

“Mysterious Figures”: Character and Characterisation in the Work of Virginia Woolf  
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## Declaration Page

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been presented for any other degree.

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## Abstract

This thesis argues for a reading of Virginia Woolf's work based on notions of character and characterisation as a primary interpretative perspective. The bulk of Woolf scholarship, particularly in recent years, has not been directed towards the study of character, due to both general theoretical discomfort with the category of character, and a sense that Woolf's work in particular, as that of a feminist and modernist writer, may not respond well to traditional readings of character. However, Woolf's exploration of the human self and its relations with other people is best understood by looking at her formal experiments in characterisation.

Her writing was consistently engaged with questions of character, as an examination of her early journalism makes clear. In the years before the publication of her first novel, Woolf articulated a broad theory of character in her reviews of contemporary literature and in essays on Gissing and Dostoyevsky. In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf began a writing career of experiment in character, examining a continuum of character ranging from complete non-identification to a consuming over-identification. A key element here is the introduction of the notion of the Theophrastan type as an alternative form of fictional characterisation that corresponds to a way of knowing real people.

In *Jacob's Room*, Woolf continued to focus on the speculative nature of characterisation and its demands for imaginative identification demonstrated by her short story collection *Monday & Tuesday*. The importance of this issue is clear from the debates she engaged in with Arnold Bennett during the 1920s, a debate re-framed in this paper as focussing on characterisation. *Jacob's Room* initiates a quest for an elusive 'essence' of character that may, or may not, exist outside of the structuring forms of social life, and may or may not be accessible through speculative imaginative identification.

This elusive essence of character is a primary focus of *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel which explores the ways the self can be shaped under social pressures into more permanent and stable structures. This is explored in the novel in a series of metaphors circling around treasure and jewels. While alert to the role of exterior factors, including time and memory, the novel maintains at least the possibility that some more internal form of the self exists and can be represented in fiction. This possibility is explored further in Woolf's short story cycle *Mrs. Dalloway's Party*, and leads into *To the Lighthouse's* study of character and its ability to represent essential or internal aspects of self, the self as it exists in relation to other selves, and ultimately a projected or created version of character that reconciles this complexity. This is again carried out through the use of an extensive chain of metaphors which function symbolically in the text, and through a meditation on the nature of the relationship between real people and their fictional counterparts. While the novel offers no clear resolution, it gestures towards a type of characterisation, and hence a type of relationship, based on limited understanding and acceptance.

This notion is picked up in *The Waves*, a novel which both explores the continuity of the self as represented by character over time - something that is also important in *The Years* - and explores the ways that characters can be represented and the implications this has for the types of unity that can, for good or for ill, be achieved. Again, a notion of a limited character, closer in form to caricature than to the whole and rounded characters often associated with Woolf, is proposed by the novel as a possible solution to the problem of character. In Woolf's last two novels, *The Years* and *Between the Acts*, many of these themes reappear, and Woolf simultaneously situates her characters more firmly than ever in a comprehensible physical and social context, and uses them to explore areas where language and rationality cease to function.

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## List of Abbreviations

- BA*.....*Between the Acts*. London: Granada, 1978.
- D 1 - 5*.....*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie. 5 vols. London: Hogarth, 1977 - 1984.
- E 1 - 4*.....*The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Andrew McNeillie and Stuart N. Clarke. 5 vols. London: Hogarth, 1986 - .
- F* .....*Flush: A Biography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.
- H*.....*The Hours: The British Museum Manuscript of Mrs. Dalloway*. Ed. Helen M. Wussow. New York: Pace UP, 1996.
- JR*.....*Jacob's Room*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- JRH*.....*Virginia Woolf's Jacob's Room: The Holograph Draft*. Ed. Edward L. Bishop. New York: Pace UP, 1998.
- L 1 - 6*.....*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. 6 vols. London: Hogarth, 1975 - 1980.
- M*.....*Melymbrosia: An Early Version of the Voyage Out*. Ed. Louise DeSalvo. New York: New York Public Library, 1982.
- MD*.....*Mrs. Dalloway*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- MDP*.....*Mrs. Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*. Ed. Stella McNichol. Harvest, 2001.
- ND*.....*Night and Day*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- O*..... *Orlando: A Biography*. London: Hogarth, 1928.  
*Major Authors on CD-ROM: Virginia Woolf*. Woodbridge: Primary Source Media, 1996.
- P*.....*The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portions of The Years*. Ed. Mitchell A. Leaska. London: Hogarth, 1978.
- R*.....*A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1981.

*Major Authors on CD-ROM: Virginia Woolf.*

Woodbridge: Primary Source Media, 1996.

- TG*.....*Three Guineas*. London: Hogarth, 1986.
- TTL*.....*To the Lighthouse*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.
- TTLH*.....*To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*.  
Ed. Susan Dick. London: Hogarth, 1983.
- VO*.....*The Voyage Out*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- W*.....*The Waves*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- WD*.....*A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of*  
*Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. London: Triad,  
1985.
- Y*.....*The Years*. London: Vintage, 2000.

## Chapter 1

In her 1924 essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs Brown”, Virginia Woolf proclaimed that “on or about December 1910 human character changed” (*E* 3: 421). This statement has attracted a great deal of critical attention, but it is not always accurately used. Modris Eksteins, for example, in *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, has Woolf arguing that “human nature changed” in 1910, while similarly Rachel Teukolsky quotes Woolf in *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modern Aesthetics* as writing that “on or about December 1910 human nature changed” (Eksteins 117, Teukolsky 168). These are not isolated instances: even the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* gives “human nature” in place of human character (Knowles 826).<sup>1</sup> There must, it seems, be something peculiar about the phrase ‘human character’ to lead to such pronounced confusion.

In contemporary English, ‘human character’ is not a strong collocation: a search of the British National Corpus, assembled between the 1970s and 1990s, reveals 505 instances of ‘human nature’ against only 13 of ‘human character’ (Davies).<sup>2</sup> Nor was it frequent in the early twentieth century. A search of the *Times* digital archive, for instance, for the year of publication of “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”, produces 113 instances of ‘human nature’ against only 15 of ‘human character’. Woolf’s diction was thus unusual in 1924 and remains so today. Both Woolf’s decision to use the phrase ‘human character’, and the fact that it has so often been rendered as ‘human nature’, are significant.

The peculiarity of Woolf’s choice of words is an instance of what David Trotter has described as a recurring strategy of modernist texts, in which “minor disturbances of linguistic structure alert us to the possibility that we may have to work very hard indeed in order to understand what the writer might mean for us to infer” (70). Here, the ripple in the surface of Woolf’s prose, the use of the nearly synonymous ‘character’ in place of ‘nature’, indicates just such a submerged level of meaning. ‘Human character’ has connotations which ‘human nature’ does not. The semantic indeterminacy of the word ‘character’ allows access to two different but related ideas. The first of these is the concept of the human self. This set of ideas is referred to explicitly by the frequent misquotation ‘human nature’, and is also clearly implied by the phrase ‘human character’, when character indicates “the sum of the

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<sup>1</sup> A search for the phrase “on or about December 1910 human nature changed” on Google Books yields over 150 hits - 193 on 20 October 2009. In comparison, “on or about December 1910 human character changed” gave 454 on the same date. Clearly the misquotation of Woolf, while not universal, has entered common usage.

<sup>2</sup> Character is a human attribute, and to discuss ‘human character’ is to approach tautology: character is always human. This makes Woolf’s choice of the phrase particularly interesting.

moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual” (“character”). According to this reading, Woolf’s statement is about the shifting ontological nature of individuals: how people are in the real world, how they envisage themselves as selves, and how this sense of self changed at the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, ‘human character’ also refers to the literary context of her essay; Woolf is writing not only about human subjectivity, but about its representation as character. By writing of ‘human character’, Woolf indicates that her focus is not only - or even primarily - on human nature, on the real people that surrounded her as a writer and surround us as readers, but on the imagined selves produced by the written word, characters.<sup>3</sup>

Woolf’s diction also focusses on the mutability of the self. In his 1896 *Social Rights and Duties: Addresses to Ethical Societies*, Leslie Stephen reviled the “tacit assumption that all changes of human nature are impracticable” as mere “cynical and unproved assertion” (23). The fact that Stephen needed to refute so energetically the idea of human nature as immutable indicates the strength of the perspective associated with the phrase. The *OED* defines ‘human nature’ as “the inherent character or nature of human beings,” and ‘inherent’ refers to “a permanent attribute or quality” (“human nature”; “inherent”). Human nature is thus defined as an immutable set of characteristics demanding, as Stephen was aware, enormous effort to redefine as changeable, and even more effort to change: the fact that “[. . .] men have become at least more tolerant and more humane” is a vision of gradual alteration of the almost unalterable (*Social* 23). Nor is Stephen’s position merely personal: his views were seen to represent “the more fundamental thoughts” of the educated classes (Small 843). His attempt to redefine ‘human nature’ as changeable indicates the persistence into the late-Victorian period of a view of it as unchangeable. This view has continued into the twenty-first century. Referring again to the *OED*, there is a remarkable consistency in the quotations used to illustrate the phrase. In the first recorded usage in English, Caxton’s 1474 translation of *Game & Play of Chess*, “humayne nature” is a product of God’s “wylle,” and as such immutable (qtd. in “human nature”). In the most recent quotation, ‘human nature’ is similarly immutable, although the context is radically different: “[. . .] a topless girl is just very sexy,” opines British lads magazine *Nuts*, “[. . .] it's just human nature - everyone loves a good rack, don't they?” (qtd. in “human nature”). Whether used five centuries ago to assert theological stability or five years ago to reinforce essentialist gender roles, the phrase ‘human nature’ is associated with stasis rather than transformation.

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<sup>3</sup> Woolf also made regular use of the phrase ‘human nature’, including in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, in which Mrs Brown “is human nature” itself (*E* 3: 426).

While Stephen attempted to demonstrate that human nature was in spite of traditional beliefs mutable, his approach was gradualist. To say that “ancient brutalities have become impossible” is to take a long view of the potential for transformation in the internal organisation of the individual (Stephen, *Social* 23). For Woolf, on the other hand, the transformation in human character is anything but gradual - it occurred “on or about December 1910,” a formulation which not only specifies the month but grammatically implies a particular, though elided, day (*E* 3: 421). Change, in the modern world, occurs not incrementally but suddenly.

While Woolf’s provocative statement about the sudden shift in human character will be examined in more detail later in this thesis, for the moment the point is the fundamental duality of ‘human character’. It is around the intersection of ‘human nature’ and ‘human character’ that Woolf’s fiction circulates, exploring both notions of the self and ideas of literary character. When reading Woolf, one needs to be alert to both levels of meaning.

It has been frequently noted that an important aspect of literary modernism is its exploration of selfhood. Exploration is perhaps an inexpressive and incomplete term; modernist writing, in the words of one critic, “radically probed the nature of selfhood and problematised the means whereby ‘self’ could be expressed” (D. Brown 1).<sup>4</sup> This formulation indicates both the intensity of the questioning to which traditional notions of self were subjected by modernist writers, and the way that this questioning was carried out within a literary context. Modernist explorations of self were developed through literary experiments in characterisation, for character is the literary structure which bears the closest and most direct relationship to human subjectivity. This relationship was one which modernist - or to use the contemporary term, Georgian - critical discourse was alert to.

E. M. Forster articulated this relationship between character and self in his 1927 *Aspects of the Novel*.<sup>5</sup> The process of character formation is primarily linguistic: “the novelist [. . .] makes up a number of word-masses” and assigns them characteristics (64). A fictional character is, however, “conditioned by what” the writer “guesses about other people, and about himself” (65). The word-mass is linked to the real world. Fictional

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<sup>4</sup> I am here using ‘modernism’ both as a temporally descriptive category, indicating in broad terms the period between the last decade of the nineteenth century and, roughly speaking, the first half of the twentieth, and as a stylistically descriptive category indicating a range of ‘experimental’ technical and thematic features.

<sup>5</sup> Forster is an appropriate representative, for while in some ways peripheral to Bloomsbury, he is often cited as a representative figure for the group’s ideas (McNeillie, “Bloomsbury” 4).

character is, however, different from biographical character: biography is based exclusively on evidence which “shows on the surface” while “it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source” (65). A similar distinction exists between “people in daily life” and “people in books” (67). Like biographical characters, real people in the real world can only be known “approximately, by external signs” which “serve well enough as a basis for society and even intimacy,” while fictional characters “can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes” (67 - 68). Percy Lubbock argued a similar point in his 1921 *The Craft of Fiction*, in which he writes of the “creation [. . .] we practise every day” when we piece “together our fragmentary evidence about the people around us,” and relates this quotidian act of interpretation to the reader’s assembly of fictional characters from textual clues (7).<sup>6</sup> Fictional characters were thus seen as the literary equivalent of real people, and the process of interpreting real-world selves was analogous to the process of reading fictional character. While there are numerous differences between characters and people - characters do not, for instance, “have glands” - there remains an intimate bond between character and self (Forster, *Aspects* 73).

If character was seen as the literary analogue of the self, selfhood was in turn a primary concern of modernist fiction. One description of this interest situates “some kind of pre-existent unity” which “constitutes a model of selfhood which is autonomous, integral and continuous” in opposition to a “pluralist, heterogeneous and discontinuous” modernist version of self (D. Brown 2). Pre-modernist subjectivity, according to this argument, was unitary, while modernist subjectivity was fragmented. Alternatively, modernism’s relation to self has been described as a simultaneous “longing to recover some figure of the self, to preserve some vessel of subjectivity, and the willingness to [. . .] release the knot of subjectivity” (Levenson, *Modernism* xi). The self is both an absent object of desire and an all-too-present burden. Another reading contrasts the novel’s traditional role as a vehicle for the exploration of social relations with modernist fiction’s focus on the interior mental spaces of individual characters (Roston, *Modernist* 8). This is a movement from a concern with the interaction between individuals, for instance the intricate social manoeuvrings of Jane Austen’s characters, or Arnold Bennett’s detailed and explicit social placement of characters, to an interest in a type of depth psychology. Jean-Michel Rabaté describes this as “a deeper psychological realism” and links it to the modern experience of the urban environment and

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<sup>6</sup> In her review of Lubbock’s book, Woolf highlighted its uniqueness as a lengthy and serious reflection on fiction, but rejected its central contention that the aesthetic appreciation of the novel centres around apprehension of overall form: “[. . .] the ‘book itself’ is not form which you see, but emotion which you feel [. . .]” (*E* 3: 340).

its random and temporary social configurations (*James* 119). The brief encounter on the city street with an unknown individual leads directly to the sort of speculative psychological approach found in modernist literature.

This is a point to which Woolf was sensitive, writing in “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” that movement into urban space involves a shedding of “the self our friends know us by” and a sensitivity to the “vast republican army of anonymous trampers” (155). “The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted,” memory, association, distinct identity itself, “is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye” (156). This ‘eye’ which observes the urban space is also a new formulation of the ‘I’, one less fixed, more open to the impression of the other; an impression at once unsettling and alluring of “the army of human beings” with “its oddities and sufferings and sordidities” (157). The impressions received on the street, however, are temporally limited - just as “the number of books in the world is infinite, and one is forced to glimpse and nod and move on after a moment of talk, a flash of understanding” - so to “in the street outside, one catches a word in passing and from a chance phrase fabricates a lifetime” (163). This establishes a parallel between the experience of understanding other people and the literary experience of reading texts. Both are creative and speculative enterprises, fabrications; reading “the volume of life” is as much invention as interpretation (163). In an urban environment in which “the main stream of walkers [. . .] sweeps too fast to let us ask such questions,” speculation replaces certainty (163). The city offers the opportunity to “penetrate a little way” into the lives of others, “far enough to give oneself the illusion that one is not tethered to a single mind [. . .]. One could become a washer-woman, a publican, a street singer” (165). This is, however, illusion - it is only possible to “tell oneself the story” of the people one meets, and the “the only spoil” recovered from the city is “a lead pencil,” a formulation that directly links transitory urban encounters with the creation of written character (165, 166).

Many critics and scholars have examined the representation of self in Woolf’s fiction. James Naremore, for instance, has explored the ways in which Woolf withdrew from egoistic self-articulation by developing a “series of techniques, which allowed her to present the ‘tremor of susceptibility’ in the self without neglecting what is ‘outside ... and beyond’” - what Gillian Beer describes as a “suffusion of consciousness” (“World” 123; Review 359). Alex Zwerdling writes that Woolf “has long been recognized as one of the great explorers of the psyche, and her novels in particular have given us a vividly realistic sense of how our

minds and feelings work” (*Virginia* 4). In a recent summary of the history of Woolf scholarship, Maren Linett notes that “[. . .] Woolf’s intense concern with identity and mental processes has guided critics to illuminating psychological readings [. . .]” and that scholarship from the 1950s to the early 1980s was often concerned with “issues of subjectivity” (x). Following this, Linett describes a period of “exploration of otherness of various kinds [. . .]” (x). The emphasis in these formulations lies with the object of representation, the self, rather than with the mode of representation, character. Woolf criticism, then, has generally not focussed on the impact of character and characterisation on her explorations of selfhood. There are of course exceptions to this generalisation: Susan Rubinow Gorsky, for instance, writes that “from her first to her last novel, Virginia Woolf displays a persistent concern with the nature of the human being and thus with characterization” (221). Nonetheless, character is not a primary focus of Woolf scholarship. There are five possible reasons for this, the first two of which are generally applicable, while the last three are more directly related to tendencies in Woolf criticism.

While as some critics argue, and common sense dictates, characters and characterisation are central to the production and consumption of fictional texts, the theoretical status of literary character has become ever more tenuous in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Woloch, *One* 14). Character is, and has long been, out of fashion - at least since L. C. Knights’ 1932 address to the Shakespeare Association, “How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?”, an essay which has since been seen as a critical watershed dividing interest in “motives and character-development” from interest in “*leitmotifs* and themes” (Rutter 38). For Knights, “*Macbeth* is a poem,” and must be read as such, with attention paid to language and its effects instead of to characters as imagined human beings (60). Since what Richard Rorty described in 1967 as the “linguistic turn”, character, in the words of another critic, “has been seen as one of those nets that sophisticated critics [. . .] fly by to attend to the truly important matters of language [. . .]” (10; Knapp 349). When not being ignored, however, the view of characters as implied or represented humans, as presented by E. M. Forster among others, has been challenged by a view of characters as textual entities divorced from reality.<sup>7</sup> Alex Woloch argues that “the price of entry into a

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<sup>7</sup> While Forster believed in a close relationship between character and person, he was also keenly aware of their status as textual entities or “word-masses” (*Aspects* 64). It is for this reason that he remains acceptable to both schools of character theory - his theory of flat and round characters being “unique in its popularity among both referential and formal theories of characterization” (Woloch, *One* 344)

theoretical perspective on characterization” has, since the emergence of the Russian formalists, been the refutation of the “implied humanness” of characters (*One* 15). This process, continued through the work of “French structuralists, poststructuralists, and new novelists,” denies the “anthropomorphic component of characterization” (Woloch, *One* 15 - 16). In Jeffrey Berman’s words, “for Lacan, Derrida, and the postmodern critics, character does not exist, at least not in its recognisably humanistic form” (45). Instead, the self is a “decentered subject,” or “passive elements of an impersonal linguistic system” (Berman 45).

Attacks on character have come from both ideological and formal perspectives. Alain Robbe-Grillet, proponent and practitioner of the *nouveau roman*, wrote in his 1957 essay “On Several Obsolete Notions” that character was unjustifiably persistent in the twentieth century: “[. . .] nothing has yet managed to knock it off the pedestal on which the nineteenth century placed it” (27). Robbe-Grillet represents what Woloch refers to as an ideological attack on a “particularly bourgeois notion of personhood” (*One* 16). “The novel of characters,” Robbe-Grillet writes, “belongs entirely to the past, it describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual” (28). This era of individualism was the nineteenth century, “the days of Balzac’s bourgeoisie,” a period when the main features of character - “a proper name [. . .]. parents, a heredity [. . .]. a profession [. . .]. possessions. [. . .] a face” - “represented both the means and the end of all exploration” (29, 27, 29). The twentieth century, on the other hand, is “one of administrative numbers,” and under such a socio-political dispensation the importance of personal identity, or character, is minimised (29). In the 1950s, Czeslaw Milosz described this as the determining role of “historical formation” in structuring individuals in contrast to the bourgeoisie’s “delusion that each individual exists as a self” (10). Dialectical materialism relies on “man’s lack of an internal core” for its success: external pressure “creates this core, or in any case, the feeling that it exists” (Milosz 80).

Another attack on character emerges from a “hermeneutic/semantic” perspective: character is a linguistic product that refers only to other linguistic products, not to the real world of individuals (Woloch, *One* 16). Novelist and critic William Gass’ critique of character centres on this tenuous connection between fiction and reality. While character provides a focus for both “innocently minded” readers and the “most erudite [. . .] critics,” it provides only a “simple formula” for the evaluation and explanation of literature: “Great literature is great because its characters are great, and characters are great when they are memorable” (Gass 35). All critical discussion of character, the “endless succession of opinions about the value and function of characters” since Aristotle’s *Poetics*, makes the

egregious mistake of seeing characters “as living outside of language” (Gass 35). Gass’ rejection of this fallacy is trenchant: “[. . .] the belief in Hamlet [. . .] is like the belief in God - incomprehensible to reason [. . .] (37). Characters are not people, nor are they analogous to people. Instead, they are multifaceted textual entities. Henry James’ Mr Cashmore in *The Awkward Age*, for instance, is “(1) a noise, (2) a proper name, (3) a complex system of ideas, (4) a controlling conception, (5) an instrument of verbal organization, (6) a pretended mode of referring, and (7) a source of verbal energy” (44). “But,” Gass insists, “Mr. Cashmore is not a person” (44). Character remains vitally important to narrative; they are in fact “those primary substances to which everything else is attached,” but important only as foci of narrative energy (49). As such, any narrative feature, “any idea or situation [. . .] or a particular event, an obsessive thought, a decision [. . .] a passion, a memory, the weather [. . .]” anything at all around which narrative energies circulate, is a character (50). This position, like Robbe-Grillet’s, is clearly some distance from the close association between character and self which was current in the modernist period.

While these rejections of character are situated in a particular historical context, they have by no means lost their force or persuasiveness in the twenty-first century. Zadie Smith, writing on David Shield’s 2010 *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, argues that it is “filled with anti-fiction fighting talk,” quoting, for example Robbe-Grillet’s statement that even “[. . .] the creators of characters, in the traditional sense, no longer manage to offer us anything more than puppets in which they themselves have ceased to believe” (“Essay”; Robbe-Grillet 28). A “certain kind” of writing student, Smith writes, remains excited by the idea that the novel “with all its vulgar, sentimental, ‘bourgeois’ [. . .] plots, characters and dialogue” is “dead” (“Essay”). Even a novelist such as J. M. Coetzee rejoices in Shield’s “all-out assault on tired generic conventions” including character (qtd. in Z. Smith, “Essay”). While Smith herself mounts a trenchant defence of the novel in general and character in particular, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, it is clear that the view of character as “sentimental and bourgeois” persists (Z. Smith, “Essay”).

If character, as a contested critical category, is an unpopular avenue of approach to modernist literature, it has also been challenged by the success of an alternative narrative of the origins and significance of modernism. The following section will briefly trace the emergence of this narrative, indicating how its strength and persuasiveness leave little room for character. An appropriate place to begin is with Kim L. Worthington’s statement that “modernity, broadly understood as the past several hundred years in Western history, may be

defined as the rise to prominence of the self [. . .]” (1). Modernity, and later modernism, is the story of the development of the self as it emerges from religious certainty during the Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup>

For the religious, the soul is “continuously *known* and *seen*” by God, and as such is an immutable irreducible unit of identity; this is the stability of human nature against which Stephen argued so vigorously (Langbaum 25). This stability provided a reassuring sense of personal significance, the loss of which, it has been argued, prompted the literary search for “meaningful identity” so important in twentieth-century fiction (Roston, *Search* 33). Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume challenge this notion of a self possessed of “perfect identity and simplicity” (258). Hume proposes instead a self fragmented and fluctuating, “[. . .] nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (259). Hume recognises the human “propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions,” but argued that selfhood is the “fictitious” product of memory, “which not only discovers the identity, but contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions”: memory is the “source of personal identity” (259 - 260, 264, 266, 267). Hume’s position represents a radical transformation in the vision of the self, seeing it not as a permanent reality, but as “a necessary fiction” (Langbaum 27).

This Enlightenment version of selfhood in turn became the target of a Romantic reassertion of self. Wordsworth, for instance, envisions a transcendent and independent self structured around nature and psychology rather than religion, a self “free, enfranchised and at large,” a self that not only exists but possesses “depths” (Langbaum 46; Wordsworth 1.9, 12.165). This coherent, complex and identifiable entity is part of Romanticism’s attack on “Enlightened, classicizing, conformist rationalism,” but it is also an attack on versions of identity that deny the coherence of the self (M. Brown 26). In place of Enlightenment scepticism, we have a “celebration of self-expression and the inner sanctity of the autonomous mind” (Worthington 2). While recent scholarship argues that this was only one of the models of self in circulation during this period, its canonisation as the Romantic vision of self is most relevant here (Henderson 2).

The narrative I am tracing follows the Romantic rehabilitation with a set of competing concepts of self. On the one hand, normative selfhood was expressed in the

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<sup>8</sup>Routledge, for instance, has a title on subjectivity in its New Critical Idiom series, but not on character. It should be emphasised, however, that this is a relative situation, and that character is certainly not completely ignored in discussions of modernist literature.

Victorian and Edwardian periods in a traditional fashion, offering a stable and unified self disturbed only by doubling, a motif that reaffirms the norm of the traditional self even as it questions it (D. Brown 14 - 15). This is the base ground of stable unified selfhood against which modernism would react. On the other hand, this period has been described as including two antithetical approaches to selfhood, each feeding directly into modernist thought: an “increasingly radical egoism” and a “similarly extreme formalism” (Levenson, *Genealogy* 132). According to Levenson, subjectivists such as Pater, Bergson, Stirner, and Ford “offered a sceptical critique of traditional beliefs and institutions, and a renewal through retreat to the self” while key formalist figures such as G. E. Moore, Gaudier-Brzeska and Wyndham Lewis insisted “on the autonomy of art, logic, politics and aesthetics [. . .] independent of human will [. . .] - the existing order criticized from the standpoint of objective truth and objective value” (*Genealogy* 132, 133).

T. E. Hulme, an early and influential theorist of modernism, associates these opposing tendencies with romantic - “man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities” - and classical - “man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant” - impulses (“Romanticism” 116). At the end of her short story “The String Quartet”, Woolf aestheticizes this dichotomy: “Bare are the pillars; auspicious to none; casting no shade; resplendent; severe. Back then I fall, eager no more, desiring only to go, find the street, mark the buildings, greet the applewoman, say to the maid who opens the door: a starry night” (43). This contrast between the inhuman but magnificent restraint of the classical and the human intimacy of the personal is one that informs much of Woolf’s fiction. Interestingly, T. S. Eliot singled this story, and its conclusion, out for praise (*D* 2: 125). Another key modernist practitioner, Wyndham Lewis, like Hulme, links subjectivism with romanticism, and associates both with psychology as symptoms of the same pathology, the “fanatic hegemony with your unique self-feeling” (*Time* 8).

Essentially, then, this narrative developed by a range of eminent scholars and critics offers a convincing and coherent picture of the emergence of modernism, and it is a story that focusses on self rather than on the literary structure which represents self. Character, then, operates in a general sense at a real disadvantage as a tool for literary exploration. It is, firstly, a suspect category that has been criticised from both ideological and formal perspectives, and a category that seems in a sense redundant: if powerful critical narratives can use the concept of the self as explanatory and interpretative tools to deal with key periods in literary history, why is character necessary?

The other reasons for the lack of critical interest in Woolf as a writer of character are less generally applicable. Baruch Hochman's argument that "there is a measure of irony in considering Virginia Woolf under the sign of character" because "many things did not interest Woolf, and character in its classical sense was one of them" outlines the first problem (*Test* 157). Hochman's definition of classical character presumably refers to Aristotle's *Poetics*, an enormously influential text which has inspired a tremendous amount of comment and interpretation (Olson, Introduction x). A brief look at the *Poetics* will indicate what this type of character, which apparently did not interest Woolf, is.

Poetry, according to Aristotle, is mimetic; its different forms are "modes of imitation" (23). This idea lies at the heart of classical character theory, and indeed at the heart of character theory until the twentieth century: literary characters are representations of real-world selves, or at least possessed of "an ontological parity": character is to textual world as self is to real world (Berman 46). Next, character is secondary. Primarily, "the objects the imitator represents are actions," and while these actions require agents to perform them, these agents are secondary to the actions they perform (25). Finally, there is a moral distinction between good and bad characters: "the diversities of human character" are "nearly always derivative from this primary distinction, since the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind" (25 - 26).

