf's tunnelling process constitutes a development from and particularly

flexible version of the modernist engagement with space- and time-conscious narrative forms.

Woolf's rhythmic character design constitutes a modified version of the self-conscious experiments of character creation she uses in *Jacob's Room*. For instance, in *Jacob's Room* Woolf represents the abandoned farmer's wife Mrs. Pascoe by using different perspectives which attribute different values to her. Mrs. Pascoe is seen through the eyes of the tourist, through the eyes of her friends and through the semi-omniscient narrator. In *Mrs Dalloway* these perspectives are moved to the memory space of other characters, weaving it into the fabric of the novel while strictly limiting the author's / narrator's voice and perspective.

True to Woolf's pedagogic project, her tunnel design aims at the education of her readers. In her essay 'On Re-Reading Novels' (1922) Woolf outlines how she imagines the reading experience of the modern novel. In her opinion, the modern novel will require repeated reading in order make the rhythms visible and, thus, unlock the novel fully. It is necessary:

> that the reader can detect these devices, and by doing so will deepen his understanding of the book … a charge is laid upon the indolence and credulity of the reader. Let him press hard upon the novelist's heels; be quick to follow, quick to understand, and so bring to bear upon him, even in his study, with reams of paper at his disposal. (ORR, 129-30)

Woolf implies that modern fiction will require note-taking and thorough study. The viewing experience of a painting translates to a repeated reading of the novel. This constitutes one of the bigger differences between modern painting and modern fiction. However, as Woolf's modern fiction claims to produce, or at least pursue, the modern character, it also demands a modern reader. Therefore, the implications of Woolf's

adaptation of Post-Impressionist designs expand and reinforce its inherent renovative energy. *Mrs Dalloway*, in theory, constitutes a renovation of the modern character as well as the modern reader.

I want to give some thought to the implications of Woolf's tunnel design in relation to the reader. Many scenes in *Mrs Dalloway* suggest that Woolf creates her characters with a set of priorities different from strictly giving insight into the character's minds. As the famous car and airplane scene of the novel exemplifies, the novel is interested in how minds connect and separate. There are distinct collective experiences which unify and focalise characters in varying degrees but never fully. At other times individual characters are solely viewed from external, unreliable perspectives, defying certainty about them. As Edmondson notes:

> We can never know whether Woolf the novelist "perfectly knows" Clarissa. But we can determine that she refuses herself authority over her character and deliberately refuses the reader a complete knowledge of her character's interiority because she is ultimately more interested in the question of how people attempt to account for other minds as they exist in reality — other minds which are not transparent. (Edmondson, 20)

Different critics read the narrative method of *Mrs Dalloway* as different kinds of implied order. However, the most common models follow a general sense of connectedness of the characters' minds with varying interpretations as to how the minds are connected, how they relate to the narrative voice and to what purpose Woolf deploys this implied unity. For instance, in a similar way to the reading I hope to advance here, Edmondson reads Woolf's method as product of her engagement with formalist ideas. She argues that Woolf uses narrativization, "the imposition of the form of a story onto the recounting of events" (Edmondson, 18), in order to express Woolf's underlying theory of the mind. Miller follows a similar interpretation but finds the rhythmic design

of the novel as working towards the superimposed theme of life and death. Both critics read Woolf's tunnels as tunnels of the spirit which connect the minds of the characters.

This method is less concerned with concrete knowledge about characters rather than relations between them. Characters are built around their interpretation of others and vice-versa. This involves the reader filling in the gaps and uncertainties which result from the style. Woolf wants the reader to acknowledge this role. She reflects on the borders between minds, only then to ignore them by pointing to an elusive connectedness. Woolf repurposes the narrative voice as a structural element which moderates, contrasts or merges alternative perspectives.

As Caughie suggests, this mode of writing characters aims at creating a distance between author and book:

> What we encounter, though, are not two kinds of narration but the narrative strategies involved in connecting those detached and those intimate perspectives. The narrative draws the reader's attention to the mediation of scenes and thoughts. Blurring distinctions between characters and between characters and narrator, Woolf makes the source of a thought doubtful, thereby inhibiting our tendency to seek the author's view in the characters or in the narrator. (Caughie, 74)

Therefore, Woolf's intersubjective style reinforces the necessity of a "modern" reader with new modes of reading. Woolf proposes that characters can attain expressive qualities, in the formalist sense of evoking a meaningful emotional response, by becoming resonating elements in a patterned design. Woolf's characters come to life in their relation to other characters. The mediating, instable narrative voice draws attention to the interpretative processes which call on the reader to complete the characters. Hence, in its design, *Mrs Dalloway* implies the intention of connecting characters with each other and the characters with the readers. Woolf communicates

and partially outsources the renovative quest of exploring and re-assembling a shattered society in her typically self-questioning, pedagogic style.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf developed a style which communicates and commentates on her experimentation with alternative modes of representation. In *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf continues this dialogue. Woolf indicates her concept for the novel on the very first page. The opening paragraphs go as follows:

> Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach.
>
> What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; (MD, 3)

To begin with, Woolf demonstrates the seamless transitions between the London and the Bourton episodes. As Baldick notes Woolf opens the novel with a "powerful exploitation of narrative anachrony … which introduces us to its title character first by reference to her intentions for the immediate future, but then by means of distant memories seemingly 'triggered' by her present situation" (Baldick, 79). Already, Woolf emphasises the meaningful connection between these two days through the reading experience. Woolf leads the first-time reader to believe that the two days are the same before going on to distinguish between them. Woolf perhaps cheekily announces the

tunnel design of the novel by metaphorically taking the “doors off their hinges”, implying the seamlessness of the two temporal spaces. Woolf then refers to the sound of another set of hinges which initiate the transition between the present and the past through the forceful opening of window blinds at Bourton. Windows and doors constitute a frequent framing device in *Jacob’s Room* which we see repurposed here as the opening of what we could describe as Woolf’s first tunnel. I would suggest that this is representative of Woolf’s development of her space-conscious poetics towards a more defined, proactive design: in short, an expressive form.

As we have seen above, Woolf’s design works towards a rhythmic composition. Woolf locates this harmony in the climax of the novel. Hoffmann’s research on the *Mrs Dalloway* manuscripts found that Woolf noted in June of 1923: “every scene would build up the idea of C[larissa]’s character. That will give unity, as well as add to the final effect” (qtd. in Hoffmann, ‘Mrs Dalloway’, 183). Woolf foreshadows this in the opening paragraphs. Looking out of the window at Bourton Clarissa has a prophetic intuition: “something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking” (MD, 3). Miller reads the theme of rising and falling as connected to the “life and death” duality which is primarily played out through Clarissa and Septimus Smith. As Miller put it:

> If a “lark” and a “plunge” seem at first almost the same thing, rising and falling versions of the same leap of ecstasy, and if Clarissa’s plunge into the open air when she bursts open the windows at Bourton seems to confirm this identity, the reader may remember this opening page much later when Septimus leaps from a window to his death. (J. Miller, 185)

In a way, Woolf foreshadows that the lark at Bourton in the beginning will be balanced by a plunge in London at the end. The rising and falling movements are associated

with emotional undulations, which Woolf establishes by tunnelling into the past. Therefore, the novel acquires a kinetic and emotional vibrancy or energy expressed through its rhythmic use of this movement.

The Formalist Treatment of Plot

I want to turn to how this rhythmic composition informs Woolf's treatment of plot. Woolf tells the story of *Mrs Dalloway* primarily through Clarissa, Peter and Septimus. Aside from Septimus, Peter Walsh can be read as different kind of counter-balance to Clarissa. He constitutes a central character and an integral structural element of the novel at the same time. Peter was a close friend of Clarissa at Bourton. He left Bourton for India after he was rejected by Clarissa in favour of Richard. That day at Bourton changed the direction of Peter's life. After a failed career in India, he returned to London on the day of Clarissa's party. The first page establishes that Clarissa is vaguely aware that he will return but due to their estrangement she has not read his letters carefully and is surprised by his visit later that day. It is through Peter's recollections that we gather most information about Clarissa's time at Bourton. Peter remembers the events which shaped the course of both of their lives.

Woolf reveals this plotline gradually over the course of several "tunnels" back to Bourton. First, Peter is introduced through Clarissa's memory where we learn that there was an estrangement. Then, Peter visits Clarissa and we learn that the memories of Clarissa's choice at Bourton are painful for Peter. After their meeting Peter is tortured by these memories and recalls the full story. For Peter, the defining moment at Bourton is when Clarissa confronts Sally Seton about a joke about Richard Dalloway and confirms to Sally and Peter that she has an understanding with Richard.

The scene marks the end of the Bourton episode and the end of her close friendship with Sally and Peter until their reunion at Clarissa's party. It also marks the end of Clarissa's youth as depicted in the novel and the beginning of her adult life.

Reading this sequence in terms of its composition, Peter's memory of these scenes, in contrast to Clarissa's, offers an example of a rhythmic form of plotting. If we understand the characters who remember Bourton as tunnel-building plot devices, then the individual plotlines they build assume their full meaning as part of a larger composition. For instance, Abel points out that the significance of the Bourton plotlines is heavily informed by Peter's perspective.

> When Woolf discovered how to enrich her characterization by digging "beautiful caves" into her characters' pasts, her own geological image for the temporal strata of *Mrs. Dalloway*, she chose with precision the consciousness through which to reveal specific segments of the past. Although Clarissa vacillates emotionally between the allure of Peter and that of Richard, she remembers Peter's courtship only glancingly; the burden of that plot is carried by Peter, through whose memories Woolf relates the slow and tortured end of the relation with Clarissa. (Abel, 166)

The events at Bourton as narrated through the memories of Clarissa and Peter have a determining influence on both of their lives but differ in their detail and significance. Clarissa remembers the ambiance, the sound of the window blinds and the freshness of the morning. For her, the key moment at Bourton was her kiss with her friend Sally which was "the most exquisite moment of her whole life" (MD, 26). While the lake reminds Clarissa of feeding the ducks in her childhood, for Peter the lake is synonymous with the boating party which led to the end of their friendship. Peter remembers the "final scene, the terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life" (MD, 47). Clarissa's associations with Bourton

are, although ambiguous, generally happy ones. The events in her memory defined her development from childhood to young adulthood whereas Peter's recollection of Bourton is primarily associated with the dramatic end of his courtship of Clarissa. It constitutes his initial failure to succeed in society which continues over the course of his life in India, leading him back to Clarissa's party.

Abel reads *Mrs Dalloway* as a "palimpsestic layering of plots" (Abel, 103) with which Woolf demonstrates awareness of traditional plots only in order to disrupt or subvert common tropes of the novel genre. If we consider the Bourton episode as told through Clarissa and Peter as two separate, traditional plots, the story of female development for Clarissa, perhaps the sketch of a bildungsroman, and a courtship plot for Peter, then Woolf's prioritisation of Peter's rendering of Bourton over Clarissa's developmental plot constitutes an inherent criticism of the patriarchal order of early 1890s England. The male character's experience appears to take precedence over that of the central female character. However, if we consider the temporal polarity of the novel, Woolf inverts these values as the plotlines move from a Victorian England to the modernising London of 1923. As Abel points out, this inversion of values is shown in the duality of Clarissa's and Septimus's story:

> Her foregrounded domestic plot unfolds precisely in shops and drawing rooms rather than on battlefields, and substitutes for epic quest and conquest the traditionally feminine project of giving a party, of constructing social harmony through affiliation rather than conflict; the potentially epic plot of the soldier returned from the war is demoted to the tragic subplot centering on Septimus Warren Smith. (Abel, 107)

There is an inversion of plotlines as they move from one pole of the novel to the other, from Bourton to London. This can be viewed as a metaphoric renovation of the social and literary norms of the respective age represented in the poles.

However, Woolf takes this self-aware layering of traditional plots even further. As Abel explains:

> Marriage in *Mrs. Dalloway* provides impetus rather than closure to the courtship plot, dissolved into a retrospective oscillation between two alluring possibilities as Clarissa continues to replay the choice she made thirty years before. The courtship plot in this novel is both evoked through memories of the past and indefinitely suspended in the present, completed when the narrative begins and incomplete when the narrative ends, sustained as a narrative thread by Clarissa's enduring uncertainty. (Abel, 107)

This means that Woolf's plot design not only upends but destabilises the traditional linearity of the romantic plot, which moves from courtship to marriage. As Sherry describes it: Woolf "needs to unmake and remake the model of imaginative temporality in which the novel is set by precedent convention" (Sherry, *War*, 269). Woolf's rhythmic plotting conveys a critique of, and an alternative to, the traditional Victorian novel. The memories of Bourton put the plotlines of the novel's central characters in meaningful relationship to each other.

My reading uses Abel's analysis of Woolf's plotting as an example of how Woolf's tunnelling process shifts meaning to the structural level of the novel. Abel describes the design as a palimpsestic layering. I would argue it is palimpsestic in its variety but the layering follows a rhythmic design. As I have shown earlier, one aspect of Woolf's style concerns the building of a frame and the communication of its design. Another layer concerns the expressive and ordering qualities which tunnelling exercises on the plotlines.

However, in itself, Woolf's rhythmic plotting expresses its own meaning. She uses tunnelling as a meta-critique of the traditional novel. True to Woolf's renovative approach to literary tradition, she does not supplant one mode of storytelling with

another. Rather, tunnelling allows Woolf to represent several approaches at once. For instance, Woolf preserves traditional plots like Peter's courtship and Clarissa's coming-of-age in the late Victorian past. But Woolf also subverts expectations by "modernising" the plot as the plotlines move into the present of 1923 London. The patriarchal prioritisation of the male plot is reversed. Clarissa's storyline dominates that of Septimus. Further, Woolf breaks the expectation of plot linearity by suspending the courtship plot in the present after its initial end in the past. Similarly, in the Victorian spirit Clarissa's development would be presumed complete with her engagement to Richard which Woolf transforms into a new beginning instead. Clarissa's day of the party constitutes a journey which culminates in an alternative completion of her development. It is rooted in emotional self-discovery.

Clarissa Dalloway's Party

As we have seen, Woolf's self-questioning style explores how form can communicate meanings. Woolf hoped that the individual rhythms of *Mrs Dalloway* would communicate the experience of personal, social, and political reality and "to show it at work, at its most intense" (*Diary* 2, 248). I want to turn to the inter-relation of Woolf's rhythmic narrative strategies next. Woolf's early conceptions of modern fiction theorised that "there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style" (MF, 189). Woolf followed this principle to some extent in *Jacob's Room* but was dissatisfied with the design as too loose and undefined. Hence, we see a developed version of this approach in *Mrs Dalloway*. As Lodge observes:

> the unity and coherence of the narratives comes increasingly to inhere in the repetition of motifs and symbols, while the local texture of the writing becomes more and more densely embroidered with metaphor and simile. (Lodge, 177)

In other words, there is an effort to recreate narrative coherence out of Woolf's modernist abstractions of the realist novel. The trajectory from *Jacob's Room* to *Mrs Dalloway* is bound up with the integration of ideas concerning rhythmic design into the text. However, my reading also understands Woolf's development of a modern fiction as a continual renovation of social and literary conventions. Woolf, similar to Fry's understanding of Post-Impressionist form, theorised about a harmony of rhythms which would bring about a sense of completeness of Clarissa's character and the "final effect" of the novel (qtd. in Hoffmann, 'Mrs Dalloway', 183). I would argue that Woolf's final effect constitutes the rebirth, or in my reading, the renovation and reconstitution of the novel genre and the literary character.

Despite the objectively thin story, deliberately destabilising narrative methods, the "empty" characters and the strongly subverted or fractured plotting, the novel manages to communicate its substantial themes well. Like Cézanne's geometric use of colour which recreates the impression of depth and volume, *Mrs Dalloway* recreates profound explorations of human experiences such as sanity and insanity, life and death, and complex, intimate relationships without resorting to the traditional modes of character representation and narrative. *Mrs Dalloway* constitutes an expression and or suggestion of social change which is best exemplified in the novel's climax: Clarissa's party. The party is more than just a social gathering. The main plotlines which began (and ended in Bourton) are resumed at the party. Hence, the party constitutes a resolution in multiple ways. Peter, Sally, Richard, and Clarissa are

reunited in a transformative ceremonial event which changes all of its guests over the course of a momentary communion.

The party creates a space of open communication and for (re-)defining social values. We learn that “it was possible to say things you couldn’t say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper (MD, 124). Clarissa’s offering to life is a temporary equaliser of classes and genders, it is a chance to redeem and reform through repetition. For instance, Squier reads the party as a renovation of Georgian social spaces from a traditional male-centric place of encounter to a modern form of social intercourse:

> Clarissa’s parties become a private method of transforming public life from its characteristically male dimensions … to a more characteristically female world marked by “both the desire and capacity for fusion. (Squier, *Sexual Politics*, 100)

Change is undeniably in the air at Clarissa’s party but it is unclear at first if the party can unify these guests from different layers and periods of English society. Woolf builds up expectation for a major transformative event, her “final effect”. Notably, it is not the Prime Minister’s arrival to fulfil this vision. The communion, if successful, is meant to bring about a success of a different sort.

Clarissa as the host of the party is intensely invested in its outcome. For instance, this shows in Clarissa’s fears that the party could be a failure. Clarissa’s biggest fear is a lack of connection between the guests:

> She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat. Anything, any explosion, any horror was better than people wandering aimlessly, standing in a bunch at a corner like Ellie Henderson, not even caring to hold themselves upright. (MD, 122)

What the paragraph indicates are the communal qualities of the party which can potentially equalise the diverse blend of guests. As Miller explains, the party is a communion of sorts:

> Though people laugh at her for her parties, feel she too much enjoys imposing herself, nevertheless these parties are her offering to life. They are an offering devoted to the effort to bring together people from their separate lives and combine them into oneness. (J. Miller, 193)

However, Clarissa, as a fragmented and insecure character has ambiguous, if not conflicting feelings about herself in relation to this communion. One part of Clarissa, perhaps her egocentric side, rejects taking part until the turning point of the party. We learnt that:

> She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being — just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it; yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn't help feeling that she had, anyhow, made this happen, that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs. (MD, 124)

In other words, Clarissa's inner conflict revolves around the self in relation to the community. She indicates a desire to become part of the crowd and she takes pride in having enabled the situation. However, there is a tangible anxiety about having her individuality compromised by the communion. Clarissa appears to overidentify with her role as enabler to the degree of blending into the background as part of the house. Squier explains:

> Unlike most of the men in the novel, who see themselves as important figures (Peter Walsh as a colonial administrator and a lover), Clarissa thinks of herself as merely background and does not attempt to project herself into the world. Rather, she effaces herself, concentrating instead on creating an atmosphere

> in which other people can shine. (Squier, *Sexual Politics*, 99)

Clarissa's big emotional and spiritual quest is to re-form the sum of her parts in the present and manifest fully as a balanced modern character. Woolf constructs this challenge as both, a literary metaphor and character reality.

The party with its various guests can be read as an attempt to recreate order out of chaos. As Wilson explains, the party's success, the reinstating of a shared value set, depends on the emotional maturity of its guests:

> Virginia Woolf's characters represent a world struggling to recover from a horrendous conflict, unreasoned and chaotic; and though they are deeply divided, and can't easily be separated by category or theory, their search for stability and resolution is finally a unifying one, and in *Mrs Dalloway* their success or failure in that search is determined largely by their possession or lack of the quality of literary sympathy. (Wilson, 41)

This attempt at social renovation is true for Clarissa as well. It is the party which brings the defining characters of her life back together. It resumes and changes her personal development. In a way, Woolf uses repetition as a form of redemption here. It is an opportunity to let the modern character with its modern values defy the structures of the past without rewriting them. In painterly terms, the pre-war world could be described as a realist portrait of England. If we accept that it was shattered by the war, it is the rhythmic arrangement of the many shards which recreates order in a Post-Impressionist way.