If these prescriptions form the basis of classical character, Hochman's observation may be sound. Woolf, like many other early twentieth-century writers, began to loosen the referential bonds of character. Nor is Woolf's characterisation built around clear moral distinctions. However, dispute over moral distinction in characters died out as the novel matured as a genre: Henry Fielding, for instance, defended his mixed characters against Samuel Richardson's, described by Leslie Stephen as "personified virtue and vice" (*English* 158). For Fielding, the novelist deals in what "human agents may probably be supposed to do" (233). The novelistic character is neither superlatively excellent nor egregiously bad; it inhabits the neutral ground left by Aristotle's distinction between Tragedy and Comedy: "the one would make its personages worse, and the other better, than the men of the present day" (27). While there was a debate between supporters of Fielding's mixed character and Richardson's ideal character, the latter was a minority position, generally confined to continental sources; the main tendency of British novelistic practice was towards mixed characters (Innes 262; Siti 112). Thus the use of mixed character does not offer adequate grounds for a description of Woolf as uninterested in classical character. This judgement must rest instead on the prioritising of action over character.

Here, too, the history of character theory is relevant. Aristotle's elevation of action over character remained a force well into the novel's development. Indeed, Henry James' 1884 response to Walter Besant's lecture "The Art of Fiction," which makes the case for "Fiction as one of the Fine Arts," challenges this Aristotelian dictum (Besant 62). James agrees with Besant's position; the novel must be "very artistic indeed" and character can contribute to this goal (James "Art" 168). It is both the irreducible product of a number of factors, and a factor in the irreducible whole which is the total work of art. Character, James argues, is not the product of alternating portions of "description" or "dialogue" or "incident" ("Art" 173). The "literal opposition" of these elements of character "has little meaning and light," for while "people often talk of these things as if they had a kind of internecine directness" in reality they melt "into each other at every breath" and are "intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression" ("Art" 173 - 174). The elements of character are together, not in isolation, character. James' vision challenges generic distinctions, including the fruitless differentiation of novels of character and incident: "what is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" ("Art" 174).<sup>9</sup> Even in the late nineteenth century the link between character and action - or plot - was one which excited a considerable amount of critical attention. Woolf, then, who relies only lightly on plotting, is not so much rejecting classical traditions of characterisation as working within the main stream of the development of the novel as a genre. Nor was Woolf alone in her practical rejection of Aristotelian precepts: Forster for instance, explicitly rejects the prioritisation of action over character: "Aristotle is wrong" (*Aspects* 113). Thus while Woolf may not have been interested in classical character, this does not indicate that she was uninterested in character in a broader sense.

A second reason for the lack of critical interest in Woolfian character is the perception that her key literary innovations are concerned with narrative. Melba Cuddy-Keane's summary of narratological approaches to Woolf outlines the situation clearly, pointing out how for many critics "however innovative Woolf's approach to character, the greater, more radical innovation was her distinctive narrator" ("Narratological" 21). Most of the attention given to Woolf's narrative technique has centred around free indirect discourse.

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<sup>9</sup> René Wellek argues that this is a refutation of Anthony Trollope's preference for novels of character (231 - 232). Trollope's own contention, however, that a "good novel should be both" realistic, or concerned with the "elucidation of character" and sensational, or concerned with "the continuation and gradual development of plot," and "both in the highest degree" seems to indicate that the differences between James' and Trollope's positions are minor (*Autobiography* 206).

While early readings of Woolf's use of this narrative technique emphasised the way it can produce a sensation of unity-in-diversity, the merging of different consciousnesses into a single narrative unity, more recent interpretations have emphasised the way this narrative technique allows for the articulation of diversity (Snaith, *Virginia* 70). However, one of the effects of the mobility of Woolf's narrative voice is that it is not readable as a character: it is insufficiently "individualized and personalized" to be "a character-narrator" (Cuddy-Keane, "Narratological" 21). While the consciousnesses represented by this narrative voice are certainly characters - free indirect discourse requires characters whose "thoughts or words are interwoven with the voice of the narrator" in order to function - critical interest is often directed away from these characters to "the *relationship* between inner and outer," between the narrative voice and consciousnesses it represents (Snaith, *Virginia* 63, 65). Cuddy-Keane describes these questions - of the "connectivity [. . .] posited among the various consciousnesses represented in Woolf's novels" and the presence or absence of "a unified vision [. . .] from the blend of voices" - as central to Woolf criticism ("Narratological" 21). As such, they have to a certain extent shifted attention away from character to narrative voice and the relationships this voice establishes.

The third factor here is related to Woolf's position as both a producer of feminist texts and as a touchstone author for feminist theorists and critics: as Laura Marcus has argued, "the preoccupations of post-war feminist literary and cultural criticism could [. . .] be traced through accounts of and approaches to Virginia Woolf" ("Feminism" 209). Woolf's reputation had suffered in Anglo-American critical circles by the 1950s and 60s, and the reappraisal of her work has to a large extent gone hand in hand with the development of feminist approaches (Marcus, "Feminism" 209). One of the main focuses of this feminist reassessment has been the articulation of a specifically female subjectivity.

Clare Hanson writes that "what Cixous might call a 'feminine' economy is at work in Woolf's texts" (58). This economy "continually moves towards an effacement of the constituted subject," a process which evacuates the "'full' self in order that the other should be known" (Hanson 58). The contention here is that a particular type of subjectivity is articulated in Woolf's work, a subjectivity which exists in a particularly open relationship to other subjectivities. To achieve this, the self must abandon a fixed, separate, integral subjectivity: it must recognise "the fiction of a stable and unitary ego" as a fiction (Battersby, *Gender* 145). This explicitly feminist interrogation of the status of the self is part of a larger post-structuralist critique of unitary selfhood, a critique that was particularly sharp in the last

quarter of the twentieth century, when suggestions “that subjectivity originates in flows of social power and historical legacies of differential valuations” were common (Hall 97). As Donald Hall points out, these theories of gender and sexual identity are closely related to other post-structuralist approaches, but are themselves central to the theoretical project of the late twentieth century rather than being derivative (97). This intersection of post-structural and feminist criticism indicates that feminism’s interest in “the cultural construction of subjectivity” and awareness of the nature of the self as “unstable and fragmented” challenges a vision of “a specifically *poststructuralist* perspective on subjectivity” (Belsey 45; Hall 100). Feminist criticism during the period in which Woolf was being rehabilitated helped shape the notion of post-structuralist subjectivity as a fragmented entity formed by external pressures.

While some critics link the “The Death of the Self”, be it post-structuralist or feminist, to the death of “fictional persons”, to the decline in the status of character, many critics focus on the self rather than on its articulation through character (Waugh 1). Patricia Waugh offers a possible explanation, arguing that “for those marginalized by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of an inner ‘essence’) has been [sic] a major aspect of their self-concept long before post-structuralists and postmodernists began to assemble their cultural manifestos” (3). Women and other oppressed groups have long been aware of the fictional or constructed nature of the self, the way that it is constituted through and by an intricate and interlocking network of power relations, and thus are less inclined, in Waugh’s words, to “share the nostalgia for Dostoevsky’s representation of ‘life’ and ‘character’” (3). Waugh’s rejection is sweeping: this novelistic tradition is a male construct built around a male fiction of the self. What is of interest, then, is the ways in which a writer such as Woolf challenges or modifies this male version of the self, not the literary means by which the fiction or fraud has been perpetrated. Character is of little interest when the question ‘Who am I?’ is unavailable, assuming as it does an “a priori belief in an ultimate unity and fixity of being” and “a rational, coherent, essential ‘self’” (10). The alternate question that Waugh postulates as appropriate to Woolf and other women writing from within patriarchal cultures, “‘What represents me?’,” is answered not by character, but with a range of techniques including narrative voice and structure (10). This is not to say that Waugh ignores character in her powerful reading of Woolf. Instead, she argues that while Woolf shares in the common modernist tendency towards “the disappearance of ‘character’ as the expression in action of a fixed inner ‘essence’, she replaces the “(masculine) ideal of

the unified transcendent ego” with a “a subjectivity defined in relationship and in specific but historically changing context [sic]” (89, 91).<sup>10</sup> The argument thus returns to Hélène Cixous’ notion of a feminine textual economy built up between open and related subjectivities - the classic post-structuralist and feminist stance of the late twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Waugh’s argument is very much part, then, of the late twentieth-century’s troubled relationship with selfhood, which has manifested itself in literary terms in post-modernist fiction through the disappearance of “the human ‘subject’” (Waugh 1). Waugh is, however, sceptical of the universal claims of the post-modern argument. As indicated above, she feels that female experience of conditional subjectivity predates post-modernism, and that the loss of the “full humanist subject” is only possible for those whose dominant cultural position allows them to possess such a sense of subjectivity (2). For Waugh, this sense of conditional subjectivity is intimately related to the fictional creation of character: self is a product not just of “institutional dispositions of relations of power” but also of “fictional convention”: specifically here the “particular set of historical and moral conditions which allowed for the reading and understanding of the conventions of character in nineteenth-century fiction” (2, 3). “Fiction,” as Catherine Belsey writes, “plays a part in the process of constructing subjectivity” both by encoding the myths of social power relations and by situating the reading subject within an ideological framework (45). However, for the female subject, the post-structuralist and post-modernist attempt to de-centre the full humanist subject is pointless, as she has never experienced the humanist plenitude of self to which these late twentieth-century movements are reacting (Waugh 9).

What results is a specifically feminist “need for women to become ‘real’ subjects and to discover their ‘true’ selves’,” and thus a search for “a *coherent and unified feminine subject*” existing simultaneously with post-structuralist and post-modernist attacks on the coherence and unity of subjectivity (Waugh 9). This formation of a feminine subjectivity, Waugh argues, offers “an alternative conception of the subject as constructed through *relationship*, rather than postmodernism/post-structuralism’s anti-humanist *rejection* of the subject” (Waugh 13). As the notion of character disappears from post-modern fiction and late twentieth-century criticism, it must, Waugh argues, reappear in the articulation of a feminine

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<sup>10</sup> Waugh is not alone in articulating this position. Makiko Minow-Pinkney offers another example of a reading of Woolf in relation to “post-individualist subjectivity” and the “dissatisfaction with unitary selfhood” (194, 168).

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that, according to Waugh, “the subject positions culturally available to *all* the characters are shown to be restrictive and repressive” (107). Male characters are included in Waugh’s vision of Woolf.

subjectivity which operates on principles of relation.

These five factors, then - the twentieth-century's rejection of character, the success of narratives stressing the importance of subjectivity in the emergence of modernity and modernism, the perception of Woolf as uninterested in character, the critical interest in Woolf's narrative techniques, and the feminist and post-structuralist focus on inter-subjectivity and relational selfhood - have led to a situation in which character has not played a central role in Woolf criticism. However, while Waugh's description of a feminist assertion of relational selfhood indicates a reason for the elision of character in Woolf studies, it offers an avenue for the reappearance of character. While Waugh's argument must be situated in a particular historical moment of literary and theoretical history, for the debates over the formation of subjectivity have cooled considerably in the almost twenty years since the publication of *Feminist Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*, the direction Waugh indicated towards a sense of real subjectivity and, in fictional terms, real character, has persisted into the twenty-first century. The key here is the feminist sense of self developing in relation to self, and the ethical implications of this relationship.

For post-structuralist criticism, ethical perspectives are problematic, associated as they are with "the demise of modern humanism" (Davies and Womack ix). However, ethical responses to literature - in forms ranging from close readings of the text to the text's repercussions on the real world of the reader - have in recent years regained a critical respectability, in what has been called the ethical turn (Davies and Womack x). This ethical attentiveness is often related to character - both the "dilemmas and conundrums presented in the lives of" the fictional inhabitants of a literary text, and the "the overall effect" of a given work of fiction "on the *ethos*, the *character*, of the listener" (Davies and Womack x; Booth 353). There is a causal relationship, according to this argument, between the reader's ethical status, the stories they have experienced, and the characters in these stories (Booth 353). This is an Aristotelian formulation of the ethical impact of literature, even in its terminology, but the relationship it establishes between the reader, ethical value, and character is important. What is emerging here is a correlation between the real-world ethical implications of relation, and the textual implications of characterisation, particularly in the context of the relational self outlined by Waugh and others: as Tzvetan Todorov argues, "*the relation to value is inherent in literature*" (qtd. in Gregory 195). This turn towards the ethical has implications for the figuring of subjectivity in ways that challenge the post-structural consensus: to the ethical critic "becoming a self is not just a consequence of the *actions that*

*are done to us* by culture, history, language, master narratives, gender, class, race, or bourgeois masters, but is a consequence of the *actions that we choose*" (Gregory 210).

This is not so much a rejection of post-structuralist insights into the range of pressures that shape self as an assertion of that self's ability to manoeuvre within this framework. It places the centre of the fictional experience with imagined human beings, with what Zadie Smith calls "other people" - the title given to a recent collection of character sketches edited by Smith is *The Book of Other People*, which, she writes, celebrates the diversity of characterisation (Introduction vii). All forms of fictional creation are forms of "ethical strategy" - and this applies as much to a post-modernist such as Thomas Pynchon as to any other form of fiction (Z. Smith, "Love"). This ethical strategy is manifested through character, and for Smith, Forster represents an ethical touchstone in this regard, with his contrast between the "existentially flat" characters who fail in terms of ethical flexibility, and the central Forsterian concept of "human connection" (Z. Smith, "Love"). This concept, derived from Forster's epigraph to *Howard's End*, turns this discussion of ethical criticism back towards the insights of feminist Woolf criticism into the structuring of subjectivity through relation. The function of the narrative, Smith argues, "is the performance of" ethics itself, the "consequences of human actions as they unfold in time," always considered in relation to other people; the category of the ethical is meaningless in a solipsistic world ("Love").<sup>12</sup>

This ethical turn in criticism indicates that characters as representations of imagined human selves whose narrative existence has ethical repercussions may be moving towards the centre of literary study - although any centrality it achieves will clearly be disputed by those who have textual or ideological issues with the concept of character. At the least, as Hochman notes in a recent essay, something has occurred to "diminish the fierce skepticism about character" so prevalent for much of the twentieth century ("Character" 100). This rehabilitation may occur in specifically feminist contexts as part of a project to establish a coherent feminine subjectivity, or more generally as part of fiction's "struggle against those more dogmatic and therefore deceitful versions of self generated by church, by state, by ourselves at our weakest, and now by our rapacious televisions" (Z. Smith, "Limited"). This increasing acceptance of the ethical nature of both the literary and critical undertaking has been identified within Woolf scholarship, with Mark Hussey highlighting "a broader concern

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<sup>12</sup> For Smith, this sort of ethical exploration through relationship is quintessentially Forsterian. Woolf, she writes, represents the "most metaphysical" manifestation of the novel, which investigates "how selves are made, their superficial unity and hidden fragmentation," but this view can be challenged by the ways Woolf's texts explore relationship ("Limited").

with ethics” in recent writing on Woolf (Afterword 421).

It is in this context that views of characters as referential literary constructs based on a relationship with humans, much closer to Forster’s position, have recently been articulated. James Wood, for instance, has explicitly targeted Gass’ extreme formalist position, arguing that to “deny character with such extremity is essentially to deny the novel” (82). For Wood, while a “great deal of nonsense is written every day about characters in fiction - from the side of those who believe too much in character and from the side of those who believe too little,” character remains vital to narrative, and is something more than the list of grammatical and functional attributes Gass associates with the term (79).<sup>13</sup> The key distinction for Wood is between many layers of “reality-level” (93). “There is no such thing,” Wood writes, “as a ‘novelistic character’” which can be fixed in a particular relationship to the real world (83). Instead, “there are just thousands of different kinds of people, some round, some flat, some deep, some caricatures, some realistically evoked, some brushed in with the lightest of strokes” (83). Some literary characters bear a much stronger and more intimate relationship to the real world than others, and a sensitive reading of any given text must respond to the different levels of characterisation present in it. As Wood puts it, the “reality-level differs from author to author, and our hunger for a particular depth or reality-level of a character is tutored by each writer, and adapts to the internal conventions of each book” (93). This recognition of the variety of relationships between character and reality is reminiscent of Forster’s distinction between flat and round characters. Here, then, is a contemporary position on character that returns us to something that would have been more familiar to a Georgian writer such as Woolf than late twentieth-century rejections of the link between character and self, a return of character from its long “exile from the novel” (Docherty, *Reading X*).

Other recent work on character and characterisation has attempted to reconcile opposing camps. Baruch Hochman and Ilja Wachs, for instance, have made a case for “the value of focusing on characters as hypothetical realities, constructed on the model of people in life” as a way of accessing “the nexus of issues that inform the text” (405). This approach recognises the textual nature of character, but argues from a utilitarian standpoint for a type of conditional reading: if Anna Karenina were a real person, what would her behaviour tell

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<sup>13</sup> It seems unlikely that a great deal of nonsense is written about character *every* day, even granting the sheer scale of the contemporary critico-scholarly establishment. Character is in fact a relatively unpopular field. Still, it is my pleasure to add here to Wood’s daily ration of nonsense, attempting to steer between the Scylla of faith and the Charybdis of scepticism.

us about the novel which creates her? Another interpretation of Hochman's approach emphasises his insistence of recognising character's "virtual independence from texts" despite its "linguistic constitution" (Fokkema 28). Woloch's recent attempt to reconcile traditionally opposed readings of character argues that there is no real conflict between the two approaches, for "literary character is itself divided, always emerging at the juncture between structure and reference" (*One* 17). A character is neither an inwardly oriented literary artefact, springing strictly from and referring only back to the text, nor an imitation of a person; it is always both.

One potential danger of approaching characters referentially and emphasising their status as implied human beings whose relationships to each other and to the reader have ethical implications has been articulated by Peter Brooks, who argues that while "the fictive character has been deconstructed into an effect of textual codes, a kind of thematic mirage, and the psychoanalytic study of the putative unconscious of characters in fiction has also fallen into disrepute," some feminist criticism "needs to show how the represented female psyche (particularly of course as created by women authors) refuses and problematizes the dominant concepts of male psychological doctrine" (335). While Brooks is here referring specifically to feminist criticism, his point applies to any criticism that deals specifically with character. Brooks describes the use of psychoanalytic criticism in feminist scholarship as studying "Oedipal triangles in fiction, their permutations and evolution, [. . .] the roles of mothers and daughters, [. . .] situations of nurture and bonding, and so forth" (335). While Brooks does not deny this work's interest, he is concerned with the methodological issues raised by the "use of Freudian analytic tools in a wholly thematic way, as if the identification and labelling of human relations in a psychoanalytic vocabulary were the task of criticism" (335).<sup>14</sup> This approach has been described as exhibiting "a regressive interest in studying fictional character" (Berman 41). What is regressive is the overly rapid move from "formal explication to [. . .] moral and psychological interpretation" (Brooks 337). In other words, the textual and formal structures of character are ignored in favour of the referential, a reading through character to the thematic and ethical implications these characters create,

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<sup>14</sup> Brooks' essay is in not an attack on feminist criticism in general, or Woolf scholarship in particular. Rather, he is looking at the role of "a de-authorized psychoanalytic discourse within literary-critical discourse," or the ways in which the narrative of psychoanalysis can continue to function as an interpretative strategy after it is recognised as lacking interpretive authority (336).

but without due attention to the formal level on which these characters are constructed.<sup>15</sup> This returns to the question of Lady Macbeth's fertility and the reading of characters as imagined human beings with implied attributes and biographies that extend beyond the written page and allow for ethical judgements: is Mrs Ramsay, for instance, a good mother? This is neither to single out a particular critic as responsible for this sort of reading, nor to argue that this type of reading is invalid; surely one of the things that fictional texts do is ask us to treat them, and the characters in them, as if they were real. It is neither possible, nor, arguably, appropriate to read Mrs Dalloway strictly as a Forsterian word mass, a formal structure within a larger pattern, without ever thinking of her as an individual and as such a woman, a wife, a lover, a mother - as part of what Brooks describes as the "situational - thematic" structure of the text (335). However, this rapid move from textual character to imagined self is a danger when reading for character. As Aleid Fokkema points out, the representational conventions of characterisation are so strong that "not surprisingly [. . .] the borderline between fiction and reality is often crossed and critics speak of people rather than characters" (28).

Clearly, the core feminist insights into the nature of the self in Woolf's novels are sound: Woolf does articulate a type of subjectivity that is composed within a network of relations, and a type of subjectivity that rejects, or at least questions, notions of integral unified selfhood.<sup>16</sup> However, this rejection is not complete, and a balanced reading of Woolf needs to be aware of the extent to which Woolf continues to explore the possibilities, potentialities, and perils of a component of the self which precedes, and potentially surpasses, this relational subjectivity. Woolf does not reject the possibility that characters, and by analogy real people, possess some sort of stable configuration of self that responds to and simultaneously resists the pressures of socially and linguistically configured identity formation. Berman's argument that "a corollary to the belief in character is that, however discontinuous real and fictional people appear to be, they possess a core, stable self" is relevant here (47). Woolf's work demonstrates a clear and consistent belief in character, and

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Price in a 1983 response to post-structuralist theory equates character with words: "Words acquire their meanings from the range of their use in our lives, and to say that words refer only to other words produces a startling effect of unreality," and the same applies to characters who are "in the frame of their fictional world, no less than fictional persons" (55, 64).

<sup>16</sup> The notion of self summarised here represents a form of post-modern consensus: from a "late twentieth-century perspective," Worthington writes, "subjectivity [. . .] is understood to derive from inter-subjectivity. That is, our conceptions of selfhood are deemed to be constituted by, not merely reflected in, the terms of language, which is social and public" (4 - 5).

this should at least indicate the possibility of what Levenson describes as the tension between the modernist novel's pursuit of "formal disruptions of character" clashing with a sustained "nostalgic longing for a whole self" (*Modernism* xiii). Furthermore, this exploration is consistently filtered through the structures of literary character: as Berman reminds us, "when we talk about fictional people we must always approach them as one element in the larger literary text as a whole," and this is perhaps particularly true with regards to Woolf's novels (46). Woolf's experimental representation of self is manifested in experimentation with characterisation. It is, then, at the juncture of human nature and human character, of the referential and the literary, that Woolf's work operates, exploring different ways of conceiving of human subjectivity and different ways of formulating it within a literary structure. Experiments in representation of self are by their nature experiments in characterisation, and a shifting or transforming sense of selfhood demands a shifting type of literary character. This then, is the shift that Woolf identified in her 1924 essay, and highlighted by her choice of the phrase 'human character': the tense relationship between literary form and lived reality.

## Chapter 2

The Virginia Woolf of the period between 1904 and 1912 is critically problematic, “uneasily suspended between life and work,” resistant to readings in search of a “sense of continuity” between the young journalist Virginia Stephen and the mature modernist Virginia Woolf (Gualtieri, *Virginia* 25, 27). Leila Brosnan has attempted to establish such a continuity by postulating a radical divergence between the apparent and actual meanings of Woolf’s early criticism, evidence of a struggle against the “strictures of censorship, both overt and covert, of propriety” (Gualtieri, *Virginia* 29).<sup>17</sup> As Woolf’s early journalism establishes her interest in characterisation, and the terms in which she saw character functioning, the reliability of these texts, the extent to which the surface meaning of her writing can be trusted, is critical. Censorship and self-censorship are the two main issues.<sup>18</sup>

While Woolf was undoubtedly subject to editorial constraints, the extent to which this affected her criticism are difficult to trace (Dubino 26). Editorial control was sometimes blatant: Woolf was forced to alter her review of *The Golden Bowl* with “scissors” and a “scrawl,” and a text produced with this level of editorial interference is not an ideal guide to Woolf’s critical posture (*L* 1: 178). Thus S. P. Rosenbaum’s assertion that Woolf was not “ready” for the psychological convolutions and textual subtleties of James’s late style can only be speculative (155). Another instance of aggressive editing occurred when an essay for *Academy & Literature* was re-titled, drastically cut, and had words added to it (Rosenbaum 157).

The best-known example of editorial interference with Woolf’s journalism is Bruce Richmond’s 1921 request that she alter the word ‘lewd’ in an essay on Henry James’ ghost stories for the *TLS*. Woolf complied, but felt that the consciousness of “writing against the current” affected her: “one writes stiffly, without spontaneity” (*WD* 48). At stake here is one word in an essay including the word “obscenity” twice, which is, as Andrew McNeillie points out, the word originally used in her reading notes (*E* 3: 325 - 326). This is not an

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<sup>17</sup> Woolf’s non-fiction has been frequently used to support analyses of her modernist and feminist literary practice (Brosnan 2). However, it has increasingly been regarded as a centre of critical interest in its own right (Snaith, Introduction 11).

<sup>18</sup> Another problem is the speed of Woolf’s composition. In 1905, she wrote and published over thirty pieces (Rosenbaum 151; Lee 214). Unpublished writings, including a translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, must be added to this (Rosenbaum 152, 159). While Woolf sometimes employed a “layered, extended, and self-critical process of composition” she sometimes wrote quickly: her review of Howells’s *The Son of Royal Langbrith* was written in half an hour, “quick, I wont [sic] say good, work” (Brosnan 2; *L* 1: 161). There is a tension between the Woolf whose articles were “written and revised with immense care,” and the Woolf who responded to the exigencies of professional journalism (*L*. Woolf 7).

extreme form of censorship, especially given that on other occasions Woolf published more inflammatory material. An extended quotation from Henry James' *Portraits of Places* was included in a 1906 review:

The face of this fair creature had a pure oval, and her clear, brown eye a quiet warmth . . . The young man stood facing her, slowly scratching his thigh, and shifting from one foot to the other. He had honest, stupid, blue eyes, and a simple smile that showed his handsome teeth. He was very well dressed. 'I suppose it's pretty big,' said the beautiful young girl. 'Yes, it's pretty big,' said the handsome young man. 'It's nicer when they are big,' said his interlocutress, and for some time no further remark was made. (qtd. in *E* 1: 126)

Although the discussion concerns the size of a boat, Woolf does not reveal this, leaving readers to get, or miss, the joke. While Rosenbaum is uncertain as to how "indecent she meant to make Henry James sound," Woolf's bawdy intention seems clear (181). If this could slip under the editorial net, it seems unlikely Woolf was in general overly confined by the strictures of her censors. Thus, while Kathleen Lyttelton, editor of the *Guardian's* women's pages may have stuck "her broad thumb into the middle of" Woolf's sentences to improve "their moral tone," leading Woolf to complain "in her letters of Mrs Lyttelton's editorial interventions and of the need to mould her own writing to suit the moralising tone of the paper and the expectations of its readers," and Reginald Smith of *Cornhill* may have "added words" and "cut out others" from Woolf's writing, she generally wrote what she wanted to write (*L* 1: 214; Gualtieri, *Virginia* 23; *L* 1: 332).<sup>19</sup>

The internalisation of journalistic codes of practice is a closely related issue. Brosnan argues that Woolf's encounters with overt editorial censorship led her to "develop her own forms of self censorship," strategies to enable adequate critical responses in spite of internalised repression, often in the form of a "suggestive subtext" underlying the apparent compliance of her articles to editorial norms (40, 58). These techniques of "metaphor and simile, quotation and patterning," Brosnan believes, constitute a "language of disguise"

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<sup>19</sup> Elena Gualtieri argues that Woolf "often complained in her letters of Mrs Lyttelton's editorial interventions" (23). Thirty-three letters in the Hogarth edition of Woolf's letters mention Mrs Lyttelton. Only three complain of intrusive editing: the oft quoted letter of 3 December 1905; another undated letter in which she complains that "Mrs. L[yttelton] or Margaret [Lyttelton] rather cobbled my poor Shag between them," a reference to Woolf's mock-biography of the family dog; and another which implicitly criticises the "morals" of Lyttelton and the *Guardian* readership (*L* 1: 172, 1: 206). Three instances is not often, especially given Woolf's permission to Mrs Lyttelton to "alter my things as you like," her apology for asking her to "do all the dirty work of correcting and polishing for me," and her description of Lyttelton as "angelic" in comparison to other editors (*L* 1: 169, 1: 181).

allowing her to express herself without fear of internal or external editorial intervention (64 - 65). As Gualtieri writes, “for Brosnan [. . .] although Woolf’s essayistic style is itself split between the surface of her pronouncements and their actual meaning, its continuity through time is guaranteed by her relentless fight against the strictures of censorship, both overt and covert, and of propriety” (*Virginia* 29). While Brosnan’s readings are convincing, most notably her examination of Woolf’s 1921 review of W. E. Norris’ novel *Tony the Exceptional*, I believe that there is evidence suggesting that Woolf wrote without excessive self-censorship, even in the early stages of her career (65 - 66).

This argument contradicts Woolf’s own pronouncements: she claimed in a 1931 speech to the Women’s Service League that her earliest reviews had struggled with self-censorship:

[. . .] I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her [. . .] The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. [. . .]. Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: ‘My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. (Woolf, “Professions” 202 - 203)

As Brosnan points out, Woolf refers to two authors in the draft version of her speech: Henry James and Thomas Carlyle (58). As two of her first reviews were of Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* and *The Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle*, the novelist in question must be Henry James. In Woolf’s review of *The Golden Bowl* the disfigurement left by self-censorship, the mark of The Angel in the House, should thus be visible. This novel was in 1905 the most recent work of a major writer, “revered by other writers and the more discriminating critics,” author of perhaps “the most demanding fiction” of Woolf’s time, and an important critic in his own right; an intimidating book for a novice reviewer, even more so as James was an old friend of the Stephen family (Lodge, *Consciousness* 202; Rosenbaum 155; Lee, *Virginia* 213). If anything could prevent Woolf from giving a clear and explicit critical opinion, these adverse circumstances seem certain to have done so, yet in the published review Woolf’s criticism is trenchant.

James is, Woolf writes, “sufficiently great,” and has gifts which “fail very little of first-rate quality,” comments characteristic of the complimentary portions of the review, in which Woolf damns with faint praise (*E* 1: 22). Her specific criticisms of the novel are more direct. She does not agree with James’s “theory of what a novel ought to be,” the plot is “of

the slightest,” as is the theme, the reader suffers from “a surfeit of words,” the characters are “ghosts,” sentences are “overburdened,” and overall the book lacks “genius” (*E* 1: 22 - 24). In fact, Woolf’s critique of the novel is sweeping, detailed and explicit. Her final qualification, that “there is no living novelist whose standard is higher, or whose achievement is so consistently great,” does little to soften this devastating review (*E* 1: 24). If this is the shadow of *The Angel in the House* on the page, the censorious domestic deity seems to have been singularly ineffective in restraining her young charge. Woolf, at the age of 23, only slightly more than two months after the publication of her first article, could write and publish an openly critical review of the pre-eminent male author of the era.

It seems improbable, then, that she felt the need to code her 1921 critique of a minor novelist such as Norris in the “linguistic subtleties” Brosnan describes as a product of self-censorship (Brosnan 65). In fact, in a 1905 review of Norris’ *Barham of Beltana*, Woolf’s condemnation was explicit: the novel is “a simple story” written from a “prosaic point of view” by an author who does not “take any very excessive interest in the performance” (*E* 1: 36 - 37). The gleefully subtle critique read so carefully and perceptively by Brosnan is the result not of necessary strategies to avoid editorial interference or self-censorship, but of boredom at reviewing yet another tedious novel by Norris, for by 1921 Woolf had reviewed four, and of conscious craftsmanship: the desire to say better what she had said before. Woolf’s subtle critical approach is not a “prose of protest,” or a “language of disguise,” but a playful celebration of literary virtuosity (Brosnan 65).<sup>20</sup> As Ann Fernald has pointed out, “[. . .] feminist critics have been slow in identifying either self-consciousness or professionalism” in Woolf’s early journalism (Fernald 88 - 89). Woolf’s non-fiction, then, should offer valid information about her developing sense of the importance of characterisation. While subtextual meanings are important, my default position will be that proposed by Peter Kaye: to “take the authors at their word, unless the evidence suggests otherwise” (10). This is not to ignore the importance of the type of active and alert reading of Woolf’s essays that Cuddy-Keane has called for, but to attempt to respond to all levels of the texts (*Virginia* 195).

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, in her 1929 essay, “Phases of Fiction”, Woolf includes Norris, albeit as “second-rate,” among the writers who “gratify our sense of belief,” along with Defoe, Swift and Trollope (Woolf, “Phases” 98, 94).

Character was from Woolf's earliest engagement with literature a key critical category. Her early criticism was closely related to the type of fiction she was attempting to write, part of a process of literary self-definition centring to a great extent around issues of characterisation (Rosenbaum 348). Much of the relevant material is concentrated in Woolf's earliest reviews: by 1908 the majority of her journalism dealt with non-fiction, and she published very little from 1910 until 1916. However, during the period 1904 to 1908 Woolf's main output took the form of critical reflection on contemporary literature.<sup>21</sup> References to character and characterisation appear regularly in this period. In only one of the approximately twenty works of fiction Woolf reviewed in 1905, a very short review of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* which Rosenbaum identifies as particularly unsatisfying, did Woolf not refer to characterisation (172 - 173). This exception proves the rule: Woolf was keenly interested in characterisation. She was also extremely critical of character in contemporary novels, and her reviewing centres on different types of failure, including conventional characterisation, exaggerated characterisation, thin characterisation, excessively detailed characterisation, representational characterisation, and structural characterisation.

Woolf sees the conventional portrayal of character as directly opposed to modern literary practice, arguing in 1905 that A. J. Dawson's *The Fortunes of Farthings* "has little in common with the average modern novel. [. . .]. The characters are of the conventional type of hero and villain, and they play their parts with simple-minded consistency" (*E* 1: 38). Not only are the conventional characters themselves insufficient, but their narrative stasis is untrue, Woolf implies, to the modern experience of selfhood. These points represent a clear step away from the tradition of classical character, which called for just this type of adherence to convention and consistency: appropriateness is the second, and consistency the fourth of Aristotle's standards for character (55 - 56). Similarly, Horace's *Ars Poetica* demands that the poet keep a character "to the end even as it came forth at the first" (461). Even in the seventeenth century, John Dryden could argue that characters must be "constant and equal" (215). Woolf's review of Algernon Gissing's *Arrow of Fortune* demonstrates the

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<sup>21</sup> The reviews in question are generally short, "one-paragraph write-ups in which she could do little more than give plot summaries" (Dubino 32). Although this is material from Woolf's "apprenticeship," this need not mean that "her short notices [. . .] give, by their nature, little indications [sic] of the directions her writing will take" (Gualtieri, *Virginia* 24, 26). On the contrary, these pieces offer insight into Woolf's conception of character. One final proviso may be necessary: these texts predate by at least a decade the emergence of the key texts of modernism (Gualtieri, *Virginia* 29). While tentative formulations of what may develop into modernist stances are present, a full exploration of modernist character must wait until the 1920s.

strength of her rejection of this sort of stereotyped, conventional characterisation. “The reviewer,” she writes, “need not spend much time in criticism of his characters” because “their names speak for them” (*E* 1: 41). Woolf presumably refers to characters such as Mercy Whinfield, who advises forgiveness, questioning a person’s right to decide ““who are to be instruments o’ judgement”” (A. Gissing 46). Not all of the characters’ names signify as clearly as this, but they all possess a simplistic set of character traits associated with conventional roles. Sir Philip Scorton, who marries the heroine at the end of the novel is, for example, a paragon of virtue: “It is needless to say,” the narrator informs the reader, “that such a youth was above any vulgar curiosity” (A. Gissing 92). Woolf’s final assessment of the novel is vicious. She uses the fate of the most prominent plot device, the “evil book” about which the melodramatic action of this novel centres, to imply that *Arrows of Fortune* itself should be “burnt to ashes” (*E* 1: 42). Similar critiques of the “traditional conception” of characters occur in other reviews of this period, indicating a persistent questioning of the role of convention in constructing character (*E* 1: 95).

If convention can kill character, so too can exaggeration.<sup>22</sup> In Woolf’s generally positive 1905 review of Elizabeth Robins’ *A Dark Lantern*, the only critique concerns exaggerated characterisation. Robins’ vehemence mars the work. Writing of the male protagonist, Garth Vincent, Woolf notes that “the argument [. . .] seems to be that, if you want a man to be excessively masculine, you have only to take certain of the conventional masculine qualities and develop them [. . .]” (*E* 1: 43). As the novel is read, the effect is “overpowering,” but upon reflection it is “melodramatic” (*E* 1: 43). Exaggerated characterisation thus has a powerful temporary impact, but fails to live beyond the text. Once safely removed from the mesmerising influence of the character, the reader begins to doubt its essential verisimilitude.<sup>23</sup> In the case of *A Dark Lantern*, Woolf’s concerns seem reasonable. Garth Vincent is a representative of a “radically different” world from the genteel existence Katherine Dereham is accustomed to (Robins 58). He is, within the pattern established by the novel, “the very prose of life” in contrast to the poetry of Katherine’s lover Prince Anton (Robins 138). And he is prose with a vengeance, possessed of a “vigorous, essentially masculine frame” and a tremendous disdain for poets, who are ““responsible for a lot of harm - filling women’s minds with foolishness, encouraging their weakness - blinding

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<sup>22</sup> This is a less frequent point of criticism in Woolf’s reviews of her contemporaries, but she also raises the issue in her writings on Charlotte Brontë.

<sup>23</sup> Within the text, Garth Vincent is literally mesmerising; he has an almost magical ability to sway other characters (Robins 158).

them to reality” (Robins 149). While Vincent possesses a great deal of force within the narrative as an embodiment of action and decision opposed to dishonesty, super-refinement, and lassitude, it is certainly hard to see him as an imagined human being. In addition, Vincent disturbs narrative balance: “If Miss Katherine Dereham had met Mr Garth Vincent under normal conditions she would not have allowed herself to take him seriously” (*E* 1: 43). Normal conditions refers to the world outside of the narrative conventions of the novel: outside of a book the central relationship of *A Dark Lantern* is impossible. As Woolf noted in another 1905 review, “it is necessary also if you have drawn one character above life-size to heighten the others in due proportion [ . . . ]” (*E* 1: 67). *A Dark Lantern* does address this issue, establishing a strong sense of the ways in which Vincent is initially “too ‘different’” for Katherine, allowing a period of several years to elapse, and their relative situations to change, before bringing them into contact again (Robins 46).<sup>24</sup> Finally, exaggerated characterisation depends on the conventional notions of character which are inadequate to the task of representing contemporary reality. In a character like Garth Vincent, Woolf reads a heightened unreality, an exaggeration of an untrue convention.

Another danger in the creation of characters is thinness: if a character is only sketched out, it does not give a substantial impression of reality. In her second review of a W. E. Norris novel, *Lone Marie*, Woolf identifies this as a central problem: “In the present book the characters, so far as they go, are suggested with admirable ease and delicacy of touch, but the wise reader will ask no more than a suggestion [ . . . ]” (*E* 1: 66). Characters are brief entries in a “sketch-book,” and as such offer no solid reality, as Woolf makes plain by her repeated emphasis on the “delicacy” of the novel, which operates strictly on the surface of character: “depths [ . . . ] remain unrevealed” (*E* 1: 66). Woolf identifies another instance of this failing in her review of Beatrice Harraden’s *The Scholar’s Daughter*, in which the main characters are “not convincing” (*E* 1: 92). Woolf’s definition here of a convincing character seems to be one which allows the reader to believe in its reality both within the novel and outside its boundaries. In this case, if Harraden “had [ . . . ] chosen to expound the characters more elaborately, she might have given us an interesting study of the conflict of one temperament with another” (*E* 1: 92). The conflict in question in this novel is between the “generous impulsive nature” of Geraldine Grant, and the reserved coldness of her father, Professor Grant, who has taken refuge in the “impersonality of comparative philology,”

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<sup>24</sup> Woolf’s *Night and Day* establishes a similar contrast in the relationship between Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham.

between the closeted academic mind and the “manly beauty and spirited hardihood” of Harold Warwick, Australian rancher (Harraden 46, 50, 57). None of the characters in the novel are drawn in depth; Professor Grant’s three assistants, for instance, are almost indistinguishable as they sit “staring like statues [. . .] all silently thinking the same thought” (Harraden 87). In other cases, even when characters are “pleasantly like nature,” as in Dorothea Gerard’s *The Compromise*, thinness can remain a problem, leaving the reader “upon the outskirts of her characters”: this is “satisfactory rather than exciting” (*E* 1: 110). Woolf seems to be arguing that something more is required for effective characterisation than imitative and narrative credibility. Thin characterisation for Woolf, then, can both fail to create realistic characters and fail to offer a stimulating interest in character.

Accretion of detail is not the solution to this problem. In a number of early reviews that anticipate her later critique of Edwardian fiction, Woolf objects to detail in characterisation. In Mary E. Wilkins Freeman’s *The Debtor* the protagonist’s fall from prosperity is recorded from “every possible point of view,” while “the characters of the debtor himself, of his wife and children, of his creditors, of any one remotely connected with him are drawn in with a curious elaboration” (*E* 1: 69). Bessy Van Dorn, for instance, a minor character, is described drinking soda in a drug store:

The girl’s semi-German parentage showed in her complexion and big-bosomed, matronly figure, although she was so young. She had a large but charming face, full of the sweetest placidity; her eyes, as blue as the sky, looked out on the world with amiable assent to all its conditions. [. . .]. She sat on a high stool and sipped her ice-cream soda with simple absorption in the pleasant sensation. [. . .]. Her chin overlapping in pink curves like a rose, was sunken in the lace at her neck as she sipped. (Freeman 160)

This passage continues for another page, before a dialogue begins in which the girl is further described by the other patrons of the drug store, which is in turn interrupted by personal histories and descriptions of the speakers provided by the narrator. Woolf argues that this compilation of minutely detailed information “is not wholly successful” (*E* 1: 69). The “pages of close description and unessential [sic] detail which should have been transacted silently in the writer’s brain” act to shatter the text’s unity, leaving the reader with a series of “disconnected studies of character” rather than with a seamless “single and well-proportioned whole” (*E* 1: 69). By piling up detail in an attempt to create full, believable characters, Wilkins buries them, and thus deprives them of a coherent narrative within which to develop. Woolf again finds fault with this technique in her 1907 review of Richard Bagot’s *Temptation*, which she describes as “an able study of character” (*E* 1: 135). Here “Mr Bagot

spends so much care on the few characters whom he introduces, and offers so close an explanation of their motives, that we are prepared both for greater vigour of action and greater subtlety of speech” (*E* 1: 135). For Woolf, detail alone is inadequate, and character study by itself is no solution to the problem of character.

Woolf is even more explicit in her condemnation of representational character, in which a fictional character becomes a medium for the transmission of a message. In A. Cunnick Inchbold’s *The Letter Killeth: a Romance of the Sussex Downs*, “the main characters are coldly conceived and have little likeness to palpable human beings” and Inchbold “does not attempt to penetrate beneath a somewhat elementary conception of character” (*E* 1: 65). It is worth noting the two structures that Woolf brings into play here, the concept of referential approximation of real-world selves, and the literary conception of character. Inchbold’s failure is due to the presence of concealed conceptual structures: the main characters are “not much more than lay figures upon which the conventional virtues hang [. . .]” (*E* 1: 65). In the novel, for instance, the narrator tells us that “one desire fired” the hearts of John Gilbert and his young wife, “the desire to work among the unbelieving that many might be convinced of the truth through their united efforts” (Inchbold 25). These are not imagined Christians, but imagined Christianity. As a result, “the actors seem for the most part to live in a rarified atmosphere among shadows”; they “climb to heaven after a descent to hell,” representing Christian repentance and virtue rather than imagined selves (*E* 1: 65; Inchbold 307). In a 1906 review of Vincent Brown’s *Mrs Grundy’s Crucifix*, Woolf is more explicit as to the “motive” that leads to this type of failure: the misuse of the novel as propaganda (*E* 1: 111). Finding that one character in *Mrs Grundy’s Crucifix* is “little more than a tract which has been put somewhat crudely into a human case” while another is “a type” of an “institution,” Woolf argues that these failures of characterisation are the result of fiction motivated by non-artistic considerations (*E* 1: 112, 1: 111).<sup>25</sup> “Indeed, Mr Brown,” Woolf writes, “has given one more proof of the danger of the novel that undertakes a

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<sup>25</sup> This is an early example of what Marcus has identified as an important tendency in Woolf’s essays and fiction: the conflation of different definitions of character based on the etymological origin of the word ‘character’ from the Greek *kharratein*, meaning to engrave (*Virginia* 18). Marcus argues that Woolf carries out a “subversion of the received definition” of character by playing on the semantic gap between “a definition of ‘character’ as (punctuation) mark and print type” and “‘character’ as psychological ‘type’” (*Virginia* 18). In this instance we find the word ‘character’ in conjunction with ‘type,’ and the idea of a didactic conceptual structure, a tract, being transposed into a “human case,” denigrating an ineffective literary strategy through a metaphor derived from writing or printing. This etymological ambiguity in the word character has also been noted by Cixous, who uses it to relate the notion of character to the individual’s Lacanian inscription into the social order (386).

crusade. So much of natural human nature, so many lights and shades, so much truth, in short, must be sacrificed [ . . . ]” (E 1: 112). Representational characters cannot approximate the “lights and shades” of human subjectivity (E 1: 112). The result is a flat simulacrum of an individual. Even when a book is positively reviewed, Woolf insists that “the purpose of a novelist demands individual men and women” who indeed confront “dragons,” or narrative problems, but that “the dragons serve but to [ . . . ] exhibit their characters” (Woolf, “Selected” 284). The issues serve to reveal character, not character to reveal issues.

This type of characterisation can, Woolf argues, move outside of the generic boundaries of the novel. *One Immortality* by H. Fielding Hall “has nothing in common with the ordinary novel,”: the presentation of character is hopelessly representative, and “to supply them with names is to put the picture out of perspective; a name implies substance, passions, and a number of relationships, and Mr Hall’s figures have no more flesh than will cover a single point of view” (E 1: 255). This type of character is “a modern version of the old allegory” (E 1: 255). This distinction is taken up in a review of Amy Dora Reynold’s *The Making of Michael*, which is peopled with highly abstract characters, who are “seldom endowed with proper names, but are dubbed ‘Stranger’ or ‘Dreamer’ [ . . . ]” (E 1: 71). This creates characters “at once real and ideal [ . . . ]. The result is [ . . . ] neither one thing nor the other, and [ . . . ] the picture is too vague to leave other than a shadowy and fantastic impression upon the world” (E 1: 71). Once again, Woolf rejects characters who are unlike the complex individuals who people the real world. Attempts to use character to represent something other than individuals result in literary wraiths: shadowy, insubstantial, and untrue to human experience.

A final category of character failure is caused by its submergence within a larger narrative structure. This is related to representational character, but is more artistically creditable; it is on these grounds that Woolf was in her 1929 “Phases of Fiction” to question Henry James’s characterisation (122 - 123). In 1905, however, she was not as explicit in the linkage between structural patterning and loss of vitality in characterisation. The characters in *The Golden Bowl* are “so many distinguished ghosts” and the reader must be content to live “with thoughts and emotions, not with live people,” (E 1: 23). While it is impossible to say if Woolf attributes this to the same constrictive patterning she was later to associate with James, in a 1906 review of *The House of Shadows* by R. J. Farrer the connection is clear. She distinguishes between two types of novels: character-led and pattern-led. “In many novels,” she writes, “the situation seems to have been suggested by the author’s desire to introduce

certain characters; in others the writer seems to have conceived his scheme first and to have made his characters its creatures” (*E* 1: 93). This refers to the Victorian opposition between novels of character and novels of plot. Woolf does not discount the structural novel, recognising that it can produce works of “force and continuity” (*E* 1: 93 - 94). However, the result is a weakened sense of reality in the characters, who “are always seen under some kind of distortion [. . .]” (*E* 1: 94). In the case of *The House of Shadows*, the scheme is an intense melodrama revolving around infidelity, suicide, and murder. The characters are presented in a most lurid light. Tempest Landon is filled with an “almost insane hate,” while his daughter-in-law, “a girl of warped views and disastrous education” is likened to “the heroine in a sensation novel” (Farrer 280, 63, 54). The characters move through a series of set-piece scenes which illuminate their opposing traits. This scheme limits, according to Woolf, the ability of the characters to manifest themselves fully.

Woolf’s earliest reviews thus analyse the failure of character in contemporary fiction. They also indicate what Woolf would have considered successful characterisation. The limited praise she bestows is generally associated with minor characters. In her review of *The Letter Killeth*, the minor characters are “drawn with greater freedom and force and provide welcome relief” from the laboured unreality of the protagonists (*E* 1: 65). Similarly, certain “subsidiary characters” in *The Face of Clay: An Interpretation* by H. A. Vachell “are observed with such humour and sympathy that they make a very severe touchstone by which to test the other characters in the book,” an observation similar to that made by Leslie Stephen regarding George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, a novel purportedly centring around Dinah Morris but highjacked by Mrs Poyser (*E* 1: 97; *George* 77). Woolf also admires what she refers to in her review of *The Golden Bowl* as “live people” (*E* 1: 23). This idea is anathema to much twentieth-century criticism, but was considerably more familiar to the writers and readers of this period. Woolf’s earliest reviews embrace rather than reject the implied relationship between the literary text and the real world.

This was a view firmly grounded in Victorian criticism. Matthew Arnold, for instance, wrote that the physical traits of the characters in *Anna Karenina* are “as real to us as any of those outward peculiarities which in our own circle of acquaintance we are noticing daily” (286). This physical intimacy accompanies greater access to the inner lives of these characters than readers have to the inner lives of their “own circle of acquaintance,” the same point that Forster makes when he writes that “people in a novel can be understood completely” (Arnold 286; *Aspects* 68). This duality of exterior and interior knowledge

creates an impression of life so strong that not only does the reader take Tolstoy's characters "fiction though they are, too seriously," but also that the overall impression of his novel is not of art, but of life (Arnold 288, 285). Leslie Stephen also employs this trope in an essay on Charlotte Brontë, writing that a reasoning author creates "mechanism and constructs automata" while a "seer," or writer of genius, "creates living and feeling beings" (*Hours* 3: 4). For Stephen, the two types of character can coexist: The Bailie, Nicol Jarvie, in Scott's *Rob Roy* is "as real a human being as ever lived" while Mrs MacGregor, from the same novel, "has obviously just stepped off the boards of a minor theatre, devoted to the melodrama" (*Hours* 1: 149). Scott's young heroes all suffer from a similar problem: "they can all run, and ride, and fight, and make pretty speeches, [. . .] but somehow they all partake of one fault, [. . .] namely, that they are dead" (*Hours* 1: 152). For the Victorian critic, one of the primary ways of assessing a character was through the categories of 'alive' and 'dead', and in Woolf's early criticism this dichotomy remains apparent, although Woolf's interest lies with the technical causes of death rather than with mortality itself.<sup>26</sup>

An attempt to assess characterisation in Woolf's work must look past these early reviews which, while demonstrating her interest in character, do not offer a viable critical model for her own writing. However, as she assumes "the role of a critic" a better sense of this model emerges (Dubino 26). For Woolf, this transition from journalist to critic involved writing substantial criticism of major writers instead of short reviews of minor writers (Gualtieri, *Virginia* 24). A key text here is Woolf's 1912 *TLS* article marking the release of a new edition of George Gissing. Woolf had written articles on major authors previously,

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<sup>26</sup> This concept of living character originates in eighteenth century criticism. Maurice Morgann, for example, analyses the "roundness" of Shakespeare's characters, who "seen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole" (167 - 168). As such, Morgann's 1777 *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* was implicated in the "hue and cry" against "Bradleyan confusion of Shakespeare's characters with living human beings" (Fineman 29). While Fineman argued in 1972 that such readings of the *Essay* were overly simplistic, as recently as 1997 John Osborne wrote that Morgann "sets out to defend the character [Falstaff] against the moralistic charge of cowardice, as if he had an independent existence outside the action of the drama [. . .]" (36; 208). Morgann's reputation as a progenitor of the so-called heresy persists in spite of clear evidence of his awareness of the distinction between textual and real existence, for instance his analysis of the ways in which character is conditioned and defined by its location within a text as a finite sequence of words: the characterisation value of certain actions or words are altered by where they stand in relation to other actions of words in the text (Morgann 195 - 196). The idea of living character entered the twentieth century in the criticism of Henry James, whose argument that the elements of character - plot, dialogue, description - are together, but not in isolation, character has been interpreted as indicating that "no single method" of narrative technique "insured the depiction of 'living' characters" (James "Art" 173 - 174; S. Daugherty 117).

including Charlotte Brontë, Thomas De Quincey, Henry James, Elizabeth Gaskell and even a piece on Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in which Woolf highlighted interest in human character as a key factor (Rosenbaum 179). However, this was her first retrospective survey of a major author, and it offers important indications of Woolf's developing vision of characterisation.

Woolf wrote "The Novels of George Gissing" at a moment of particular stress. The essay was published on 11 January 1912, the same day Woolf received a proposal of marriage from Leonard Woolf. She had in the previous year rejected two marriage proposals, dealt with violent changes in her sister Vanessa Bell's relationships and health, and had serious doubts about her literary career (Lee, *Virginia* 301 - 302). She had also been periodically unwell with the illness that culminated in commitment to a rest home and an attempted suicide in 1913 (DeSalvo 8). Finally, she was struggling with *The Voyage Out*, which she had been actively writing since 1908, and it is around the reception of her first novel that her anxieties crystallised (DeSalvo 8, 4). Something of this tension is found in this essay; the sight of Gissing's collected works makes Woolf shudder, for "dead leaves cannot be more brittle or more worthless than things faintly imagined - and that the fruit of one's life should be twelve volumes of dead leaves!" (*E* 1: 355). This fear of completion, death, and posterity's assessment are linked to Woolf's doubts regarding her own status as a writer and the reception that awaits her first novel. However, Gissing's novels are not dead: "We have one moment of such panic [. . .] and then we rise again. Not in our time will they be found worthless" (*E* 1: 355). The religious trope indicates how seriously Woolf takes the issue of critical assessment, and the importance of creating vivid, living fiction. The important question for Woolf as she begins her career as a novelist is how Gissing's novels metaphorically elude death, and the answer is through characterisation.

Gissing's "men and women think" (*E* 1: 359). Thought "is enough to distinguish Gissing's characters from those of other novelists," where we may find "characters who feel violently; characters who are true types; witty characters, bad ones, good ones, eccentric ones, buffoons [. . .]" but rarely characters who think (*E* 1: 359). Woolf's list of familiar characters is reminiscent of her early reviews and her critiques of exaggerated and conventional characterisation, and her insistence on the importance of the representation of individuality in character. The category of the thinking character is, however, new:

The great advantage of making people think is that you can describe other relationships besides the great one between the lover and the beloved. There is friendship for instance; the relationship that is founded on liking the same books, or sharing the same enthusiasms; there is a relationship between one man and men in general. [. . .]. It is out of these relationships that he makes

up the texture of his works. Loves have exploded; tragedies have flared up and sunk to ashes; these quiet, undemonstrative feelings between one man and another, one woman and another, persist; they spin some kind of thread across the ravages; they are the noblest things he has found in the world. (*E* 1: 359)

Woolf's elevated rhetoric indicates the importance of this statement. The thinking character opens up a tremendous range of relations for literary exploration. Passionate love has long been the stuff of fiction; humbler relationships - friendship, common interest, even the relationship of the one to the many - have remained in shadow. These are the material of Gissing's fiction, and they redeem it from "the English method of writing fiction," a method which "instead of leaping from one high pinnacle of emotion to the next" is careful to fill in "all the adjoining parts most carefully" (*E* 1: 359). This method is "sometimes very dull," but the strength of the relationships out of which Gissing's novels are built save them (*E* 1: 359). At the conclusion of this essay Woolf draws a familiar distinction between life and death. While this dichotomy has often been applied to characters, Woolf now shifts it to the novel as a whole.

You clasp a bird in your hands; it is so frightened that it lies perfectly still; yet somehow it is a living body, there is a heart in it and the breast is warm. You feel a fish on your line; the line hangs straight as before down into the sea, but there is a strain on it; it thrills and quivers. That is something like the feeling live books give and dead ones cannot give; they strain and quiver. (*E* 1: 361)

For Woolf, the most important element in Gissing is the network of complex relationships established amongst his characters. While she highlights other factors in his work, such as their anti-idealism, to no other point does she give the textual space or linguistic energy that she bestows upon his interrelated characters. As Woolf finishes her own first novel, she is aware of the importance of successful characterisation, of the pitfalls that await incautious authors in their attempts to create character, and of the role that relationship plays in developing living character and living books. If Woolf was palpably afraid that her life's work would be squandered to produce "volumes of dead leaves," the way forward seems to lie through character (*E* 1: 355).

Woolf's encounter with the nineteenth-century Russian novelists, especially Fyodor

Dostoyevsky, offers an alternate approach.<sup>27</sup> Woolf first read Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in a French translation in 1912 during her honeymoon. A letter to Lytton Strachey reveals the strength of her reaction:

You can't think with what a fury we fall on printed matter, so long denied us by our own writing! I read 3 new novels in two days: Leonard waltzed through *The Old Wives Tale* like a kitten after its tail: after this giddy career I have now run full tilt into *Crime et Châtiment*, fifty pages before tea, and I see there are only 800; so I shall be through in no time. It is directly obvious that he is the greatest writer ever born: and if he chooses to become horrible what will happen to us? Honeymoon completely dashed. If he says it - human hope - had better end, what will be left but suicide in the Grand Canal. Have you been writing about him? (*L 2: 5*)

Woolf's response is radically different to her measured critical reviews of contemporary novels. She reads voraciously, but distinguishes between the new novels she has read and *Crime and Punishment*: while she devoured the former, she seems more likely to be devoured by the latter.<sup>28</sup> Her praise for the novel is unstinting, as she grants it, with a comic seriousness, ultimate power over her destiny. Woolf's other early references to Dostoyevsky are similarly enthusiastic, although a certain hesitancy is perceptible. A letter to Strachey dated 1 December 1912 in which she writes that she is "reading among other things [. . .] *Un Adolescent*, by Dostoevsky - more frantic than any, I think, 12 new characters on every page, and the mind quite dazed by conversations [. . .]" is typical of Woolf's bewildered appreciation (Woolf and Strachey, *Letters* 47).<sup>29</sup>

Woolf's 1915 reading of *The Idiot* inspired another set of responses which centre on character. She notes in her diary that Dostoyevsky seems "to have the same kind of vitality in

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<sup>27</sup> Between 1912 and the mid 1920s, Woolf wrote widely on Russian literature, a personal interest coincident with a broader English interest in Russian cultural activity (Marcus, "European" 344). A period of fascination with Dostoyevsky in the 1880s waned by the end of the decade, with only one new translation into English in twenty years, and existing translations going out of print (Kaye 13). Thus by 1912 Strachey could write that "of the three great writers who dominated Russian literature during the last half of the nineteenth century, certainly the least known is Dostoevsky" (Strachey, "Dostoevsky" 174). This situation was transformed by Constance Garnett, "the greatest and the most prolific translator of Russian fiction," whose translations of Dostoyevsky's novels into English are part of the general growth of interest in Russian culture, the "fascination with all things Russian that characterized the end of the Edwardian era" (Orel 376; Kaye 19). This period of intense literary interest lasted through the 1920s, before fading in the 1930s (Marcus, "European" 348).