This modernist phenomenon of postwar crisis and reassembly is by no means unique to Woolf. As Sherry points out: "The writers of a specifically English modernism will distinguish themselves by identifying this crisis and realizing — incorporating— its meaning in an imaginative literature" (Sherry, *War*, 22). For instance, similar patterns can be found in Joyce, Eliot, and Richardson. Levenson compares the spiritual quest

of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*: "for Eliot, the grail quest to redeem the waste land, and for Joyce, Odysseus' long-delayed return to home." In both instances the mythical process "suggest the inclusiveness of universality" (Levenson, 124) which can be read as a literary and social desire for stability and reconstitution not unlike Clarissa's party. Levenson traces a similar tendency in the fine arts:

> The movement from burnished particles to grand syntheses, which represents one of the most notable phases of the postwar years, recurs through 1922. Picasso's turn from "analytic" to "synthetic" Cubism follows a related course, a change from the disassembly of bodies and objects, to their reconstitution. (Levenson, 124)

Mrs Dalloway develops its "grand synthesis" of a shattered and confused social landscape by bringing its guests together in communion while reconstituting the metaphorical fragmented individual in the form of Clarissa through rhythmic redemption of her past and present relations.

This is very similar to Richardson's development of her main heroine Miriam Henderson. In a way, Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, as the title indicates, constitutes a comparable character journey to Joyce's and Woolf's books. *Pilgrimage*

> depicts a fragmented identity that moves between present, past and future, not always making a clear distinction between them. This identity is reflected, using the mirror of memory, in the fragmented language and narrative structure of *Pilgrimage*. (Paradisi, 52)

In the case of Clarissa's sense of postwar fragmentation, Woolf partially externalises the struggle through the mirrored, if contrasting, experience of Septimus Smith. As Cuddy-Keane points out, Woolf's sense of a modern, democratic community "resisted simple objective definitions, in part because she believed that the identity of such a community could be determined only in collaboration with voices that had not yet been

heard" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 40). Septimus constitutes the living echo of the war experience. He gives a voice to the countless, "half forgotten" (MD, 174) soldiers whose absence keeps informing reality. As Saint-Armour argues, both Clarissa and Septimus share a sense of anxiety about the experience of the modern metropolis:

> It would be going too far to say that the novel connects Clarissa and Septimus solely to collapse the distinction between civilian and soldier or to endorse that collapse, although toward the end of her life Woolf would explore the critical possibilities latent in just such a collapse. *Mrs. Dalloway* links its protagonists mostly through their similarities of temperament and experience: they share a history of illness and a dread of doctors who worship the sister goddesses, Proportion and Conversion; they have both witnessed the motorcar in Bond Street and the airplane above it; they can apprehend the coalescence of chatter and accident, occasionally, in a moment of radiant presence that is seldom fully dissociable from a sense of dread. (Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 118)

Septimus and Clarissa serve as Woolf's primary rendition of "life and death, sanity and insanity … at its most intense" (*Diary* 2, 248). Septimus's path of insanity and death finds his way into Clarissa's celebration of rebirth and triggers the final effect of the novel.

Woolf's Architecture of Social Change

Woolf's methods change from *Jacob's Room,* as the first iteration, to *Mrs Dalloway* as a more fully developed form of modern fiction. This has implications beyond how we read the formal relationships which compose the novel's design. For instance, my reading of *Jacob's Room* analysed how Woolf's space-conscious poetics, her architectural and spatial themes build, criticise, and renovate the metaphoric Edwardian house, and with it the Edwardian mindset, in order to search for a space

for the modern character to take shape. In the world of *Mrs Dalloway,* the modernisation of society has progressed a great deal as many of the novel's characters notice. From a literary point of view, this change is enabled by Woolf's integration of formalist values and painterly methods into modern fiction. After *Jacob's Room*, Woolf felt that her initial use of space-conscious poetics had some limiting effects on world building and characterisation. For instance, Jacob is a frequently read as the hollow centre of the novel, he is a non-character to some extent. Similarly, Clarissa is the centre of her party but struggling to manifest outside of her role as hostess, as a sincere social self. However, through the repetitions and rhythms of Woolf's Post-Impressionist method, Woolf develops the spatial and architectural themes which build her main characters.

If, as I concluded in Chapter One, Jacob, as a modern character, struggles to manifest in the oppressively old-fashioned architectures of Edwardian England, then Clarissa constitutes a fully-developed modern character who provides and identifies with a modernised, Georgian home. *Jacob's Room* traces the oppressive mechanism of public and private institutions. Woolf's depiction of literary architectures self-consciously draw attention to the network of social conventions which enable social ills like oppressive marriages and the male conformity which fuels the war machine.

In *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf relies on similar methods of tracing social conventions as experienced in public and private spaces. However, there is a transition from the (mostly female) passive observers of an oppressive society in *Jacob's Room* to Clarissa's pro-active harbinger of change in *Mrs Dalloway. Mrs Dalloway* utilises the modernised space of Clarissa's home as a space of communication and reconciliation. Clarissa provides the space, an appropriate framework, for the fractured polyphony of voices and values of post-war London. Open communication and sympathy are the

underlying values which enable this renovation of society. As I will show shortly, Clarissa is very much aware of these values as a necessity for social change.

Woolf continues to construct metaphoric relationships between characters and their rooms which had dominated the characterisation of Jacob. However, with Clarissa, the room-character relation is integrated into a rhythmic design which enables the novel to reconnect with the past and renovate it without rewriting or rejecting it. Clarissa, who derived from the late Victorian past and was heavily influenced by Edwardian values, can eventually fully manifest as a modern character. Woolf draws attention to these repetitions of past events overtly when Clarissa and Sally reunite. In the beginning of the novel Clarissa remembers her kiss with Sally. When Sally arrives at the party their intimacy is re-enacted for a short moment when they kiss on the cheek and stand together looking at the other guests, holding hands. Woolf evokes an echo which we first encounter as a fragment of her memory at Bourton: "To think of her under this roof, under this roof!" (MD, 123) The repetition of the phrase self-consciously draws attention to the significance of this temporal connection.

However, this party is different from the past. Clarissa enables a profound personal and social change in each of the characters, most notably herself. The novel stresses the significance of the connection between the house as social space and the success of the party. The architecture of the house becomes a ceremonial space of union. As I have described in my introductory chapter, removing the heavy Victorian curtains, and bringing things to light were primary changes for Vanessa Bell and Woolf when they liberated themselves from the past by renovating their new Bloomsbury house in 1904. The modern home, as they created it, was full of physical and metaphorical light and space which had an equalising effect.

The social change of Clarissa's party comes about in a similar way. The success of the party unfolds with a metaphorical opening of the room. Clarissa's initial fears of failure in the social sense are quelled when the guests begin to assemble in the upper rooms: "She had six or seven words with each, and they went on, they went into the rooms; into something now, not nothing, since Ralph Lyon had beat back the curtain" (MD, 124). As Miller describes:

> Clarissa's party transforms each guest from his usual self into a new social self, a self outside the self of participation in the general presence of others. The magic sign of this transformation is the moment when Ralph Lyon beats back the curtain and goes on talking, so caught up is he in the party. (J. Miller, 193)

We learn that the open windows at the party let in something: "Gently the yellow curtain with all the birds of Paradise blew out and it seemed as if there were a flight of wings into the room, right out, then sucked back. (For the windows were open)" (MD, 122). Woolf reiterates the up and down, rise and fall motion which runs through the novel. In this context, it is representative of the connectedness of the public space on the outside and the private space on the inside (This is true in more ways than one as we will see in Clarissa's transformation). The birds of Paradise move in and out of the room, inspiring the room with a utopian ideal.

Woolf's use of windows in *Jacob's Room* functions in a similar way. As I have shown in chapter one, the ghost-like Jacob is frequently framed by windows in order to manifest or fixate him in varying degrees in the world of the novel. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf returns to the use of windows and doors as devices which conduct manifestation and transformation. But in *Jacob's Room* windows are framing and limiting. They are closed, so to speak, in order to define Jacob as a character against the world and characters around him. In *Mrs Dalloway* the windows are repurposed as conductive

channels, they are transitory spaces which loosen up preconceived notions about social gatherings and their values in order to foster an atmosphere of renovative change.

Clarissa Manifests as the Modern Character

At the party, Woolf builds up suspense for Clarissa's final encounter with her friends. Clarissa draws out the reunion: "They must wait, she meant, until all these people had gone" (MD, 131). Sally notices that Clarissa "lacked something. Lacked what was it?" (MD, 137) This state of anticipation culminates in Clarissa retreat into her private rooms where she faces the reality of Septimus's suicide. This triggers a transformation in Clarissa which gives her the missing quality and thus, completes herself and on the structural level, the design of the novel. I argue Woolf constructs this transformation through a combination of the space-conscious method as developed from *Jacob's Room*, and of the rhythmic composition of the novel. In order to understand this transformation, I will analyse how Woolf introspects and externalises parts of Clarissa through a variety of reflections and repetitions as for instance, a physical mirror, a mirror image of an old lady across the street, and her symbolic double in Septimus.

Early in the novel, Clarissa contemplates herself in the mirror of her room. The mirror serves as a catalyst for self-reflection. For instance, when Clarissa remembers her kiss with Sally, Clarissa contemplates herself in the mirror in her bedroom and feels a plunge in her mood: "as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment" (MD, 27). The anxious state of Clarissa is partially stabilised by her mirror image:

> seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the women who was that very night to give a party; Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (MD, 27)

Clarissa's mirror image collects "the whole of her" which indicates her struggle with the fractured nature of her self-image. As Stevenson points out, Clarissa's private rooms provide her with the illusion of wholeness:

> Clarissa uses the room to rehearse the identity of the woman she is supposed to be: the woman giving a party named "Clarissa Dalloway," who, she insists, is herself. A space in which an individual is assembled, "contracted," and identified, Clarissa's bedroom houses the fantasy of a self-contained, stable identity. (Stevenson, 125)

This inner chasm brings Clarissa at the edge between sanity and insanity, between life and death. But Clarissa has an appreciation for life, she values and enjoys many aspects of it, as for instance her cherished memories which keep bursting into the present. This ambiguous emotional landscape is represented in the metaphorical lark and plunge movement of the novel which, in the end, steers Clarissa towards choosing the lark whereas Septimus chooses to plunge.

We see a repetition of this self-contemplation scene later in the novel. Clarissa looks out of her window and observes her neighbour: an old lady. The old lady enables an externalised self-contemplation of Clarissa's emotional sphere. Clarissa projects her feelings onto the old lady:

> And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that — that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was

> something solemn in it — but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. (MD, 92)

Connecting to the room of the old lady, a mirror of her metaphorical private room enables Clarissa to observe herself from an external perspective. Her rooms represent the "privacy of the soul".

We learn what keeps Clarissa from connecting to others in a sincere way. She describes the invasive qualities which spiritual and emotional relationships like love and religion pose for her. Clarissa perceives love and religion like this because she lacks a stable centre and is exposed to love interests like Peter and Richard and religious people like Miss Kilman who try to invade her privacy or to convert her. Clarissa is very clear about her values:

> The cruellest things in the world she thought, seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion. Had she ever tried to convert anyone herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? (MD, 92)

I would suggest this realisation is at the heart of the "modern" values which the communion of *Mrs Dalloway* is designed to manifest. Clarissa and her party aim to achieve a sense of community which is not based on oppression and conversion. A modern society as envisioned by Woolf enables its members to be merely "themselves".

The tragic story of Septimus and his battle with two domineering psychologists constitutes another iteration of this social criticism of a will to conversion, seemingly inherent in many social institutions. Clarissa, like Woolf, conceptualises this problem for her social renovation in the form of connecting rooms:

> And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that or love? (MD, 93)

Hence, Clarissa's quest is to create a conductive space in which her guests can communicate and co-exist in new ways. It is also a metaphorical vision of design which upholds the integrity of its elements within a balanced design.

Clarissa's transformation is triggered when William Bradshaw tells her about Septimus's suicide. Clarissa falls into a shock and retreats, for a third time, into her room. Clarissa then vividly experiences the death of Septimus in a kind of vision. Locked in her room, Clarissa wages life against death. On the one hand, death has the cleansing capability which offers a connection to a truth of sorts which is unobstructed by social distractions: "A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter." For Clarissa: "Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically evaded them. … There was an embrace in death" (MD, 134). Hence, Clarissa considers death an alternative form of self-completion. On the other hand, the experience invigorates her sense of life with ecstasy: "Odd, incredible; she had never been so happy" (MD, 134).

True to Woolf's initial conception of rooms as indexes of character in *Jacob's Room*, Clarissa's room is a metaphoric home for her internal character. It is a space which protects her from outside invasions and enables her to engage with her most private memories in a transformative way. Notably, Woolf creates the repetition of experience through shock. Earlier in the novel Clarissa receives a shock when she is hurt by the news that unlike her husband, she was not invited to lunch with Lady

Bruton. She retreats to her room and falls into a deep contemplation of her emotional and sexual desires. As Lodge explains, this retreat to her room, enables her to come to terms with her lesbian desires:

> This leads to a depressed meditation on her sexual frigidity which in turn yields to a reviving memory of privileged moments when, through intimacy with other women, she obtained an insight into erotic rapture. (Lodge, 186)

Hence, the repetition of shock when Clarissa hears the news of Septimus suicide enables Clarissa to come to terms with the ultimate question of life or death. As Saint-Amour points out, shock plays a major role Woolf's writing of the inter-war period:

> We might even say that, for Woolf, anxiety about some imminent blow or shock is the necessary prologue to recognition; that there is no apprehending without apprehension. … increasingly in Woolf's fiction after the First World War, anxiety leads to a recognition not of the dreadful object but of anxious others, and of the communal life. (Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 94)

This brings us to Clarissa's final retreat. Clarissa's epiphany is designed in a kaleidoscopic way which invokes the mirror reflection of the old lady and the relived experience of Septimus's death at once. As Stevenson explains:

> This final scene in the room is one of repetition and mirroring. Each character mirrors the other, as the narrator describes the scene in a kind of rhythmic cadence of repeated words and images, all revolving around the theme of death. Clarissa looks out her window to see her mirror image, the old lady, staring straight at her and looking out of her own window. Septimus's suicide is echoed by the old lady when she "put out her light". And Clarissa feels connected to Septimus and his decision to "throw it away". Instead of isolating Clarissa as a distinct and knowable identity, the room enables a communication between and confusion of selves that undermines the difference between inside and out. (Stevenson,128)

Like the open space of Clarissa’s party enables the mending of a fragmented society, Clarissa’s retreat opens her up to communicate between the multiple facets of her identity. In this sense, Septimus constitutes an externalised mirror image of Clarissa. He is the side of Clarissa which leans towards the union of death, when Clarissa opts for the union of her party. Reliving Septimus’s death reinforces her will to live. As Roberts points out, the duality between Clarissa and Septimus is part of the novel’s emotional balance:

> Our "joy" in the novel consists in our recognition of the rightness of this basic design, that is, of the way in which Clarissa and Septimus complement each other, Clarissa's elementary love of life matching Septimus's repudiation of it. The two emotions complete each other to form a whole; one attitude cannot, within the limits of the novel, exist without the other. (Roberts, 837)

I would suggest, the completeness which Clarissa experiences in death is cleansing her of the rigid, preconceived notions of her character which pull her apart. Further, the old lady as a mirror image of Clarissa, enables Clarissa to look at her life from an external perspective. The insights won from this experience facilitate the reassembling of her fractured selves into a balanced and stable form. In this sense, the rhythm and repetition of Clarissa Dalloway’s self-actualisation constitutes an attempt in modernist fiction to structurally convey in a narrative the disintegrated order caused by the post-war reality.

When Clarissa concludes her epiphany many of the motifs of the novel come together at once:

> There! The old lady had put out her light! The whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him — the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad

> that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room. (MD, 136)

Clarissa remembers a song form Shakespeare's Cymbeline: "Fear no more the heat of the sun." The song signifies that Clarissa has accepted death. As the clock strikes for the final time in the novel, Clarissa is ready at last to attend her party as her complete self. Clarissa chooses to embrace life: "She must assemble." Clarissa's problem was the harmonious connection between one's and other people's rooms: "Here was one room; there another" (MD, 93). Clarissa can finally open up and connect her metaphorical room, her "private soul" to the adjourning rooms where her guests await. The communion of the party is complete. Hence, the literary reconstitution of the modern character in a modern society is complete.

Mrs Dalloway constitutes an important milestone for Woolf's modern fiction. Drawing from, what Fry described as, the rhythmic design of Post-Impressionism painting, she weaved the narrative strategies of *Jacob's Room* into a harmony of rhythmic elements which negotiate the modern character in a reconstituted society. As Daiches notes:

> In *Mrs Dalloway* a deliberate attempt is made both to bring all the tracts of experience explored into a single focus and to effect all transitions from one part to another in such a way that the unity of the work is emphasized rather than (as in *Jacob's Room*) weakened by the continual shifts. (Daiches, *Woolf*, 62)

Conceptualising the novel as an "aesthetic construction" enabled Woolf to explore and innovate modes of representation without abandoning traditional methods. Rather, Woolf engages with the literary and social past in order to pursue a modern voice and

form for the English present. As the next chapter will show, these developments, as well as core ideas from *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* build up to Woolf's next iteration of modern fiction in *Orlando: A Biography*.

Chapter Three: *Orlando: A Biography*

Woolf Expands Modern Fiction to the Biography Genre

So far, I have traced the stylistic and ideological evolutions of Woolf's modern fiction and the ways in which she depicts and critiques a modernising England. In her first experimental novel, *Jacob's Room,* Woolf synthesises the social structures, as represented in the spatial politics of the Victorian home of her childhood, to a modernist style which constructs character and world through a set of architectural motifs. The novel constitutes a critique and a fictionalised renovation of Edwardian England as well as a negotiation of changing literary styles. This reconstitution of the novel is developed further in *Mrs Dalloway.* Woolf depicts the fragmented post-war society as experienced by the internally fragmented cast of characters. Once more Woolf synthesises elements from the cultural sphere in order to reconstitute a modernised society and literature. Building on her guiding conception of literary architectures in *Jacob's Room*, Woolf integrated concepts from the world of avant-garde painting in order to advance her pursuit of a new literature.

I argue that in the latter half of the 1920s Woolf's perception of her modern fiction in relation to on-going social and literary transformations changes once more. If we read her previous novels as literary and social renovations which negotiate the modern character in relation to pre-war England in *Jacob's Room* and post-war society in *Mrs Dalloway*, then Woolf's novel-biography *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) negotiates the emancipation of modern fiction from social and literary history, as inherited by Victorian/Edwardian traditions, as an alternative, yet equally valid mode of representation. In this way, the subject of renovation in *Orlando* is modern fiction

itself. For this purpose, Woolf synthesises elements from literary debates about historiography and by extension biography writing as posed by her friend Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) as well as from a predominantly modernist engagement with parody and genre, and applies it to her fiction. The resultant blend of biography, historiography and parodic fiction in *Orlando* constitutes a renegotiation of English history which enables Woolf to enter in a dialogue with the Victorian and Edwardian ideas about literary representation against which she, thus far, built her aesthetics.

In her diaries, Woolf describes her work on *Orlando* as a final chapter in her genre-bending experimentation with the novel form: “I doubt that I shall ever write another novel after O[rlando]. I shall invent another name for them” (*Diary* 3, 176). A primary reason for the perceived break of *Orlando* with the “novel” classification constitutes its self-aware blending of fiction with historiography and the English biography tradition. This evolution of Woolf’s modern fiction constitutes a turning-point in her ideological and stylistic re-construction of the past. Woolf represents Orlando’s fantastical journey through four centuries of English history via multiple layers. For instance, Orlando, as fictional character, has a grounding in reality since he/she is a fictionalised representation of Woolf’s complicated love affair with Vita Sackville-West, through which Woolf sketches the history of the Sackville family and their historic Knole House. The life of Orlando is narrated by a fictional biographer who changes his style of narration as Orlando moves through different periods. As Sproles points out: “It is commonplace for the Biographer to rehearse the rules of biographical propriety before proceeding to break them” (Sproles, 76) which informs *Orlando* with a meta-discussion about the history and limitations of the biography genre. As a hybrid of biography and fiction, Woolf’s literary critique is concerned with the borders of genre and the capabilities of fiction. This is also represented in Orlando as an award-winning

poet who adjusts his/her literary style as he/she lives through English history, reflected in his/her centuries-long work-in-progress poem 'The Oak Tree'.

Overall, the novel's many layers and meanings have established an uncertain critical status among Woolf critics. For instance, as Sproles notes: "Genre instability is only the beginning of the ways in which *Orlando* evades restrictive expectations. The subject of the biography, Orlando is not fixed in history, sex, or gender" (Sproles, 74). This open-ended range of interpretation of *Orlando* is in part derived from its middle position within the Woolf-ian canon. The book is advancing Woolf's established experiments as conceived in *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and as a breakthrough in her critique of genre canonicity and historicity, it anticipates *The Waves*, *Flush* and *Between the Acts*.