<sup>28</sup> The three new novels Woolf read on her honeymoon before beginning *Crime and Punishment* seem to have been D. H. Lawrence's *The Trespassers*, Emily Hilda Young's *Yonder*, and Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redcliffe*. She also read Scott's *The Antiquary*, which may have influenced through chronological propinquity the later comparisons she made between Scott and Dostoyevsky (*L 2: 6*).

<sup>29</sup> The brief reference to Dostoyevsky in this letter is immediately followed by a lengthy and detailed discussion of Samuel Butler's *Note-Books*, a work which she praises highly in a 1916 review. Woolf's passion for Dostoyevsky was one of many concurrent literary interests.

him that Scott had; only Scott merely made superb ordinary people, & D. creates wonders, with very subtle brains, & fearful sufferings” (*D* 1: 23). Dostoyevsky’s characters have the vitality of Scott’s, but can think and thus suffer; analytical ability enhances their capacity for pain. For instance, Marmeladov’s confession in *Crime and Punishment* reveals that he, although characterised as a wretched drunkard and melodramatic buffoon reminiscent of Dickens’ Mr Micawber, has a capacity for thought that allows him to understand the degradation of his family. His wife cherishes fond if illusory memories of her previous marriage, and uses this constructed past as a weapon against Marmeladov. His understanding of the situation is subtle: “[. . .] I’m glad, I’m glad, for even though it’s only her imaginings, she’s able to perceive herself as having once been happy [. . .]” (Dostoyevsky 21). Thought forces him - allows him - to suffer.

In a review of Tolstoy’s *The Cossacks*, Woolf praises the combination of physicality and intellect which allows readers to “know his characters both by the way they choke and sneeze and by the way they feel about love and immortality and the most subtle questions of conduct,” or by the “continuous vein of thought” which runs through their minds (*E* 2: 77 - 79). She ends her review by contrasting the English talent for the “comedy of manners” and the “profound psychology of the Russian writers” (*E* 2: 79). In this review, then, Woolf highlights a trait she also associates with Dostoyevsky: powerful characterisation built on a combination of simulated thought processes and physical detail. This is similar to Arnold’s view of Tolstoy’s characterisation, stemming from a long tradition of distinguishing between external and internal elements of character. These were described in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, one of the earliest Roman rhetorical treatises, which became highly influential in mediaeval times, as *effectio* and *notatio* (Atkins 1: 15). Misattributed to Cicero, the *Rhetorica* bridged classical and mediaeval character theory (Caplan vii- viii). *Effectio* is concerned with the physical appearance of an individual, “representing and depicting in words clearly enough for recognition the bodily form of some person” and consists of the enumeration of physical traits (Cicero 387). *Notatio*, on the other hand, is concerned with the description of internal or moral traits, “describing a person’s character by the definite signs which, like distinctive marks, are attributes of that character” (Cicero 387). For Woolf, characterisation demands both.

In her most important early article on Dostoyevsky, her review of Constance Garnett’s translation of *The Eternal Husband, and Other Stories*, Woolf describes the central experience of reading Dostoyevsky as a “sense that something strange and important has happened” which makes his books “surprising” and “bewildering” (*E* 2: 83). This was not a

unique response. Strachey wrote that Dostoyevsky's "books are strange not only in form, but in spirit" and argued that "what must first be apparent in those works is the strange and poignant mixture they contain" ("Dostoyevsky" 176, "Russian" 181). The rest of Woolf's review attempts to define the source of this mysterious yet vital peculiarity. The narrative events of "The Eternal Husband" are, Woolf writes, "the little bits of cork which mark a circle upon the top of the waves while the net drags the floor of the sea and encloses stranger monsters than have ever been brought to the light of day before" (*E* 2: 84). This image contains two related elements: surfaces, in Woolf's metaphor the cork fishing floats which are visible on the surface of the water, and a series of nets which descend from the visible surface into the invisible depths. Within this metaphorical structure, the surface elements of narrative - plot, description, incident - support the essential, if unseen, elements of the narrative, which catch the strange monsters that are its object.

A metaphor for Dostoyevsky's depiction of thought may indicate the monsters' identity. Woolf describes the reader's response to Velchaninov, the protagonist of "The Eternal Husband", as groping through a "labyrinth of the soul," an image of darkness and depth at the centre of character (*E* 2:85). But this soul is a detailed depiction of the processes of thought.

Velchaninov [. . .] passes over his involved and crowded train of thought, without a single hitch [. . .]. From the crowd of objects pressing upon our attention we select now this one, now that one, weaving them inconsequently into our thought; the associations of a word perhaps make another loop in the line, from which we spring back again to a different section of our main thought [. . .]. (*E* 2: 85)

Thought is seamless, uninterrupted by narrative interpretation or external description; it is assimilative, incorporating elements of the external world into its processes; and it is linguistically associative, building itself in part out of the semantic and aural relations between words rather than through logically meaningful concepts.<sup>30</sup> A familiar image emerges as Woolf continues her analysis: "[. . .] if we try to construct our mental processes

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<sup>30</sup> Dennis Brown identifies this "auditory imagination," whereby a word "can breed another by differential similarity and sound-attraction" rather than by dependence on "pure meaning," as a key trope in literary modernism (33 - 34). Woolf refers to a text in which she could not have assessed this technique: translations limit this sort of word-association. An example of the associative value of words can be found in *Crime and Punishment*, when Raskolnikov argues that an exceptional person "has the right to step across certain [. . .] obstacles" (308). The Russian for step across is *pereshagnut*, which is for a Russian reader directly related to *prestuplenie*, or crime (McDuff 665). As Dostoyevsky writes, "[. . .] one little word leads to another, one thought suggests another" (401). As Woolf knew, this linguistic association is lost in translation ("Russian" 174). This is an instance of Woolf using her critical writings as part of a larger process of defining literary modernity.

later, we find that the links between one thought and another are submerged. The chain is sunk out of sight and only the leading points emerge to mark the course” (*E 2*: 85). This metaphor has shifted from identifying a relationship between surface incident and narrative depths, to charting a relationship between conscious and unconscious elements of the thought process.

Alone among writers Dostoevsky has the power of reconstructing those most swift and complicated states of mind, of rethinking the whole train of thought in all its speed, now as it flashes into light, now as it lapses into darkness; for he is able to follow not only the vivid streak of achieved thought, but to suggest the dim and populous underworld of the mind’s consciousness where desires and impulses are moving blindly beneath the sod. (*E 2*: 85)

Woolf’s metaphors explore the ways thought can be portrayed: it is a train associated with speed and alternating light and dark; it is linked to polarities of surface and depth; it is figured in terms of conscious light and unconscious darkness; and it is split between an implicitly sunlit surface and a teeming underground darkness. These metaphors do not operate in seclusion; rather they create a dense network of allusion, a composite metaphor of Woolf’s vision of thought as a series of contrasts between light and dark, speed and stillness, vision and blindness, surface and depth. As Marcus points out, Woolf’s interpretation of Dostoyevsky is very much keyed to “[...] her habitual preoccupation with the relationship between speed and surface, on the one hand, and depth and immutability on the other” (*European* 351).

The strangeness for Woolf, then, of reading Dostoyevsky seems to be related to the duality inherent in the portrayed thought-processes of his characters, a duality that is both new insofar as it “is the exact opposite of the method adopted, perforce, by most of our novelists” who “reproduce all the external appearances - tricks of manner, landscape, dress and the effect of the hero upon his friends - but very rarely, and only for an instant, penetrate to the tumult of thought which rages within his own mind” and yet peculiarly familiar (*E 2*: 85). This familiarity stems from the fact that however mysteriously bewildering the thoughts of Dostoyevsky’s characters are, at the same time “[. . .] we constantly find ourselves wondering whether we recognise the feeling that he shows us, and we realise constantly and with a start of surprise that we have met it before in ourselves, or in some moment of intuition have suspected it in others” (*E 2*: 86). Marcus argues that the strangeness Woolf experiences reading Dostoyevsky mirrors Freud’s notion of the uncanny, a recovery of something previously known but forgotten (*European* 350). The association between Woolf’s reading of Dostoyevsky and Freudian thought is critical for her later formulation of the

modernist character:

For Virginia Woolf [. . .] Russian literature came to represent the spheres of the psychological and of unconscious life more generally. It was a psychoanalytically informed model which enabled Woolf to engage with, and seek to represent, unconscious processes long before she acknowledged any real familiarity with Freud's work. (Marcus, *European* 350)

A final linkage between Russian literature and psychoanalytic theory lies in the concept of ambivalence, which, as Marcus points out, resonated strongly for Woolf when she eventually read Freud (*Virginia* 182 - 183). The point here is that ambivalence, the simultaneous existence of opposed feelings of love and hatred, is both a key term in Woolf's reading of Dostoyevsky and is linked to the patterns of "vacillation and of oscillation which run throughout her work" (Marcus, *European* 350).

The connections between the strangeness of Russian fiction, relating to a technique of characterisation, ambivalence, and an uncanny sense of recognition are part of a critique of Edwardian characterisation. Woolf argues that character in Dostoyevsky reminds the reader of something lost or forgotten, and is the opposite of the standard English character - the very character that her early reviews attack. The English novel has forgotten, yet strangely recognises, what character is and how it can be created. "We have to get rid of the old tune," Woolf writes, "which runs so persistently in our ears, and to realise how little of our humanity is expressed in that old tune" (*E* 2: 86). That old tune, and its inability to adequately create character, will be the substance of Woolf's attack on Edwardian realism. As David McWhirter argues, in her praise of Dostoevsky's ability to follow the sinuous line of thought "Woolf is clearly echoing the terms of her celebrated quarrel with 'Mr. Bennett'" (787).<sup>31</sup> Or, as Lucia Aiello points out, Woolf uses "the source of her disorientation as a [sic] leverage against traditional novel-writing, and in particular against Bennett and other writers like him" (666 - 667). Thus Woolf's reading of Dostoyevsky is pivotal in informing both her early conceptualisation of character, and her later debates about the nature of modern character.

Woolf's relationship with Dostoyevsky in particular, and with Russian writers in general, was by no means stable. She initially shared the broader cultural enthusiasm for the Russian writers, viewing them as an illuminating and stimulating alternative to the English literary tradition. However, she uses these writers freely as she gradually builds up her own

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<sup>31</sup> The normal sequence of an echo is here reversed, as her praise for Dostoyevsky precedes her critique of Bennett.

vision of character: “[. . .] Woolf used Russian literature as a means of identification of her priorities in writing” (Reinhold 5). Thus she can use the Russians to define herself against the English tradition, and the English tradition to define herself against the Russians. For instance, In her 1918 article “On Re-Reading Meredith”, Woolf opposes the Russians to English novelists, Meredith in particular. While they “possess an entirely new conception of the novel,” she accuses them of excessive detail: “they accumulate” (*E 2: 274, 273*). Meredith, on the other hand, “takes truth by storm; he takes it with a phrase [. . .] compact of many different observations, fused into one and flashed out in a line of brilliant light” (*E 2: 274*). Meredith’s distillations of detail are in turn related to the construction of fictitious literary individuals: “it is by such phrases that we get to know his characters” (*E 2: 274*). Here, Woolf hopes, lies the future of the novel: “That is the way [. . .] that the art of fiction will develop” (*E 2: 275*). This development has a familiar goal, the creation of “the living men and women who justify modern fiction” (*E 2: 276*). Even when Woolf redeploys the Russian authors as part of her protracted meditation on the nature of the novel, her terms of reference remain focussed around character and the sense of life they should possess.

Woolf’s early non-fiction, then, is intimately concerned with characterisation. Her early reviews of contemporary fiction analyse the failure of Edwardian literary techniques to create what she views as the primary goal of the novel, ‘living’ character. These reviews can be seen as a protracted analysis of the ways that fictional representations of humans can be constructed, and of the ways these approaches can fail. The bulk of these reviews, and thus Woolf’s first mediation on the nature of character, were written prior to 1908 when she began writing the novel that was eventually published as *The Voyage Out*. Her discussions of Gissing and Dostoyevsky occur later, but still predate the bulk of her published fiction. The ideas she develops in her journalism and criticism do not remain static even over this period, much less to later points in her writing career. But many of the ideas around which Woolf’s early discussion of character circulated in the first decades of the twentieth century remained points of central concern and interrogation. Ideas of living character, of the relation between character and ideological representation, of the roles of thinness and detail in creating character, the relationship between interior and exterior forms of characterisation, and perhaps most particularly of the role of relationship in character and of character in relationship will return repeatedly in Woolf’s later writings, albeit in altered forms and from altered perspectives. As Woolf began, so she continued: a writer absorbed by character.

## Chapter 3

As *The Voyage Out* begins, and the *Euphrosyne* sets sail from London to Santa Marina, Rachel Vinrace faces a number of challenges. One of the first is domestic: Mrs Chaily, the Vinrace's family servant, manufactures an emotional crisis over the ship's stock of presentable bed-linen. On one level this incident signifies Rachel's rejection of the social role occupied by her dead mother, and the "Lies! Lies! Lies!" it entails (VO 22). On another level Mrs Chaily and her sheets introduce the extended meditation on the nature of characterisation that lies at the centre of *The Voyage Out*:

There was nothing for it but to descend and inspect a large pile of linen heaped upon a table. Mrs. Chaily handled the sheets as if she knew each by name, character, and constitution. Some had yellow stains, others had places where the threads made long ladders; but to the ordinary eye they looked much as sheets usually do look, very chill, white, cold, and irreproachably clean. (VO 21)

The terms used here to describe linen - name, character and constitution - are generally used to describe people. Both sheets and people require examination, and both are potentially indistinguishable in their superficial likeness. Sheets, and by implication people - or characters - are simultaneously unique and identical, individuals and type. This chapter will explore the systematic and sustained meditation on the nature of character initiated by Mrs Chaily and her damaged linen.

While early criticism of *The Voyage Out* identified character as an area of primary interest, it was not particularly attentive to the innovative ways it was employed. The *TLS* praised the characters surrounding Rachel Vinrace as "brilliantly drawn," singling out Helen Ambrose, "who is so real and so baffling" as a particular success, while E. M. Forster claimed that Woolf's "characters are not vivid" (Majumdar 50; "New" 53). "There is nothing false in them" but "when she ceases to touch them they cease, they do not stroll out of their sentences [. . .]" ("New" 53). These assessments rely on the Victorian category of living character, which Woolf had employed in her early journalism, but which may well miss, or at least radically simplify, the role of character in *The Voyage Out*. The *Morning Post*'s quibble that the reader is "confused among a mass of people" and that Woolf "needlessly complicates matters" by alternating between first and last names is perversely closer to the point, indicating at least that character is not necessarily functioning here in strict accordance with received notions of the vivid fictional representation of real subjectivity (Majumdar 51).

Both aboard the *Euphrosyne* and in Santa Marina, the novel and its characters are intensely preoccupied with defining character: one of the primary mental activities of

characters is defining, or characterising, other characters. Helen Ambrose, for instance, ends her first night on board by summing up the characters of her shipmates:

[. . .] Helen drew her own conclusions, which were gloomy enough. Pepper was a bore; Rachel was an unlicked girl, no doubt prolific of confidences, the very first of which would be: ‘You see, I don’t get on with my father.’ Willoughby, as usual, loved his business and built his Empire, and between them all she would be considerably bored. (VO 16)

Helen examines the social scene, listens to conversations, observes actions, analyses relationships and comes to conclusions, which depend upon generalisation - Mr Pepper is a bore, and a bore is not an individual but a type - and allow the prediction of action from generalised notions of character: Rachel is the type of inexperienced girl who will behave in a particular fashion. This general characterisation functions in several ways. Helen’s mental action within the text, as an imagined self, mirrors the reader’s mental action; as readers begin a novel they move from a relatively generic vision of character into a system of increased particularisation. Both readers and characters get to know characters better as they move further into a novel. Thus Helen’s experience of setting out on a voyage to Santa Marina parallels the reader’s voyage into the pages of the novel. But Helen’s first attempt at characterisation fails: Rachel is not the type of girl who confides or complains: “[. . .] there had been no confidence of any kind,” and Helen’s assumptions are proven wrong (VO 25). Readers too must adjust themselves to new visions of character as they emerge from the text in a constant process of assessment and revision, just as they must deal with people in the real world.<sup>32</sup> Character, Helen’s experience indicates, is provisional rather than absolute - character not nature - and this is a departure point for the novel as a whole.

This process of inter-characterisation, the attempts of characters to understand other characters within the text, involves an interchange of characterisations. At breakfast aboard the *Euphrosyne*, Helen continues her ruminative characterisation. Mr Ambrose is “big and burly, and has a great booming voice, and a fist and a will of his own” (VO 17). However, while Helen from the apparent security of her inviolate self analyses the characters around her, making them her “victims,” she is herself “under examination,” as Mr Pepper considers her in turn (VO 18). “One of his penetrating glances assured him that he was right last night in judging that Helen was beautiful. [. . .]. She was talking nonsense, but not worse nonsense

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<sup>32</sup> Jane Wheare has pointed out that the voyage of the title can be taken to operate on several levels, referring both to Rachel’s voyage, the reader’s, and indeed Woolf’s own voyage as writer (Introduction xxxiii). She has also commented on the way the text mimics the real-world experience of meeting people by staging a gradual release of information about characters (Introduction xxviii). Both points are also made by Joan Bennett in her 1945 *Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist* (20).

than people usually do talk at breakfast” (VO 18). The terms in which this characterising is presented imply violence and intrusion: characterising is not value-neutral. Rather, it is an aggressive invasion of privacy. While Pepper’s characterisation of Helen is superficial, as the text does not imply that Helen is prone to talking nonsense, the circularity of the process is the key point, for Pepper, examining Helen, is in turn the object of Rachel’s characterisation: “[. . .] and now you’ve chewed something thirty-seven times, I suppose?” (VO 18 - 19). This breakfast is punctuated with sharp reciprocal or cyclical attempts at characterisation which undercut its superficial amiability; the characters breakfast together, wondering incessantly and aggressively who they are breakfasting with.<sup>33</sup>

This characterising activity also fulfils a social function; characters mediate unfamiliarity and distance by describing each other. Mr Ambrose returns to the *Euphrosyne* from Lisbon bearing a token of characterisation: the visiting card of the Dalloways: “Mr. And Mrs. Richard Dalloway, 23 Browne Street, Mayfair” (VO 30). This is the type of rudimentary social characterisation practised more elaborately in *Who’s Who*, which Rachel finds irresistible: ““It gives short lives of people,”” she tells Helen, “Sir Roland Beal; born 1852; parents from Moffatt; educated at Rugby; passed first into R. E.; married 1878 [. . .]; served in the Bechuanaland Expedition 1884 - 85 (honourably mentioned). Clubs: United Service, Naval and Military. Recreations: an enthusiastic curler”” (VO 74). Sir Walter Elliott of Austen’s *Persuasion* is enthusiastic about social characterisation, and this is one of Mrs Dalloway’s favourite novels.<sup>34</sup> She explicitly contrasts Austen, as the socially realistic reading preference of her age and maturity, to what she mischaracterises as the romantic literary tastes of Rachel’s youth.<sup>35</sup> When Mrs Dalloway reads *Persuasion* to Rachel and her husband, the Austen text offers a remarkable commentary on the nature of character and characterisation. Mrs Dalloway reads that “Sir Walter Elliott, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the *Baronetage*” (VO 54). She then interjects, “don’t you know Sir Walter?” (VO 54). This opens up two aspects of characterisation; the reference to the *Baronetage* refers to the minimal

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<sup>33</sup> This inter-characterisation also helps the reader to assess the characters: Rachel’s impatience with Mr Pepper is as much an indicator of her youth as of any quality intrinsic to him.

<sup>34</sup> Austen’s character is only interested in his own character, “his own history,” for “vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character” (Austen 35, 36).

<sup>35</sup> Rachel does “not naturally care for books” beyond the extent to which they can provide her with the “repulsive chunks” of the knowledge she lacks of the world (VO 27). Mrs Dalloway’s attempt to cast Rachel into the mould of a young romantic woman reveals her sense of her own character as that of a woman past the first raptures of her romantic youth, but still keenly aware of them. It also indicates the extent to which characters are shaped by and resist the generic expectations of the narratives they inhabit: Mrs Dalloway thinks she is in a romance, while Rachel rejects this generic classification.

social characterisation of visiting cards and *Who's Who*, while Mrs Dalloway's interjection draws attention to the ability of Austen as a writer to characterise with a telling detail, to sum up an individual through one swift gesture of the pen. There is also a question here regarding the extent to which these minimal, socially conditioned characterisations can in fact be said to capture character: do we in fact know Sir Walter, and, indeed, what does it mean to say we know him?

Woolf, as a writer interested in the portrayal of "character consciousness," might be expected to reject such pocket biographies (Frye 403). If as David Dowling argues "the relationship of the subjective consciousness to external reality, which is Rachel's great problem in the novel, is also Woolf's great problem as an artist," then it would seem that only an intricate, detailed and highly internalised exploration of consciousness would be textually acceptable (*Bloomsbury* 109). This is not, however, the case. Mrs Dalloway expresses her admiration for Austen's ability to characterise with a touch, an admiration Woolf writes of in her essay "Phases of Fiction": the Austenian sentence "runs like a knife, in and out, cutting a shape clear" (Woolf, "Phases" 114). Similarly, in her "Sketch of the Past", Woolf praises Dickensian characters as "caricatures; they were very simple; they were immensely alive. They could be made with three strokes of the pen [. . .]" (Woolf, "Sketch" 73). This type of characterisation is, it seems, as valid as any other, and offers at least the potential for the creation of living character. In the excerpt Rachel reads aloud from *Who's Who*, a telling detail, embedded in an unfamiliar context, performs this essential function of characterisation: Sir Roland Beal is an "enthusiastic curler" (*VO* 74). Amidst the mass of biographical information the *Who's Who* entry provides about his professional and social life, this detail brings Beal into focus, imperialist soldier, member of the ruling caste, and eccentrically, a curler.<sup>36</sup> Rachel's absorbed interest in this type of characterisation and its recurrence throughout the text imply that it is not present to be dismissed, but to act as part of an exploration of the different ways characterisation occurs and functions.

The minimal, socially-conditioned characterisation epitomised by the *Who's Who* entry can stand, for the moment, at one end of a continuum of characterisation; the next step is occupied by a series of slightly richer character sketches. After having displayed the Dalloways' card, Vinrace continues the process of characterisation: "'Mr. Richard Dalloway [. . .] 'seems to be a gentleman who thinks that because he was once a member of

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<sup>36</sup> Linden Peach reads this passage as an exposition of how "[. . .] the privileged position enjoyed by men of the upper class was inextricably linked to empire" (48).

Parliament, and his wife's the daughter of a peer, they can have what they like for the asking'" (VO 30). Mr Vinrace's sketch of Mr Dalloway as a man who behaves in a certain way establishes him as a type rather than as an individual. It also serves a rudimentary social function, the verbal equivalent of a visiting card, providing identifying information around which the community of the *Euphrosyne*, and the reader, can begin to assemble characteristic features.

This occurs frequently within the text. The Dalloways travel with "letters of introduction," written attestations of character which qualify their bearer to special treatment and provide their readers with an initial core of knowledge around which to assemble character traits (VO 31). Again, when the Dalloways have come aboard, characterisation plays a socially mediating function:

However, punctuality had been impressed on her, and whatever face she [Rachel] had, she must go in to dinner.

These few minutes had been used by Willoughby in sketching to the Dalloways the people they were to meet, and checking them upon his fingers.

'There's my brother-in-law, Ambrose, the scholar (I daresay you've heard his name), his wife, my old friend Pepper, a very quiet fellow, but knows everything, I'm told. And that's all. We're a very small party. I'm dropping them on the coast.' (VO 33)

This is an instance of the social tagging of individuals; Pepper is a pedant, Ambrose a scholar, Helen a wife, and Rachel an absence. Mr Vinrace also characterises himself: if Pepper and Ambrose are intelligent, he is powerful, "dropping them on the coast" (VO 33). Additionally, the passage is introduced by Rachel's concern with, or dislike of, her face, a concern prompted by the arrival of the Dalloways and the recognition that "her face was not the face she wanted, and in all probability never would be" (VO 33). It is inadequate in terms of characterisation; it does not, Rachel feels, adequately represent her sense of self. No more would Helen be satisfied with Vinrace's characterisation of her as wife alone, but these are the labels, the characters, that attach to people, be they descriptive or physiognomic.

After dinner, Mrs Dalloway continues the inter-characterisation that has been underway since the two parties met. Sitting down to write a letter, she attempts to describe the "very oddest ship you can imagine" to her correspondent, except that "it is not the ship, so much as the people" who are a collection of "queer sorts" (VO 40 - 41).

There's the manager of the line - called Vinrace - a nice big Englishman, doesn't say much, you know the sort. As for the rest, they might have come trailing out of an old number of *Punch*. [. . .]. The man's really delightful (if he'd cut his nails), and the woman has quite a fine face, only she dresses, of course, in a potato sack [. . .]. Then there's a nice shy girl - poor thing [. . .].

She has quite nice eyes and hair [. . .]. Oh, I'd forgotten, there's a dreadful little thing called Pepper. He's just like his name. He's indescribably insignificant, and rather queer in his temper, poor dear. (VO 41).<sup>37</sup>

Mrs Dalloway's brief character sketches are in some respects very different to Mr Vinrace's. They are less flattering, private rather than public, and intended to be amusing rather than socially functional. However, the structure of Mrs Dalloway's minimal characterisations is the same as Mr Vinrace's: a name or personal indicator accompanied by a brief identifying tag which attempts to highlight the most relevant aspect of their character. Mr Vinrace is the familiar type of the bluff Englishman, Pepper is temperamental, and the women are characterised by their proximity to standards of fashion. And all of them are compared to figures from *Punch*.

*Punch* published many Theophrastan character-sketches, perhaps the best-known of which are included in Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*, and this reference provides an important context for *The Voyage Out*'s exploration of character (Smeed 118). Theophrastus was Aristotle's student and successor as head of the Lyceum, but he is best remembered for his *Characters*, which represents an alternative to the influential Aristotelian vision of character (Kennedy 194). It is a collection of thirty character-types, with a description - "the fraud is the sort who stands on the breakwater and tells strangers how much of his money is invested in shipping [. . .]" - and a definition, "you can be sure fraudulence will seem to be a pretence of nonexistent goods" (Theophrastus 117). A comparison of this Theophrastan structure and Vinrace's description of Richard Dalloway as "a gentleman who thinks that because he was once a member of Parliament, and his wife's the daughter of a peer, they can have what they like for the asking" reveals similarities (VO 30). A Theophrastan character is a type rather than a complex individual, and is completely externalised: the reader's understanding of the "inner man emerges from this description of externals" (Smeed 4). This alternative approach to characterisation persisted throughout European literary history, from inclusion in Mediaeval rhetorical handbooks through numerous imitations in the seventeenth and

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<sup>37</sup> Woolf excised this passage in her 1920 revisions of *The Voyage Out* for American publication (Wheare, Notes 359.) This was part of the protracted revision that *The Voyage Out* underwent, a "process of restricting a wealth of personal detail in favor of universal image" (Haule 318). It can also be seen in the context of Woolf's early condemnation of excessive detail in characterisation. An example of this occurs in chapter 16 of the novel, where Woolf cut the dialogue between Rachel and Hewet, seemingly to reduce redundant and potentially clogging detail. A long passage in which Rachel describes her daily routine - "And after tea people sometimes called; or in the summer we sat in the garden or played croquet [. . .]" - and recalls the furnishings of her aunts' house in detail - "green plush chairs stood against the wall; there was a heavy carved book-case, with glass doors [...]" - is replaced in the 1920 version with "she summoned before her a typical day's life" (VO 198, 379).

eighteenth centuries, to appearances in the nineteenth-century novel (Rusten 33 - 39).<sup>38</sup> Modernist satirists, such as Wyndham Lewis, can also be seen as working within this tradition of character as a standard type presented in terms of typical actions and words. Mrs Dalloway's letter indicates, then, that Woolf is employing Theophrastan types as part of the continuum of character with which she is experimenting; a type of character that rejects individual identity in favour of a broad correlation to types, and the portrayal of internal experience in favour of external observation.<sup>39</sup> Woolf's only reference to Theophrastus occurred in 1939: "I have just read 3 or 4 Characters of Theophrastus, stumbling from Greek to English, & may as well make a note of it. [. . .]. No Latin would have noted that a boor remembers his loans in the middle of the night. The Greek has his eye on the object" (*D* 5: 236). This entry indicates previous exposure to Theophrastus, but it is unclear when Woolf read him for the first time. She would, however, have been familiar with the tradition of Theophrastan character types: Leslie Stephen, for instance, owned a copy of La Bruyère's *Les Caractères De Théophraste* and dismissed George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus* Such as the "least appropriate application of her energies" in his 1902 book on the author (*Catalogue*, Victoria Square, Section 1: 32; *George* 193). Woolf's reference to Theophrastan character, then, indicates that the characters on board the *Euphrosyne* are presented by the text, and interpret each other, in terms of a style of literary characterisation which deals in types rather than individuals, exteriors rather than interiors.

The series of reciprocal minimal, or Theophrastan, characterisations carried out onboard the *Euphrosyne* continues throughout the voyage. Even as Mrs Dalloway's act of epistolary characterisation concludes, the text presents a counter-characterisation: "Mrs. Ambrose was speaking low; William Pepper was remarking in his definite and rather acid

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<sup>38</sup> In the seventeenth century Theophrastan character re-emerged as "a distinct literary genre with conventions of its own," the first example of which was Joseph Hall's *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, published in 1628 (H. Osborne XV; Smeed 24). Perhaps the most successful instance of this genre was John Earle's *Microcosmography*, in which the character-sketches are very much in the Theophrastan vein (Smeed 30). A "flatterer," for instance, is "the picture of a friend" who "listens to your words with great attention, and sometimes will object that you may confute him" (Earle 48). While modern Theophrastan character types are often traced to Jean de La Bruyère's 1688 *Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle*, the two English works mentioned here predate La Bruyère by half a century. Their basic function was "to individualize a type" (Baldwin 64).

<sup>39</sup> J. W. Smeed has pointed out that the number of character sketches in *Punch* decreases after about 1860 (320). Thus, when Mrs Dalloway writes that the guests on the *Euphrosyne* are like "people playing croquet in the 'sixties" the association between her characterisation of the guests and the Theophrastan tradition of character may seem somewhat weakened. Woolf may still be referring to the long association of *Punch* with character sketches.

voice, “That is the type of lady with whom I find myself distinctly out of sympathy. She -” (VO 43). In this case the content of the minimal characterisation is lost, as Mr Dalloway “directly it seemed likely that they would overhear [. . .] crackled a sheet of paper” (VO 43). This must be his wife’s letter, to which he is adding a postscript; one act of aggressive, reductive characterisation is rendered mute by another. The reader can anticipate the elided substance of Mr Pepper’s criticism of Mrs Dalloway: presumably he finds her superficial, poorly educated, and pretentious. More important, however, is the way that the absence of content in Mr Pepper’s criticism highlights the very structure within which it is framed, that of the traditional Theophrastan character, the individual presented as a simplified accumulation of physical or moral traits.

Chapter 3 of *The Voyage Out* ends with Mrs Dalloway dreaming, an instance of the type of chapter ending Dowling criticises as “a vague general gesture from the godlike narrator” (*Bloomsbury* 111). I would argue, however, that Mrs Dalloway’s dream offers a clear indication of the way *The Voyage Out* conflates issues of subjectivity, relation, and characterisation:

She then fell into a sleep [. . .] visited by fantastic dreams of great Greek letters stalking round the room, when she woke up and laughed to herself, remembering where she was and that the Greek letters were real people [. . .]. The dreams were not confined to her indeed, but went from one brain to another. They all dreamt of each other that night, as was natural, considering how thin the partitions were between them [. . .] (VO 44).

This passage sets the inter-characterisation which has occurred so far in context. The “fantastic dreams,” for Mrs Dalloway and for the other characters who share her dreams, are that they are all no more than printed characters. This is ultimately true: they are letters, or characters, printed on a page.<sup>40</sup> Or, to read through the “the pierced aperture” of the literary form to the “subject”, to use James’ terms, the fantastic dream is that rather than existing as complex individual subjectivities, the voyagers have been reduced to abstract symbols of identity, simple characters rather than complex: this too is true, for they have done little but reduce each other to this status since they boarded the *Euphrosyne* (“Portrait” 290). The “Greek letters” of Mrs Dalloway’s dreams represent simultaneously fictive word-masses printed in characters, reduced Theophrastan characterisations, and “real people” (VO 44).

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<sup>40</sup> Marcus’ observations regarding the semantic gap between characters as represented individual and character as printed letter are highly relevant here (*Virginia* 18). What was only hinted at in Woolf’s 1906 review of Vincent Brown’s *Mrs Grundy’s Crucifix*, the linkage between character type and printing type, is here made textually explicit, as characters become letters.

Woolf is playing here with readers' "ability to imagine a character as though he were a real person," their awareness of the "highly artificial and formal" elements of narrative structure, and the physical substance of literary characters as words printed on a page (Woloch, *One* 13).

In the second half of the novel, the hotel and villa in Santa Marina become the locus of the text's examination of characterisation. Mr Pepper defects from the Ambroses' villa, a place which strikes the Vinraces' housekeeper as horribly exposed and exposing - "the indecency of the whole place struck Mrs. Chaily forcibly" - to the hotel (VO 82). This indecency is a product of bare openness: the villa has "no blinds to shut out the sun, nor was there any furniture [. . .] in the bare stone hall" (VO 82). The hotel, in contrast, is a place of public anonymity, an "old monastery" which is presented as a "big block" or "several rows of lights" in the darkness; it offers the privacy of darkness instead of the scrutinising illumination of the villa (VO 81, 83). For Ann Ronchetti, the villa and the hotel embody contrasting values: the villa is associated with privacy, freedom and artistic endeavour, while the hotel is linked to publicity, conformity, and conventionality (19). To this could be added a contrast between minimal and deep characterisation. However, these dichotomies are not absolute: the hotel, for instance, while certainly embodying the public sphere, offers a sort of privacy unavailable to the residents of the villa. Similarly, while the villa may be, as Ronchetti argues, associated with the artistic "exercise of one's intellect and creativity," the dance, the main textual location of creative freedom, is held in the hotel (11). There is thus some danger in demarcating strict boundaries between the textual worlds of the villa and the hotel. With this proviso, it seems that while Pepper's flight is ostensibly from ill-cooked vegetables and a prescient fear of typhoid, it is also a flight from the unwelcome intimacy of anything exceeding minimal characterisation.

Rachel and Helen's first visit to the hotel takes place during one of their strolls to "see life" (VO 88).<sup>41</sup> What they see is a series of character vignettes: "A row of long windows opened almost to the ground. They were all of them uncurtained, and all brilliantly lighted, so that they could see everything inside. Each window revealed a different section of the life of the hotel" (VO 90). In the first rooms are the hotel employees, each captured as if

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<sup>41</sup> Carey Snyder interprets these walks as a "means of potentially revitalizing a lifeless and trivial society" and links them to the later voyage to a native village (94). Both of these expeditions depend on voyeurism, and invert the traditional active-passive relationship of viewer and viewed. However, they also work within the interlocking network of characterising activity carried out amongst all the characters in the novel.

in a scene; a waiter, for instance, “eating a bunch of grapes with his leg across the corner of the table” (VO 90). Somnolent guests recline “in deep arm-chairs” (VO 90). In the hotel lounge, Rachel and Helen study a group of card players. Helen recognises “a lean, somewhat cadaverous man of about her own age, whose profile was turned to them” (VO 91). This man, Hughling Elliot, is at first glance a silhouette, both in the literal sense of a “portrait obtained by tracing the outline of a profile” and the figurative sense of a “slight verbal sketch or description in outline of a person” (“silhouette”). Only Terrence Hewet is lifted off this plane of minimal character. His face, “seen among ordinary people, [. . .] appeared to be interesting” (VO 92). Ironically, Rachel and Helen, believing themselves secure in darkness, and thus able to characterise with impunity, are being observed by St. John Hirst, whose laconic observation ““two women”” - perhaps the most generic form of characterisation of all - completes the circle of minimal characterisation by turning the observer into the observed, the characterisers into the characterised. When this incident is later discussed, Hughling Elliot sums up the situation: ““I don’t know anything more dreadful,’ he said, pulling at the joint of a chicken’s leg, ‘than being seen when one isn’t conscious of it. One feels sure that one has been caught doing something ridiculous [. . .]”” (VO 121). Being minimally characterised is tantamount to being disjointed. Every character in the novel wants to be able to observe, and thus characterise, from the security of anonymity, yet they are all caught up in a constant reciprocal process of potentially violent and violating characterisation.

While the novel is deeply concerned with minimal characterisation, it is also open to the possibilities of more detailed and intimate characterisation. On the *Euphrosyne*, the Dalloways’ arrival precipitates a series of acts of minimal characterisation: written, in formal biographical documents and personal character-sketches, oral, as the characters exchange views regarding each other, and mental, as they think about each other. Rachel is not, however, satisfied with this level of characterisation; she is intent on penetrating beneath the superficial aspects of character to discover more about the people who surround her. This is in some ways Rachel’s quest - a voyage of discovery into other people, and indeed into herself.

The first stage is her encounter with the Dalloways, and the emergence of the triadic relationship sometimes read as an illustration of Woolf’s “ideological positions” (Wheare, *Virginia* 46). The Dalloways are, according to these readings, “veritable encyclopedias of

conventional attitudes” (Wollaeger, “Jungle” 38).<sup>42</sup> This interpretation is sound; Mr Dalloway is characterised as a foolish chauvinist blind to the power structures that shape his responses to women, a “male defender of the marriage plot,” and Mrs Dalloway is complicit in this patriarchal world-view (Froula, “Chrysalis” 72). A complementary reading positions Richard as a prophet of imperial power, “who offers nearly simultaneous lessons in empire and sexuality” (Wollaeger, “Postcards” 53). However, Rachel’s relationship with the Dalloways also extends the text’s exploration of character and characterisation.

The morning after the Dalloways have boarded ship, Rachel sits next to Richard at breakfast, and her interest, aroused the previous evening in sexualised terms - “he seemed to come from the humming oily centre of the machine where the polished rods are shining, and the pistons thumping,” - is renewed (VO 38). Rachel explores Richard’s character, beginning with his appearance - “his well-cut clothes, his crackling shirt-front, his cuffs with blue rings around them [. . .]” - or shell, a type of exteriority familiar from Theophrastan characterisation (VO 47). She does not remain at this level, however, asking him a series of questions and receiving banal replies about his childhood and pets. For Rachel, however, this is a peculiarly charged situation: “Rachel had other questions on the tip of her tongue; or rather, one enormous question, which she did not in the least know how to put into words [. . .]. ‘Please tell me - everything.’ That was what she wanted to say” (VO 48).

This plea for total knowledge may be partially explained by the way in which Rachel is characterised as a vacancy, as “scarcely formed” (Raitt 38). Her desire for knowledge, even basic information about the “system in modern life,” is understandable, for “her mind was in the state of an intelligent man’s in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth” (VO 26). On the other hand her question can be seen as a request for deeper insight into Richard’s

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<sup>42</sup> Such readings identify Richard Dalloway in particular as a frame for notions of masculinity and imperialism (Wheare, *Virginia* 46, Wollaeger, “Jungle” 38, Froula, “Chrysalis” 72). This should be compared to Woolf’s critique of representative character. This does not mean that the characterisation of the Dalloways fails; all characters are representative insofar as they participate in a narrative structure that incites, or allows, thematic readings. Hochman argues that as “all of the elements in literature are symbolic,” characters too inevitably come to represent something other than their own quiddity (*Character* 116). From this perspective, the women Rachel meets both on the *Euphrosyne* and in Santa Marina represent alternate possibilities: Evelyn Murgatroyd a life of sexual freedom, Susan Warrington a conventional marriage, Helen Ambrose an unconventional marriage, and Miss Allan professional spinsterhood. Another interpretation positions Helen, Evelyn and Miss Allan as representatives of the possibilities of lesbianism (P. Smith 130 - 137, 140 - 142). The extent to which these readings are incomplete is the extent to which Woolf has succeeded in combining representative narrative status with “natural human nature, [. . .] lights and shades, [. . .] truth” (*E* 1: 112). Conversely, if these readings are satisfactory, Woolf has fallen into the trap she warned against in her early journalism.

character. Rachel shares the text's obsession with questions of character. As she lies, for instance, "in the hot sun her mind" is fixed "on the characters of her aunts, their views, and the way they lived," a type of meditation on character that "lasted her hundreds of morning walks around Richmond Park, and blotted out the trees and the people and the deer" (VO 28). Thus she interprets Richard's stories as specifically revelatory of character: "he had drawn apart one little chink and showed astonishing treasures" (VO 48). Richard's clothing, his exterior, acts as a suit of armour protecting his internal being from external observation.

The treasure of Richard's private character may appear to be a meretricious reflection of Rachel's naivety (Froula, "Chrysalis" 71). Alternately, this scene can be read as Rachel's first partially successful access to the private world of another character. Her previous attempts at making out character have met with little success. Her Aunt Lucy, for example, simply refuses to respond to her personal questions in any meaningful way (VO 28). Thus, while Rachel's response to Richard is naïve, it should be seen in the context of both the text's questioning of character, and of Rachel's own desire for a deeper understanding of the other people in her world, the other characters in her novel.

The substance of Rachel's interrogation is revealing. "Have you done what you said you'd do," she asks, a question which explores the continuity of self over time (VO 55). "What," she goes on to inquire, "is your ideal?" (VO 55). While Richard's answer is couched in the terminology of empire and politics, Rachel's response to his lecture on the value of unity and progress, his reformulation of "the sterile received wisdom of the paternal word," is not a response to an ideological stance (Montgomery 39). It is instead a response to the apparently open expression of self: "She liked Richard Dalloway, and warmed as he warmed. He seemed to mean what he said" (VO 53). Rachel listens sympathetically to Richard, and eventually shares her own vision of the world. What she produces is a character study:

'There's an old widow in her room, somewhere, let us suppose in the suburbs of Leeds.'  
[ . . . ] she goes to her cupboard and finds a little more tea, a few lumps of sugar, or a little less tea and a newspaper. [ . . . ] Still, there's the mind of the widow - the affections; those you leave untouched.' (VO 57).

Rachel's response to overtly political questioning is to create a fictional character in place of the traditional structures of rational discourse Richard employs.<sup>43</sup> He can "pick holes" in her

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<sup>43</sup> As Marcus has pointed out, this old widow is a slightly peculiar formulation of the "image of fiction" to find in the "narrative of a young woman's formation" (*Virginia* 12).

“philosophy” because it is not philosophy but a sort of imaginative humanist sympathy extending the range of the argument to include the personal as well as the abstract, to include a deeper understanding of character in the debate (VO 57).<sup>44</sup> Rachel sums up the conversation by saying “we don’t seem to understand each other” (VO 58). This is true, for they employ different discourses for different reasons.

Rachel’s quest for fuller characterisation and deeper understanding of the lives and motivations of other people is not confined to her unsatisfactory experiences with Richard Dalloway. As she walks on deck with Mrs Dalloway, Rachel expresses a desire for a fuller understanding of character. After answering questions about her life and family, she is overcome “by an intense desire to tell Mrs Dalloway things she had never told anyone - things she had not realised herself until this moment”: “I am lonely, she began. ‘I want -’ She did not know what she wanted, so that she could not finish the sentence” (VO 52). Rachel’s urge is oriented both towards self-characterisation, her desire to reveal things about herself, and towards the characterisation of other people, a desire to know more about them. Perhaps the first of these two impulses is more strongly manifest here; it thus operates as a sort of counterpoint to her plea to Mr Dalloway. She wants him to tell her everything about himself, and she wants to tell Mrs Dalloway everything about herself.

Mrs Dalloway interprets Rachel’s desires in her own way. While the narrator indicates that she “was able to understand without words,” the text reflects ironically upon this claim. She reads Rachel’s desires as part of “conventional womanhood,” and her response is an opening up of, and an invitation to, the “plot of marriage and motherhood governing female destiny” (Froula, “Chrysalis” 71, 67). “When I was your age,” Mrs Dalloway responds to Rachel, “I wanted too. No one understood until I met Richard. He gave me all I wanted. He’s man and woman as well” (VO 52). This is an extraordinary claim as Richard is associated in the text with a sexualised, mechanised and aggressive masculinity (Wollaeger, “Postcards” 53). Rachel has little time to follow up on her inarticulate expression of desire. Instead, she listens to Mrs Dalloway read aloud from *Persuasion*, part of the text’s exploration of minimal characterisation. Rachel’s rejection of the book, for she doesn’t like Austen, comparing her to “a tight plait,” can be read as a rejection of the minimal characterisation offered here. Rachel is in the midst of a protracted and intense attempt to explore her own and the Dalloways’ characters. In context, her rejection of Austen is more

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<sup>44</sup> This is an approach that Woolf uses in her debates over character with Bennett in the mid-twenties, when she creates the character of Mrs Brown, a “clean, threadbare old lady,” instead of “analysing and abstracting” (E 3: 422 - 423).

than a rejection of the way “Austen's novels [. . .] signify the education that ‘plaits’ or plots young girls tightly into femininity, marriage, and motherhood” (Froula, “Chrysalis” 71). It is also a rejection of an approach to characterisation exemplified not by Austen’s novels, but by the *Baronetage* that appears in the opening passages of *Persuasion*. Rachel’s rejection is not complete; she is soon studying *Who’s Who*, reconstructing character from minimal biography. What is at issue here is the immediate contrast between her pursuit of full character and the offer of minimal characterisation implied by Mrs Dalloway’s reading of *Persuasion*.<sup>45</sup>

A discussion of Rachel’s relationship with the Dalloways must address the kiss, which is amenable to readings highlighting its socio-political implications; it has been described as a “violent sexual act,” an “enactment of male privilege in the socially constructed economy of desire,” and a physical expression of Richard’s general disdain for women, his “obtuseness and inability to understand or sympathise with Rachel” (Froula, “Chrysalis” 73; Wheare, *Virginia* 48). Rachel’s response, elation followed by disgust and nightmares, is linked in these readings to a movement from a positive sense of sexual awakening to a recognition of the deforming social structures which limit and threaten her (Froula, “Chrysalis” 73 - 74). An alternate reading based on alternate notions of character is, however, possible.

Prior to the kiss Rachel has been attempting to reach greater levels of intimacy and to achieve a form of characterisation hitherto unavailable to her. After an interregnum in the routines of shipboard life, caused by a storm and ensuing seasickness, Rachel and Richard find themselves alone in her room. The moments before the kiss are a time of freedom from social convention: “They stood in a whirlpool of wind; papers began flying round in circles, the door crashed to, and they tumbled, laughing, into chairs” (VO 65).<sup>46</sup> The kiss, when it comes, is sudden and terrifying; but Rachel quickly recovers herself from the “great leaps of her heart” and finds that something strange has happened (VO 67).

She became peaceful too, at the same time possessed with a strange exultation. Life seemed to hold infinite possibilities she had never guessed at. She leant upon the rail and looked over the troubled grey water, where the sunlight was fitfully scattered upon the crests of the waves, until she was

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<sup>45</sup> *Persuasion* can be seen as Mrs Dalloway’s contribution to the Dalloways’ attempt to socialise Rachel, an attempt to lure, or persuade, her into accepting the confines of the traditional woman’s role in society, to “leave their mark” on her (Briggs, *Reading* 67).

<sup>46</sup> The two main avenues towards characterisation proposed by the text are absent here: the wind silences speech, and disorders writing.

cold and absolutely calm again. Nevertheless something wonderful had happened. (VO 67)

In spite of her initial panic, Rachel seems to have accepted this kiss as an important contribution to her stock of experience. The seascape over which she gazes operates as an analogue for her mental state; she is troubled, like the waves, but there is something in this trouble worth seeing, a ray of light. This is the new level of insight into character that she has gained. Her knowledge of Richard has suddenly taken on a new depth; a new factor, and it must be remembered that Rachel “scarcely knew that men desired women,” has entered into her assessment (VO 71). This euphoric awareness fades, not first as is sometimes argued when she begins to connect “Richard’s kiss with the prostitutes in Piccadilly,” but when his character reverts to minimal characterisation (Froula, “Chrysalis” 73). Eating dinner in company “she did not feel exalted” and she and Richard avoid each other’s eyes while “formal platitudes were manufactured” (VO 67). The very syntax here indicates the level of abstraction their relations have reached: the subject has vanished, leaving only the passive voice to express the impersonal conventions of society.

When Rachel has recovered from her shock, and the Dalloways have left the ship, she returns immediately to her exploration of character: “Rachel explained that most people had hitherto been symbols; but that when they talked to one they ceased to be symbols, and became - ‘I could listen to them forever!’ she exclaimed” (VO 74). For Rachel, Richard moves from a minimal to a more intimate and detailed level of characterisation, and then, disappointingly, back. When the Dalloways leave the *Euphrosyne*, he is only able to “look at her very stiffly for a second” (VO 69). This is the banal end of Rachel’s first venture into deep characterisation. Mark Wollaeger reads a tension between Rachel’s intuitive sense of the linkage between sexuality and politics and Helen’s rejection of any such connection. “Why else,” he asks, “would Rachel run to read about public figures in *Who’s Who* right after coming to terms with Dalloway’s kiss?” (“Postcards” 54). This reading of *The Voyage Out* offers an alternate answer. Rachel’s reading of *Who’s Who* is an indication of her unsatisfied longing for a deeper sense of character than has hitherto been available to her, and an indication that her voyage into character has not ended with the departure of the Dalloways.

*Who’s Who* and *Persuasion* are instances of the ways Woolf develops her exploration of character through intertextual reference. Other intertexts in *The Voyage Out* perform similar functions. Soon after “the vision of the hotel by night,” Rachel sits in her room and reads (VO 112). She begins to inhabit the characters she reads about, asking herself “‘What’s

the truth of it all?” (VO 112). But this question is a product of her possession by the characters in her books: “She was speaking partly as herself, and partly as the heroine of the play she had just read. [. . .]. Ibsen’s plays always left her in that condition. [. . .] then it would be Meredith’s turn, and she became Diana of the Crossways” (VO 112). Beverly Ann Schlack has argued that these intertexts act as touchstones of modernity and feminism within *The Voyage Out* (18). Ibsen’s “strong women characters” provide potential role models for Rachel as she seeks to establish her own sense of self, her own character, while “Meredith’s full projection of the character of women would of course be especially valuable to Rachel in her search for identity” (18 - 19). According to this reading, both Rachel Vinrace and Diana Warwick seek to “reconcile their feminine/sexual nature with individual/intellectual identity” (18).<sup>47</sup>

*Diana of the Crossways* is, like *The Voyage Out*, fascinated by character. Diana Warwick is first introduced in a narrative frame reflecting on the nature of literary characterisation. The narrator examines the different ways she, and other characters in the main story, have been portrayed in a range of memoirs and diaries (1). One Dorset Wilmers, for instance, is reticent concerning Diana: “the stressed repetition of calculated brevity [. . .] implies weighty substance,” and his “unadorned harsh substantive statements [. . .] give his Memoirs the appearance of a body of facts,” but “his exhibition of his enemy Lord Dannisburgh, is of the class of noble portraits we see swinging over inn-portals, grossly unlike in likeness” (5 - 6). The records of Henry Wilmers, on the other hand, deal “exclusively with the wit and charm of the woman” (8). Character, Meredith establishes, is not absolute, but dependent on perspective and narrative mode.

While within the frame of the narrative itself, “estimates of character” in the sense of moral character are of the utmost importance, Diana is also an author, and intimately concerned with fictional characters (153). Speaking of Princess Egeria, the eponymous heroine of her second “literary venture,” Diana says that she was “conceived as a sketch; by gradations she grew into a sort of semi-Scudéry romance, and swelled to her present portliness” (202 - 203). Diana’s character has grown from the dimensions of a Theophrastan type to what appears to be a more fully fleshed character, but only by a “great deal of

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<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, a more recent study ignores *Diana of the Crossways*, concentrating instead on Rachel’s reading of Ibsen as a demonstration of Woolf’s “concern to develop and authenticate female-centred responses to the books she has read” (de Gay 23). While the Ibsen reference supports a feminist reading of *The Voyage Out*, the intertextual role of Meredith may be less clear, although his portrayal of “remarkably independent women [. . .] refusing to chose the road assigned to them and [. . .] carving out fictional spaces for their own stories” has an obvious feminist resonance, and *Diana* has been described as “a committed feminist novel” (Manos 25; Roberts 229).

piecing, not to say puffing, of her frame” (203).<sup>48</sup> As her literary career develops, Diana writes “more and more realistically of the character [. . .] less of the wooden supernumeraries of her story, labelled for broad guffaw or deluge tears” (263). Diana is moving away from a tradition of character creation that depends on types and plot development, towards a more detailed exploration of human character. The results are not, according to narrative explanation, “poetical [. . .] for the reason that the chief characters were alive” but were instead “poetical inasmuch as they were creations,” an observation that calls attention to the very creative process involved in literary characterisation, and the ultimately textual nature of character (263).

Outside of her writing, Diana explores character in the ‘real’ world of the text. Percy Dacier, with whom Diana has been very intimate, and whom she loves, is best read as a type rather than an individual: “Gradually she became enlightened enough to distinguish in the man a known, if not common, type of the externally soft and polished, internally hard and relentless” (426). A key trope within the novel is the way in which character is a product of subjective creation rather than a fixed object of contemplation. “We score,” the narrator says, “on that flat slate of man [. . .] the device we choose” (443). *Diana of the Crossways* revolves around questions of character and characterisation, wavering between moral and literary terms to create a picture of a complex and varying reality inherent in the word itself, and always in ways that are textually self-aware. This rich sense of character as a field of exploration rather than convention is one of the ways that this novel sounds within *The Voyage Out*.<sup>49</sup>

While Rachel initially structures elements of her identity around the models offered by the heroines of the books she reads - as Susan Friedman points out, she lives “out the script of what she reads in a grand romantic gesture” - she ultimately rejects them: “Moreover, none of the books she read, from *Wuthering Heights* to *Man and Superman*, and the plays of Ibsen, suggested from their analysis of love that what the heroine felt was what she was feeling now. It seemed to her that her sensations had no name” (121; VO 211). This rejection can be read in different ways. Christine Froula describes a progression towards the inarticulate: “As Ibsen’s art moves Rachel beyond conventional ideas about the world,

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<sup>48</sup> Madeleine de Scudéry was known as a writer interested in “character-drawing” (Baldwin 71). Sheer length is also an issue here. Her ten-volume *Cyrus*, for example, was 12,946 pages long, excluding prefaces and dedications (Baldwin 70)

<sup>49</sup> *Diana of the Crossways* also works very effectively as an intertext in terms of the questioning of the standard marriage plot in *The Voyage Out*: Diana’s “loss of self in the man” surely reflects one of the main themes of Woolf’s novel, the dangers inherent in intimacy, and particularly in marriage (Meredith 483).

Rachel's 'What's the truth of it all?' moves beyond Ibsen's play to blank, unworded being as such" ("Chrysalis" 75). Similarly, after Rachel rejects the literary description of love, she feels that "her sensations had no name" (VO 211). Marcus, on the other hand, associates this rejection - specifically that of Ibsen and Meredith - with "Woolf's [. . .] ambivalent relationship" to the 'New Woman' literature of the late nineteenth century, with its "narratives of female purity and male sexual pollution" ("Feminism" 215). It is perhaps unsurprising that George Bernard Shaw's exploration of the "sex question," and evocation of a world "strewn with snares, traps, gins and pitfalls for the capture of men by women" does not resonate for Rachel, who seems unlikely to identify herself with Ann Whitefield, Shaw's "Everywoman," in her relentless pursuit of Johan Tanner (Shaw xxi, xviii, xxviii). Nora's rejection of her roles as "doll-wife" and "doll-child" in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, and her recognition of her "sacred" duty to herself are equally inappropriate to Rachel's experience (72, 73). While Friedman argues that Rachel's "preference for Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* over Austen signals the wild spirit beneath her vague exterior and sheltered existence," this novel, too, is rejected as a model (Friedman 111). This is particularly interesting in the context of Catherine's claim of identity with Heathcliff: "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same [. . .]" (71). Rachel rejects all formulations of the love relationship, from Ibsen's dramas, to Shaw's clinical analysis of the sex question, to Brontë's passionate romanticism. While *Diana of the Crossways* is not explicitly rejected by Rachel, its record of scandal, divorce, death and remarriage is in all likelihood implicated. Thus the novel functions both as an intertextual point of reference to *The Voyage Out*'s exploration of character and as part of a larger intertextual exploration of relationship, love, and marriage.