For instance, Woolf interweaves the layers of *Orlando* through a combination of narrative strategies, partially derived from her previous novels. *Orlando* is constructed in a similar way to *Mrs Dalloway*. Consistent with Woolf's tunnelling process, Orlando moves forward in time while revisiting the past. And like Clarissa's party and Lily Briscoe's painting in *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando* culminates in an epiphany which indicates a sort of rebirth. As Froula notes, there is an observable evolution of Woolf's concern with freedom from the weight of the past up until her last novel *Between the Acts*:

> Woolf had felt years earlier [before *Between the Acts*] that writing *To the Lighthouse* freed her from her parents' ghosts; and *Orlando* and *The Waves* suggest not imaginative impoverishment but adventurous freedom and deepening vision. (Froula, 297)

In terms of Woolf's innovative drive, there is an overlap between the writing of *Orlando* and *The Waves* which has drawn some critical interest. From the diaries we know that

Woolf's creative instinct aimed at two distinctly separate concepts for innovation as she was working on both novels: *Orlando* was conceived as a playground for "all those innumerable ideas & and tiny stories" and *The Waves* as a "very serious, mystical poetical work" (*Diary* 3, 131). However, as Marcus points out: "The two novels in fact share many of the same preoccupations: experiments with time and narrative; the representation of lives in biography; the unfixing of identities" (L. Marcus, *Woolf*, 132). As my reading will show, the self-proclaimed denigration of *Orlando*'s standing as a less serious work is not justified if we consider its complex engagement with the English biography tradition and its meta-commentary on English modernism.

Orlando constitutes an interesting evolution in Woolf's lifelong engagement with life writing. As a mock-biography, Woolf arguably revisits some of her experiments with narrative strategies which I discuss in my chapter on *Jacob's Room*. As Marcus explains:

> *Jacob's Room* … uses the biographical form as a way of satirizing biographical conventions, in particular those in which blindness to gender differences and inequalities allow for highly partial versions of the 'representative' life. The relationship between biographer and subject is central to *Jacob's Room*, the biographer as 'outsider', excluded from the men's room, and the elusive biographical subject conjoining, or failing to conjoin, to make biographical knowledge thoroughly uncertain. (L. Marcus, *Woolf*, 118-9)

After *Orlando,* Woolf would take the parody of the biography genre even further and remove the human subject entirely in her canine comedy *Flush*. Again, in her letters, Woolf repeatedly denigrates *Flush* as an elaborate "joke on Lytton [Strachey] — it was to parody him" (*Letters* 5, 162). However, as Caughie points out:

> As a mock biography, *Flush* undercuts the very value system that informs the biographer's craft, as well as the critic's, by revealing not only the variability and

> contingency of value (whether of the individual subject or the individual text) but also the implication of intrinsic (aesthetic) value in exchange (economic) value (Caughie, 149)

Hence, *Flush*, like *Orlando* constitutes a serious contribution to the modernist negotiation of genre and canonicity and an advancement of Woolf's critical exploration of the potential of modern fiction.

Orlando is a parodic chronological progression through significant eras in English history. Woolf returns to this concept in *Between the Acts*. Written against the backdrop of the approaching WWII and parallel to her anti-fascist considerations in *Three Guineas*, Woolf arguably sharpens her impressionist rendering of English history for ideological ends. For instance, Cuddy-Keane reads the village crowd of *Between the Acts* as a sort of culmination of Woolf's imagined ideal democratic readership who "combined individual difference with participatory togetherness" (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 42-3). However, from its inception, *Orlando* was planned as a much more light-hearted text which engages with English history not by drawing its themes from contemporary politics but from literary and social continuity.

Woolf's original concept for *Orlando*, positions parody and satire as a primary mode of expression:

> No attempt us to be made to realise the character. Sapphism is to be suggested. Satire is to be the main note — satire and wildness. … My own lyric vein is to be satirised. Everything mocked. (*Diary* 3, 131)

As a thorough investigation of various modes of parody and satire Woolf engages with various literary periods and styles, including her own. Woolf re-writes the lineage of English life-writing in a way which allows modern fiction to stand on its own without denying its roots in previous periods. In this endeavour *Orlando* is by no means a rare

example of the parodic side of modernism. Critical interest in the connection between modernism and parody rose with works like Margaret A. Rose's *Parody//Metafiction* (1979) and Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* (1985) which make a case for the "modern parody" (Hutcheon, 7) as a distinct form of the early twentieth century. In the modernist and post-modernist context, Bradbury classifies the twentieth century as an "age of parody" in which:

> parodic activity has vastly increased, moved, in art and literature, in practice and theory, from the margins to the centre, and become a primary level of textual or painterly representation. (Bradbury, *Not Bloomsbury*, 60)

Hutcheon specifies the modernist engagement with parody as ironic "trans-contextualization and inversion" (Hutcheon, 15) which serves as a primary form of "modern self-reflexivity" (Hutcheon, 2). Similarly, Rose's argument explores parody as an inherent mirror to its own methods which paradoxically deconstructs its target texts while creating a new fiction in the process.

In recent years, the interest in the role of parody for the evolution of modernism has experienced a revival. Research like Daniel Tracy's "Investing in Modernism: Smart Magazines, Parody, And Middlebrow Professional Judgement" (2010), Leonard Diepeveen's work on the modernist parody in *Mock Modernism: An Anthology of Parodies, Travesties, Frauds, 1910-1935* (2014) and *Modernist Fraud: Hoax, Parody, Deception (2019)* and Sarah Davison's *Modernist Parody: Imitation, Origination, and Experimentation in Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (2023) explore the mutually shaping influence of a mocking public on modernist innovation and a mocking modernism on the public perception of literature and the arts.

For instance, Diepeveen explores parodies of modernism as an anti-modernist reaction. It is a "symptom" of a "larger cultural anxiety" (Diepeveen, *Fraud*, 3) about

the implications of modernist art forms. Diepeveen explains early reactions to modern art and literature:

> While the actual cultural power of modernism at the time may have been more notional than true, the parodies show us where their authors argued the threat in modernism lay, and in that they were, at times, surprisingly prescient. (Diepeveen, *Mock*, 13)

Tracy substantiates this notion in his research on period "smart magazines" which showcase a degree of anxiety about their professionalism in their reactions to the new and modern. He argues that these periodicals derived their evaluative and communicative function for their readers in part from the parodic:

> Parody becomes a professional skill, allowing tongue-in-cheek evaluations of its targets even while edging into sheer free play that models a critical confidence and aesthetic euphoria that can be shared by readers. (Tracy, 44)

However, non-modernists were not the only ones utilising parody to navigate the increasingly unintuitive experience of modern visual and literary art.

The Avant-Garde maintained a lively culture of parody which was directed not only at critics but also at each other. Modernists parodying modernists becomes a fashionable sport in the early twentieth century. For example, Ford Madox Ford "rewrites" a poem from William Butler Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) in a review in *Outlook* in 1914. Ford adapts Yeats's poem to his own style. As Saunders describes this transformative parody: It "is an agile critical act, carefully poised between parody of Yeats and self-parody of impressionist mundanity" (Saunders, 'Close Reading', 26). As Diepeveen points out:

> Parody's imitation and polemics have large implications for the nature of art, and for modernism. In their partial and allusive imitation, parodies talk back to their sources, their very existence announcing that modern art is a conversation

— and not just a conversation between works of art, but between different works of art, their social contexts, and their readers. (Diepeveen, *Mock*, 11)

It is no coincidence that parodic reference became a staple of modernist creativity. As Bradbury explains, there is a natural attraction inherent to the modernist spirit which came to use parody as an enabling form:

> Aware of its own composition, its own textual relation with the realism that had gone before, its own fiction or forgery, it came to move toward the parodic. Recapitulating older predecessors with a new sense of tradition, quoting past forms to make new ones, the art of Proust, Joyce, Woolf, Mann, Gide, Faulkner, Beckett and Nabokov was novel and often deeply invested with the parodic. The parody, deeply rooted in such works as *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, or *The Counterfeiters*, could indeed seem of a new kind. (Bradbury, *Not Bloomsbury*, 58)

Saunders explains Joyce's use of parody and satire in relation to genre:

> The main innovation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the way Joyce introduces a variety of styles and modes that mark his escape from the limitations of a single, decadent, mode. The effect of Joyce's mastery of such variety is to turn each into a parody — a discovery that was to prove the core of *Ulysses*. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 333)

The influence of Joyce's discovery can be found in many works such as Ezra Pound's self-satire *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920). Saunders reads the book, in part, as a response to "the formal possibilities of fictional authorship, and their possibilities for parody, as reinvented by Joyce and Beerbohm" (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 418).

As Davison points out there is also a combative quality to the culture of modernist parody:

> Writers who were genuinely knowledgeable about modern writing frequently settled their differences by parodying one another's work as part of their ongoing quest to separate the 'durable' from the 'apparent'. (Davison, 128)

A case in point is BLAST editor and modernism's *enfant terrible* Wyndham Lewis whose work of the late 1920s becomes increasingly critical of his modernist colleagues. As Miller explains:

> Lewis launched his polemic against modernism first in his 1926 book, *The Art of Being Ruled*, he followed up the next year with "The Revolutionary Simpleton," an attack on his friend and supporter Ezra Pound. 1927 also saw the publication of *Time and Western Man*, which lambasted everyone from Stein to Einstein. (T. Miller, 76)

Lewis' parodic critique of modernism arguably climaxed in *The Apes of God* (1930). The "unwieldy satirical novel" (Baldick, 182) targets a wide range of modernist texts like the poems of W. H. Auden and Gertrude Stein, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. Woolf, too, was a recurring target of Lewis with parodies of her works in *The Apes of God*, *Men without Art* (1934), *The Revenge for Love* (1937). Woolf reacts to *Men without Art* in her diaries where she describes Lewis's parody semi-seriously as an "arrow" to the "heart" and Lewis as a "gnat" who has "settled & stung" (*Diary* 4, 251-2). Miller reads Lewis's "grotesque parody" *of Mrs Dalloway* in *The Apes of God* as "an emblematic instance of a modernism become manner and fashion" (T. Miller, 71).

Orlando, as a more light-hearted fantasy comedy, belongs to a different branch of modernist parody. For instance, Marcus places *Orlando* in line with "a number of satires and historical fantasies … to emerge in the first decades of the twentieth century" (L. Marcus, 'Woolf Mansfield West', 728) like Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) and Rebecca West's *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (1929). As Davison points out, the sophistication of the parody form, as reflected in *Orlando*, is emblematic of the later stages of this development:

> While parody was enmeshed in modernist thinking from its earliest stages, it was not until high modernism that the full, multilayered, philosophical, and literary applications of parody came to the fore as a palimpsestual means towards a complex historical critique. (Davison, 5)

Woolf's parody includes references to her earlier achievements in modern fiction. For instance, as Bowlby points out, *Orlando* contains a "self-parody" (Bowlby, 324) of the Time Passes chapter in *To the Lighthouse* when Orlando is sitting in his room, doing nothing, as several years go by.

As we have seen *Orlando* is part of a wider movement towards the modernist parody. As Davison points out, the high modernist parody becomes a form of expressing and resolving concerns with literary lineage and influence:

> At the level of formal experimentation, parody became programmatic. It enabled the modernists to situate themselves within and beyond historical narratives, cultivating a modern sensibility that distinguished their work from that of mere revivalists. (Davison, 2)

As I will show in the pages below, Woolf's mock-biography constitutes a thorough expansion of her modern fiction through the synthesis of parodic and biographical themes for emancipatory ends.

In order to unravel the many layers of *Orlando*, I will use Max Saunders' *Self-Impression* (2010). His research on the mutually shaping relationship between life-writing and modernism reveals modernism's roots in, and its negotiation of form through, life-writing traditions. In the case of *Orlando*, there is a noticeable concern with Victorianism in particular. This is reflected in Woolf's biting parody of nineteenth century thinking and Orlando's struggle to adapt and overcome the social and artistic landscape of the century. I will apply Saunders concept of a "composite portrait" to unpack *Orlando*'s design. The term derives from the photographic experimentation of

Francis Galton (1822-1911) who put multiple facial photographs of the same person over one another which has an "averaging" effect on the look of the face.

This composite portraiture can be extrapolated to the literary meta-critique inherent to the novel-biography. As Saunders explains:

> *Orlando* does composite portraiture in a way that is itself a composite, of multiple times and periods, multiple people, multiple selves, multiple genders, multiple literary forms; … Orlando is a striking chronological composite portrait of different ages from the Renaissance to the time of publication. It is also a domestic version of this temporal composite: a composite of family history, using Vita's *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922). (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 467)

Building on Saunders' reading of *Orlando,* I will examine the novel as a set of parodic composite portraits. The first half of the chapter will explore the modes of ironic layering and imitation, as derived from the modernist parody as an enabling method for Woolf's literary emancipation. Woolf re-constructs the Victorian age as a composite portrait by satirising Victorian metaphors and conceptions of periodisation, canonisation, and characterisation. The transition from the Victorian to the modern period is marked by a literary emancipation of style which respects its roots in previous periods.

The second half of this chapter will trace how Woolf constructs a composite portrait of the evolution of the English biography genre, including the "New Biography", through the biographer-narrator of the novel. Orlando's story is told through parodies of different biography schools embodied in a biographer who finds his methods frequently compromised or outlived by Orlando's supernatural lifespan. Finally, I will read the character of Orlando as a culmination of Woolf's previous experimentations with character in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and beyond. Orlando constitutes a composite portrait of his/her multiple, and indeed infinite, selves

which mark Woolf's metaphoric realisation of the infinite possibilities of fiction. There are two consistencies in Orlando's life: his family estate (Woolf's continued architectural metaphor for literary form and characterisation) and 'The Oak Tree' (a representation of an English literary lineage*).* As I will show, these composite portraits form a satirised complex of historical, biographical, and fictional elements which add up to the literary renovation of genre and a milestone for Woolf's creative journey to a modern fiction.

Lytton Strachey and the New Biography

I argue that Woolf's engagement with history in *Orlando* reflects a modernist shift in the biography genre which was shaped, in part, through Lytton Strachey's influential *Eminent Victorians* (1918) [16]. As a highly ironic take on the biography, Strachey's book spawned a modernist sub-genre of the "New Biography" which we can read as an offshoot from the rise of the modernist parody as discussed above. Before we can explore how Woolf adapts and perhaps even parodies the New Biography, we need to understand how Strachey's modernist reform builds on the Victorian traditions it portrays and reworks. The friendship between Strachey and Woolf constitutes one of the most consistent and close friendships in Woolf's life[17]. In Woolf's mind, Strachey's breakout success with *Eminent Victorians*, positioned her friend as "the great master of biography" (*Letters* 2, 501). Strachey's success is significant to Woolf if we consider

[16] Strachey, as Woolf was aware, began working on his biography sketches for *Eminent Victorians* as early as 1912. (Stratford, 93)

[17] The fact that Strachey, who lived his homosexuality openly in private (Bloomsbury) circles, proposed to Woolf in 1909 is a testimony to this. According to Quentin Bell's biography of Woolf, Strachey's withdrawal from the proposal one day later was a great disappointment for Woolf who had ambiguous feelings about her own sexuality and would have liked an amicable companionship. (Q. Bell, *Woolf*, 141)

that, as a craftsman, he was closest to Woolf as an essayist and novelist among the varied cast of high-achieving Bloomsbury members.

For instance, prior to Strachey's book, some artist members of Woolf's circle had already gained fame or, indeed, infamy with Fry's Post-Impressionist exhibitions in 1910 and 1912, Clive Bell's *Art* (1914), which introduced the concept of "significant form", and Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant who had risen to the ranks of some of England's most famous Post-Impressionist painters and interior designers. In the political realm, John Maynard Keynes became a household name shortly after Strachey with his political and economic reflections on the Versailles Treaty in *The Economic Consequences of Peace* (1919) (Albrecht-Carrié,114).

In contrast, Woolf's first two novels *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919) received mixed reviews and Leonard and Woolf's Hogarth Press would not become an avant-garde institution until the 1920s (Southworth, 2). Hence, Strachey arguably paved the way for what would become known as literary Bloomsbury modernism. There are similarities in Woolf's and Strachey's childhood experience which might inform their sympathy for each other as well as their perceived anti-Victorian tendencies. Woolf and her sister grew up in an oppressive Victorian family which was well-connected through Leslie Stephen's standing as an authority on English biography and historiography. Strachey derived from a centuries-old English dynasty. His father was an authoritarian military general. Four generations of Stracheys were involved in leading positions in the administration of India (MacLachlan, 143). Woolf and her sister Vanessa failed to live up to expectations in their upper-class background due to their tomboyish, free-spirited nature. Similarly, Strachey was frequently bullied for his weakly appearance and chronic poor health which, as may well have suited him, prohibited him from continuing the military or

colonial heritage of his family (MacLachlan, 139). Both, Woolf, and Strachey were thus part of a Victorian elite in decline which engaged artistically with their inherited Victorian legacy. As a founding member of the initial Bloomsbury meetings, and an impoverished and sickly member of the Strachey family, Strachey found a spiritual home in the open spaces provided by the Stephen children.

However, unlike Woolf and Bell's private conspiracy, Strachey's turn towards a modernist revision of Victorian style began as a Cambridge student of history. Strachey was intensely engaged in a debate surrounding the biography genre as posed by his superiors. As MacLachlan points out, in intellectual terms Strachey had more in common with the academic elite, as, for instance, his fellow Apostle and biographer G.M. Trevelyan, than with the more overtly avant-garde Bloomsbury painters:

> Born within four years of each other, they belonged to the late Victorian intellectual aristocracy. They shared common Whig ancestries, home lives steeped in literature and history, and curiously coincident but contrasting Anglo-Indian backgrounds. Both were residual, godless products of the early nineteenth-century evangelical movement. At Cambridge, they were scholars of Trinity College, graduates of the tiny as yet unnamed History Faculty, and defenders of the belletristic tradition of historical writing against the new gospel of scientific history proclaimed by Professor J.B. Bury in a famous inaugural of 1903. (MacLachlan, 138)

The rivalry between Trevelyan and Strachey is often depicted as representative of the larger ideological dispute about historiography, and by extension, biography writing. Bertrand Russell, also a Cambridge Apostle, describes their dispute within the society: "There was a long-drawn-out battle between George Trevelyan and Lytton Strachey, both members, in which Lytton Strachey was on the whole victorious" (Russell, 99). Trevelyan continued in the established style and family tradition which had

distinguished his father George Otto Trevelyan (author of *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* [1876]) and his great-uncle (and subject of G.O. Trevelyan's book), Thomas Babington Macaulay (author of *The History of England* [1848]). Strachey, on the other hand, became the *enfant terrible* who spawned a new school of biography which was in some respects directly opposed to Trevelyan's style of narrating history.

However, in their Cambridge days, Trevelyan and Strachey found themselves both arguing against their professor Bury. His inaugural address titled 'The Science of History' (1902) inspired Trevelyan to respond with his paper 'The Latest View of History' (1903) (anthologised, edited and renamed 'Clio, a Muse' in *Clio a Muse and Other Essays* [1913]). Strachey responded with his unpublished 'The Historian of the Future' (1903) which he read to the Sunday Essay Society. The central argument of this tri-angular debate constitutes the relationship between history and art. What provoked protest from Trevelyan and Strachey was Bury's especially intolerant stance on creative elements in biography writing. Bury denounces artistic liberty and artful writing as a hindrance to historiography which he considers as a pure science. For instance, he argues:

> History has really been enthroned and ensphered among the sciences; but the particular nature of her influence, her time-honoured association with literature, and other circumstances, have acted as a sort of vague cloud, half concealing from men's eye her new position in the heavens. (Bury, 9)

Trevelyan acknowledges this development in his counter-paper: "History was, by her own friends, proclaimed a "science" for specialists, not "literature" for the common reader of books" (Trevelyan, 140). Both Trevelyan and Strachey understand art as an interpreter of fact rather than embellishment. Both aim at an audience of common readers, although Trevelyan, with his loyalty to the English biography tradition

probably had a different readership in mind than the disillusioned, war-tired readers of *Eminent Victorians*.