Rachel's experiences aboard the *Euphrosyne* and in Santa Marina establish a rough continuum of levels of characterisation, from the socially constructed *Who's Who* entry, to minimal Theophrastan characterisations, to attempts at a deeper sort of characterisation built on intimacy. This schematic presentation of the range of characterisations available to both the characters in the text and the reader of the text lacks, however, its appropriate poles: at either end of the continuum should be found first, absolute strangers; in literary terms the characters who enter the text only marginally, and at the other end of the scale, characterisation in total depth and detail. Given the level of interest the text displays in character and characterisation, it is unsurprising that both of these extremes are present in *The Voyage Out*.

Helen and Ridley Ambrose enter *The Voyage Out* out of an undifferentiated mass, the “innumerable poor people” of London (VO 6). This mass of unknown and unnamed characters remains present throughout the novel as one extreme of a continuum of character. For instance, as the *Euphrosyne* moves away from England, the inhabitants of the island are reduced to a mass “swarming about like aimless ants” (VO 24).<sup>50</sup> On board, the process continues, as Mrs Ambrose sees the crew as anonymous: “Round her men in blue jerseys knelt and scrubbed the boards [. . .]” (VO 25). On one level, the role of these non-characters is uncomplicated; they are part of the narrative background, no more significant than the sea itself, or the boat, or Mrs Dalloway’s toothbrush. The text, however, situates the crew within the continuum of character: it moves from Helen to the anonymous crew members, to Mr Pepper, and on to both Mr Vinrace and Rachel. The key difference is that the crew-members are nameless. When the Dalloways leave the ship, they are seen off by “Captain Cobbold, Mr. Grice, Willoughby, Helen, and an obscure grateful man in a blue jersey” (VO 69). While his blue jersey identifies the last of these characters as a member of the crew, he is indeed obscure. Neither his presence nor his gratitude are accounted for; his only feature is his obscurity. This narrative attention to the namelessly obscure continues in Santa Marina. The villa, a place in which it is possible to “escape the slightly inhuman atmosphere of an hotel,” an inhumanity associated with minimal characterisation, becomes a refuge to “not only Hirst and Hewet, but to the Elliots, the Thornburys, the Flushings, Miss Allan, Evelyn M., together with other people whose identity was so little developed that the Ambroses did not discover that they possessed names” (VO 208). The nameless are not here the masses of London, or the masses of the working class, but the masses of the text itself, gratuitous but for the emphasis placed on their anonymity. There is an irony in the presence of the nameless in a place presented as a refuge against inhuman anonymity; as with the poor, the nameless are always with us. At the end of the novel, after Rachel’s death, the nameless are again present, the “miscellaneous people who had never been discovered to possess names were stretched in their arm-chairs with their newspapers on their knees” (VO 349). The presence of these nameless non-characters is best explained by their location at one end of the spectrum of characterisation; that of the refusal to characterise, or the impossibility of universal

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<sup>50</sup> Marianne DeKoven has pointed out that the significant structural parallels between Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and *The Voyage Out* begin with an opening scene in a London “dominated by the Thames” (90). Woolf has inverted the associations of insect-like anonymity here, however, turning Conrad’s “mostly black and naked” people who “moved about like ants” into the masses of England (14).

characterisation.<sup>51</sup>

At the other end of the character-spectrum lies the type of intimate, detailed characterisation which is the object of Rachel's quest. Two of the key plot elements within the novel - the voyage up the river, and Rachel's illness and death - are important here. The first of these is sometimes read as a voyage that reveals or clarifies the "pressures of domestication and normalization against which" Rachel has struggled "since she left England for South America" (Wollaeger, *Modernism* 116). While this is a convincing reading, alternative interpretations are possible. The key event on the boat trip, in terms of a reading of character, is not the visit to the village, or that "strangest" moment in Woolf's fiction, the semi-erotic grappling of Helen and Rachel (Leaska 30). Rather, it is the claustrophobic mirrored dialogue through which Rachel and Hewet apparently declare their love for each other: "'we are happy together,' [. . .]. 'very happy,' she answered. [. . .] 'We love each other' Terence said. 'We love each other' she repeated. [. . .] 'Hot' he said. [. . .] 'Very hot' she said'" (VO 257 - 259). While the two characters have become gradually more familiar with, and attractive to, each other, with a great deal of information about their pasts, opinions, tastes, and weaknesses available, it is in this dialogue that intimate characterisation reaches the far end of the character continuum. Rachel and Hewet are now as close as two characters can be; they have become almost one, and the result is, paradoxically, anonymity through lack of differentiation. The most intimate characterisation leads not to, or not only to, greater knowledge of other people, but to an effacement of difference that challenges the very notions of character and self.

This reading of Rachel and Hewet's engagement needs to be balanced, however, by a recognition of the intense strangeness and discomfort that accompanies this scene and others associated with it. As Wollaeger points out, the engagement scene developed from "the romantic clichés" of *Melambrosia*, Louie DeSalvo's reconstruction of the novel as it existed prior to Woolf's engagement in 1912, to the "prolonged moment of surreal dislocation" of *The Voyage Out*, from a couple who "embraced passionately" to a couple who "clasped each other in their arms, then [. . .] dropped to the earth" ("Jungle" 56, 56 - 57, *M* 197, VO 257).

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<sup>51</sup> These characters can also be seen as an extreme example of the "character-space" compression that Woloch argues minor characters undergo in novels, a compression related to the economic system within which the novel flourishes ("Minor" 302 - 303). Thus the textual compression of the sailors would be related to the economic compression they undergo as workers. However, the same argument cannot be applied to the nameless guests at the hotel, who are of the same socio-economic class as the named characters in the novel.

While I argue that this scene enacts a terrible and dangerous intimacy, a loss of individual character through excessive rapport, and as such represents an extreme in the schema of levels of characterisation proposed by the text, it is important to be aware of the ways in which this intense closeness can be read as illusory, a satirical or parodic version of the standard love scene. Wollaeger, for instance, is unsure if this scene really represents “an acknowledgement of shared feeling” (“Jungle” 57). However, the strangeness of the scene should not, I believe, cancel out its intensity. The hushed stillness of its setting, the claustrophobic atmosphere, the references to an almost primeval reality of a “remote world,” the tears “running down Terrence’s cheeks,” seem to indicate that this scene, while indubitably strange and stilted, is serious, and that the intimacy it proposes, while also strange, is real (VO 257).

This strangeness is also apparent at the culmination of the voyage upstream. Rachel, walking ashore with Hewet, experiences the “whole world” as “unreal” (VO 267). A second dialogue of echoes ensues as the couple attempt to understand ““What’s happened?”” (VO 267). This conversation is interrupted by Helen’s hand, “abrupt as iron,” dropping on Rachel’s shoulder, Rachel’s fall into the grass, and a series of disjointed images of Helen and Terrence (VO 268). Rachel’s vision of them as “two great heads” has been read by Wollaeger as an image of “the cultural hegemony of heterosexuality,” and her ensuing embrace of “Helen’s soft body” as a mark of “dissident desire” (“Jungle” 58; “Postcards” 64).<sup>52</sup> However, these scenes modify rather than replace the moments of intimacy that precede them:

The recollection of sitting upon the ground [. . .] seemed to unite them again, and they walked on in silence [. . .]. [. . .]. Long silences came between their words, which were no longer silences of struggle and confusion but refreshing silences [. . .]. They began to speak naturally of ordinary things [. . .]. (VO 267)

These moments represent what might be described as a form of normative unity achieved through the strange and dislocating process of the mirrored dialogues of Rachel and Hewet’s unconventional courtship. While they certainly do not efface the overwhelming impression of strangeness this portion of *The Voyage Out* conveys, they do seem to indicate that the level of intimacy realised here is more than a parodic critique of male and female relations. However, this form of romantic intimacy is, as I have argued, implicated in Rachel’s

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<sup>52</sup> For a full discussion of the lesbian subtext of this scene, see Patricia Smith’s “The Things People Don’t Say: Lesbian Panic in *The Voyage Out*” in *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*, edited by Eileen Barrett and Patricia Cramer.

sweeping rejection of literary models of relationship.

This reading implies, then, that the text deals with this intimacy achieved by Rachel and Hewet, this characterisation so complete as to transcend character, by killing Rachel. There are many accounts of Rachel's death, from Edward Bishop's interpretation of it as a point of narrative access to that which is "beyond the usual reach of language," to Froula's view of Rachel's experience as a "symbolic death-in-life" related to female initiation structures, to Wollaeger's argument that in "killing Rachel off, Woolf responds to Rachel's resistance to becoming both subject and object of imperialism," to Friedman's contention that it is a vulnerable female reader who is killed (28; "Chrysalis" 84; *Modernism* 122; 116). Alternately, it can be argued that "the whole point of Rachel's death [. . .] is that it is *meaningless*" (Oldfield 12). It is possible that Rachel's death is overdetermined, revealing more about critical approaches than about the text itself. My account, linked to the patterns of characterisation running through the novel, argues that Rachel's quest for characterisation takes her from the unsatisfactory, minimal, Theophrastan characterisation she rejects aboard the *Euphrosyne*, through a series of unsuccessful attempts to read character in more detail and depth, first with the Dalloways and then through her developing relationship with Hewet, and finally to the union of character implied in the jungle courtship scene, an experience of total intimacy that Rachel calls "'terrible - terrible'" (VO 257). The result of this terror of intimacy, this terrible intimacy of detailed characterisation, is a withdrawal into solipsism: "At last the faces went further away; she fell into a deep pool of sticky water [. . .]. She saw nothing and heard nothing but a faint booming sound [. . .]. While all her tormentors thought that she was dead, she was not dead, but curled up at the bottom of the sea" (VO 322). Rachel, and the novel, have explored the entire range of levels of characterisation and found none satisfactory. Rather than settle for an unacceptable form of characterisation, Rachel dies, or the novel kills her. Having studied and rejected the levels of characterisation available, Rachel becomes, like Mrs Chaily's sheets, "very chill, white, cold" (VO 21).

## Chapter 4

In 1924, Woolf located the change in human character in December 1910; arguably, better dates in terms of Woolf's own writing would be July 1917, when her short story "The Mark on the Wall" was published, or July 1920 when "An Unwritten Novel" appeared, or April 1921 when *Monday or Tuesday* was published. These short stories mark the beginning of a period of fictional experiment that is in many ways an experiment in character. "I shall never forget the day," she wrote to Ethel Smyth in 1930, "I wrote The Mark on the Wall - all in a flash, as if flying [. . .]. The Unwritten Novel was the great discovery, however. That [. . .] showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it [. . .]" (L 4: 231). This was, Woolf indicates, the beginning of the creative path that led to *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* (L 4: 231). Like *The Voyage Out*, these stories focus on issues surrounding character.

"The Mark on the Wall" connects the interpretation of subjectivity, both "the image of oneself" and that of other people, with the processes of fictional characterisation (56). "Suppose the looking glass smashes," the narrator asks, and "the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people - what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! A world not to be lived in" (56). Stripped of the fictional forms and generic categories in which self-image is embedded, its halo of characterisation, the self and the world are barren. But the narrative frame or mirror need not consist of Tennysonian images "too unlike the original to be believed in any longer," for "as we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror [. . .]" (56). Contemporary reality can provide a context for the elaboration of the self, and the material for modern fiction: "[. . .] the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue [. . .]" (56). This emphasises the multiplicity of the self, its elusiveness, and its relational nature: the self is created in the mirrors of other people.

If selfhood is thus re-imagined in "The Mark on the Wall", character is also portrayed as radically uncertain. The narrator imagines an antiquary whose habits and mannerisms answer the question "what sort of a man is an antiquary, I wonder?" (57). Characterisation responds to speculation. The result of this is, however, uncertainty, for these details prove "I really don't know what": in fact, "nothing is proved, nothing is known" (58). The solution is a shift away from the human. A powerful imaginative identification with the

experience of the other allows knowledge, but here the object of identification is a tree: “I like to think of the tree itself: first the close dry sensation of being wood: then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap” (60). This is an attempt to know the quiddity, rather than to speculate about the detailed characteristics, of something outside the self through imaginative inhabitation.<sup>53</sup>

This sort of sympathetic identification also occurs in “An Unwritten Novel”. The story begins as the narrator’s reading is interrupted by awareness of a stranger’s face on a train: “Such an expression of unhappiness was enough by itself to make one’s eyes slide above the paper’s edge to the poor woman’s face [. . .]” (25). The association of human face and printed paper correlates the act of reading with the act of speculating about another person. When the narrator’s eyes “once more crept over the paper’s rim” she observes a peculiar action: “She shuddered, twitched her arm queerly to the middle of her back and shook her head” (25). This gesture is transmitted to the observer: “And then the spasm went through me; I crooked my arm and plucked at the middle of my back” (27). From this point the narrator begins to build up a version of speculative character around the subject of her observation, for “[. . .] she had communicated, shared her secret, passed her poison [. . .]” (27). This poison is the need to reconstruct identity, the indelible “little speck on the glass” around which character and selfhood is structured (27).

The narrator proceeds to assemble character. Names are used, but only speculatively: the woman opposite the narrator is “[. . .] what’s your name - woman - Minnie Marsh; some such name as that,” while her sister-in-law is “Hilda? Hilda? Hilda Marsh” (31, 27). Everything about Minnie is open to narrative construction, from her belief in “a brutal old bully - Minnie’s God,” to the crime which she has - or may have - committed (28). “I have my choice of crimes,” the narrator gloats, before realising that even this is beside the point: “Whether you did, or what you did, I don’t mind; it’s not the thing I want” (29). The process of understanding another subjectivity relies on the interpretative and creative freedom of characterisation, but it lacks a clear goal - neither name, nor appearance, nor event is central. James Moggridge, for instance, is characterised by details of profession, routine, complexion, physiognomy, appetite, and dress, but this, the narrator argues “is primitive, and whatever it may do the reader, don’t take me in” (32). Instead, the narrator comes “irresistibly to lodge [. . .] on the firm flesh, in the robust spine [. . .] on the person, in the soul, of Moggridge the man” (33). This is the type of imaginative inhabitation of the other that allows characterisation to move beyond external details.

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<sup>53</sup> Here Woolf is in agreement with Gass: anything, even a tree, can be a character.

What is reconstructed, however, remains uncertain, as Minnie “turns t’other way and runs between my fingers” (30). Only a profound uncertainty exists, the question “Have I read you right?” and the recognition that “the human face at the top of the fullest sheet of print holds more, withholds more” (30). The self is a text which rejects full interpretation, yet the parallel between the real-world activity of interpreting people and the literary activity of reading character could not be more explicit.<sup>54</sup> The self is not simply illegible or uncertain, however; the quest of “An Unwritten Novel” for character is unsuccessful. The “life, soul, spirit, whatever you are” of a character remains “a puzzle” (31). Characterisation of “the entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in, in, to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world” is unable to achieve certainty or stability (34). The unstable tower of character that the narrator has built topples as ‘Minnie’ proves the narrator’s certainty - “I’ve read you right - I’m with you now,” - wrong by meeting a man at the train station, leaving the narrator “confounded” (35). The narrator realises “that’s not Minnie. There never was Moggridge” (36). What remains is a sense of the vital importance of characterisation, however flawed and uncertain its processes are: “Wherever I go, mysterious figures, I see you, turning the corner, mothers and sons; you, you, you. I hasten, I follow. [. . .] If I fall on my knees, if I go through the ritual, the ancient antics, it’s you, unknown figures, that I adore; if I open my arms, it’s you I embrace, you I draw to me - adorable world!” (36). In these stories Woolf begins to articulate a sense of ‘human character’ as the intersection of an unknowable self demanding to be known, and the ways in which fiction can and cannot represent that self.

Characterisation also features in Woolf’s protracted dispute with Arnold Bennett, which lasted for a decade or more depending on where one places the opening shots of this “most famous literary war of the post-war years” (Dubino 3; Hynes, *War* 399). This dispute has attracted a great deal of attention, in part because of its links to the “battle of the brows” over the role of the intellectual in English life, in which Woolf “sharply polarized attitudes” between low-, middle-, and high-brow audiences (Collini 113, 117). Readings of the debate generally take class or gender as its unarticulated basis. Both positions have been powerfully argued, and their very strength effaces the extent to which the debate was about character.

The case for a class reading has been forcefully made by Samuel Hynes, who argues that the quarrel arose not from the aesthetics considerations, but from “personal

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<sup>54</sup> Like *The Voyage Out*, “An Unwritten Novel” recognises that characterisation is aggression: “The eyes of others our prisons; their thoughts our cages” (31).

differences” (“Contention” 27). These stem from a “class bias” openly manifested in Bennett’s review of *A Room of One’s Own*, in which he admits that Woolf “is the queen of the high-brows; and I am a low-brow” (Hynes, “Contention” 35; “Queen” 327). Hynes believes that Woolf’s contributions to the debate are polemical rather than theoretical: Woolf “did not argue with Bennett, she satirized and parodied him,” while a less forgiving critic has described Woolf’s comments as “demonstrably slanderous” (“Contention” 30; *War* 400; Baldick 11). Hynes ultimately suggests that the issue of characterisation was but a pretext (“Contention” 28). Other critics have made similar arguments. Irving Kreutz argues that Woolf’s reading of Bennett’s *Hilda Lessways* is inaccurate, but does not speculate as to her motives beyond a recognition of a generational clash (107). Margaret Drabble, on the other hand, writes that Woolf’s “recoil” from Bennett and his novels “was an involuntary movement of class” predicated upon Woolf’s dislike of the *nouveau riche*, stammering, and gastric complaints (294). Woolf, according to this reading, failed as a writer to understand Bennett’s art, and failed as a human being in the ferocity of her attack on Bennett. As Drabble puts it, Bennett won a “victory of generosity,” while Woolf “over-reacted” to his criticism (292 - 293).

These class-based readings have been opposed by feminist readings which situate the debate within a conflict over “women’s intellectual and artistic abilities” (B. Daugherty 269). Beth Rigel Daugherty recognises “personal, social, cultural, generational, historical” and “aesthetic” sources for the dispute, but emphasises the role of gender (269). She agrees with Hynes that the overt topic of the debate, character, is irrelevant. Instead, Woolf reacts to Bennett as “the father as internalized tyrant, telling her how to write” (272). If the Angel in the House is the maternal censor, Bennett is the paternal, criticising Woolf for her “failure to create characters” (277). For Woolf, who associates this with Bennett’s dismissal of women in his 1920 *Our Women* and Desmond MacCarthy’s support for the book, this merely disguises the “use of gender to determine literary stature”: Woolf cannot create character because she is a woman and *ipso facto* second-rate (277). Bennett and Woolf are disputing feminism not characterisation (278). Neither Bennett nor Woolf are interested in character: Bennett uses the issue to mask his misogyny, and Woolf in response “chose character to argue about because Bennett had used character to disguise his sexism” (287). An essay like “Character in Fiction”, Daugherty argues, is thus not about character, but about the “feminist details” which “permeate the essay, allowing Woolf to achieve her feminist and aesthetic aims simultaneously” (282). It is, in the words of another proponent of this reading, an instance of the “subversive power of feminist criticism” (Benstock, “Editor’s” 9).

Class- and gender-based interpretations thus stand in opposition: “The critical tradition has noted” that the dispute “can be read in these two ways” (Matz, *Literary* 202). Both are valid, but their claims need to be tempered. Daugherty herself realises that “it is dangerous to reduce the whole contention [. . .] to only one of its many factors” (287). Class certainly played a role in Woolf’s response to Bennett. Her private obituary notice, for instance, reveals clear class-consciousness: Bennett was “coarse [. . .] glutted with success [. . .] prosaic intolerably [. . .] a shopkeeper’s view of literature [. . .] covered over in fat and prosperity and the desire for hideous Empire furniture” (*WD* 166). Yet this snobbery is absent from her published comments. The only instance of published class bias Hynes provides is a passage from “Modern Fiction” - Bennett’s characters, “deserting even the well-built villa in the Five Towns [. . .] the destiny to which they travel so luxuriously becomes more and more unquestionably an eternity of bliss spent in the very best hotel in Brighton” (Woolf, “Modern” 148 ). To Hynes, this indicates “class-conscious disapproval” (“Contention” 28). But this ignores both the fact that a journey to a “gilt-lettered hotel” in Brighton is a key plot-element of the novel Woolf refers to, *Clayhanger*, as is the Clayhangers’ “beautiful house,” and the fact that Woolf’s primary metaphorical structures in this essay are architectural (Bennett, *Clayhanger* 477, 186). This is slim evidence on which to base a class war.

Similar arguments can be made against feminist interpretations. Daugherty argues, for instance, that “Woolf makes her feminist perspective more apparent” by embodying her concept of character as a woman (282). However, Woolf begins “Character in Fiction” by stating that gender is not an important category for her discussion of character. When she asks herself “what demon whispered in my ear and urged me to my doom,” that is to write novels, “a little figure rose before me - the figure of a man, or of a woman, who said, ‘My name is Brown. Catch me if you can’” (*E* 3: 420).<sup>55</sup> The gender of Brown is incidental, even in the final version of Woolf’s side of the debate delivered as a lecture to the Heretics Club at Girton College, a version Daugherty argues “grows out of feminist anger, matures through contact with a female audience, and functions as a feminist statement” (280). Similarly, Daugherty interprets Woolf’s famous remark that “on or about December 1910 human character changed” as a riposte to Bennett’s *Our Women*, implying that “husbands need not always act as masters, that dominance and submission need not shape relations between men

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<sup>55</sup> In a recent article, Sarah Davison has convincingly proposed Max Beerbohms’s essays and fiction as an explicit source both for this demon and for the figure of Mrs Brown herself (354).

and women, and that consequently, men need not assume women are inferior” (*E* 3: 421; 282). Woolf writes, however, that “all human relations have shifted - those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children” (*E* 3: 422). Only one of these relationships is gendered, which hardly “clinches” a feminist “argument” (B. Daugherty 282).

Neither position accounts for the overt subject of debate, characterisation.<sup>56</sup> The thematic continuity of this dispute with Woolf’s earlier critical writings and with the concerns manifested in her fiction is one indication of the centrality of character here. In “Modern Novels” Woolf objects to Edwardian conformity to generic categories - “the tragic, the comic, the passionate, and the lyrical” - but the context implies a relationship to characterisation, as she goes on to describe a modernist vision of “the mind” which “receives upon its surface a myriad of impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel” (*E* 3: 33). Character should not conform to generic demands; a novelist should “convey this incessantly varying spirit with whatever stress or sudden deviation it may display, and as little admixture of the alien and external as possible,” a position similar to her critique of typical character (*E* 3: 33). She goes on to associate the Russian authors with modern interest in the “dark region of psychology,” another familiar trope (*E* 3: 35). In the version of this essay published as “Modern Fiction” she asks if “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 for catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side?” (149). While Bennett’s novels may once have been able to capture character, due to changes in human character this is no longer the case, an argument similar to her 1906 critique of Charlotte Elizabeth Maitland.

Character is thus more than a pretext. For Bennett, it is central to the novel, which cannot be true if “the characters do not seem to be real” (“Decaying” 191). While style, plot and other qualities are important, “none [. . .] counts anything like so much as the convincingness of the characters. If the characters are real, the novel will have a chance; if they are not, oblivion will be its portion” (“Decaying” 191). This position derives from Victorian character theory, and is one Woolf adopted in her early criticism - character must live - but Bennett spends little time defining real character. It should be consistent, “*kept true throughout,*” yet not overly detailed as this is antithetical to “the full creation of [. . .]

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<sup>56</sup> Other interpretations have been proposed: Bergsonian, literary historical, epistemological, and historical (Kumar 68; Rosenberg, “Postmodern” 1123; Arac 1086; Kaplan and Simpson xi).

individual characters” (“Decaying” 192, 193). Characters will only “survive in the mind” if the author focusses on creating real character rather than on “originality and cleverness,” for Bennett “perhaps the lowest of all artistic qualities” and the only ones possessed by Woolf (“Decaying” 193 - 194).<sup>57</sup> Woolf, the “champion of the younger school,” can “not create character,” but Bennett provides little specific criticism (“Another” 4 - 5). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, “Mrs. Woolf (in my opinion) told us ten thousand things about Mrs. Dalloway, but did not show us Mrs. Dalloway. I got from the novel no coherent picture of Mrs. Dalloway” (“Another” 5). The novel thus “fails in its object of presenting a character” (“High-Brow” 212). Bennett’s position is clear, but he does little to justify it.

Woolf generally agrees with Bennett on character. Responding to Bennett’s “Is the Novel Decaying?”, she writes that “none of this is new; all of it is true” (*E* 3: 384). The novel is indeed “a very remarkable machine for the creation of human character” (*E* 3: 384). She believes that “all novels [. . .] deal with character, and that it is to express character - not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel [. . .] has been evolved,” a position familiar from Woolf’s attack on representational character (*E* 3: 425). But Bennett has failed to realise the complexity of his own arguments: “here we have one of those simple statements which are no sooner taken into the mind than they burst their envelopes and flood us with suggestions of every kind” (*E* 3: 384). Woolf’s attempt to resolve this complexity in “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” begins with a historical survey of characterisation. Victorian literature lives through “the astonishing vividness and reality” of its characters (*E* 3: 385). This richness, however, and the techniques that led to its production, must be modified by the impact of Russian literature. How, she asks, “after reading *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, [. . .] could any young novelist believe in ‘characters’ as the Victorians had painted them?” (*E* 3: 386). Their “undeniable vividness [. . .] is the result of their crudity. The character is rubbed into us indelibly because its features are so few and so prominent” (*E* 3: 386). This is character as strongly-drawn type. The character, and here Woolf seems to be shifting semantic registers, is written onto the reader, but with a bold imprecision, the blurred product of a rubbing which reproduces prominent features while omitting detail. Modern authors must “bring back character from [. . .] shapelessness [. . .] to sharpen its edges, deepen its compass” (*E* 3: 387). The indelible, but potentially illegible, Victorian smudge must be replaced by an engraved image of

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<sup>57</sup> Woolf herself was not sanguine with regards to her ability to create living character: [. . .] “it is true, however, that I don’t have that ‘reality’ gift. I insubstantise, wilfully, to some extent, distrusting reality - its cheapness. But to go further, have I the power of conveying the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself? (*WD* 63).

precision and depth in order to make believable and relevant the “conflicts between human beings which alone arouse our strongest emotions” (*E* 3: 387). The Edwardian writers - Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett - are absent from this survey, for they “scarcely attempted to deal with character except in its more generalised aspects” (*E* 3: 386). If the Georgian writers have failed to create character, they have at least tried, while the Edwardians have avoided the writer’s responsibility to deal with the “particular” rather than the “general” (*E* 3: 387). Finally, Woolf argues that this dispute over character is of tremendous importance, for “to disagree about character is to differ in the depths of the being” (*E* 3: 387).

For Woolf, character is historically located, a question of the interaction between fiction and reality: “[. . .] on or about December 1910 human character changed” (*E* 3: 421). Interpretations of the significance of this date most frequently link it to Roger Fry’s Post-Impressionist exhibition in London; alternatives include the death of King Edward VII or the Welsh miners’ strike: transformations in character are linked to changing artistic, political, or social realities (Parsons 68). Another line of reasoning takes the date as a feminist watershed (Matz, *Literary* 196). The fact that Woolf calls the date she chose for the great change “disputable” and “arbitrary” indicates that it should perhaps not be taken as more than a gesture towards the reality that real people change over time - this is human character rather than human nature - and that the nature of fictional characterisation must change to suit (*E* 3: 421 - 422). As Martha Nussbaum has observed, “it is usually a mistake to read earth-shaking significance into a philosopher’s pedestrian choice of examples” (“Professor” 41). More important than the particular date is the fact that historically conditioned changes in real human subjectivity demand changes in fictional character. The results of this transformation are unclear. Woolf finds it difficult to explain “what novelists mean when they talk about character” (*E* 3: 422). In both “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and “Character in Fiction” Woolf, “instead of analysing and abstracting,” attempts to illustrate her vision of character, or perhaps more accurately her vision of the difficulty of character, through the figure of Mrs Brown (*E* 3: 422).

Mrs Brown is a fictional character. But what, Woolf asks, “after all is character [. . .] when we cease to believe what we are told about her, and begin to search out her real meaning for ourselves?” (*E* 3: 387). What is character when Victorian assumptions have been discredited by the literary impact of the Russians and the historical impact of changes in human identity? Mrs Brown “becomes a will-o’-the-wisp, a dancing light, an illumination gliding up the wall and out of the window [. . .]” (*E* 3: 387). These metaphors emphasise character’s intangibility, its ephemerality, its changeability - Andrea Zengulys points out

that Woolf's concept of character "remains hazy" - but from these "gleams and flashes of this flying spirit" the writer must fashion "solid, living, flesh-and-blood Mrs Brown" (152; *E* 3: 388). Character operates on two levels, which Woolf describes in "Modern Fiction" as materialist and spiritual (147). The Edwardian novelists focus on the material, but the Georgian writer must capture both.