For Trevelyan, the biography is an educational monument to set an example for the nation. As a work of literature, he promotes artistic skill and accessibility for a broad audience rather than an academic elite. Strachey's idea of the biography was leaning much more towards aesthetics concerns. In 'The Historian of the Future' he writes:

> If in any given piece of history the interest of the facts narrated is great, and if the beauty of the narration is great, the history is good history. If however the facts narrated have little or no interest, and if the narration itself is devoid of beauty then the history under consideration is (except for the hardly perceptible value which resides in the knowledge of mere facts) completely worthless. (Strachey, 'Historian', 63)

Hence, Strachey's vision for a new biography was as much about the selection of subject matter and writing skill, as it was about the purpose of the genre. Strachey's biographies were meant to be truthful, aesthetically pleasing accounts of history. However, the balance of fact and style poses challenges to the genre which inform Strachey's and Woolf's considerations.

For instance, Strachey describes the short sketches of his subjects in *Eminent Victorians* as the pursuit of a fragmentary, aesthetic rendering of truth rather than a wholistic portrait. As he describes in his preface:

> But, in the lives of an ecclesiastic, an educational authority, a woman of action, and a man of adventure, I have sought to examine and elucidate certain fragments of the truth which took my fancy and lay to my hand. (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 9)

This mode of concentrating information, puts an emphasis on the selection process of the author. Strachey explained this idea previously in his article ‘A New History of Rome’ for the *Spectator* in 1909:

> The function of art in history is something much more profound than mere decoration; to regard it, as some writers persist in regarding it, as if it were the jam put round the pill of fact by cunning historians is to fall in grievous error; a truer analogy would be to compare it to process of fermentation which converts a raw mass of grape-juice into a subtle and splendid wine. Uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold; and art is the great interpreter. (Strachey, ‘History of Rome’, 20)

For Strachey, the stylised condensation of information constitutes a device to achieve an essence of truth. It is the “becoming brevity — a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant” (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 10) which has become synonymous with the “New Biography”.

However, there is an undeniable discrepancy between Strachey’s claim to truth and the reality of Strachey’s character sketches. Strachey claims *Eminent Victorians* as a humble offering without any conscious method or ulterior motives other than aesthetic ones. As Avery explains:

> Strachey's limitations were initially obscured by the success with which he manipulated his readers, beginning with the ironic "Eminent" of his title. He constantly resorted to fictional devices such as staged scenes, imagined interior monologues and conversations, and dislocations of time. He cultivated a trick of seizing incongruous details from his sources (he admitted to having invented only one, Dr. Arnold's short legs, which he used to devastating effect) and ripping phrases from their contexts, in the interest of both comic ambiguity and innuendo. (Altick, 82)

Strachey’s idiosyncratic portraits were received with approving laughter and scorn alike. For instance, in his autobiography, Russell tells the story of how he was

reprimanded by a prison warder for his uncontrollable laughter when he read *Eminent Victorians* during his six-month prison sentence for his pacifism in 1918. Russell commemorates Strachey in a particularly condemning way:

> His style is unduly rhetorical, and sometimes, in malicious moments, I have thought it not unlike Macaulay's. He is indifferent to historical truth and will always touch up the picture to make the lights and shades more glaring and the folly or wickedness of famous people more obvious. These are grave charges, but I make them in all seriousness. (Russell, 99)

The heavily parodic tone of the biography angered conservative readers but struck a chord with the disillusioned post-war generation. As Holroyd explains:

> *Eminent Victorians* was first published on 9 May 1918. Its impact was tremendous. The world was weary of big guns and big phrases, and Strachey's polemic was especially attractive to the jaded palate of the younger generation. (Holroyd, 'Introduction', ix)

Its comic manipulation of fact and often imagined, dramatized or ridiculing scenes were perceived as an attack on Victorian morality and iconography which elevated the book to an expression of the post-war moment.

Despite its polarised reception, *Eminent Victorians* was a huge success and laid the foundation for a new school of English biography. There are numerous biographies which can be linked to Strachey's approach. As Altick describes:

> The most immediate result of the splash *Eminent Victorians* made was the advent of what reviewers called "the new biography" or, less flatteringly, "the jazz age biography," fizzing with colorful personal details, imagined scenes, purported psychological insights derived from letters or thin air, and illusive intimacy. (Altick, 83)

Among the notable samples of the post-Strachey biography are André Maurois's *Ariel: The Life of Shelley* (1923) and Harold Nicolson's (husband of Vita Sackville-West)

Tennyson: Aspects of his Life, Character and Poetry (1923). Notably, Woolf highly praises Nicolson's *Some People* (1926) as the closest approximation to perfecting the new style in her essay 'The New Biography' (1927).

The scandal around *Eminent Victorians* created a sense of an all-out attack on Victorianism which is not entirely justified. In his memoirs, *Enemies of Promise* (1938), Cyril Connolly assessed the consequences of Strachey's book:

> Too late they understood that four Victorian idols had been knocked off their pedestal in such a way that they have never been replaced or deemed in any manner replaceable. And after they had dismissed the book as "clever, but unsound", worse was to follow, a questioning of the values the Victorians stood for and all reflected from the eyes of their own demobilised and disillusioned children. (Connolly, 47)

This perception is somewhat contradicted by Strachey's discussion of the English biography tradition in the preface.

It is true that Strachey strikes heavily against his Victorian predecessors. For instance, Strachey describes how the biography became bent out of shape by its tendency to record the Victorian abundance of information:

> The art of biography seems to have fallen on hard times in England. … Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead — who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design? They are as familiar as the cortege of the undertaker, and wear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism. (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 10)

However, Strachey also defines this Victorian legacy as the literary standard against which he wrote *Eminent Victorians*:

> The studies in this book are indebted, in more ways than one, to such works — works which certainly deserve the name of Standard Biographies. For they have provided me not only with much indispensable information, but with something even more precious — an example. How many lessons are to be learnt from them! (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 10)

In retrospect, Woolf herself was not entirely convinced of Strachey's use of parody. In 'The Art of Biography' she admits to the perhaps overly satirised depiction of Strachey's eminent Victorians.

His characters were "short studies with something of the over-emphasis and the foreshortening of caricatures" (AB, 164). Similarly, Woolf advertises Harold Nicolson's *Some People* as pointing into the right direction for the future of the genre but warns from the delicate effects of irony:

> Mr Nicolson has proved that one can use many of the devices of fiction in dealing with real life. He has shown that a little fiction mixed with fact can be made to transmit personality very effectively. But some objections or qualifications suggest themselves. Undoubtedly the figures in *Some People* are all rather below life size. The irony with which they are treated, though it has its tenderness, stunts their growth. (NB, 154)

However, for Woolf these were the growing pains of a necessary break with Victorian tradition in order to return to authentic representation:

> For at last it was possible to tell the truth about the dead; and the Victorian age was rich in remarkable figures many of whom had been grossly deformed by the effigies that had been plastered over them. To recreate them, to show them as they really were, was a task that called for gifts analogous to the poet's or the novelist's, yet did not ask for that inventive power in which he found himself lacking. (AB, 163)

Hence, the New Biography with its interest in the connection between aesthetics and history, its focus on subject and scene selection, its self-aware reflection on genre

boundaries, its "fermentation" of fragments into biographical essences and its self-understanding as rooted in but innovative of previous traditions overlaps with many of the wider trends in modernism. Like other modernist parodies, *Eminent Victorians* and *Orlando* can be read as to: "to spike enemies, transgress literary convention, and violate social decorum" (Davison, 3). However, as Saunders notes, there is a difference between *Orlando* and the New Biography: "Strachey and Nicolson had, in their different ways, written auto/biography as novelists. Woolf would write a novel as a biographer" (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 468). Hence, it is important how Woolf understood the New Biography. As the following pages show, Woolf was intensely engaged with these developments in the biography genre and synthesised elements of the debate for her mock-biography.

Modern Fiction Renovates Biography Writing

Woolf wrote two seminal essays on the biography genre: 'The New Biography' (1927), which was written parallel to *Orlando,* and 'The Art of Biography' (1939). While the former reflects the writing process of *Orlando*, the latter constitutes a sort of retrospective on the development of the biography genre as she experienced it. As Briggs notes, Woolf's essays describe the evolution of the genre as indicative of a larger social transition:

> A cultural shift in the nature of biography had begun. Both Woolf's later essays on biography — 'The New Biography' and 'The Art of Biography' analyse this development in which Lytton Strachey played a key role. (Briggs, 26)

These shifts revolve around questions of representation. For instance, Woolf's essay is predicated on Sydney Lee's hypothesis that biography "is the truthful transmission of personality" (NB, 149). Woolf notably references Lee, who had assumed her father's

position as editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* after Leslie Stephen's retirement in 1891 (Annan, 112). Woolf uses this notion in order to lay out the problems of biography as she perceived them:

> On the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality. And if we think of truth has something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and what we need to wonder if biographers have for the most failed to solve it. (NB, 149)

As with 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', Woolf reiterates her understanding of her literary generation as emerging and in search of a new method. The new literary form is a problem to be solved: in this instance, balancing granite and rainbow.

As Saunders points out, Woolf's ideas for *Orlando* were thoroughly embedded in Strachey and Nicolson's theoretical considerations:

> It was Strachey who elicited Woolf's energies of parody in *Orlando* — parody of him, and also of the subjects and epochs he ironized. Nicolson's *Some People* helped provoke *Orlando*'s experiment in autobiografiction. But his next book, which the Woolfs published at the Hogarth Press, *The Development of English Biography* (1927), also contributed to her thinking about these questions of lifewriting. … Her concern there for the difficulties of combining fact and fiction provides the main axis for Nicolson's study. (Saunders, Self-*Impression*, 468)

Further, 'The New Biography' mirrors the theoretical concerns played out in *Orlando* as she browses over several centuries of biographers from Izaak Walton (1593-1683) to Harold Nicolson, her contemporary (who also appears in *Orlando* as Shelmerdine). In both her critical writing and *Orlando*, Woolf repeatedly points at the literary legacy

and the established modes of reading as defined by Victorian authorities like Lee or her father as an obstacle to be overcome. For instance, Briggs notes:

> Woolf was often amused when not annoyed by the prudishness of contemporary biography: *Orlando* is a novel that repeatedly draws attention to its acts of concealment by presenting them as elaborate jokes. (Briggs, 213)

As we will see below, these elaborate jokes also open a dialogue with the literary voices of the past. In that way, like my reading, Squier reads *Orlando* as an example of Woolf's "self-creation" as an emancipated author. If *To the Lighthouse* "laid to rest the ghosts of her parents, establishing herself as an adult woman independent of their potentially eclipsing examples" (Squier, 'Tradition and Revision', 167), then *Orlando* constitutes the acceptance of her father's literary heritage.

I would suggest *Orlando* constitutes the literary emancipation of Woolf's modern fiction which is marked by a conciliatory, yet modernising approach to historiography. As Squier explains:

> Claiming her literary majority, she confronted the influence of both literal and literary fathers to reshape the novel, and so to create a place for herself in the English novelistic tradition which was their legacy to her. (Squier, 'Tradition and Revision', 167)

In her essays Woolf argues that the emerging new school of biography shows the limitations which Victorian periodisation imposed on the genre and, thus held back her generation of writers. In 'The New Biography' Woolf divides the English biography tradition into three periods from the prolific eighteenth century, the regressive and constrictive Victorian period, and the rebirth of the biography genre under Strachey's new school. In *Orlando*, Woolf frames this succession in a flexible, self-parodic way which satirises and retells English literary history including its contemporary tendency towards modernist parody of genre. Cuddy-Keane reads this approach as reflective of

Woolf's "awareness of the provisional effect of historical positioning on our reading texts." Instead, Woolf expands modern fiction into the realm of biography by democratising the genre with her typically dialogic methods:

> Woolf goes beyond the historical critics, like her father, who conceived of the relative nature of different historical eras, to a conception of relativity of historical narratives to location — special, geographical, temporal, ideological — of the historian. Shifting the subject from morality and battle to the everyday, and writing a self-conscious, self-reflexive historical criticism are the two striking innovations that inform Woolf's historical approach. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 148)

In her engagement with the Victorian legacy, there are many parallels between Strachey's and Woolf's arguments on the biography genre. For instance, Woolf shares Strachey's concerns about the English biography form.

Woolf argues the rise of the Victorian biography constitutes a regression from the liberation and expansion of the genre; or the "evil times" (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 10) of the art of biography as Strachey described it. For Woolf the Victorian biography:

> was a parti-coloured, hybrid, monstrous birth. For though truth of fact was observed as scrupulously as Boswell observed it, the personality which Boswell's genius set free was hampered and distorted. (NB, 151)

The distortion Woolf refers to is the superimposition of moral values. Woolf argues "the Victorian biographer, was dominated by the idea of goodness" (NB, 151). For Woolf, the Victorian biographer understands the subject of the biography, as a role-model of Victorian values and the biography genre as a national literature along the lines of Trevelyan's argument.

Woolf echoes Strachey's comparison of the Victorian biography as "funereal barbarism" (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 10) when she criticises the inherent censorship of moralistic biographies:

> The widow would say "I still love him — he was the father of my children; the public, who love his books, must on no account be disillusioned. Cover up; omit." The biographer obeyed. And thus the majority of Victorian biographies are like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, that were carried in funeral processions through the street — effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin. (AB, 162)

Hence, for Woolf the arrival of the New Biography constitutes a rebirth or reconstitution of the English biography tradition which was free from censorship and moral obligation.

An elemental part of this modernisation constitutes an overall change of perspective. In stylistic terms, the New Biography renegotiates the relationship between author and subject:

> If we open one of the new school of biographies, its emptiness makes us at once aware that the author's relation to his subject is different. He is no longer the serious and sympathetic companion, toiling even slavishly in the footsteps of his hero. Whether friend or enemy, admiring or critical, he is an equal. (NB, 152)

Likewise, as theorised by Strachey, the criteria for subject selection change. For Woolf, the emphasis of internal aspects of personality expands the list of potential subjects: "The uneventful lives of poets and painters were written out as lengthily as the lives of soldiers and statesmen" (NB, 151). In 'The Art of Biography' Woolf even opens up the biography genre to everyone:

> Is it not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography — the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the

> illustrious? And what is greatness? And what smallness? We must revise our standards of merit and set up new heroes for our admiration. (AB, 168)

We have seen a similar notion in the previous chapters. The renegotiation of subject matter and representation constitutes a key principle of Woolf's designs in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*. Woolf's modern fiction demonstrates an observable procession of her rethinking of characterisation and world building which is in dialogue with modernist developments of the cultural and literary sphere. As Saunders observes in *Orlando*:

> First, the book's historical range is alert to the historical development of biography; and the narrator is no more fixed than Orlando, but transforms with each epoch. Second, towards the ending the narrator begins to sound curiously like Lytton Strachey, himself the arch-debunker of Victorian biographical piety. Thus *Orlando* is read as both example and parody of what Woolf called "The New Biography". (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 21)

Drawing from biography traditions in this way, *Orlando* constitutes another iteration of Woolf's sustained, self-reflective literary critique and a major development for her modern fiction.

As Caughie points out, the stylistic challenge to predominant literary conventions as posed by *Orlando* is in line with Woolf's continual exploration over the 1920s:

> In *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *Orlando*, Woolf calls attention to the artificial nature of literary forms and to the tenuousness of literary language. These novels from the 1920s, the only novels besides *Flush* that are named after their central characters, raise most noticeably the issue of characterization and its related issue of narrative perspective. (Caughie, 64)

However, there is a major development from the self-aware modes of characterisation which Woolf positioned as the metaphorical and actual climax of her main characters

in Clarissa Dalloway and Jacob Flanders. Orlando does no longer depend on an epiphanic moment of self-actualisation. For instance, as Little points out:

> Orlando's psychological relation to the historical periods through which she passes is hard to define exactly. She and any given historical milieu seem to reflect each other, and yet most readers agree with Orlando that the main character does not change in any essential way; only Orlando's social behaviour varies from age to age. (Little, 70)

Instead, the climactic revelation for Orlando constitutes an embrace of Orlando's inherent, infinite multiplicity of selves which reflects Woolf's meta-commentary on emancipation of her modern fiction.

By merging biography and novel in a format which revisits the four significant eras of the biography genre as identified by Woolf, she rewrites English social and literary history in a way which emancipates her self-identified camp of Georgian writers from the authority of Victorian form. As my thesis has shown, Woolf's modern fiction frequently communicates its meanings through content and style. *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* communicate meanings as much on the structural level as through events and characters. Similarly, *Orlando*'s renovation is multi-layered. Through the eyes of the aspiring poet Orlando, the novel relives history. The novel has an acute interest in influences such as class and gender and their relation to literary periodisation and style. On another level, *Orlando* explores the boundaries of the genre by questioning and satirising its foundations. If we consider the complex debates about the features and purposes of the genre debated by followers of the New Biography, the very format of *Orlando* as novel-biography provides an alternative to the established biography styles. Woolf argues the Strachey-an formular shows the limitations of the biography as defined between the sensitive boundaries of fact and fiction. *Orlando* arguably moves its history-inspired text firmly into the camp of fiction

in order to circumvent these rules. By approaching English history through a mock-biography Woolf manages to re-establish a claim to historical actuality.

Woolf uses a mock-preface and a mock-biographer-narrator who guides the story of *Orlando*, she satirised literary critics and famous writers. As De Gay explains:

> by incorporating parodies of literary and social history and biography into *Orlando* Woolf also critiques scholarly apparati for viewing the past, thus developing her ideas about the writing and rewriting of history. (De Gay, 'Historiography', 63)

Hence, *Orlando* is representative of a later stage of Bloomsbury aesthetics which strives to emancipate its aesthetics from the Victorian legacy of Woolf's and Strachey's literal and literary fathers. The novel-biography demonstrates the flexibility of Woolf's modern style to renovate existing genres without rejecting its previous forms. *Orlando* re-imagines a lineage of English literature which places her generation of Georgian writers in line with its literary predecessors.

Woolf's Parody of Victorianism

I want to begin my reading of Woolf's engagement with the literary and social past with her representation of the nineteenth century. As described above, Saunders's model of the composite portrait as a mode of modernist portraiture can be applied to Woolf's layering of Victorian elements. Woolf merges core ideas of Victorian self-understanding and canonisation in order to attain and parody essentially Victorian thought and literature. For instance, Woolf describes the moral and social transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century visually. She invokes a metaphorical climate change, a cloud and increased rainfall, which lays a permanent dampness over England:

> But what was worse, damp now began to make its way into every house — damp, which is the most insidious of all enemies, for while the sun can be shut out by blinds, and the frost roasted by a hot fire, damp steals in while we sleep; damp is silent, imperceptible, ubiquitous. Damp swells the wood, furs the kettle, rusts the iron, rots the stone. So gradual is the process, that it is not until we pick up some chest of drawers, or coal scuttle, and the whole thing drops to pieces in our hands, that we suspect even that the disease is at work. Thus, stealthily and imperceptibly, none marking the exact day or hour of the change, the constitution of England was altered and nobody knew it. Everywhere the effects were felt. (O, 217)

Hence, Woolf presents the arrival of the Victorian age as a sort of mould which disintegrates pre-existing things, it swells the wood and rusts iron. Woolf attributes a variety of domestic changes to the damp. For instance, people begin to dress more heavily to account for the chilly climate, "walls and tables were covered" (O, 218).

Due to her upbringing in a stereotypical Victorian household, Woolf had strong feelings about Victorian domesticity and we see recurring themes here. For instance, in 'A Sketch of the Past' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' Woolf compares the liberties of the Georgian servants to their Victorian counterparts. The Victorian cook is a "leviathan in the lower depths" (BB, 5), referencing the dark, smelly kitchens in the basement of Hyde Park Gate. Likewise, Woolf remembered the unsanitary, "like hell" (SP, 116) conditions of the crowded servant quarters. In *Orlando*, Woolf re-enacts the origins of this domestic order as the growth of the ivy strangles the houses and creates unbearable conditions:

> The ivy had grown so profusely that many windows were now sealed up. The kitchen was so dark that they could scarcely tell a kittle from a cullender. A poor black cat had been mistaken for coals and shovelled on the fire. Most of the maids were already wearing three or four redflannel petticoats, though the month was August. (O, 224)

The burning of the cat evokes the notion of a daemonic or witchcraft-related ceremony, turning the satirised Victorian kitchen into hell's kitchen.

These changes also have a direct effect on Orlando. Among the many alienations with Victorian life, she finds Victorian women's fashion particularly burdensome. She is:

> dragged down by the weight of the crinoline which she had submissively adopted. It was heavier and more drab than any dress she had yet worn. None had ever so impeded her movements. (O, 233)

Orlando is used to walking on her family estate. But when she puts on her heavy dress and delicate shoes, she trips and breaks her ankle. Lying helpless on the ground, she recognises her loss of independence: "But whom could she lean upon? She asked that question on the wild autumn winds. … 'Everyone is mated except myself', she mused" (O, 234-5). Hence, Victorian social norms coerce Orlando into male dependence. We learn that the "sexes drew further and further apart. No open conversation was tolerated" (O, 219).

However, there is another side to the dampness. The high degree of moisture comes with excessive growth in the country: "Outside the house — it was another effect of the damp — ivy grew in unparalleled profusion. Houses that had been of barer stone were smothered in greenery" (O, 218). The change of climate brings about constrictions of the private life but they are fertile in other ways. For instance, Woolf reads the emerging British Empire as a product of this growth (O, 219). Travelling Victorian England, Orlando is dismayed at the opulent display of colonial goods, fashion trends and architectures; the "crystal palaces [evidently a reference to the Crystal Palace of London's world exhibition built in 1851], bassinettes [a wicker basket for babies], military helmets, memorial wreaths, trousers, whiskers, wedding cakes,

cannon, Christmas trees, telescopes" (O, 222). Woolf sums up the look of the century based on a heterogenic mix of scientific, military, cultural and religious objects which shows its many layers as a contradictory age of conservative and progressive elements. I would suggest that the fact that Woolf chooses a list of objects to express this, constitutes a reiteration of her frequent critique of Victorian (and later Edwardian) values as "materialistic", as in overly class-conscious and focussed on material possession and social prestige. As Beer points out:

> In *Orlando* Virginia Woolf characterises the Victorian age by rank profusion, prodigious growth, as well as by fulminating clouds: in a bravura passage she captures its oppressive fertility. Using hyperbole to mimic hyperbole she suggests the melancholy Romanticism, both rampant and dampened, of Victorian culture. (Beer, 115)

Hence, despite Woolf's underlying critique of oppressive Victorian domesticity, she also recognises a complexity in the Victorian age. Victorian domesticity is depicted as a burden on women but also as a natural development and reaction to intangible atmospheric changes. Woolf shows herself critical of the effects of the social change on domesticity and the social sphere. However, she also recognises contradicting and / or progressive trends inherent to the period.

These ambiguities become even more visible if we consider the intertextual context of Woolf's metaphorical climate change. Her cloud constitutes a parody of John Ruskin's published two-part lecture *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884) which criticises the gradual effects of industrialisation on the social climate which became visible in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Saunders points out:

> But whereas Ruskin's is clearly a metaphor for industrialization and the social tensions it has produced, Woolf's is metaphysical: a change in the mental and

> moral climate. Woolf uses the image of dampness to characterize the Victorian age; a dampness which is transcendental, moral, and linguistic. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 448)

Thus, Woolf turns a Victorian metaphor against itself. Ruskin's cloud metaphor was intended as a mode of social critique. By repurposing Ruskin's cloud, Woolf enters in a conversation with Ruskin about Victorian self-understanding and its literary articulation. Hence, Woolf's representation of social changes in the nineteenth century is ironic but rooted in Victorian rhetoric. This is not the only Victorian metaphor Woolf uses for this purpose.

When Orlando comes to terms with her loss of independence and wonders about a potential husband, we learn that: "it was not Orlando who spoke but the spirit of the age" (O, 235). The term gained prominence through William Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age: Contemporary Portraits* (1825) which is a collection of biographical essays about a variety of prominent contemporaries which, as Hazlitt thought, represented qualities which defined his era. The spirit of the age is representative of an ideologically charged, nineteenth-century mode of literary periodisation and canonisation which was subsequently cultivated by the Victorians. For instance, Woolf's father was a firm believer in the spirit of an age. Stephen outlines his understanding of the spirit of the age in *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1904). Great literature must be "natural" which means that the author writes and thinks in symbiosis with the predominant ideas and feelings of times:

> Literature must be produced by the class which embodies the really vital and powerful currents of thought which are moulding society. The great author must have a people behind him; utter both what he really thinks and feels and what is thought and felt most profoundly by his contemporaries. As the literature ceases to be truly representative, and adheres to the conventionalism of the

> former period, it becomes “unnatural” and the literary forms become a survival instead of a genuine creation. (Stephen, *English Literature*, 218)

As Woolf was aware, Stephen’s ideology is classicist, gendered and conformist. It typically revolves around the “Great Men” idea which informs the selection process of the biography genre.

His approach to periodisation and canonisation reflects these concepts. For instance, in his study *George Eliot* (1902) Stephen canonises his eponymous subject through her relation to the spirit of the age:

> The future historian of literature may settle to his own satisfaction what was the permanent value of the different stars [popular novelists in Eliot’s time like Trollope and Meredith etc.] in this constellation, and what was the relation which George Eliot was to bear to her competitors. He will no doubt analyse the spirit of the age and explain how the novelists, more or less unconsciously, reflected the dominant ideas which were agitating the social organism. (Stephen, *George Eliot*, 67)

Stephen understood the spirit of the age as a periodisation process which triangulates the concerns and philosophies of a time with the competing literary, (or otherwise relevant) personas. In this way a literary and historical lineage is created. Woolf and Stephen agree in principle that a literary generation must not copy previous conventions but find its own authentic representation. However, for Stephen, these distinctions depended on a gendered, class-based ideology whereas Woolf’s vision of a modern biography aims to liberate itself from these moral or other constrains and focus on emotionally expressive style. As Saunders points out: “Woolf reverses the trope, since the spirit of the age is not the inspiration of ‘genius’ or semi-divine creativity, but the style of the time” (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 478).

Orlando is not the first time Woolf overtly attacked these concepts. Woolf has challenged the “Great Men” idea which dominates Victorian biography writing before. As Gordon points out, there is a consistent interest in the processes of periodisation in Woolf’s work:

> Her interest in the shape of English history, particularly the shift from one age to another and the unobserved part played by women, was to find its way into many of her writings, ‘The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn’, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, *The Years*, *Between the Acts*, and Anon. (Gordon, 86)

Perhaps the most overt example of this can be found in *Jacob’s Room*. As a Cambridge student, Jacob writes an essay with the title: “Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?” Hence, Jacob mimics Strachey’s time at Cambridge. In ‘The Art of Biography’, Woolf disposes with the gendered and achievement-focused selection process all together: “the question now inevitably asks itself, whether the lives of great men only should be recorded. Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography?” (AB, 168) Woolf calls for a complete paradigm shift. She challenges the new biographer: should he not depict “the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what smallness? He must revise our standards of merit and set up new heroes for our admiration” (AB, 168).

In *Orlando*, Woolf engages with Victorian periodisation through parody and reference. As De Gay notes:

> Woolf’s satire is double-edged, for although she mocks Stephen’s method of characterising literary periods, she also uses periodisation to dismiss Victorian ideas as outmoded products of their time. She alludes to John Ruskin in a very similar way when she uses *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* to characterise that period. Ruskin had claimed that a “storm-cloud” or “plague-

> cloud" was "peculiar to our own times", and Woolf parodies this by describing the arrival of the nineteenth century as the descent of a fog influencing every aspect of life. (De Gay, *Literary Past*, 141)

This method of parody is reminiscent of *Eminent Victorians* which also can be understood as a parody of Hazlitt. Strachey chose a cast of distinctly Victorian characters who represent key institutions of Victorian power such as religion, medicine, education, and the military. However, each of his Victorians is famous for his/her reformative or controversial relation to Victorian authority. As Joyce explains:

> The protagonists of *Eminent Victorians* persistently struggle against entrenched authorities, whether in the clergy, the army, government, and sometimes (as with the case of Manning) succeed only in joining their ranks. In the process, they experience — or perhaps exacerbate — an internal split in personality which is either beneficial or detrimental to their efforts, depending in part on whether their self-division is seen as inherent, as might be the orthodox Freudian explanation, or instead as symptomatic of a wider social contradiction. (Joyce, 645)

If we assume Strachey chose his cast of characters as a representation of internal contradictions in the Victorian period, then I would suggest Woolf, like Strachey, extrapolates these social contradictions by satirising Victorian metaphors as contradictions of themselves.

Woolf's representation of Victorian thought and literary practices is part of her dialogic negotiation of tradition. As De Gay explains:

> In satirising the methods of Stephen and Ruskin, she rejected Victorian patriarchal metanarratives which had left out the history of women writers and had attempted to package the past in ways which reinforce patriarchal ideologies. Instead she inclines to a school of critics who sought to tap into the past and release its energies, and who used the strategies of fiction to bring history alive and see it at work in the present. (De Gay, *Literary Past*, 147)

Woolf simplifies and concentrates the many layers of the nineteenth century by having Orlando browse through it. Her metaphors of cultural deterioration and political growth reduce the Victorian age to a parodic essence. As Cuddy-Keane notes:

> Woolf's historical reading was informed by two primary concepts, both of which were at the cutting edge of the "new historicist" thinking of her time: the importance of everyday life and the provisionality of historical metanarratives. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 147)

Woolf's provisional portrait of Victorianism could be described as complex, contradictory, influential but on the whole negative. Yet Woolf engages with the philosophies which shaped the century, although satiric in style, in an intellectually serious way in order to negotiate the terms of emancipation from it. It is a composite portrait of Victorian ideas about periodisation and biography writing. The satiric layering of different styles and ideas, traditional and new, creates an even playing field between literary traditions which enables Woolf to place her novel-biography, as an example of modern fiction, in relation to its literary predecessors and on its own.

Orlando and the Victorian Legacy

Woolf's meta-critique of Victorian literary methods does not stop here. The text criticises and satirises the literary world overtly. Woolf continues her metaphor of Victorian dampness as it invades the literary space:

> And thus — for there was no stopping damp; it gets into the inkpot as it gets into the woodwork — sentences swelled, adjectives multiplied, lyrics became epics, and little trifles that had been essays a column long were now encyclopaedias in ten or twenty volumes. (O, 219)

Woolf evidently echoes Strachey's critique of the "fat volumes" (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 10) which tend to come with Victorian biography writing. But growth of literary production does not equal growth of literary quality and meaning. Orlando, too is affected by this trend and adds a lengthy but ultimately meaningless paragraph to his centuries-long work-in-progress titled the 'The Oak Tree'. Orlando blots out the Victorian section of the poem:

> But here, by an abrupt movement she spilt the ink over the page and blotted it from human sight she hoped for ever. She was all of a quiver, all of a stew. Nothing more repulsive could be imagined than to feel the ink flowing thus in cascades of involuntary inspiration. What had happened to her? Was it the damp, was it Bartholomew, was it Basket, [Orlando's servants] what was it? (O, 228)

Orlando is "inspired" by the Victorian literary spirit but she initially rejects the style inherent to the spirit of the age. As Saunders explains, Woolf's parody of Hazlitt's spirit of the age and Ruskin's storm cloud is intimately tied to her critique of Victorian style:

> What is being parodied here is thus not only the nineteenth century's view of itself (or at least Ruskin's influential view of it), but its way of conceptualizing and articulating that view … there is a serious critique of imperialism as a form of moral deterioration, complicit in the subjection of women; and a serious critique of how such moral aporia seep into the language, fostering euphemism and prolixity. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 449)

By equalizing Victorian ideology with style, Woolf creates a space for the modern biography to distinguish itself. As the story of *Orlando* moves into the twentieth century, Woolf rewrites the dawn of modern fiction as an emancipation from Victorian literature. Hence, Woolf's method draws Victorian ideology on the Bloomsbury battleground of style through parody.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the spirit of the age changes in *Orlando*. She adds the first lines of a new poetry to 'The Oak Tree'. Woolf notably uses a passage from Vita Sackville-West's poem *The Land* (1928) for this paragraph (Sproles, 84). When Orlando finishes his thought, the modern spirit stops her:

> As she wrote she felt some power (remember we are dealing with the most obscure manifestations of the human spirit) reading over her shoulder, and when she had written "Egyptian girls", the power told her to stop. (O, 253)

The stylistic change of shorter, concise writing is synonymous with the modern spirit. As Rose notes, Orlando's transition from the Victorian era into the modern holds a special position in the novel:

> Of all the centuries, the nineteenth is the only one which threatens to break Orlando's spirit (indeed it seems to dampen Woolf's spirit in the very process of imagining it), but even then, by a dextrous compromise with the spirit of the age, she manages to make peace and to bring her poem, at long last, to completion. (Rose, 182)

However, Woolf points at a critical dependence on Victorian literature which needs to be observed. Orlando anxiously proof-reads her poem through the mind of a Victorian critic who, so she imagines, characterises it as "admirable" and "a thought, strong from a lady's pen." Woolf even invokes William Wordsworth to evaluate Orlando's writing: "but Wordsworth, no doubt, sanctions it; but — girls? Are girls necessary? You have a husband at the Cape, you say? Ah, well, that'll do. And so the spirit passed on" (O, 253). Woolf mocks Victorian prudence and gendered critique when Orlando's work receives Wordsworth's reluctant acceptance on the basis of her married status.

However, Orlando's transition into the modern style is not purely satirical. It enables Orlando to make peace with the Victorian age. Woolf imagines this moment as a sort of border-crossing:

> She had just managed, by some dexterous deference to the spirit of the age, by putting on a ring and finding a man on a moor, by loving nature and being no satirist, cynic, or psychologist — any one of which goods would have been discovered at once — to pass its examination successfully. And she heaved a deep sigh of relief, as, indeed, well she might, for the transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age is one of infinite delicacy, and upon a nice arrangement between the two the whole fortune of his works depends. Orlando had so ordered it that she was in an extremely happy position; she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. Now, therefore, she could write and write she did. She wrote. She wrote. She wrote. (O, 253-4)

This is a key statement of Woolf's literary negotiation of the Victorian legacy. Woolf mocks the rigidity of Victorian critique as an "examination". Critical success depends on an act of deference; a submission to the spirit of the age. In contrast, Woolf references unacceptable types of writers such as the "satirist, cynic, or psychologist". This constitutes a reference to her model of modern canonicity in 'Phases of Fiction' which she wrote parallel to the novel. However, Woolf reconstitutes Orlando as a poet. Froula reads the resolution of Orlando's transition from the Victorian to an uncertain modern style as representative of Woolf's image of the modern as a pursuit rife with possibilities:

> As Orlando evolves over centuries from callow scribbler to renowned English poet, s/he parodies and transcends the contingencies of gender while figuring the quest to capture truth, essence, life, body in words as (seriously enough) a wild goose chase. (Froula, 176)

The modern style of Orlando has found a way to integrate and balance the spirit of the age with her individual expression. She is both, "of it, yet herself". If we read Orlando's stylistic transition as a meta-commentary for Woolf's artistic endeavour, then she sketches out the means necessary for the emancipation of modern fiction. Woolf

recognises that she does not need to fight Victorianism and that she has firm roots in it. Instead, modern fiction can establish a balanced relationship between the Victorian legacy and find an original mode of expression.

The Biographer-Narrator as Composite Portrait

The biographer-narrator in *Orlando* constitutes a central element in Woolf's re-negotiation of literary history. He narrates Orlando's life from inside the respective period of the narration which sets the scene of the novel's historiographic journey from the 1500s to 1928. As De Gay, explains:

> On the surface, *Orlando* is organised along the lines of clearly demarcated literary periods — the Renaissance, the Restoration, the Enlightenment, the Romantic era, the Victorian period and the present — but these categories become unstable for they are frequently treated ironically. Woolf's narrator attempts at several points to characterise the literature of a particular period, but the method is rendered ridiculous by the sheer excess of the connections made. (De Gay, 'Feminist', 63)

As Orlando adapts to the customs of different centuries, the biographer-narrator adapts different styles of biography which renders him a somewhat paradox or inconsistent voice. As Sproles describes it:

> We know nothing of the Biographer beyond his profession, although when referring to himself, he uses the Royal "we," and all other biographers are referred to as "he." His intrusive presence deliberately complicates the narrative as he both exposes, hides, hints at what has been hidden, and undermines the hiding. (Sproles, 76)

Woolf's imagined biographer reflects the great biographical debate as understood by Strachey and Woolf. This is indicated in his frequent meta-commentary about the craft

of biography writing in which he discusses the duties and limitations of the biographer. This narrative strategy constitutes another form of Woolf's parodic layering of literary history; it is a composite portrait of the English biography tradition.

For instance, the biographer re-enacts different paradigms of the genre, from the "scientific" approach *à la* Bury, the biography as moral and national literature as promoted by Trevelyan and the New Biography as developed by Strachey and Nicolson. For instance, in the 1500s the biographer shows himself censorious and keen on presenting Orlando in a positive light: With regard to Orlando's look "we have to admit a thousand disagreeables which it is the aim of every good biographer to ignore" (O, 15). With regard to Orlando's behaviour, he is apologetical: "It was Orlando's fault perhaps; yet, after all, are we to blame Orlando? The age was the Elizabethan; their morals were not ours; nor their poets; nor their climate; nor their vegetables even" (O, 26). In contrast, in the Restoration period the biographer redefines his duties along the lines of source-based, factual biography. The absence of documents about Orlando's life in this period poses a major problem for the biographer-narrator:

> The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando's life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; … But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it; whole religious systems founded upon the signification of it. Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may. (O, 63)

Then again, as Orlando becomes a woman at the dawn of the Enlightenment period, the biographer-narrator alters his philosophy once more. Instead of viewing biography

as the tenacious pursuit of truth, he abandons the concept of truth as a whole and turns towards art as the great interpreter of facts like Strachey's and Trevelyan's argument:

> To give a truthful account of London society at that or indeed any other time, is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian. Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it — the poets and the novelists — can be trusted to do it, for this is one of the cases where the truth does not exist. Nothing exists. The whole thing is a miasma — a mirage. (O, 184)

As Orlando moves into the Victorian period, we see the "Great Men" approach as he redefines the biography subject as the sum of his actions:

> In short, every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written in large in his works, yet we require critics to explain the one and biographers to expound the other. (O, 200)

By assuming and satirising different types of biographers, Woolf negotiates a literary lineage which can integrate the New Biography as envisioned by her. This is most prominent in her depiction of the Victorian period. The biographer-narrator assumes a version of Leslie Stephen's understanding of the century, as the following excerpt shows:

> For it is probable that the human spirit has its place in time assigned to it; some are born of this age, some of that; and now that Orlando was grown a woman, a year or two past thirty indeed, the lines of her character were fixed, and to bend them the wrong way was intolerable. (O, 234-5)

Like Stephen, the biographer of Orlando adheres to the gendered ideology of the spirit of the age which understands identity as based on certain social and historical relations.

However, he struggles to reconcile this Victorian mode of biography writing which builds on these preconceived notions about character with Orlando's timeless and genderless, ever-changing life. He notably holds the spirit of the age to be "probable" which signifies a degree of emerging doubt. Woolf challenges the validity of the Victorian mode of periodisation and canonisation by confronting the Victorian biographer, arguably her fictionalised father, with the paradox of an age-less character. The existence of Orlando challenges the definition of a person's identity as tied to a set of values and trends which "agitated the social organism." He/she does not belong to any one gender, class, or period. Orlando adapts to changing social norms but he/she is not defined by them.