In 1914, Henry James criticised Bennett's *Clayhanger* and *Hilda Lessways* as "a monument [. . .] not to an idea, a pursued and captured meaning [. . .] but just simply of the quarried and gathered material it happens to contain, the stones and bricks and rubble and cement and promiscuous constituents of every sort that have been heaped in it [. . .]" ("New" 322). Woolf also uses architectural metaphors to criticise Bennett. While Woolf has built a house out of James' rubble, she too feels that it is untouched by spirit. It is difficult to evaluate the validity of Woolf's claims: much of her critique is relative in nature, based on critically productive contrast, rather than what might be described as 'objective' criticism. She was also aware of the possibility that Bennett's critiques were to some extent valid, recording in her diary in 1923 that "I daresay its true, however, that I haven't that 'reality' gift" (*WD* 63). On the other hand, she wrote of him in a heavily satiric vein after a meeting at a party in 1930: he is not, despite his own opinion, a "creative artist" and he produces rather "uninspired discourse" in an affected tone (*WD* 158). Perceptible again in this diary entry is a sense of continuing discomfort, heavily infused with class-consciousness, with the idea that Bennett may "possess more 'life'" than Woolf (*WD* 159). Writing immediately after Bennett's death, Woolf returns to the theme of life: "Queer how one regrets the dispersal of anybody who seemed - as I say - genuine: who had direct contact with life [. . .]" (*WD* 166). Accompanying this is a powerful sense of opposition: "[. . .] for he abused me; and I yet rather wished him to go on abusing me; and me abusing him" (*WD* 166). For Woolf, Bennett and his association with 'life' seem to have represented a form of productive opposition.

Bennett's novels are clearly what Woolf would describe as materialist, concerned as they are with the physical apparatus and procedures of living. The first sentence of *Clayhanger* concerns its main character, "Edwin Clayhanger stood on the steep-sloping, red-bricked canal bridge [. . .]" (3). However, the narrative immediately shifts to a detailed and lengthy report on the prominent landmarks, educational system, industrial circumstances, and transportation links of the area; they have, as the narrator says, "everything to do with the history of Edwin Clayhanger, as they have everything to do with the history of each of the two hundred thousand souls in the Five Towns" (3 - 4). While this is undoubtedly true - and forcefully reminiscent of Milosz's argument that everything from "occupations" to

“beliefs and ideas” are the product of “historical formation” - it is unsurprising that Woolf objects to this extreme obliquity (10). It is exactly this approach to character that she objects to in *Hilda Lessways*: “One line of insight would have done more than all those lines of description [. . .]” (*E* 3: 429).<sup>58</sup> However, a critique of materialism is certainly present in *Clayhanger*. On Jubilee Day, Edwin Clayhanger wanders into town to see the celebrations in “sheer aimless disgust” (391). The leading citizens of the town have provided an ox to be roasted for the poor:

[. . .] a dead ox, slung by its legs from an iron construction, was frizzling over a great primitive fire. The vast flanks of the animal, all rich yellows and browns, streamed with grease, some of which fell noisily on the almost invisible flames, while the rest was ingeniously caught in a system of runnels. The spectacle was obscene, nauseating to the eye, the nose, and the ear [. . .]. (393).

This ox, in its gross carnality, obscene scale, and combination of savagery with industrial technique, represents within the narrative economy of the novel the materialism of the Victorian age against which Edwin so ineffectually rebels. The ox is a synecdochic substitute for a whole culture which emphasises the material over the ineffable, and in a final savage narrative irony, it has “turned” in the heat: it is a grotesque, inedible monument to materialism (394). Thus while Bennett employs a narrative technique that seems vulnerable to Woolf’s critique, it cannot be said that he was unaware of the dangers of materialism.<sup>59</sup>

A duality between spirit and matter is inherent in the figure of Mrs Brown. As Jesse Matz argues, “[. . .] what Woolf wanted was some right combination of the two - some way to have the kind of life that resides in the material detail, but yet to make it a part of some more essential vision; some way to have essential insight, but yet stay grounded in material life” (*Literary* 174). While this replaces theological with philosophical discourse, essence and spirit are here interchangeable. Woolf wishes to reconcile Edwardian materialist characterisation with the intangible strangeness she has identified in Russian fiction and in her experience of a historically transformed world. The initial stages of the creation of Mrs

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<sup>58</sup> Ray Monk has argued that “Woolf’s impatience with what she sees as the Edwardians’ excess in describing the things in the world and the outer appearances of people leads her [. . .] into gross caricatures of their novelistic methods [. . .],” referring particularly to Woolf’s analysis of the opening of *Hilda Lessways* (16).

<sup>59</sup> Nor is the dispute between ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ schools of fiction over: a 2009 article in *The Telegraph* argued that the Edwardian trinity of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy have been unjustly neglected in favour of the “self-obsessed frauds” Lawrence and Woolf (Heffer). One of the main strengths of the former is that their characters are “believable” (Heffer).

Brown - and of her male travelling companion, Mr Smith - in "Character in Fiction" are material, employing the standard language of *effectio*: age, appearance, clothing, and social standing, the same techniques the narrator of "An Unwritten Novel" rejects as "primitive," the same techniques Rachel Vinrace initially uses to read Richard Dalloway (32). Claiming no narrative omniscience, the essay explicitly speculates about the invisible, interpreting physical signs as social indicators in the same way that Sherlock Holmes interprets a scuffed boot or grease-stained hat. This is part of the fundamental process of characterisation. The narrator then quotes a conversation - another material approach. From the dialogue, new material for speculation is garnered. It is only when the narrator is alone with Mrs Brown that material characterisation gives way to spiritual or essential:

She sat in her corner opposite, very clean, very small, rather queer, and suffering intensely. The impression she made was overwhelming. It came pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning. What was it composed of - that overwhelming and peculiar impression? (*E* 3: 424 - 425)

Mrs Brown is at once a material presence, clean and small; the product of narrative speculation, queer and suffering; and a mystery, for there is no causal or logical relationship between her and the smell of burning.<sup>60</sup> The smell is the non-material element of character that Bennett misses. Woolf links it to the wanderings of the creative mind which attempts to embody, or account for, the burning essence of character by creating stories, "myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas" (*E* 3: 425). The function of creativity is to account in narrative for the unaccountable essence of self.

Woolf does not end her essay in triumph; having identified the "overmastering impression" of character she is at a loss as to how to "transmit" this impression to the reader in the absence of acceptable literary conventions - the description, dialogue and supposition she uses to create material Mrs Brown (*E* 3: 431). As Matz writes, "[. . .] she ends her essay [. . .] admitting failure - failure to come up with any alternative, and failure to replace Edwardian Materialism with credible new conventions" (*Literary* 174). Georgian writers are left "facing Mrs Brown without any method of conveying her to the reader" (*E* 3: 432). The modern method must be one of questioning and experimentation, and this is an undertaking for Woolf of high seriousness, for Mrs Brown, "that surprising apparition," is "the spirit we

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<sup>60</sup> Matz describes the smell of burning as "something that conveys the essence of character. It is an experience of essence, an inessential essential, and therefore a category through which to refute Materialism without giving up its claim to life" (*Literary* 175). Mrs Brown is "that material supplement that ensures the impression's claim to vital experience" (*Literary* 180). The impression of character, what Woolf defines as the spiritual, is the important element of characterisation, while the material element acts only to give credence to that essence, to ensure its legibility.

live by, life itself" (*E* 3: 436).

This chapter opened by relocating Woolf's assertion regarding the transformation in human character from an ambiguous retrospective pre-war moment to the publication of the short stories in which Woolf first articulated the radical importance and difficulty of character. Her dispute with Bennett represents an equally reasonable date, as two major public figures asserted and debated the importance of character in the early 1920s. With equal validity, the change could be placed with the publication of *Jacob's Room*, in which the importance, complexity and ambiguity of character are equally clear.<sup>61</sup> Preparing the novel for publication, Woolf anticipated that criticism would centre around characterisation: "If they say 'You can't make us care a damn for any of your figures', I shall say read my criticism then" (*WD* 53). Early reaction to the novel met Woolf's expectations. Leonard Woolf said that "the people are ghosts" or "puppets, moved hither and thither by fate," a metaphor also employed by W. L. Courtney, who described Woolf as "seated in an armchair playing with her puppets" (*WD* 53; Majumdar 104). These critiques arise from the notion of living character.

A. S. McDowall, reviewing for the *TLS*, offered another approach: "we do not know Jacob as an individual, though we promptly seize his type" (Majumdar 97). Other reviewers were alert to this distinction. One argued that the novel offers "an outline of the kind of young man Jacob was," and Rebecca West agreed "that it is not about individuals at all but about types" (Majumdar 99, 101). This indicates that the distinction between character-in-depth and Theophrastan types present in *The Voyage Out* is relevant to *Jacob's Room*. The early critics are, however, almost unanimous in their disapproval of a novel employing typified character - it is seen neither as an attempt to address an ontological or epistemological reality, nor as a literary technique referring back to an alternate historical formulation of character: it is simply a failing. Some contemporary critics remain doubtful of the place of character in the novel. Bishop, for example, underlines the fact that "in the figure of Jacob, Woolf is not representing *character*; what she is exploring is the construction, and representation of, the subject" ("Subject" 137). While this reading of the novel as an exploration of ideology's capacity to form and control subjects - in Louis Althusser's words the way "ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects" - offers powerful insights into aspects of the text, it does not exhaust the role of character in the novel (109). Rather it

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<sup>61</sup> In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh identifies the period 1918 - 1923 as "somehow very important" in a transformative sense (*MD* 78).

is an illustration of the power of readings oriented towards the self to elide the role of character.

One place to begin reading *Jacob's Room* is with names. The novel is not called *Jacob Flanders*, directing attention away from Jacob to the spaces surrounding him.<sup>62</sup> However, Jacob's name plays important roles in the novel; for instance, it acts as a framing device. Jacob's brother Archer calls for him on the beach: "'Ja-cob! Ja-cob!' Archer shouted" (*JR* 4). The last of these cries has great textual weight: "The voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks - so it sounded" (*JR* 4).<sup>63</sup> Archer's cry becomes an aural pattern of a human voice which goes into the world in quest of Jacob, and fails to find him: it breaks on the rocks, the intractable realities of the world-as-it-is, and fails. At the end of the book, after Jacob has died, his mother, Betty Flanders and his friend Bonamy are in his room:

Bonamy crossed to the window. Pickford's van swung down the street. The omnibuses were locked together at Mudie's corner. Engines throbbed, and carters, jamming the brakes down, pulled their horses sharp up. A harsh and unhappy voice said something unintelligible. And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves.

'Jacob! Jacob!' cried Bonamy, standing by the window. The leaves sank down again". (*JR* 155)

Archer's "lambent" cry is echoed across the pages of the novel and the length of Jacob's life, and as such it is not, as Bishop argues, "lost in the bureaucratic naming of faceless subjects of the state" ("Subject" 151).<sup>64</sup> But this is not a duet between Archer and Bonamy: it is a trio. Both Bonamy's cry and the "harsh and unhappy voice" which says something "unintelligible" are linked to Archer's cry. The harsh voice is comparable in emotional tone

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<sup>62</sup> The title seems to have been with the novel from its inception. On 10 April 1920, before starting composition, Woolf refers to *Jacob's Room* (*WD* 33). Jacob's name also remains the same from holograph to publication, unlike the names of many other characters in the novel (Bishop, Introduction iv).

<sup>63</sup> Archer's cry is a late addition to the novel; the holograph does not embed Jacob's experience on the beach within the context of his family. He is alone until he runs to his nurse Alice (*JRH* 2 - 4). This addition makes the text's quest for Jacob more explicit.

<sup>64</sup> Vara Neverow points out that the narrative is framed within Betty Flanders' experience. While the holograph of *Jacob's Room* opens with Jacob on the beach, "trotting towards" a line of seagulls, "in the published version, Woolf brackets Jacob's life with the prior and subsequent presence of [. . .] the woman who not only gives birth to him and survives him, but who has a very distinct narrative experience separate from him" (*JRH* 2; Neverow 203). The calling of Jacob's name must be seen as a framing device within a larger framing device.

to Archer's, although "unhappy" carries a different emotional load to "extraordinary sadness" (*JR* 155, 4). It is harsh, in contrast to Archer's purity. In the holograph, the sentence "all the voices of the August morning were in full cry" has been struck out. Also, the man's voice "cried out" rather than says something unintelligible (*JRH* 274). These holograph versions seem to reinforce the link between these concluding cries and Archer's. The unintelligible voice may not communicate, but it succeeds in conjuring Jacob: "And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves" (*JR* 155). This sudden gust is Jacob; Bonamy responds to it by calling his name. In 1919, Woolf described Bennett's novels as "so well constructed and solid" that "there is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows," leading her to think that life may "refuse to live there" (*E* 3: 32). This gust of wind is the essence Edwardian character lacks. *Jacob's Room* is a quest for a character named Jacob, whose essence, or to use Woolf's terms, spirit, eludes the novel until, perhaps, this last moment. *Jacob's Room* thus looks in two directions, examining the ways external forces shape character, and at the same time gesturing towards essence.

Names in *Jacob's Room* also have associative meanings.<sup>65</sup> His surname ties him to his future, for his fate is "prefigured through [. . .] his family name" (Flint, "Revising" 362). It was well-known in the post-war years that almost a third of British war deaths occurred in Flanders, as the popularity of John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" attests (Peach 67). This association of Jacob with the battlefields of Flanders may be even stronger than is generally recognised. The 1917 British campaign in Flanders, known as Passchendaele after a small village named in turn after the Passion of Christ, was "the most notorious land campaign of the war" (Keegan 375). It led to half a million Imperial casualties, and was perhaps the clearest example of the insanity of the British military establishment's method of war (Keegan 375). In 1927 Winston Churchill placed the blame for this debacle squarely on the shoulders of the military leadership (339).<sup>66</sup> "The point of Passchendaele [. . .] defies explanation": it served no clear or useful military objectives, and it was carried out in

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<sup>65</sup> It is important to remember Isobel Grundy's warning that Woolf was perhaps more interested in the "sound and texture" of names than "distant, learned, and obscure" references (206, 203).

<sup>66</sup> Current historiography has attempted to rehabilitate British leadership, arguing that the condemnation of the war as "waste and sham" was a historically conditioned product of the "penury and disillusionment" of the nineteen-twenties and thirties (Holmes 613). Contemporary disputes also played a role in interwar criticism. Churchill, for instance, as an "Easterner," or proponent of an indirect military strategy, was hardly an impartial judge of the "Westerners" who insisted on the value of a direct assault on the German army (Holmes xix - xx). However, Woolf and her readership would have interpreted the war in general, and Passchendaele in particular, as the sort of bloody farce Churchill described.

opposition to the wishes of the elected government (Keegan 387). It was led by Field-Marshal Haig and his staff with a lack of intelligence that eventually penetrated public consciousness in Britain, with *The Times* calling for Haig's removal on 12 December 1917 (Searle 718).

“Essentially,” writes Leon Wolff, “the fate of the assault which unrolled that morning - one so monstrous that it appeared beyond the creation or control of the human will - depended on II Corps, commanded by [. . .] Lieutenant-General Claud Jacob” (175). Jacob Flanders' given name thus offers an additional reference to the First World War, although it is perhaps unlikely that Woolf would have noticed or remembered this name; the general was mentioned in *The Times*, for instance, on only four occasions between 1917 and 1920, and never in connection with the battle of Passchendaele (*Times digital*). In any case, the association of Jacob with the battlefields of Flanders is clear, and this has interesting effects on a reading of his character. As Jane Goldman points out, his name renders him absent from the novel even as it represents him (*Cambridge* 52). His name gives him identity, as an individual, as a member of a family, and as a member of a generation, and simultaneously encodes the very time and place which strips him of identity: his name “both grants identity and cancels it out” (Marcus, *Virginia* 88).

While the primary set of associations grouped around Jacob's name are military, Flanders also refers to the “vivacity and tenacity” of Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders, who was for Woolf an exemplar of a type of character construction. (Grundy 214). In a 1918 review, she contrasts plot- and character-based novels:

[. . .] bring to mind Tom Jones, Moll Flanders [. . .]. But consider how many things we know about them, how much we guess, what scenes of beauty and romance we set them in, how much of England is their background - without a word of description, perhaps, but merely because they are themselves. We can think about them when we are no longer reading the book. (*E* 2: 290)

In the *Common Reader*, Woolf makes a similar comment about Moll Flanders, arguing that Defoe “makes us understand that Moll Flanders was a woman on her own account and not only material for a succession of adventures” (Woolf, “Defoe” 89). Thus Jacob's name ties him directly to both the immediate social history of his generation, and to a broader literary history of characterisation.

The next obvious feature of names in *Jacob's Room* is their surplus; there are over 150 named “light impressionistic sketches” in the roughly 150 pages of the novel, a situation which can cause confusion (Goldman, *Cambridge* 50; Grabo 191- 192). Many critics have

recognised the novel's disturbance of the linkage between name and named and its challenge to "the belief that names are coterminous with identities, and naming people with knowing them" (Marcus, *Virginia* 87).<sup>67</sup> Betty Flanders soothes Archer by conjuring fairy-tale visions: "Mrs. Flanders stooped over him. 'Think of the fairies,' said Betty Flanders" (*JR* 7). Two different identifying tags refer to one character, yet it seems impossible to associate either version with the narrative voice or a character. Betty Flanders is not Betty Flanders to Archer, nor is Mrs Flanders the particular title the narrator uses to refer to her. There seems to be no significance in the alternating names; they imply nothing, thus drawing attention to naming as arbitrary labelling. Rachel Bowlby has argued that Woolf's use of names for minor characters prevents the emergence of "any consistent grasp on the position from which each person is viewed" ("Jacob's" 88). This observation also applies to major characters; the shifting nomenclature used to refer to Betty Flanders leaves the reader without a stable perspective on her character. This has been described as a "a suspension of signification itself," and while this post-structuralist formulation is strong, it indicates the extent to which the text challenges the linguistic notions associated with character (Minow-Pinkney 26).

This surplus of character sketches does more, however, than confuse the inattentive reader and demonstrate the validity of Saussurian linguistics, as a close reading of "Captain George Boase," who "had caught a monster shark" demonstrates (*JR* 12). Initially, the Captain is text, his exploit advertised on "one side of the triangular hoarding [. . .] in red, blue, and yellow letters; and each line ended with three differently coloured notes of exclamation" (*JR* 12).<sup>68</sup> Some pages later the reader learns, parenthetically, that Ellen Barfoot, wife of Captain Barfoot, friend of Betty Flanders, "had known Captain Boase who had caught the shark quite well" (*JR* 19). This is all the information available about the captain, yet it provides a core of character which encourages speculation.

The reader knows that Boase is a fisherman, or shark-hunter as he would perhaps style himself, and is in the business of seaside resort entertainment. This brings into question his status as a captain; it may be a stage name rather than a nautical title. He is perhaps a sort of glorified carnival worker, a meretricious confidence man with a ready line of patter. After all, the shark itself is "only a flabby yellow receptacle, like an empty Gladstone bag in a

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<sup>67</sup> This excess has also been linked to the text's positioning of the individual "as a subject" of dominant ideology (Bishop, "Subject" 151).

<sup>68</sup> In the holograph the captain's presence is elided: "A monster shark had been caught. One side of the triangular hoarding said so [. . .]" (*JRH* 10). The later inclusion of the captain allows a character to emerge from the minimal text of the "red, blue & yellow letters" (*JRH* 10).

tank” (*JR* 13). This act of speculative characterisation is complicated by his relationship with Ellen Barfoot. Ellen is James Coppard’s daughter, who was the mayor of Scarborough “at the time of Queen Victoria’s jubilee,” and nothing could be more respectable than that (*JR* 19). If she knew Captain Boase well, he must have been at one point a reputable member of society, and is thus perhaps a genuine captain fallen on hard times. Unless, that is, Ellen Barfoot has had some sort of inappropriate relationship with Boase and known him carnally. Ellen Barfoot’s memory of Captain Barfoot may also be coloured by her current ill health and sense of imprisonment, “for Ellen Barfoot in her bath-chair on the esplanade was a prisoner - civilization’s prisoner,” contrasted with memories of a time of relative freedom (*JR* 19). This character sketch yields an unexpectedly rich seam of information, however uncertain it may be.

This speculative construction of character is in one sense not meant to be taken seriously. There is simply not enough textual evidence to support any firm reading of Captain Boase. There are, however, two points raised here. First, the process of speculating about character, so central to Woolf’s short stories and to her critical debates with Bennett, is embedded in the structure of the novel. *Jacob’s Room* offers fragments of evidence, in themselves trivial, spread throughout the pages of the novel without the standard narrative framework upon which a traditional novel relies to organise its presentation of information, a structure that demands the reader “draw together specific terms from different parts of the text [. . .]” (Bradshaw, *Winking* 4). The disparate elements of character only acquire significance by being actively placed in relation to each other in a process of speculative reconstruction.<sup>69</sup> As David Bradshaw writes, “[. . .] a reader [. . .] who is not asking questions from the beginning of the novel is not really reading *Jacob’s Room*” (*Winking* 7). Woolf’s comments regarding *Moll Flanders* may now make more sense: there is indeed a conjunction in Captain Barfoot, as in all the “novel’s extensive roster of named and nameless faces,” of what we know and what we guess, of imagined romance, and of the specific social background of England (Bradshaw, *Winking* 5). Character is the product of attentive

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<sup>69</sup> This requires a reader to notice and reassemble the references. This raises a methodological issue: when reading a novel with more than 150 characters, many facts will not be placed in relation by many readers. For instance, Mrs Pascoe first appears in the middle of chapter 4 and reappears at the end of chapter 13, and it is not certain that a reader will draw the required links between the separate passages. However, searchable electronic texts allow for instant re-association of these elements. This ability runs counter to normative reading behaviour: forgetting and half-remembering are part of reading. In terms of scholarly methodology, however, the difference is one of degree rather than type: close and repeated readings produce similar results in terms of retention. Similarly, Bishop has pointed out how electronic texts, and indeed varying editions, can fail to adequately convey Woolf’s use of blank space in *Jacob’s Room* (“Mind” 31).

speculation on the part of the characteriser, be they author, reader, or character in the narrative itself.

The second point is that characters in *Jacob's Room* are affected by the intersecting forces of the society within which they are presented. The images of Boase and Barfoot a reader extracts from the text are based on their positioning within different social and economic matrices: the language of advertising, the economic implications of a seaside leisure economy, the realities of the social and economic structure of a particular town, the transformation of social roles since the Victorian period, the gender roles of a patriarchal culture. As Peach puts it "Woolf was not interested in making 'real' the character of those who died, but in the cultural *archive*, to employ Foucault's term, that shaped their world views [. . .]" (73). Or, in Bradshaw's words, she is interested in the "hierarchy and hierarchical structures which the novel discloses" and, I would argue, the ways these hierarchies impinge on our understanding of character (*Winking* 25). These observations can be extended from Jacob as representative of a lost generation, who "metonymically represents millions," to all of the minor characters in the novel who are presented as embedded products of their cultural matrix (Handley 130).

Naming thus highlights the ways in which character is in part established not by a "notion of individuality," but by complex and intersecting social realities, "the action of ideology in constructing human character, revealing the process and effect of subjectivity" (Bowlby, "Jacob's" 85; Bishop, "Subject" 142). The Reverend Andrew Floyd, for instance, is generally referred to by both the narrator and other characters as Mr Floyd. After Betty Flanders has declined his proposal of marriage, and he has left Scarborough, however, the Flanders read about him in the newspaper: "'Dear me,' said Mrs. Flanders, when she read [. . .] that the Rev. Andrew Floyd, etc., etc., had been made Principal of Maresfield House, 'that must be our Mr. Floyd'" (*JR* 16). Mr Floyd exists on two levels; a personal level of relationship, including his abortive romance with Betty Flanders and his pseudo-paternal relationship with the Flanders children, in which he is Mr Floyd, and a social level in which he is embodied by a formal title. Both of these names refer to the same imagined individual, but they exist in effect as separate characters. Mr Floyd is a romantic who cherishes a letter from Betty Flanders for years after his marriage, while the Reverend Andrew Floyd is the son of the Reverend Jaspas Floyd and a transmitter of official tradition. Other instances of this include Betty Flanders and her maid, Rebecca: Betty Flanders is always Mrs Flanders, both in Rebecca's reported speech and when the narrative deals with

their relationship. Similarly, Mrs Durrant's servant is referred to with a frequency - six times on one page - that can only be intended to draw attention to itself, as "the boy Curnow" (*JR* 45). The narrator adopts the naming conventions of the social world she is describing. Mrs Durrant presumably thinks of and addresses her servant as 'boy'. He is named in a way that indicates a socio-economic relationship.

Another instance of this association of naming with social utility occurs during the Durrants' party, but in this case the narrator pillories the social function of naming:

'Are you going away for Christmas?' said Mr. Calthorp.  
 'If my brother gets his leave,' said Miss Edwards.  
 'What regiment is he in?' said Mr. Calthorp.  
 'The Twentieth Hussars,' said Miss Edwards.  
 'Perhaps he knows my brother?' said Mr. Calthorp.  
 'I am afraid I did not catch your name,' said Miss Edwards.  
 'Calthorp,' said Mr. Calthorp. (*JR* 73)

Neither Mr Calthorp nor Miss Edwards reappears, unless Miss Edwards in chapter 7 is the Cissy Edwards Sandra Wentworth Williams questions in chapter 12.<sup>70</sup> The repetition of their names mocks both the standard novelistic convention of attaching discourse markers such as 'he said' to dialogue and the very act of naming. The content of the dialogue is as absurd as its structure. The characters do not know who they are talking with, so their attempts to establish a social relation based on name and class-membership fails. The holograph indicates that this minimalist absurdity was the product of revision, as conversational padding was cut: "We had thought of ~~went~~ St. Moritz," was, for example, excised (*JRH* 109). What is left is a sharp indictment of the role of names in sustaining social structures.

This attention is at times focussed on the relationship between naming and women. Clara Durrant is introduced in a way which heightens awareness of her name: "'Oh, Clara, Clara!' exclaimed Mrs. Durrant, and Timothy Durrant adding, 'Clara, Clara,' Jacob named the shape in yellow gauze Timothy's sister, Clara. The girl sat smiling and flushed. With her brother's dark eyes, she was vaguer and softer than he was" (*JR* 47). This repetition of Clara's first name indicates possession rather than nomination, and can be read in contrast to Archer's cry for Jacob. Clara is presented as an object of relation, Timothy Durrant's sister, with his eyes but vaguer and softer; she is a creature of the comparative, the feminine defined

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<sup>70</sup> This is another way Woolf challenges conventions which would avoid repeating names to avoid confusing the reader; in *Jacob's Room* confusion seems to be a goal. Grundy attributes this to "the shared history of the race," and to the way Woolf "uses names as they occur in life: the same names hitched at random to the random swarms of people" (213).

in relation to the masculine. Similarly, Florinda's name was "bestowed upon her by a painter" and she is "without a surname" (*JR* 65). While Clara does not literally lack a surname, she is generally referred to as Clara, and her textual baptism by stressing her first name strips her of her last. Thus both women are nominatively incomplete, as they wait for the second half of their name, Flanders.<sup>71</sup>

Naming as indicator of socio-economic positioning links to other structures in the novel. Mr Plumer, "Professor of Physics, or whatever it might be," - and this is an example of the satiric voice of the narrator undercutting the significance of titles - has named his house "'Waverly,' [. . .] not that Mr Plumer admired Scott or would have chosen any name at all, but names are useful when you have to entertain undergraduates" (*JR* 26 - 27). They ease social difficulties by enabling conversation: "on Sunday at lunchtime, there was talk of names on gates" (*JR* 26). Everyone at this egregious lunch experiences intense social discomfort:

There can be no excuse for this outrage upon one hour of human life, save the reflection which occurred to Mr. Plumer as he carved the mutton, that if no don ever gave a luncheon party, if Sunday after Sunday passed, if men went down, became lawyers, doctors, members of Parliament, business men - if no don ever gave a luncheon party - 'Now, does lamb make the mint sauce, or does mint sauce make the lamb?' (*JR* 26 - 27)

This passage explicitly connects naming with the maintenance of social order. The naming of 'Waverly' facilitates this sort of institutional party, and this sort of institutional party has no justification beyond its contribution to society, producing men to fill positions. Mr. Plumer's question - "'Now, does lamb make the mint sauce, or does mint sauce make the lamb?'" - while seemingly vacuous, may provide the key to the passage (*JR* 26 - 27). The textual sequence runs something like this: names help form parties, parties help form society, society helps form lambs. In the greater narrative context, the young men at this party will go to war, and Jacob and many others will feed "crows in Flanders" within a few short years (*JR* 83). The passion of Jesus, referred to in John 1: 29 as "the Lamb of God," is explicitly linked to Passchendaele, the centre of the battles in Flanders; indeed, a regiment of French soldiers marched into battle in May 1917 "baa-ing like sheep to indicate that they were lambs being

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<sup>71</sup> Clara, although deprived of a surname pending marriage, cannot rest secure even in her given name. Edwin Mallett, courting her, "wrote his verses ending: And read their doom in Chloe's eyes," prompting Clara "to blush at the first reading, and to laugh at the second, saying that it was just like him to call her Chloe when her name was Clara" (*JR* 71).

driven to slaughter” (Wolff 94). Naming lies at the root of the social order, and the text implicates the nominative act in the slaughter of Jacob and his generation, “swallowed up by the War, a fate prefigured through a very marker of identity, Flanders, [. . .]” (Flint, “Revising” 362).