By plucking at the seams of these Victorian ideas, Woolf deconstructs the Victorian self-understanding of biography writing. As Saunders explains:

> She is developing the turn-of-the-century awareness that the conventions of biography (like history) are beginning to seem absurd: that as soon as they begin to become visible as conventions, they can no longer do their work of transparently creating the impression of authority and objectivity. That argument was perhaps in danger of posing 'biography' as a monolithic, timeless entity. Whereas of course biography has a history. It responds to other literary developments. This is one of the stories *Orlando* tells. It had also been told, in the previous year, by Vita's husband Harold Nicolson, in his book *The Development of English Biography*. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 450)

The biographer-narrator, arguably Woolf's proxy-father in this instance, is confronted with the limitations and injustices of the "Great Men" paradigm. Woolf leads the Victorian notion of biography *ad absurdum* by turning the priorities of the biographer into his own disabling factors. For instance, Woolf drives him to the edge of desperation when Orlando does not do anything except sit and think for an entire year:

> This method of writing biography, though it has its merits, is a little bare, perhaps, and the reader, if we go on with it, may complain that he could recite the calendar for himself and so save his pocket whatever sum the Hogarth Press may think proper to charge for this book. But what can the biographer do when his subject has put him in the predicament into which Orlando has now put us? Life, it has been agreed by everyone whose opinion is worth consulting, is the only fit subject for novelist or biographer; life, the same authorities have decided, has nothing whatever to do with sitting still in a chair and thinking. Thought and life are as the poles asunder … If only subjects, we might complain (for our patience is wearing thin), had more consideration for their biographers! (O, 255)

The biographer-narrator counts the months as he is confronted with the Victorian paradigm that biographies consist of actions and speech. As Briggs notes, this is part of Woolf's playful contrasting of biography styles:

> *Orlando* makes delighted and self-mocking play with the various forms of the unspeakable or the unspoken … opening up the gap between writer and reader, drawing our attention to the culturally unspeakable, and representing interiority. This novel simultaneously celebrates "High battlements of thought" while ironically scolding Orlando for her thoughtlessness in sitting down to write, and thus depriving her biographer of the action necessary for any account of her activities. (Briggs, 170)

As we have seen in Woolf's critical essays, for her, the New Biography reconstituted "personality" to the subject which entailed internal lives, emotion and thought. Woolf made this point in 'The New Biography' when she writes: "The uneventful lives of poets and painters were written out as lengthily as the lives of soldiers and statesmen" (NB, 151). Orlando acts out her argument in order to prove the absurdity of its Victorian antithesis.

Confronted with the shortcomings of the Victorian method, the biographer changes into the modern style along with Orlando. The biographer-narrator invokes a version of Strachey's model to describe it:

> And now it is clear that there are only two ways of coming to a conclusion upon Victorian literature — one is to write it out in sixty volumes octavo, the other is to squeeze it into six lines of the length of this one. Of the two courses, economy, since time runs short, leads us to choose the second; and so we proceed. (O, 277)

Orlando's biographer constitutes a composite portrait of the English biography tradition. By exposing the limitations of each period of the genre, Woolf draws attention to the inherent limitations of genre boundaries and expectations. (*Orlando* as a novel-biography itself somewhat constitutes the ultimate argument in this debate.) It is noteworthy that her parody of changing styles does not single out Victorian biography writing as she did with Victorian literary criticism. Orlando's biographer-narrator is a particularly poignant example of what Davison identifies as a core-approach of the modernist parody:

> The indeterminacy arising from parody's ironic fusion of irreconcilable perspectives provided a language and structure that could give expression to and even transcend the modernists' paradoxical situation in history. … In parody's inbuilt insistence that literature is historicized language in unstable play before it is representation, modernist writers found a ready means to counter naïve mimesis and even confront the crisis in aesthetic representation that motivated their break with established artistic conventions. (Davison, 3)

Woolf includes the New Biography in her parodic panorama of styles. Even though the biographer-narrator transitions from Stephen to Strachey as a model, Woolf continues to challenge even this iteration of the English biography. The climactic explosion of Orlando's infinite selves challenges the mode of "fermentation" and essentialising of

the New Biography. Thus, Woolf renegotiates a smooth lineage of literary styles which accepts and mocks nineteenth century styles and the New Biography alike.

Orlando as Composite Portrait

I want to turn to the character of Orlando and how he relates to Woolf's layered composition next. The significance of Orlando's selves has been recognised by a number of critics. For instance, as one of the first detailed studies of the novel, Beach concludes Orlando's epiphany as a central message:

> The point of the book seems to be that there is more than one person in each body, that each individual has, at least potentially, many selves, … Orlando, then is not a figure drawn from "life". He is an image, … a truth of human nature which, the author thinks, can be most conveniently and amusingly rendered in this way. (Beach, 491-2)

In her biography of Woolf, Rose attributes the complexity of Orlando to Woolf's feminist gender critique as part of its satirical messaging. In her opinion Orlando "parodies also unity of identity and unambiguous gender" (Rose, 179). However, if we read the self-aware layering of Orlando's selves as part of Woolf's narrative strategies in order to critique modes of biography writing, then Orlando's reconstitution out of his/her many selves satirises the limits of knowledge about the biography subject. As Banfield argues: "The old biography has the 'I''s false completeness" (Banfield, 335). Instead, Orlando's "plurality is contradictory beliefs warring within a single individual. The 'true self' has no singleness of purpose" (Banfield, 202). Woolf ends her novel with a self-actualising epiphany of Orlando, not unlike, yet different to, her previous novels *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

In order to unfold the design of Orlando's climax as an expression of Woolf's metaphorical outgrowing of her own methods, I will trace Orlando's development through two externalised frames which are frequently read as somewhat separate from Orlando's climactic exploration of his/her selves: Orlando's house and his/her poem 'The Oak Tree'. These two recurring motifs reflect how Woolf integrates and advances methods pioneered in *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway*. For instance, Woolf once more develops her spatial themes and the use of literary architecture. Orlando's life stands in relation to the house. While Orlando leaves and returns at pivotal moments, the house's interiors change when the times change, its contents reflect Orlando's pedigree and mental state. In this way, Orlando's rooms frame and build towards the character, as do Jacob's rooms. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the design of *Mrs Dalloway* works Clarissa's retreats to her private room into rhythmic patterns in order to observe and renew.

Another hallmark of Woolf's style is the playful self-consciousness of literary forms. Her novels reference, imitate, parallel, contrast and parody a wide variety of literary devices, styles, tropes, and traditions. Orlando's poem the 'The Oak Tree', as a consistent companion in Orlando's journey through the centuries, constitutes an externalised record of his development as a poet. Its many evolutions and revisions reflect the effects of changing styles and criticisms. Woolf uses the poem and the house as indicators of Orlando's development and lays both to rest in conspicuously unceremonious ways. As Orlando consciously leaves these character defining entities behind, Woolf acts out her emancipation from the limitations of genre and literary tradition.

Orlando's House

Orlando's family estate constitutes a central site throughout the novel. It is the physical manifestation of Orlando's pedigree and, as a historic sight, a symbol of continuity of English history. The estate is closely inspired by Knole House. Woolf asked Vita Sackville-West for a copy of her *Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922) as a source for *Orlando* (Sproles, 71). This shows in a myriad of minor and major details which Woolf transferred from Vita's book to Orlando's estate from names of servants and pets to actual events. Sproles reads Woolf's and Vita's renderings of the house as a tandem expression of their (mutual) desires:

> *Knole and the Sackvilles* is the biography of a house that has the presence of a person, and Sackville-West's desire for it is denied and rediscovered in unconventional, even subversive, practices. When she writes her history of the house, she rewrites the line of succession to conclude with herself as Knole's rightful heir[18]. (Re)writing history is another way to fulfil desire. (Sproles, 70-1)

For Woolf the house constitutes a tangible link not only to Vita but English history. As De Gay notes:

> Woolf's conception of the past — and of the Renaissance in particular — was similarly subjective and, in the case of *Orlando*, rooted in a sense of place. She conceived the central, historical idea for the novel whilst visiting her lover Vita Sackville-West at her ancestral home of Knole in Kent. (De Gay, 'Historiography', 70)

True to Woolf's theme of strong architecture-character connections, Woolf's fictionalised Knole House records and reflects Orlando's relationship to his ancestry and his past selves as it builds up to the climax of the novel.

[18] A lawsuit about the rightful inheritance of Knole one generation prior was won by Vita's uncle which prohibited Vita to inherit the house ('History of Knole'). Like Vita, Woolf rewrites the lawsuit in favour of Vita.

For instance, Orlando is aware of the social expectation of continuing the family presence on the estate. In the first pages of the novel' Woolf establishes that Orlando derives from an English dynasty of nobles. Orlando is symbolically baptised under the light of the family crest which is cast through one of the windows of the house:

> Were not the bars of darkness in the room, and the yellow pools which chequered the floor, made by the sun falling through the stained glass of a vast coat of arms in the window? Orlando stood now in the midst of the yellow body of an heraldic leopard. When he put his hand on the window-sill to push the window open, it was instantly coloured red, blue, and yellow like a butterfly's wing. Thus, those who like symbols, and have a turn for the deciphering of them, might observe that though the shapely legs, the handsome body, and the well-set shoulders were all of them decorated with various tints of heraldic light, Orlando's face, as he threw the window open, was lit solely by the sun itself. A more candid, sullen face it would be impossible to find. (O, 14)

Windows constitute an important literary device for Woolf's modern fiction. For instance, windows frequently frame characters like Jacob who appears to depend on them. As we have seen in the previous chapter, *Mrs Dalloway* develops this concept with regard to the connecting qualities of windows. The novel begins with Clarissa opening the window which symbolically opens a window into the past as a rendition of Woolf's tunnelling process. This scene in *Orlando* operates in a similar way. Woolf establishes the bond between Orlando and his house which is marked by the significance of his ancestry.

As with Woolf's use of rooms in previous novels, Woolf develops this character-room connection over the course of *Orlando*. Orlando's initial set of values are a product of his socialisation in this home since birth. As Little explains:

> Orlando's ancestral home perhaps symbolizes these prerational attachments, but even this home, this symbolic place of comfort, changes size and décor with

> each era and becomes emblematic of Orlando's capacity for change even at a basic level, at the level of what "home" means, of what psychological comfort and security mean. (Little, 71)

For instance, after Orlando awakes from one of his long trances of melancholy which let him sleep for weeks or longer, he isolates himself in the house. We learn that "it appeared as if to be alone in the great house of his fathers suited his temper. Solitude was his choice" (O, 66). We then learn that the servants clean and maintain the empty rooms. They observe Orlando roaming the house:

> as they sat over their cakes and ale, a light passing along the galleries, through the banqueting-halls, up the staircase, into the bedrooms, and knew that their master was perambulating the house alone. (O, 66)

Just as Clarissa Dalloway's retreats to her private room as a mode of self-contemplation, Orlando repeatedly makes these tours through the house.

When Orlando falls in love with the Archduchess Harriet Griselda, he experiences his erotic awakening which he perceives as the invasion of an impure "vulture" into his mental space. This invasion is mirrored in his private rooms:

> Orlando was haunted every day and night by phantoms of the foulest kind [erotic desire]. Vainly, it seemed, had he furnished his house with silver and hung the walls with arras, when at any moment a dung-bedraggled fowl could settle upon his writing table. There she was, flopping about among the chairs; he saw her waddling ungracefully across the galleries. Now, she perched, top heavy upon a fire screen. When he chased her out, back she came and pecked at the glass till it broke it. Thus realizing that his home was uninhabitable, and that steps must be taken to end the matter instantly, he did what any other young man would have done in his place, and asked King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople. (O, 113)

Orlando is overwhelmed by the experience. The shameful bird runs through the galleries which, as we will see shortly, constitutes a significant, recurring area in the

house. As his mental space is compromised by invasive erotic thoughts, his house becomes “uninhabitable” and Orlando decides to flee. The scene forebodes the necessity for a balance of Orlando’s self-image as reflected in his rooms.

We have seen the likeness of mental space to institutionalised architecture In *Jacob’s Room.* Woolf likens the mental space of one of the Cambridge dons to the architectures of the university. In *Orlando*, Woolf also describes Orlando’s interior in spatial terms. For instance, when Orlando awakes from his trance after the Great Frost of 1608-9 “some change … must have taken place in the chambers of his brain” (O, 64). When Orlando (now a woman) is deserted by his first erotic love interest, Sasha, Orlando falls into despair. However, the experience opens Orlando up to explore new sides of herself. Woolf describes Orlando’s experience: “Slowly there had opened within her something intricate and many-chambered, which one must take a torch to explore, in prose not verse” (O, 168). All this indicates that Woolf’s conceptualising of her writing and thinking as literary architectures is consistent from her first concept in *Jacob’s Room* up to *Orlando*.

These interconnections of Orlando’s mental and physical spaces also carry into her meta-critique of the Victorian era. As I have shown above, Victorianism poses a challenge to Orlando’s social and literary development. This is represented spatially as well. The sheer volume of Victorian literature clogs his house:

> Her discreet eighteenth-century hall … was now completely littered with parcels. While she had been sitting in Hyde Park the bookseller had delivered her order, and the house was crammed — there were parcels slipping down the staircase — with the whole of Victorian literature done up in grey paper and neatly tied with string. (O, 276)

Orlando's house helps to navigate his/her journey through the ages. It records personal development and outside intrusions. Orlando's many selves are shaped by and shaping of the house's interior. It stands to reason that Orlando's selves need to have room. When Orlando's selves begin to burst into her consciousness, she drives home and makes one last tour through the house.

Woolf represents Orlando's visit as a funeral ceremony; it is the resolution of the character-room bond. Orlando comes full-circle when she returns to the sight of the initial baptism at the heraldic window:

> Though she could hardly fancy it, the body of the heraldic leopard would be making yellow pools on the floor the day they lowered her to lie among her ancestors. She, who believed in no immortality, could not help feeling that her soul would come and go forever with the reds on the panels and the greens on the sofa. (O, 302)

In other words, Orlando's spirit will merge with the house, she will become part of the "heraldic light" as cast through the window into the house. The scene marks a sort of acceptance of Orlando's bond with his ancestry as permanent. Orlando proceeds to the galleries where the many moments of her past explode into her consciousness. Woolf describes the gallery:

> The gallery stretched far away to a point where the light almost failed. It was a tunnel bored deep into the past. As her eyes peered down it, she could see people laughing and talking; the great men she had known; Dryden, Swift, and Pope; and statesmen in colloquy; and lovers dallying in the window-seats; (O, 304)

Orlando's gallery constitutes a tunnel to the people she met over the course of her life. As with *Mrs Dalloway*, there is a tunnel which signifies a mental connection to the minds of the past.

However, instead of rectifying the past in the present and initiating a rebirth, Orlando achieves his emancipation by turning the house into a museum. Orlando goes to the Ambassador's bedroom and we learn that: "No Ambassador would ever sleep there again." (O, 303) Orlando then moves to the bedroom where once King James had slept and "she bounced up and down upon his bed (but no King would ever sleep there again)" (O, 303). The banquet table in the great hall is now fenced off by a rope, and throughout the house "were little lavender bags to keep the moth out and printed notices, 'Please do not touch', which, though she had put them there herself, seemed to rebuke her" (O, 303-4). Woolf metaphorically lays the influence and legacy as represented by the house on Orlando to rest: "The house was no longer hers entirely, she sighed. It belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living" (O, 304). In other words, Orlando is projected to become an equal and further entry in the lineage of his family. She will become part of the house's story which preserves the lineage of English history. De Gay interprets the preservation of the house as a mode of keeping the past accessible against Victorian critical authority:

> Woolf's attitude towards Victorian periodisation can thus be seen as profoundly ambivalent. Although she used it as a method of distancing herself from the Victorians, she also distrusted the way in which their formulations of history threatened to make the past inaccessible to later generations. The latter impulse can be seen in the closing section of the novel where Woolf attacks history as a discourse that kills off the past. (De Gay, *Literary Past*, 142)

However, considering Woolf's architectural themes, Orlando's treatment of the house also represents a monumental development for her modern fiction. The house is turned over to the public as a museum. It can be visited; it is no longer in the private hands of a noble family. And, most importantly, although Orlando gave birth to a boy (O, 282), her child will grow up differently; independent from the house. Woolf enacts

a similar ceremony for Orlando's literary journey as a poet and critic of changing styles as represented in her poem 'The Oak Tree'.

Orlando's Literary Emancipation

Orlando's poem 'The Oak Tree' contains several real-life writers. As Hoffman notes, it comprises the Sackville literary tradition from poet and dramatist Thomas Sackville (1536-1608) to Vita Sackville-West: The poem "is intended as a symbolic representation of the continuity of the poetic imagination in Orlando which persists through the ages, first in the male line and then in the female line of the Sackville family" (Hoffmann, 'Fact and Fantasy', 441). However, Woolf also incorporates brief paragraphs from other writers such as Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838) whose 'Lines of Life' (1829) stands for Orlando's first lines written in the nineteenth century style. Orlando "blotted it from human sight she hoped for ever" (O, 228). Hence, 'The Oak Tree' stands for Orlando's journey as a poet but also as a palimpsest of the English literary tradition. De Gay notes that the poem can be read as a composite of Woolf's and Vita's literary development:

> The allusion suggests that Sackville-West herself might represent an accumulation of literary history, just as she represented an accumulation of family history. Yet Woolf can also be seen to identify herself with Orlando as a writer, for the progress of 'The Oak Tree' runs in parallel with that of the novel: this is comparable to Woolf's identification of herself with Lily Briscoe, Orlando's poem, 'The Oak Tree', epitomises the element of continuity in literary history, for she continues to work on it over the 350 years scanned by the novel. (De Gay, *Literary Past*, 155-6)

If we understand the poem as a layered representation of English literary history, as a marker of the influence of history, then it is significant that Orlando as its author and bearer decides to end the poem.

Orlando’s development as a poet is turbulent. From a young age, Orlando wants to be a famous poet. But when his heart is broken and his literary work is slandered by literary critic Nicholas Greene, Orlando forsakes all writing: “Love and ambition, women and poets were all equally vain. Literature was a farce” (O, 93). But Orlando cannot deny his urge to write and comes to terms with the vanity behind his literary ambitions. He comes to realise that the pursuit of literary fame is ”a braided coat which hampers the limbs; a jacket of silver which curbs the heart; a painted shield which covers a scarecrow” (O, 100). Instead, Orlando vows to “seek the truth and speak it” (O, 100). Woolf uses Orlando’s ensuing centuries-long struggle with style and meaning as a meta-critique on literary criticism.

As the centuries unfold, Orlando recognises the problem of literary style and criticism in the face of changing times. As Froula notes: “In pursuit of poetry, Orlando encounters gossiping, avaricious, social-climbing poets from Nick Greene to Alexander Pope, who, whatever their gifts, talk less of poetry than worldly *gloire*” (Froula, 181). When Orlando adds to ‘The Oak Tree’ in a new era, he revises his earlier work in order to adjust the style. The process deletes rather than improves his poem:

> He would write till midnight chimed and long after. But as he scratched out as many lines as he wrote in, the sum of them was often, at the end of the year, rather less than at the beginning, and it looked as if in the process of writing the poem would be completely unwritten. For it is for the historian of letters to remark that he had changed his style amazingly. (O, 108)

When Orlando, now a woman, roams Turkey with the Gypsies, she lacks paper and ink so she adds to the manuscript by writing between the lines with wine and berry juice. By the nineteenth century, the poem is reduced to:

> a roll of paper, sea-stained, blood-stained, travel-stained — the manuscript of her poem, 'The Oak Tree'. She had carried this about with her for so many years now, and in such a hazardous circumstances, that many of the pages were stained, some were torn, while the straits she had been in for writing paper when with the gipsies, had forced her to overscore the margins and cross the lines till the manuscript looked like a piece of darning most consciously carried out. She turned back to the first page and read the date, 1569, written in her own boyish hand. She had been working at it for close on three hundred years now. It was time to make an end. (O, 226)

Woolf makes an important analogy here. Orlando's revisions and constant additions render 'The Oak Tree' a palimpsest of literary styles which begins to disintegrate and stain the more Orlando works on it. If we consider the poem a representation of changing literary periods and the revisionist influence of literary criticism as a result of changing styles and values, then Orlando needs to finish his work in order to escape the detrimental effects of his/her following literary traditions. Orlando ends his/her concern with changing styles which metaphorically liberates Woolf's "utopian avatar of the poet" (Froula, 181) from the literary lineage which has become a burden.

However, Orlando finishes the poem which paradoxically submits the poem to contemporary literary criticism. Orlando meets Sir Nicholas Greene again, now a knighted literary critic who also aged at a fantastical rate. Greene reviews contemporary literature in the exact way he did 300 years ago. He praises the past and slanders the contemporary. However, when he criticises the Elizabethans and praises Greek antiquity in the late 1500s, he now praises the Elizabethans and criticises the Victorians. Woolf's parody of the eternal literary critic reflects her criticism

of the Edwardian critic in ‘How it Strikes a Contemporary’ who is “for ever lecturing the young and celebrating the dead” (HC, 295). Although Orlando presents him basically the same poem as 300 years ago, this time, Greene accepts Orlando’s poem:

> It reminded him, he said as he turned over the pages, of Addison’s Cato. It compared favourably with Thomson’s Seasons. There was no trace in it, he was thankful to say, of the modern spirit. It was composed with a regard to truth, to nature, to the dictates of the human heart, which was rare indeed, in these days of unscrupulous eccentricity. It must, of course, be published instantly. (O, 267)

Woolf arguably points at her ideal for modern fiction with ‘The Oak Tree’. Although it is essentially an anthology of different styles, continually revised under the latest literary values, it is classified by Greene as comparable to old masters and not at all in “the modern spirit”. As Saunders notes:

> We have seen how *Orlando*, … proceeds by parody. Style thus becomes as unstable as the self through time. One reason for this is Woolf’s sense that to write is to confront a dissolution of the self when faced with the demands of great writers from the past: ‘They made one feel, she continued, that one must always, always write like somebody else.’ *Orlando*’s parody turns sounding like someone else into high creativity and individuality. But it also enables Woolf to produce something greater than a self-satisfied mockery of Victorianism. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 474)

It constitutes an original style which defies canonical pressure despite its integration of canonical texts. Woolf achieves this delicate emancipation, in part, through parody of the literary critic who continually slanders the modern but after a few generations, praises it once it has become canonised. Orlando’s poem becomes commercially successful and wins a prize just as Vita Sackville-West’s *The Land* won the Hawthornden Prize in 1927 (De Gay, *Literary Past*, 155). However, Orlando is no longer interested in literary fame and laughs at the success.

Instead, Orlando, like Woolf, realises that, just like she had metaphorically outgrown the need for the many rooms of her house, she also has outgrown the need for canonisation. Orlando decides to lay her poem to rest. As Whittemore explains:

> Thus Orlando arrived in the twentieth century as a human chowder of many characters and ages, but there at last discovered herself and became one person, one whole. She thereupon went out under the heavens and flung herself on the ground beside 'The Oak Tree' that had been her refuge since 1588, What to do next? She decided to bury her epic then and there. (Whittemore, 69)

Woolf metaphorically crosses the narrow bridge between art and life, between historical fact and fiction: Orlando returns to the actual oak tree on her estate[19] to which Orlando's heart has been tied since childhood (O, 19). Orlando originally intends a burial of 'The Oak Tree*'* under the oak tree but arrives at a different conclusion:

> "I should have brought a trowel," she reflected. The earth was so shallow over the roots that it seemed doubtful if she could do as she meant and bury the book here. Besides, the dogs would dig it up. No luck ever attends these symbolical celebrations, she thought. Perhaps it would be as well then to do without them. She had a little speech on the tip of her tongue which she meant to speak over the book as she buried it. (It was a copy of the first edition, signed by author and artist.) "I bury this as a tribute," she was going to have said, "a return to the land of what the land has given me," but Lord! Once one began mouthing words aloud, how silly they sounded! (O, 309)

'The Oak Tree' as a literary representation of Orlando's journey is reconciled with "the oak tree", a representation of the continuity of the family. However, Orlando chooses not to engage with the ceremonial burial. Instead, Orlando chooses to emancipate

[19]The tree has a real-life counter-part at Knole House under which shade Vita Sackville-West used to write. (O, 319)

himself as a poet. Froula reads this moment as Woolf's metaphorical acceptance of the limitations of fiction as a mode of capturing reality fully:

> In fact, 'The Oak Tree', that slender manuscript that gets slenderer the longer Orlando works on it, rewrites Milton's Eden as a quest for "Life" (Vita) that never finds its goal, or rather, arrives, after centuries of searching, at the discovery that life (Latin: vita) has and can have no linguistic equivalent. (Froula, 187)

Instead of burying the poem, Orlando admires the beauty of the land and recognises that reality is much more meaningful than the ritual: "So she let her book lie unburied and dishevelled on the ground, and watched the vast view, varied like an ocean floor this evening with the sun lightening it and the shadows darkening it" (O, 311). The landscape of Turkey bursts into his consciousness and he is reverted to the Gypsies. Orlando hears their mockery of his life as a noble: "What is your antiquity and your race, and your possessions compared with this? What do you need with four hundred bedrooms and silver lids on all your dishes, and housemaids dusting?" (O, 311) Woolf mocks the self-importance of glorified lineages and traditions. Orlando loses interest in the ceremonious, self-inscribed importance of fiction in relation to its predecessors and comes to realise the beauty of life in the present. Several other scenes emerge in Orlando's mind and she experiences an epiphany: "'Ecstasy!' She cried, 'ecstasy!'" (O, 312)

This layered built-up to Orlando's revelation contains several cues to its meaning. For instance, as Orlando drives in her car at the end of the novel, more and more selves burst into her mind, bringing her to the edge of insanity. Orlando desires to become one self which inhabits and controls all the other selves:

> There was a new one [self] at every corner — as happens when, for some unaccountable reason, the conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire to be nothing but one self. This is what some people call the

> true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all. Orlando was certainly seeking this self as the reader can judge from overhearing her talk as she drove. (O, 295-6)

Woolf arguably describes the need for a stable, dominant character which balances the infinite selves in a presentable form. If we accept this scene as a theoretical meta-discussion about the biography subject, then, there is evidence that Woolf envisioned the climax as an attempt to capturing a perceived modern complexity. For instance, in 'The Art of Biography' Woolf describes the modern biographer's challenge to represent his/her subject in the face of a modern multiplicity:

> since we live in an age when a thousand cameras are pointed, by newspapers, letters, and diaries, at every character from every angle, he must be prepared to admit contradictory versions of the same face. Biography will enlarge its scope by hanging up looking glasses at odd corners. And yet from all this diversity it will bring out, not a riot of confusion, but a richer unity. (AB, 167)

In some ways, it is an idea which precedes Woolf's engagement with the biography genre since we see a sketch of Jacob emerge out of his relations to a vast cast of characters and Clarissa Dalloway puts herself together from versions of herself in the past and present and through different mirror-images.

Through Orlando's explosion into his/her many selves, Woolf leads the, now modern, biographer to the limits of his capabilities. She parodies the New Biography by confronting a fictionalised Strachey with the overwhelming potential of character:

> Then she called hesitatingly, as if the person she wanted might not be there, "Orlando?" For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not — Heaven help us — all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit? … So that it is the most usual thing in the world for a person to call, directly they are

> alone, Orlando? (if that is one's name) meaning by that, Come, come! I'm sick to the death of this particular self. I want another. Hence, the astonishing changes we see in our friends. (O, 293-4)

When the desired self does not come, Orlando begins to call upon a long list of selves derived from different scenes in the book. For instance, Orlando calls upon his/her boy-self, his/her adolescent self, his/her Ambassador self. As Orlando grasps the limitless number of selves contained within his/her character, the biographer-narrator recognises his own limitations to narrate the experience:

> For she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand. Choosing then, only those selves we have found room for [followed by a list of selves]. (O, 294-5)

The biographer-narrator acknowledges the limitations of his biography method. Woolf conceptualises the meta-discussion about the infinite complexity of character, Orlando's selves, in contrast to the necessity of a narrative frame; in this case, the representation of "six or seven selves". Orlando takes on a form which is too complex to be contained by any, and all, of the types of biographers which the novel parodies. This is where Woolf takes full advantage of the mock-biography form. As Saunders points out, the fantastical life of Orlando allows for a unique character form:

> Galtonian composite portraiture in the visual arts implies a timeless universality. But *Orlando* is a composite of snapshots taken through history; a composite in which the differences between times does matter. This produces a paradoxical result. While Orlando has an identifiable character throughout the narrative, the contrasts between different periods militates against both the sense of his individuality and of her universality. Thus the effect of the composite portrait in Orlando is not to fuse many individuals into a single image, but to take a single character and explore its multiplicity. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 473)

Thus, if we consider Orlando as a composite portrait of these internal and external selves, the novel's climax brings about the emancipation of Woolf's modern character by forging Orlando's selves into both a timeless and temporal being. As Whittemore argues, the self-realisation of both, Orlando and the biographer-narrator constitutes Woolf's liberating triumph over the boundaries of the genre:

> Orlando managed to do with herself what the editor of the DNB had not been able to do with himself. She had managed to move beyond the chronological and the factual in her understanding of herself and others. … So Orlando the artist finally triumphed over father the dictionary man. (Whittemore, 69)

This marks the conclusion of Orlando's character. She has successfully left her rooms, her poem and the various literary limitations on her character behind. Through a complex combination of modernist parody, biography writing and methods which she explored in previous novels, the reconstitution of Orlando enables the novel to place itself as a legitimate, original entry in the history of the English novel and as a milestone in Woolf's pursuit of a modern fiction.

Conclusion

After finishing *Orlando*, Woolf recognised her book as a step outside the bounds of the novel: “I’m glad to be quit this time of writing ‘a novel’; & hope never to be accused of it again” (*Diary* 3, 185). In pursuing a modern fiction which is marked by an interest in the defining features of literary forms, alternative narrative styles, and the rules of genre, Woolf arrived at the conclusion that the “novel” as a genre was insufficient to accurately describe the modernist engagement with fiction writing. The notion that her decade-long work on a modern literature eventually leads beyond established modes of categorisation is consistent with the pursuit of her fellow modernists of the 1910s and 1920s.

For instance, as Saunders describes, the great innovators of early twentieth century poetry, such as Eliot, Pound, and Ford, felt “that the poetic language and conventions of the nineteenth century were moribund and had to be reinvented” (Saunders, ‘Close Reading‘, 24). For Ford, the novel offers a model for a clearer language from which verse can reconstitute itself. In *Thus to Revisit* (1921) Ford (then using the name Ford Madox Hueffer) took an inventory of modernist progress of the 1910s and early 1920s and arrived at the conclusion that “verse must be at least as well written as prose if it is to be poetry. Its sentences must be as well constructed; its thoughts as close; its language as nervous” (Hueffer, 201). Ford recognises the potential of a new language to revive verse from, what he perceived as, the “intolerably long, backboneless,” and moralising poetry of the Victorians (Hueffer, 201).

Eliot formulates a similar theory when he pronounces that the novel genre, as it was conceived in its nineteenth-century form, has concluded with Flaubert and

James. In his famous review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth' (1923), Eliot calls the "novel" obsolete: "Mr Joyce has written one novel — the *Portrait*; Mr Wyndham Lewis has written one novel — *Tarr*. I do not suppose that either of them will ever write another 'novel'" (Eliot, 482). Eliot establishes this claim by reframing the nineteenth century novel form as a provisional mode of fiction which, until the advent of literary modernism, was held in place by its insistence on rigid rules of form:

> If it is not a novel [*Ulysses*], that is simply because the novel is a form which will no longer serve; it is because the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need for something stricter. (Eliot, 482-3)

Likewise, Woolf initially understands the Victorian / Edwardian novel as an obstacle to overcome. Throughout her career, Woolf was primarily interested in the novel's potential to record the complexity of the modern individual.

In 1927, parallel to the writing of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf describes the benefits of the novel for her life writing:

> It will take the mould of that queer conglomeration of incongruous things — the modern mind. Therefore it will clasp to its breast the precious prerogatives of the democratic art of prose; its freedom, its fearlessness, its flexibility. For prose is so humble that it can go anywhere; no place is too low, too sordid, or too mean for it to enter. (NBA, 226)

Two years later, after the publication of *Orlando*, Woolf observes modernist literature as outgrowing the (now) limiting umbrella term of the "novel":

> "The novel" as we still call it with such parsimony of language, is clearly splitting apart into books which have nothing in common but this one inadequate title. (PF, 144)

As this thesis has shown, this exponential growth of modern fiction up to the publication of *Orlando* underwent several distinct innovations which differentiate Woolf's aesthetic development from comparable modernist experimentalists.

For one, Woolf's initial impulse on how to conceptualise and innovate pre-existing structures in literature derived from her childhood experiences. As we have seen in the introductory chapter, Woolf's modernist project took shape, in part, through her experience of and "conspiracy" against an oppressive late-Victorian domesticity. The architectural dimensions of this patriarchal mindset came to represent the initial model against which Woolf formulated the need for a new fiction. Woolf's avant-garde spirit reflects the desire for change but also an ambiguous grounding in the past. As Cuddy-Keane notes:

> Just as Woolf could reject the hierarchical principle embedded in aristocracy without disparaging all its characteristics, so she could select and reconfigure, from the wreckage of Victorian convention, the attributes that could make for a more humane world. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 135)

Woolf's use of spatial and architectural themes is part of this bifurcated expression. It represents her inter-generational self-understanding as daughter of Leslie Stephen who was raised in a stereotypically Victorian home and as a comrade-in-arms in the literary transition from Edwardian fiction to a fresh, unformed modernist novel. Woolf identifies her modern fiction as rooted in turn-of-the-century English domesticity. As she put it: "This room explains a great deal" (SP, 124). Her memoirs often describe the significance of social spaces. For instance, "two different ages confronted each other in the drawing room at Hyde Park Gate" (SP, 147) whereas "everything was on trial" (OB, 185) at 46 Gordon Square. It is the "shadow" (OB, 182) which falls from the

old house on the new, the metaphorical influence, which informed Woolf's vision of a modern fiction as a renovative project.

In Chapter One I have explored how Woolf synthesised her spatial conception of society, as experienced in her childhood home, for her profoundly experimental, first version of a modern fiction. The resultant style consists of narrative strategies which operate by paralleling, contrasting, and satirising traditional and new styles. It is a self-aware, flexible, and critical mode of social portraiture with which Woolf renders the world of *Jacob's Room*. By reading the novel through its spaces, I have unravelled layered meanings in Woolf's narrative strategies. The architectural structures of *Jacob's Room* express a sense of oppressive social order through politicised spaces of power. At the same time, this design explores the literary implications of representing these spaces through varying modes of writing and reading. Among the three novels that I consider in detail in this thesis, *Jacob's Room* constitutes the most forthright in terms of social and literary critique. At the same time, it is the least self-confident with regard to its methods. Therefore, it provides a key insight into the ambiguous nature of Woolf's original modernist project — marked as it is by a profound dissatisfaction with pre-existing structures, but still informed by an anxious desire for a more stable mode of expression.

Jacob lives in the "world of many men" (SP, 144) as Woolf experienced it in her youth at Hyde Park Gate. Woolf's feminist social critique emerges in the institutionalised spaces of encounter such as the "fortress" of marriage (JR, 4) which immobilises or displaces the many depressed or desperate women of the novel. Further, Woolf's social panorama traces the relations between institutions such as the church and the university in order to contrast the metaphorical Edwardian solidity, a rigid, traditionalist mindset, with alternative modes of living and writing. As Flint notes:

> Woolf uses Jacob as a device through which to criticise the complacent, effortless authority of pre-war, patriarchal formations: the novel helps launch a critique of this aspect of society in her work which was to reach its most concentrated apotheosis in *Three Guineas* (1938). (Flint, 'Introduction', xx)

By constructing potent bonds between characters and their social architectures, Woolf found a way to move between the divisive, Edwardian walls of division and inspire her readers to re-evaluate questions of responsibility and necessity regarding the literary and social status quo.

As we have seen the window is a recurring motif for Woolf's spatial / architectural poetics. As Harker notes: "The window — with its disjunction between inner and outer — is a central metaphor for Woolf's conception of the literary experience" (Harker, 18). In *Jacob's Room* the ghost of a woman roams outside the university unbeknownst to the students on the other side of the window. "Somehow it seemed to matter" (JR, 59). Woolf calls our attention to something invisible, at most a shadow passing a window frame. This is representative of the dialogic aspects which inform Woolf's modern fiction. As Cuddy-Keane points out, the critical mindset of modern fiction, although pointed against its Victorian and Edwardian predecessors, engages with their modes of narration:

> Woolf's criticism is evaluative while it admits its bias; it admits its bias while it is at the same time openly responsive to different forms. It should therefore entail, for example, not privileging modernist practices over traditional realism but assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each mode. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 189)

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf is not interested in directly answering the questions to which she alludes. Rather, she highlights them for the reader. The architectural structures of *Jacob's Room* are to be explored from various perspectives, not from an authoritative

point of view, and never with absolute certainty. Over and over, Woolf draws the attention of the reader to writing and reading processes like alternative modes of characterisation in the case of the multi-perspective rendering of Mrs Pascoe or the modes of teaching and learning at the university. The resultant dialogic style is capable of rendering Edwardian society and literature while overcoming the overly rigid structures.

However, Jacob, as the elusive centre of the novel, remains unknown and undeveloped. With Jacob, Woolf presents a critique of and alternative to a conventional main character. Levenson positions Woolf's construction of Jacob as one of the main innovations which came to dominate her modern fiction in the following years:

> Where is Jacob in the novel that bears his name? Where do we now locate the individuality that prose fiction had confidently delineated for two centuries? The telling stroke in *Jacob's Room*, which opened the way to all experiments of the twenties, was the refusal of character as nucleus, as a determinate structure of attributes and motives, desires and deeds. (Levenson, 126)

Jacob's elusive form is an expression of a metaphorical self-awareness of the bent-out-of-shape state of contemporary literature as Woolf perceived it. As Caughie explains:

> Without a consistent point of view and a stable focus on him, Jacob can be neither a traditional character presented through his actions in the world nor a modern character presented through "the atoms as they fall". (Caughie, 66)

Woolf deliberately denies Jacob a definitive, knowable shape and, thus, announces the arrival of a (yet unfinished) modern character in search of a modern home. Hence, the design of the novel communicates not only its departure from Edwardian form but also its unfinished quest for a sufficient form.

Woolf's next novel *Mrs Dalloway* thematises the successful implementation of a modern form for the modern character. In Chapter Two I have explored how Woolf moved her social observations from the pre-war era into a modernising post-war London. The events of *Jacob's Room* lead up to the war and *To the Lighthouse* skips over it. *Mrs Dalloway* is set in the immediate post-war reality which is mentally still preoccupied with the war. As Levenson points out:

> It's fair to say that the devastations of world war were too vast and epoch-shifting to serve as a theme. Like the sense of modernity itself, the war became a background condition for everything imagined in its shadow. (Levenson, 126)

As an example of what Sherry identifies as the "vanguard awareness" (Sherry, *War*, 19) prevalent in many of the works of London modernists such as Eliot, Woolf's novel portrays the war-torn collective consciousness of the city as it threatens to pull apart between dichotomies of military and civilian life, between trauma and recovery, remembering and forgetting. There is a noticeable change of attitude in this text, from scathing critique to a nostalgic desire for social and literary stability. Clarissa Dalloway and her party guests are marked by a sense of fragmentation which, contrary to the character of Jacob, can now be re-imagined in a modernised form.

Woolf achieves this literary transition by developing some of the features of her initial design in *Jacob's Room*. For instance, Woolf continues to shift narrative focus freely from character to character and place to place. But Woolf modifies the novel by establishing firmer boundaries of time and place and limits its cast of characters significantly. As Baldick notes:

> As in Joyce's epic [*Ulysses*], the action is confirmed to the events of a single June day in a modern city as observed by two principal characters and by a host of passers-by, while the thoughts … of the principal and even minor

> characters are certainly not restricted by "the hours" of that day, but roam freely beyond it. (Baldick, 82)

Woolf revisits her playful, multi-perspective narrative style in order to render experiences of urban life through blending external scenes and introspective observers. The loose connection between the many characters of *Jacob's Room* and Jacob constituted one of the few cohesive elements of the novel. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf replaces this loose composition with a partial interconnection of the novel's minds which she explores through scenes of focalised attention like the airplane and car scenes.

Aside from these measures to make the design "tighter" (*Diary* 2, 210), Woolf establishes one of the most important innovations in her pursuit of a modern fiction. Inspired by her engagement with the rise of English avant-garde painting and Fry's work on formalist criticism, Woolf, as well as other modernists such as Lawrence, Joyce, and Ford, adapts the general move towards abstract representation in the arts. Kern describes the revolutionary nature of this shift:

> This development entailed more than a shift in style. It involved a transformation in the very purpose of art from the interpretation of optically perceived reality to the recreation of an aesthetically conceived one. (Kern, 175)

Hence, Woolf integrates Post-Impressionist principles of rhythmic design into her space-conscious aesthetics in order to renovate literary form.

As Roston points out, this transition to abstracting modes of characterisation entails "techniques inimical to the creation of credible human characters, which had always been of central importance to the genre of the novel" (Roston, 149). Woolf conceptualises a rhythmic design which builds up to a harmony of repeating and paralleling sequences of characters and plotlines. However, *Mrs Dalloway* does not

constitute an absolute break with linear modes of narration. Through her tunnelling method, Woolf weaves a rhythmic cluster of traditional plotlines which critiques and inverts Victorian and Edwardian tropes of the Bildungsroman or the romance plot. As Saint-Amour explains, in Woolf's modern fiction "plot's headlong propulsiveness is arrested, even overwritten, by a radiant presence that the modern novel will seek new ways to apprehend" (Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 91). Hence, Woolf renovates established literary structures in order to bring about a social and literary modernity which is capable of housing the sense of a common lineage while accommodating the post-war trauma of confusion and fragmentation.

The climax of the novel "assemble[s]" (MD, 136) the modern character, embodied in Clarissa Dalloway and reconstitutes society by renewing a feeling of connection and open discourse among Clarissa's guests. Her tunnelling process presents stable values for an alternative way of living and gives Clarissa Dalloway a stable literary form. Notably, Woolf expresses this through the metaphorical problem of connecting people and their rooms as devised in *Jacob's Room*. Clarissa's metaphorical reconstitution is enabled by a kaleidoscopic mirroring and repetition within the privacy of her room. She experiences several perspectives on herself, such as the mirror in her room which frames Clarissa into a perceived, complete identity; the old lady on the other side of her window presents Clarissa with an external perspective on herself and the vision of the suicide of her spiritual double Septimus enables her to re-assemble from her fragmented identity into a new form. Ultimately, this enables Clarissa to join the ballroom where a similar communion takes place.

With *Orlando* Woolf expands beyond the limits of the "novel" and turns the innovative drive of her modern fiction towards the biography genre. As a novel-biography Woolf thematises the critical considerations of the New Biography, as

developed by Strachey, and its relation to the English biography tradition. As Fleishman explains her novel-biography "is not merely an infusion of — the literary element — into the biographical form but a genuine fusion of fiction and biography, with all the attendant contradictions that a mixture of history and art entails" (Fleishman, 64). The fantastical story of Orlando constitutes a journey through periods of English history which enables Woolf to revisit developments in literary history with her typically self-ware, meta-critical style. As with her previous novels, Woolf builds on her stylistic achievements. Saunders sums up the book:

> Instead of trying to avoid the possibly prurient attentions of biographers … Woolf turns these things, including their biographical pursuit, into the subjects of her book. But she does so, not in order to pre-empt their exposure of her personality [Vita Sackville-West], but to turn that exposure into something other: abstract patterning; a work of art. (Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 483)

For her departure from the "novel" form, Woolf synthesises the modernist biography in order to re-negotiate methods of periodisation and canonisation. By integrating several modes of biography writing into a layered discussion of an English social and literary lineage, Woolf creates a new form for her modern fiction which is capable of emancipating itself from past influences. Hence, ideologically, *Orlando* constitutes an act of self-canonisation and the renovation of her own modern fiction.

Woolf achieves this by adapting modes of modernist parody which are in full swing at the latter half of the 1920s and a vital part of the New Biography. *Orlando* represents her aesthetic liberation in various ways. However, as Rulo explains, the self-questioning, parodic style of *Orlando* sets itself apart from non-modernist and modernist texts:

> If these books [by modernists like Joyce and Lewis] seek to employ satire as a "ritual of separation" … as a method for Woolf to differentiate herself from her

> male contemporaries and from past male writers, there are plenty of hints to suggest that Woolf intends this "ritual" to be ludic in spirit. Her critique of literary-historical tradition in *Orlando*, for example, occurs in part through and alongside the adoption of previous styles but in a way that revels in the free play of language of the landmarks of that tradition. (Rulo, 169)

For instance, the fictionalised narrator-biographer is frequently brought to the limits of his methods by Orlando's extraordinary life. By satirising methods like the Victorian mode of biography of her father and the New Biography, Woolf rewrites a lineage of the biography tradition which is accepting of these traditions as well as accepting of the fact that fiction writing is not capable of capturing reality and character fully. Woolf's life-writing practice, conceived as a delicate balance of granite and rainbow, the facts of reality and their aesthetic interpretation, embraces modern fiction as an approximation of the complexity of life.

Woolf acts this out in the deliberately anti-climactic end of the novel. As with Jacob Flanders and Clarissa Dalloway, there is a sense of crisis in Orlando. He/she struggles to find a stable relationship between his/her many historical and internal selves in the context of an ever-changing cultural history. Woolf represents this metaphoric search with familiar methods. Aside from Orlando's biographer, we gain insight into Orlando through externalised indicators like his/her constantly developing poem and his/her relationship to the ancestral home.

Like the room-character bond we have observed in Woolf's previous novels, Orlando's family mansion reflects major shocks and changes in Orlando's life as he/she moves towards a personal breakthrough. In *Mrs Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse* Woolf's epiphanic character climaxes end in a sense of established order and stability, or in the case of *Jacob's Room* in its deliberate denial. However, in *Orlando* Woolf redirects the event to emancipatory ends. Orlando embraces the

influences of the past such as the critical voices which try to define him/her with changing literary theories or the accumulating, revisionist influences which threat to unwrite Orlando's poem.

Orlando relinquishes ownership of the house by democratising it and he proceeds to leave his finished poem on the ground unceremoniously. This treatment of Orlando's external characterisation devices marks Woolf's dramatized realisation. As Caughie notes: "Like Orlando's poem, fiction, identity, and history are palimpsests, bearing their plural pasts within them" (Caughie, 82). Accepting of this, Woolf surrenders the metaphorical need for a home. The author of *Orlando* is not "homeless" like the author of *Jacob's Room*. Orlando as a character is not dependent on his rooms like Jacob is. This metaphorical self-acceptance of the infinite possibilities for representation in modern fiction constitutes a milestone innovation in its development. It reflects a maturing of Woolf's relationship to the literature of the past and the self-understanding of her modern fiction as a genuinely original and valid link in the English literary tradition.

Perpetually Renovating

As I have shown in this thesis, Woolf's modern fiction developed around several recurring themes and strategies such as conceptualising characterisation through space-aware relationships, the perpetual synthetising of cross-disciplinary influences for stylistic advancement and a meta-critical engagement with alternative narrative strategies. Woolf's renovation of the literary landscape progresses through mirroring, paralleling, contrasting, and parodying of established and new methods. If we consider *Orlando* as a pivotal moment of Woolf's self-emancipation and self-canonisation, then

Woolf's varied work of the 1930s until the end of her life demonstrates the unleashed potential of her modern fiction. I want to briefly outline how many of Woolf's innovations of the 1920s played a shaping role in major works of her later fiction.

Woolf's work of the 1920s has a trajectory which gradually explores, subverts, and eventually outgrows the limits of traditional genres and forms. Woolf continued to expand her modern fiction by engaging with alternative literary traditions — for instance her failed[20] essay-novel *The Pargiters* (*Diary* 4, 6) which eventually was split into her novel *The Years* (1937) and her essay *Three Guineas* (1938). In theory, this project undoubtedly continues Woolf's journey to advance or outgrow the novel genre by interlacing it with fact and political argument. Hence, Woolf revisits the problematic dichotomy of granite and rainbow which she thoroughly explored first in *Orlando*. However, as an avid essayist, Woolf turns her focus from biographic fact and its aesthetic interpretation to the problem of stylising argument and reason.

Woolf originally intended to combine the feminist, anti-fascist polemic of *Three Guineas* with the intimate, introverted family chronical of the fictional Pargiter family spanning from roughly the 1880s to the contemporary present. As Leaska points out:

> The 'Novel-Essay' would have been for Virginia Woolf a new and profoundly challenging experiment in form, calling into action both the creative and the analytical faculties almost simultaneously. (Leaska, vii)

Critics typically read Woolf's decision to separate the novel-essay as a separation of emotional and political writing in order to improve both texts. As Leaska explains: the novel-essay would have "forced granite against rainbow" (Leaska, vii) instead of

[20] Individually, both books are generally considered successes. *The Years* even became Woolf's biggest commercial success in her life time. (Higney)

balancing it like *Orlando* did. As Winterhalter points out, the fact that Woolf submitted to the more conventional genre forms, is indicative of Woolf recognising the limits of her aesthetic theory: "If we place *Three Guineas* side by side with *The Years*, … we may see that Woolf offers us a mirror in which to view her own awareness of the stylistic constraints she placed on herself" (Winterhalter, 252). However, Woolf did not abandon the merging and expanding of genre boundaries as a significant trajectory of her modern fiction.

In contrast, *The Waves* (1931) constitutes a successful and much more radical advancement in Woolf's break with pre-conceived genres. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, *The Waves* constitutes a project that derived from Woolf's engagement with the biography genre, parallel to *Orlando*. *The Waves* was always meant as a more serious literary engagement. By Woolf's own metric, the book is a blend of various forms such as a "playpoem" (*Diary* 3, 203) and an "autobiography" (*Diary* 3, 229) which is both prose and verse. As Marcus points out, the highly experimental form of the book constitutes a paradoxical blending of "Woolf's interest in 'autobiography'" and "her desire for 'impersonality'" (L. Marcus, *Woolf*, 132). The strongly internalised perspectives of the novel's characters omit core features of the traditional representation of the self. As Froula describes it: "*The Waves* tracks a 'life', an autobiographical subjectivity, that eludes the bounds of body, identity, time, event, not just in the mystic Rhoda and the poet Louis … but in everyday life" (Froula, 209). Woolf replaces the "authorial voice of the earlier novel" by an "internalised, subjective rendition of self" (Roston, 194). The resultant "abstract mystical eyeless book" (*Diary* 3, 203) has become recognised by many critics as Woolf's "most radical and uncompromising experiment in a different kind of telling" (L. Marcus, *Woolf*, 135).

A core innovation of *The Waves* constitutes Woolf's strategy to write "to a rhythm not a plot" (*Diary* 3, 316) which "was intended to underlie the patterning of the whole work" (L. Marcus, *Woolf*, 133). Woolf takes the idea of a rhythmic structure as devised in *Mrs Dalloway*, and expands the rhythmic frame beyond repetitions and tunnels within a confined space and time, to an infinite, natural rhythm such as the ebb and flow of waves. This design is significantly more adept in representing Woolf's modified ideas of a universal connection between minds. Froula reads the book as the climax of Woolf's metaphorical quest for a

> creative freedom won by Lily Briscoe, practiced as a radical fantasy in *Orlando*, analyzed under the aegis of its socioeconomic conditions in *Room* [*of One's Own*], and pursued to the limit of her imagination in *The Waves*. (Froula, 180)

As such, like *Orlando*, *The Waves* arguably constitutes another, even bigger breakthrough with modern fiction's quest for new literary forms.

However, Woolf did not stop looking for new ground to innovate and new methods with which to build on the innovations of her modern fiction. After *The Waves* Woolf conspicuously changed course. As Zwerdling points out:

> It was an experiment she was not tempted to repeat. And it is a striking fact that the work of her final decade is almost entirely constructed of elements *The Waves* intentionally excludes: the parodic spirit in *Flush*; historical specificity in *The Years*; intense political commitment in *Three Guineas*; the detailed factual record of an individual life in *Roger Fry*; the deliberate interlarding of the exalted with the sordid in *Between the Acts*. (Zwerdling, *Real World*, 12)

Tracing all the stylistic modifications in Woolf's final years would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I want to close my reading of Woolf's modern fiction with a brief examination of one of the most accomplished and method-rich works of Woolf's career

which, fittingly, constitutes her last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). The novel revisits and develops many of the core features explored in this thesis.

For instance, the social realities of *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* reflect the transition from pre- to post-war living. In her later works, Woolf continues to develop her war-conscious observations from a sense of post-war recovery to anxious anticipation of a seemingly inevitable WWII. Saint-Amour reads Woolf's literary forms of the inter-war period as reflective of a "political commitment" informed by "a future that looks predetermined" (Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 38). In this thesis I have shown how Woolf consistently expresses her social critique in relation to insider and outsider individuals. Woolf continued to process the social developments of the, now, pre-WWII England in this way. As Saint-Amour notes, Woolf captures the complex inter-war climate through areas of social division:

> In both *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*, Woolf would continue to engage the question of how to form, represent, and give voice to dissident communities in the shadow of escalating conflicts that openly dispensed with civilian immunity. (Saint-Amour, *Tense Future*, 125)

Namely, Woolf thematises the fascist threat through its ideological seeds which, in her view, can be found within English culture such as conformist, patriarchal education and national myths of war and heroism.

Between the Acts captures the "restlessness of post-Victorian, pre-World War II Britons" (Wanczyk, 108) through a town community which is presented with a stylised, parodic tour through English history in form of a pageant. As Cuddy-Keane notes:

> In its composite nature, the group … intrigued Woolf as a model of community, for it combined individual difference with participatory togetherness, prefiguring

> the communal dynamics that she explored throughout her own writing, culminating in her last novel *Between the Acts*. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 42-3)

The characters of the novel community are diverse, and disunited. For instance, William Doge is supposedly homosexual, much to the dislike of other characters and the marriage of Giles and Isa has fallen apart and threatens to end in adultery. Woolf uses the cultural trope of the pageant which, in theory, is supposed to enforce national unity by inspiring a sense of common origin and imperial nostalgia (Lauby, 47). Instead, Woolf's deliberately failed pageant explores English social cohesion.

True to established mechanics of Woolf's social commentary, Woolf communicates her discussion of the fascist threat in the form of a social dialogue with the reader. Froula reads the eccentric director of the pageant, Miss La Trobe, as one of Woolf's self-insertions as an artist figure, like Lily Briscoe and Orlando; Froula points at the pedagogic and ideological intent of Miss La Trobe's pageant concept:

> Often discounted as a failed artist, an ineffectual village eccentric, even a parody of the fascist group leader, the outsider artist La Trobe, self-created and self-named, thinks not back through her mothers but forward with her community toward the future. (Froula, 297)

Woolf, revisits a mode of negotiating the present in relation to the past which she first devised in *Orlando*: The pageant presents a linear progression of parodic sketches of English history.

The pageant is structured in four acts: a Shakespearean prologue, a parody of a restoration comedy, a selection of Victorian scenes recalled by a Victorian traffic policeman and the final act, "Present Time. Ourselves" (BA, 177). However, there are intermissions between the acts. The novel's title reference to the "in-between" spaces constitutes a hint to the central theme of the book. As De Gay explains:

> Although the play offers chronological scenes from English history and literature, the narrative presented is fragmentary and episodic. As a result, the play resists national metanarratives of military victory and political leaders. (De Gay, *Literary* Past, 210)

Woolf re-negotiates historic episodes in order to get beneath established narratives; "between the acts" becomes the metaphorical space from where to discuss the present. We have seen a comparable strategy in the rhythmic plot structure of *Mrs Dalloway* where Woolf subverts traditional plotlines of the past in order to reform the literary present. As Froula points out, like the ending of *Jacob's Room* [and Orlando], the final scene of *Between the Acts* "delivers us to the first moment of all future historical time" (Froula, 81). The novel releases the reader to a freedom of interpretation as well as the dialogic possibility to react. The end of the pageant is also a new beginning which harbours the potential for a new social make-up.

Woolf dramatizes the moment her readers arrive at the present through the climactic fourth act of the play. Miss La Trobe presents the contemporary present by holding mirrors up to her audience: "And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still. The hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves" (BA, 186). Reflections and mirrors of Woolf's characters play a crucial role in modern fiction. For one, they frequently give them physical, literary, or mental definition. Second, Woolf's reflections through windows, mirrors and doppelganger imagery enable epiphanic scenes of self-realisation. In Woolf's final rendition of this theme in *Between the Acts* the audience fails to recognise themselves as a community and fails to understand the cohesive logic of the chosen acts. As Benziman describes the final act: Woolf's community "fluctuates between attaining and losing a tentative sense of identity through observing its own reflection: first on stage, and then in an actual mirror" (Benziman, 55). Woolf's pageant presents

an alternative to a uniform society which can represent the individual within the frame of a shared history. However, as with the denial of Jacob's self-rendition, Woolf denies the successful outcome of the pageant as a mode of critique, and perhaps a warning, of the pitfalls of English society as it is about to be rocked by war.

Between the Acts concludes Woolf's perpetual journey towards a new literature. Woolf uses many of the innovations which she developed over the course of the 1920s such as parodic retellings of history, patterned narrative structures, a space-aware conception of the individual in society and a self-aware, pedagogic style. The pageant constitutes a politicised space in which Woolf integrates literary, communal, and historical discourses. As Cuddy-Keane points out:

> Even when Woolf focuses on recreating a historical context, her underlying goal is comparative. She seeks out differences and commonalities between past and present to stimulate a contextual understanding of the past and to heighten her readers' awareness of their present positionalities. (Cuddy-Keane, *Intellectual*, 152)

What Woolf's complex scenes of encounter ultimately embody, is a spirit of self-recognition and reform; reform for the recognition of alternative ways of living and alternative ways of literary representation.

What *Between the Acts* demonstrates in the context of this thesis, is modern fiction's strong capabilities of adapting and representing major shifts in the collective and individual mental landscape. As a mode of life-recording, Woolf's methods prove extremely sensitive towards social changes. As Zwerdling summarises, modern fiction is first and foremost a product of Woolf's personal awareness and understanding of the world around her:

> Her sense of the subject is deepened by her understanding of the interrelationship of the social forces at work — familial, institutional, ideological, historical — and by her awareness of the range of individual human response — internalization, compliance, rebellion, withdrawal, and all the combinations and contradictions such different reactions can produce. (Zwerdling, *Real World*, 5)

Her novels observe social flux from between society's dividing structures. They constantly reflect on modes of integration and reconciliation of old and new modes of living; it is a perpetually renovative act. Woolf's oeuvre proves that her fiction is capable of processing social change perpetually without losing its touch or its literary relevance. This is, in part, enabled by modern fiction's perpetual self-renovation and development, with which Woolf brings each of her social portraits in new aesthetic forms.

Her diaries and letters report about her insecurities as a writer. Woolf frequently questioned herself in relation to her peers and, more importantly, in relation to her personal sensibility to literary form. In 1929, Woolf writes:

> There is something there (as I felt about *Mrs Dalloway*) but I can't get at it, squarely; nothing like the speed & certainty of *The Lighthouse*: *Orlando* mere child's play. Is there some falsity, of method, somewhere? Something tricky? — so that the interesting things aren't firmly based? I am in an odd state; feel a cleavage; here's my interesting thing & there's no quite solid table on which to put it. … I am convinced that I am right to seek for a station whence I can set my people against time & the sea. (*Diary* 3, 264)

The excerpt gives us an insight into something essential in Woolf's fiction writing. It is a glimpse into her creative process of innovating in *The Waves*. Woolf conceptualises her pursuit of a modern fiction in a familiar way: it is the balance of a stable shape for a new idea. Over the course of her career Woolf articulated this search for balance in

different ways: in *Jacob's Room* Woolf planned a form that can "change style at will" yet "the Room will hold it together" (qtd. in Bishop, 115); in *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf conceptualised a style "pliant & rich enough to provide a wall" without becoming "narrowing & restricting" (*Diary* 2, 13-14); and in *Orlando* Woolf pursued the balance of "granite and rainbow." In 'Phases of Fiction' (1929) Woolf comes to the perhaps clearest articulation of modern fiction's perpetual challenge:

> We desire synthesis. The novel, it is agreed, can follow life; it can amass details. But can it also select? Can it symbolize? Can it give us an epitome as well as an inventory? (PF, 145)

It is this combination of intense social awareness, a renovative spirit and the pursuit of aesthetic synthesis which produced Woolf's modern fiction. It is a literature which is perpetually capable of re-capturing "life or spirit, truth or reality this, the essential thing" (MF, 188) which Woolf pursued since the beginning of her modernist experimentation at 22 Hyde Park Gate.

Works by Virginia Woolf Abbreviations

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22 HPG	‘22 Hyde Park Gate’
AROO	*A Room of One’s Own*
SP	‘A Sketch of the Past’
BA	*Between the Acts*
HSC	‘How it Strikes a Contemporary’
JR	*Jacob’s Room*
MF	‘Modern Fiction’
BB	*Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*
BB1st	*Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* first version
MD	*Mrs Dalloway*
OB	‘Old Bloomsbury’
ORR	‘On Re-Reading Novels’
O	*Orlando: A Biography*
PF	‘Phases of Fiction’
P	‘Pictures’
RF	*Roger Fry*
AB	‘The Art of Biography’

TC	‘The Cinema’
Diary 1-4	*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Volume 1-4 Edited by Anne Olivier Bell
Letters 1-6	*The Letters of Virginia Woolf.* Volume1-6. Edited by Nigel Nicolson
NBA	‘The Narrow Bridge of Art’
ME	‘The Modern Essay’
NB	‘The New Biography’
RPV	‘The Russian Point of View’

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