The novel’s questioning of the role of names thus focusses on the central figure whose name is almost always Jacob, not Mr Flanders, or Jacob Flanders, or any of the other variants the text has prepared its readers to encounter. One important exception occurs in relation to Jacob’s mother: “Meanwhile, poor Betty Flanders’s letter, having caught the second post, lay on the hall table - poor Betty Flanders writing her son’s name, Jacob Alan Flanders, Esq., as mothers do [. . .]” (*JR* 77). This is the only instance where Jacob is situated by naming in a more structured social context equivalent to that which nominates Mr Floyd as the Rev. Andrew Floyd and deprives Clara Durrant of a surname. Yet it is his mother who performs this act of social identification, an act identified as typical of mothers. The narrator interprets Betty’s message as follows: “Don’t go with bad women, do be a good boy; wear your thick shirts; and come back, come back, come back to me” (*JR* 77). This is on the surface an innocuous, even idyllic, reading. But the next sentence changes the context of her message to Jacob completely: “But she said nothing of the kind. ‘Do you remember old Miss Wargrave, who used to be so kind when you had the whooping-cough?’ she wrote; ‘she’s dead at last, poor thing’” (*JR* 77). Betty Flanders’ overt concern to police her son’s sexual behaviour, a concern written under cover of Jacob’s full social name, a name which recalls his, and the reader’s, attention to his wider social role, sentences him to the death pre-figured by his surname, and to his final resting place, a war grave in Flanders. Betty Flanders, rather than standing outside the social pressures which form and destroy Jacob and the other young men of his generation, is integral to them. From minor character to central figure, then, *Jacob’s Room* uses names from a variety of angles to destabilise conventions of literary character and to explore the ways external structures contribute to the formation of the self.

This sort of social or contextual shaping of self was also explored in the works of Woolf’s contemporaries, and a brief look to Katherine Mansfield, with whom Woolf’s friendship was in its “most intense phase” during the writing of *Jacob’s Room* will both situate the novel in a wider context and indicate a potential direction forward (A. Smith 194). Mansfield, like many early twentieth-century writers, was fascinated by the concept of self and its instability, noting in a letter the essential multiplicity of identity, the impossibility of

being “true to oneself! which self? Which of my many - well really, that’s what it looks like coming to - hundreds of selves?” (*Letters* 173). Similarly, her fiction is full of what Angela Smith describes as “contradictory representations of the self” (163). In Mansfield’s 1918 “Prelude”, the Hogarth Press’ third publication, hand-printed in three hundred copies by the Woolfs, three alternative articulations of self are explored (Mitchell 100). One of these is a contextualized or embedded self similar to that explored in *Jacob’s Room*.

In “Prelude”, the characters are defined by their relation to the things that surround them. Kezia’s sense of dislocation and fear after the Burnells move responds to the absence of objects in the emptied house: “Nothing was left in it but a lump of gritty yellow soap” (14). Her mother, Linda, has a very different reaction to the physical context within which she is embedded. After the move, when “all the furniture had found a place - all the old paraphernalia, as she expressed it,” she “wished that she was going away” (25). Her primary response to the world, a desire to flee, is embodied in her unstable relation with things “which had a habit of coming alive,” transforming themselves into menacing or liberating fantasies; poppies on wallpaper become real, the aloe in the drive becomes a ship coming to rescue her (27). In contrast, her mother, Mrs Fairfield, is completely and naturally integrated into her physical surroundings: “It was hard to believe that she had not been in that kitchen for years; she was so much a part of it” (29). Her activity gives the objects meaning, connecting them in “a series of patterns” (29). Stanley Burnell, on the other hand, is embedded not so much in the objects which surround him, as in the actions his body can perform with them, the things he can consume, and the social and professional relations represented by the “signed photos of his business friends” prominently displayed in the house (30). Perry Meisel, using Willa Cather’s terminology, describes Mansfield’s figuring of the relationship between the self and its surroundings as the “material and social ‘investiture’ of the self” (“Psychology” 89).<sup>72</sup> This is a phrase which could equally well apply to *Jacob’s Room*.

The materially and socially embedded selves in “Prelude” all have a way of

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<sup>72</sup> For Cather, this implies the rejection of realist conventions, and an attempt “to interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of [. . .] characters; to present the scene by suggestion rather than by enumeration” (40). She wishes to “throw all the furniture out of the window” and “leave the room as bare as [. . .] that house into which the glory of Pentecost descended” (42 - 43). By emptying the novel of the physical, space is created for the appearance of the spiritual. These comments are reminiscent of both Woolf’s early critique of detail in characterisation and of Bennett’s comprehensive approach to situating character in a firm socio-historical context. Meisel’s use of the phrase has a different emphasis, describing a “‘material’ modernism” which links levels of self, sensations and ideas, through social and linguistic forms (“Psychology” 86).

projecting alternate selves into the spaces that surround them without damaging their embedded selves. This is fantasy and daydreaming. Children make believe as part of their normal pattern of interaction with the world: “Daisy heads” become “poached eggs” (41). In “Prelude”, however, fantasy does not cease with childhood. Stanley imagines his weekend in elaborate detail, Beryl dreams of romance, and the maid Alice exists as an “imaginary Alice” who replies to imagined slights with a devastatingly sharp tongue (49). These selves exist with all the force of the materially embedded selves from which they break off.

The final formulation of self present in Mansfield’s work was described by Cather as an alternative to “group life,” the “real life” which is “secret and passionate and intense” (109). Mansfield describes a “persistent yet mysterious belief in a self which is continuous and permanent,” which is “untouched by all we acquire and all we shed” - that is the very social and physical positioning described above (*Letters* 173). In “Prelude”, this ‘real’ selfhood manifests itself for Linda, Stanley, and Beryl in different ways. Beryl, frustrated by her inability to be other than “false - false as ever,” is conscious of a “real self” existing “faint and unsubstantial,” a “radiance,” and “for that moment she was really she” (58, 59). These rare moments of experience of real selfhood are “rich and mysterious and good” (59).<sup>73</sup> Stanley is particularly deeply embedded in a social world, but he accesses his real self through his love for his wife; when he sees her his “heart beat so hard he could hardly stop himself from dashing up the steps and catching her in his arms” (37). In a cruel narrative irony, Linda’s real self lies in her perpetual flight from the world around her, a world that includes her husband and children, a flight into what Mansfield describes as “the moment of direct feeling when we are most ourselves and least personal” (*Letters* 173).<sup>74</sup> In “Prelude”, the aloe with its century-long wait to flower represents this secluded real self.

Mansfield’s story thus seems to resonate with *Jacob’s Room’s* critique of both traditional literary conventions of characterisation and of the social pressures which are complicit in forming individuals. *Jacob’s Room’s* link between character and self is not arbitrary. As Michael Whitworth points out, there is a relationship between fictional character and socially constructed moral character; both share “metaphors of solidity and permanence” (*Virginia* 165). Woolf’s challenge to the conventions of literary characterisation is thus part of a broader critique of the institutions and ideologies - notably in Whitworth’s

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<sup>73</sup> In “At the Bay”, the sequel to “Prelude”, Beryl continues to yearn for “the Beryl they none of them know” (60).

<sup>74</sup> Again in “At the Bay”, Linda distinguishes between “the Stanley whom everyone saw” and a “timid, sensitive, innocent Stanley” who she calls “*her* Stanley” (33).

opinion the public school - which are responsible for forming moral character (*Virginia* 164). This critique is intimately associated with the uses and misuses of naming. However, it remains unclear exactly what is named in the novel, how the novel figures the characters with which unstable nominative signifiers are associated. If Mansfield's story postulates some sort of essential selfhood that exists underneath the level of socially embedded character, we might expect that Woolf's novel would also offer some sort of vision of this 'real' self, some embodiment of the essence of character discussed in Woolf's short stories and essays, and gestured towards in this novel by a flickering gust of wind. The obvious direction to look is towards Jacob Flanders.

"It has become," Francesca Kazan writes, "something of a critical commonplace to note Jacob's absence in this text" (712). Minow-Pinkney, for instance, describes Jacob as "a lacuna" while for Goldman the narrative presents Jacob "largely as an absence in the lives of others" (28; *Cambridge* 50). The novel is an "empty container" recording the absence of character, an experiment in "what a novel could be if action and character were evacuated [. . .]" (Briggs, "Shell" 142; Baldick 202). There is clear textual evidence to support these readings. From the opening chapter, in which Jacob disappears on a beach, to the novel's close, when "Jacob's old shoes" become a resonant synecdochic sign of his non-existence, he is frequently figured as absent (*JR* 155). Sometimes this is mental, as when Jacob lies "fast asleep, profoundly unconscious," something Minow-Pinkney describes as "a key element in the (non-) characterisation of Jacob" (*JR* 9; 34). Sometimes it is physical, most notably in the two identical descriptions of Jacob's empty room in chapters 3 and 14: "Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker arm-chair creaks, though no one sits there" (*JR* 31, 155).<sup>75</sup>

The holograph draft reveals that Jacob's presence has been to some extent edited out of the published novel. As Kate Flint writes, "in Woolf's original draft of the novel, Jacob was clearly visible from the start" ("Revising" 361). While this comment addresses the addition to the published version of Betty Flanders writing a letter before the appearance of Jacob, it also indicates the more substantial presence of Jacob in the holograph. Most of the

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<sup>75</sup> Woolf seems to have conflated two passages from her holograph in order to create these identical passages. In the chapter 3 passage, the holograph is substantially the same, though lacking the closing explanation "though no one sat there", which is added from the closing scene of chapter 14 (*JRH* 38, 274). The shift from the holograph's past tense to the published version's present tense is also significant, implying present absence rather than the relative safety of the traditional narrative past. For Trotter, the shift indicates that "Jacob is not present in any way that matters in his possessions" (94).

changes are minor. For instance, a description of Jacob - “then he was sunburnt, now pale like a Londoner” - is deleted, as is a reference to his “general appearance of vigour” (*JRH* 79). In the published version the reader is offered fewer physical details. His mental attributes, his consciousness, are, as Flint and Zwerdling have pointed out, also to some extent distanced (“Revising” 365; *Virginia* 69). For instance, In chapter 8, Jacob reads the *Globe* newspaper. In the holograph, there is a line that can be read as representing direct access to Jacob’s consciousness: “What are the conditions of the Home Rule Bill?” (*JRH* 134). This line is absent from the published version.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the characterisation of Jacob as both mentally and physically absent is a prominent but not constant element of the published novel, which does offer a great deal of information about Jacob; he is more than his absent stare or empty arm-chair and shoes. Rather than dwelling on what Jacob is not, I will follow Kazan in asking “what he is or how he is” (712).

One answer has been proposed by Zwerdling: Jacob is a manifestation of narrative economy; a great deal of information about him is conveyed in a minimal amount of text (*Virginia* 16). Woolf refines rather than rewrites Edwardian realism, stripping her novel of explanatory dross to allow intuitive reconstruction of character (*Virginia* 16 - 24). Matz describes this as a preference for “dynamic impressions” to “slow, objective analysis” (*Modern* 9). Of course this approach leaves the novel open to a critique based on a failure of effect: if Woolf intends the reader to ‘know’ Jacob through this compression, and he “remains unknowable,” the novel must be viewed as a failed experiment (Zwerdling, *Virginia* 63).

There are three widely accepted responses to this dilemma. One sees Jacob as a character in the process of becoming, a young person whose development into a fixed and stable subject is incomplete: he is “not yet a person” (Fernald 138). Woolf may want to give “the sense of a character still so unformed that even the relatively chaotic record of interior monologue seems too defining” (Zwerdling, *Virginia* 69). Thus the reader and narrator are kept outside of Jacob’s consciousness; interiority would imply “a finished product rather than a consciousness in process” (Zwerdling, *Virginia* 70).<sup>77</sup> This emphasis on the protean nature

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<sup>76</sup> This tentative movement away from Jacob should be balanced by an awareness of the “comprehensive pattern of post-draft revisions that sharpen the focus on Jacob” (Bishop, “Shaping” 118). These revisions include the deletion of the material concerning Angela Edwards or Williams at Newnham College. See Flint’s “Revising *Jacob's Room*: Virginia Woolf, Women, and Language” for a substantive discussion of how this deletion fits into a larger pattern of changes in the novel’s presentation of women.

<sup>77</sup> This observation has been extended to include all of the characters in the novel: “her characters are plastic, are even at the end of her story still in change” (Grabo 190).

of Jacob situates the novel as a *bildungsroman* interrupted by war, like *The Voyage Out* which also uses death to disrupt generic expectations. The second response looks to the narrator, who is not a transparent window through which character can be viewed. She is an “older, more experienced, highly skeptical consciousness” (Zwerdling, *Virginia* 71). This works to prevent any strong identification between the reader and Jacob, to maintain an “ironic distance”: the reader’s experience of Jacob is so heavily mediated through an “alien consciousness” that Jacob is little more than a construct of the narrator (Zwerdling, *Virginia* 70, 72).<sup>78</sup> The third response reads Jacob as a type, “a paradigmatic young man of his class,” whose “thoughts and experiences are treated as typical rather than unique” (Zwerdling, *Virginia* 73, 76). Much of what a reader learns about Jacob comes from the reported comments of other characters. He is, for instance, “distinguished looking,” even “beautiful” (*JR* 127, 24). Whitworth believes that the very blandness of these “epithets” prevents them from carrying individualising meaning; “Jacob has become a mass-produced type,” a sort of “generic figure” (*Virginia* 164). “Jacob,” Carl Grabo writes, “is portrayed almost wholly by the impressions he makes on others. Yet these impressions are neither very numerous nor varied” (190). There are few descriptions of Jacob, physical or mental, by other characters, and they tend to cluster around his beauty and his silence. His defining trait seems to be that he is “utterly ordinary” (Kazan 711). The strongest version of this reading has been proposed by Bowlby, who argues that “Jacob’s Room [. . .] is both an interrogation of the notion of individuality and, at the same time, a demonstration of the inescapability of ‘typing’ in the making [. . .] of what is thought of as an individual self [. . .]” (“Jacob’s” 85). Rather than character types being superimposed on unique individuals, “‘typing’ necessarily goes on all the time, and precedes structurally what then appears to be the absolutely unique individual” (“Jacob’s” 85). Types precede individuality; although a type may appear to be an example of “complex subjectivity,” this is essentially a masquerade (Marcus, *Virginia* 18). Here the argument is not that Jacob is a typical young man of his time, place, and class, but that typicality is the primary constituent of identity. Alternately, Jacob can be seen as both a type and an attempt to “transcend his category,” a type and an individual (Bishop, “Subject” 138).

The second and third of these responses open up an important question of generic categorisation. Both the mocking narrative voice and the use of character types are satiric

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<sup>78</sup> This appreciation of the satiric tone of the narrator should be balanced with an awareness of the elegiac, mourning note that *Jacob’s Room* also sounds (Ohmann 171).

devices, and satire was very much a part of the literature of the post-war period when, according to Chris Baldick, it became impossible to write seriously without “some sort of satirical awareness” (235). So strong was the post-war spirit of satire that “the traditional distinction between the satirical and the other modes of writing” vanished; satire became “invisible because omnipresent” (235). Bradshaw agrees that “a satirical spirit pervades the period’s literature,” citing *Jacob’s Room* as an example (“Modern” 218). While the satiric tendencies of the narrator of *Jacob’s Room* are clear, it is worth looking in more detail at another feature of modernist satire which is linked more explicitly to character, the conjunction of externality, physicality, mechanism, and habit. This type of characterisation was developed to perhaps its greatest extent by Wyndham Lewis, who saw an “externalist approach to his characters” as an act of opposition to “the likes of Joyce and Stein, whose fiction was contaminated [. . .] by post-Romantic constructions of subjectivity,” a form of resistance to what he described as the “fanatic hegemony with your unique self-feeling” (Bradshaw, “Modern” 221; *Time* 8). While Woolf and Lewis make strange bedfellows, character in *Jacob’s Room* shares satirical features with character in Lewis’ work.<sup>79</sup>

For Lewis the body was the locus of selfhood: Levenson, for example, has described Lewis’ challenge to the “orthodoxies” which “located the value of personality in the mind, that conceived identity in terms of psychological states” by emphasising the pre-eminence of the corporal (*Modernism* 124). This embodied self is linked to mechanisation. In Lewis’ “A Soldier of Humour”, people are equated with machines: “In every way that man could replace the implement that here would be done” (10). The Franco-American whom Ker-Orr meets in this story speaks “as though the words had been mechanically released” (13).<sup>80</sup> These machine bodies are operated not by an interior self but by habit. A beggar is described by Ker-Orr in terms of his “monotonous passion, stereotyped into a frenzied machine” (“Franciscan” 189). In “Inferior Religions” the routines of manual work shape and control “the fascinating imbecility of the creaking men-machines” and keep “the limbs of the men and women involved in a monotonous rhythm from morning to night” (232). Lewis aspires to write “the staid, everyday drunkenness of the normal real” and to uncover “the

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<sup>79</sup> Bradshaw argues that while “technically and politically, Lewis and Woolf could not have been more dissimilar,” their political critiques of society “had more in common in the 1930s than they may have been willing to concede” (“Modern” 231).

<sup>80</sup> These mechanical bodies are articulated in a prose as lumpy and material as the selves it represents: “The crocket-like floral postiches on the ridges of her head-gear looked crisped down in a threatening way: her nodular pink veil was an apoplectic gristle round her stormy brow; steam came out from her lips upon the harsh white atmosphere” (“Bestre” 113).

complexity of the rhythmic scheme” which is “so great that it passes as open and untrammelled life” (“Inferior” 232 - 233). The freedom of the self is for Lewis an illusion brought on by our inability to comprehend the complexity of the “human mathematic” of the interactions of “intricately moving bobbins” (“Inferior” 233). Independent selfhood is an illusion of stupidity in the face of complexity.

In Lewis’ *Tarr*, mechanistic and habitual selfhood is also representational and performative. In a famous passage, Tarr explores the nature of self, comparing it to “Chinese puzzle of boxes within boxes, or of insects’ discarded envelopes”, or a series of interlocking shells surrounding an absence: the self is “a painted mummy case” (58). Tarr’s self contains “nothing but innumerable other painted cases inside, smaller and smaller ones. The smallest was not a [. . .] live core, but a painting like the rest. = His kernel was a painting. That was as it should be!” (58 - 59). The self here is a series of representations of self which at its core is a representation. There is no real self for the representation to represent; representation of selfhood is selfhood. This has an obvious resonance with readings of Jacob as a central absence.

Around this non-self, self is performed in a sort of “obsessively self-dramatizing [. . .] behavior” (Levenson, *Modernism* 128). When Tarr and Kriesler meet, their lover Bertha shrinks “in ‘subtle’ pantomime from their affability” (216). Her behaviour, and that of the other characters in the novel, is consistently envisaged in terms of performance. Tarr and Bertha talk “as though posing for their late personalities” and when their relationship ends acrimoniously, “Tarr had the best rôle” (220). These roles are highly unstable, and much of the novel’s plot derives from the tensions arising from their shifts. Kriesler: “had, at his last public appearance, taken the rôle of a tramp-comedian. [. . .]. But he would not play! [. . .]” (263). Instead, he constructs a new role and becomes “a violent snob” (264). When, eventually, Kriesler’s series of role-played selves ends, he collapses back into his corporal machine-self as he dies: “He hung, gradually choking, the last thing he was conscious of, his tongue” (285). Consciousness, that defining characteristic of the self, is here subordinate to the body. In Levenson’s words, “there is no *place* where one can look for the self in *Tarr*; the inside brings one no closer than the outside” (*Modernism* 127). Tarr’s definition of art stipulates the “absence of *soul* [. . .]. No restless, quick flame-like ego is imagined for the *inside* of it. It has no inside. [. . .]. Instead then, of being something impelled like an independent machine by a little egoistic fire inside, it lives soullessly and deadly by its

frontal lines and masses” (300).<sup>81</sup> Tarr’s vision of art, *Tarr’s* vision of the modernist self: a purely mechanical contrivance without interiority.

This indicates one possible approach to the question of character in *Jacob’s Room*: character is satirical, and there is little reason to look beyond the corporal, mechanistic, and habitual. When Jacob sees Florinda with a strange man, for instance, and “it was as if a stone were ground to dust; as if white sparks flew from a livid whetstone, which was his spine [. . .]” we are in the realm of external characterisation, of the mechanistic vision of the self (*JR* 81). With Evan Williams, and “his silence unbroken” and “melancholy tolerance,” character is structured around habitual action (*JR* 124). With his wife Sandra, we see character as performance responding to “the presence of a third person” (*JR* 125). However, it seems that this approach cannot completely account for character in *Jacob’s Room*. One has only to think of the narrator’s questioning “whether we know what was in his mind” to realise that while employing some of the characterising techniques associated with modernist satire, this novel is far from content with them (*JR* 81).

One common feature of the approaches to character in the novel is intangibility, a feature of both Woolf’s short stories and her essays on character. Robert Kieley writes that the novel asserts “the impossibility of representing character accurately in words” (195). The novel certainly tries, however, to represent character in a startling variety of ways. Jacob is, as I have noted, described by other characters. He is described by the narrator in ways that have the ring of omniscient narration: “The street scavengers were the only people about at the moment. It is scarcely necessary to say how well-disposed Jacob felt towards them; how it pleased him to let himself in with his latch-key at his own door [. . .]” (*JR* 97). As Kathleen Wall has pointed out, the narrator functions alternately as a “character-focalizer” whose “knowledge is limited” but also “possesses the authority of the omniscient narrator or narrator-focalizer who is outside the textual world” (308 - 309). Jacob is also characterised by his material possessions, “[. . .] yellow flags in a jar on the mantelpiece; a photograph of his mother; cards from societies with little raised crescents, coats of arms, and initials; notes and pipes [. . .]” and by the well-built rooms - in a literary sense - that Woolf criticises Bennett for building for his characters: “The rooms are shapely, the ceilings high; over the doorway a rose, or a ram’s skull, is carved in the wood” (*JR* 31, 58). Of course even here an

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<sup>81</sup> Lewis’ distinction between external and internal is a key to his understanding, as Roger B. Henkle argues, of satire, “for satire, as he practised it, froze its subject, and enabled one to see it from the outside in its pure state without any fuzzifying empathetic ‘life’” (99).

element of un-Edwardian doubt enters the narrator's description, but the overall effect is to create a dense world of objects which reflect back on Jacob's character.<sup>82</sup>

Sometimes, the reader is given what appears to be direct access to Jacob's consciousness. Sitting with Florinda one night, Jacob is repelled by her lack of intelligence:

After all, it was none of her fault. But the thought saddened him. It's not catastrophes, murders, deaths, diseases, that age and kill us; it's the way people look and laugh, and run up the steps of omnibuses.

Any excuse, though, serves a stupid woman. He told her his head ached. (*JR* 69)

This is not a direct rendering of Jacob's thoughts, but it does waver between the narrator's perhaps speculative comments and Jacob's private thoughts. "After all, it was none of her fault" is potentially attributable to Jacob, while the next sentence is clearly tagged as the narrator's by the use of the third-person pronoun. The third sentence might be Jacob's, although the reference to omnibuses does associate the sentence with the narrator, as they are frequently mentioned in portions of the text that are directly linked to her.<sup>83</sup> "Any excuse, though, serves a stupid woman" may take the reader into Jacob's consciousness, before the text moves back to the narrator's reporting of dialogue. In this passage, and many others like it in the novel, the text walks a fine line between the representation of Jacob's consciousness and speculative narrative reporting of it.<sup>84</sup> Another instance that apparently gives the reader more direct access to Jacob's thoughts occurs in chapter 5:

'I say, Bonamy, what about Beethoven?'

('Bonamy is an amazing fellow. He knows practically everything - not more about English literature than I do - but then he's read all those Frenchmen.')

'I rather suspect you're talking rot, Bonamy. In spite of what you say, poor old Tennyson. . .'

('The truth is one ought to have been taught French. Now, I suppose, old Barfoot is talking to my mother. That's an odd affair to be sure. But I can't see Bonamy down there. Damn London!')

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<sup>82</sup> Angela Smith argues that the repeated description of this room gives it the "permanence" of the masculine world of the "monumental, the ancient, the rational" (212). While she links the ram's skull to Jacob's childhood terror on the beach, she does not comment on the way the text's indeterminacy undercuts the associations she ascribes to the carving (212). Marina MacKay perhaps more convincingly argues that the indeterminacy of the image indicates that "there is no discriminating [. . .] between love and ruin, or between feminine and masculine [. . .]" (134).

<sup>83</sup> The reference also leads past Jacob and the narrator to Woolf, who, as Bowlby points out, frequently uses trains and omnibuses as sites to "dramatise the complexity of the representation or 'reading' of character" ("Jacob's" 85).

<sup>84</sup> "We are," Grabo argues, "frequently unsure in *Jacob's Room* whether we view the character from within or without, whether as invisible spectator we identify ourselves with the author or with the character" (192).

lumbering down the street. (*JR* 60)

This traces Jacob's thoughts; the brackets physically set them off, indicating their special status, and the first person singular pronoun links them with Jacob. They are linked to the quoted speech, as when Jacob bemoans his lack of French education in response to what is presumably Bonamy's unfavourable contrast between French and English literature, but also follow an independent logic, as when Jacob moves from French to Barfoot to their odd relationship to the impossibility of Bonamy visiting Scarborough, perhaps due to his "peculiar disposition," before responding to the stimulus of the external world (*JR* 135).<sup>85</sup>

Deborah Parsons believes that this attempt to portray Jacob's interiority is a literary failure: "the use of parenthesis here is awkward and the maintaining of the 'I' form seems false" (71). The novel itself, however, questions this purported direct access to character. The preceding section is structured as a series of opinions about Jacob, from Clara Durrant's diary entry, "I like Jacob Flanders'," to Captain Barfoot, who "liked him best of the boys" (*JR* 59 - 60). The narrator then sets these varying opinions of Jacob in context:

It seems that a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow-creatures is utterly unknown. Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. 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* 60)

The narrator here establishes the terms under which people see and understand each other, under which they can read character. Character is relative: impartiality is a myth, and each observer conditions the results of their observation. This essential relativity means other people remain insubstantial shadows, radically unknowable. Yet these shadows have the ability to cause us anguish by dying and momentarily becoming solid, real, and knowable. This revelation of essential nature - the smell of burning Mrs Brown gives off, the intangible marker of her essence - is conditional upon love. When the narrative records the purported interior experience of Jacob in the passage examined above, this knowledge is questioned by

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<sup>85</sup> Bonamy is gay; Bowlby seems to have misread this, and thinks Jacob's sexuality is in question: "In this novel, the Greek ideal is ambiguously related to the possibility of Jacob's 'peculiar disposition - long rumoured among them' [. . .]" ("Jacob's" 94). There can be little doubt as to Jacob's hetero- or Bonamy's homosexuality.

these limitations on the conditions of knowledge. The bracketed interior monologues are then followed by more narrative interrogation. “But though all this,” the narrator writes, “may very well be true [. . .] there remains over something which can never be conveyed to a second person save by Jacob himself” (*JR* 61). As Rachel Hollander has written, “our desire to imagine the fullness of and depth of another’s interior life only brings us face to face with our inability to know [. . .]” (47). Jacob’s interior monologue is, it seems, a thought experiment on the part of the narrator, and an experiment that is radically insufficient even if it were accurate, for “even the exact words get the wrong accent on them,” and are incapable of conveying the critical information about sex, location, time, history, and relation that would genuinely situate Jacob as a character (*JR* 61). While the novel does “allow glimpses into Jacob’s interior, something that is often overlooked in the generalisations made by some critics,” they are situated within the narrative in ways that undermine their validity (Goldman, *Cambridge* 52).

This questioning of the possibility of characterisation to adequately represent human beings runs throughout *Jacob’s Room*. “It is no use trying to sum people up,” the narrator warns (*JR* 135). The “character-mongers” who explore individual selfhood, relating it to heredity, upbringing, sexuality, and gossip only “stuff out their victims’ characters till they are swollen and tender” (*JR* 135). Those who disdain “character-drawing” as a “frivolous fireside art, a matter of pins and needles, exquisite outlines enclosing vacancy,” ignore individuals and sentence them to mechanistic destruction (*JR* 136). In both cases the line between the formal literary question of character and the metaphysical question of the accessibility of other people is blurred. Understanding of another person is essentially a narrative construction, radically unreliable, but to refuse the attempt is to accept a reductive materialist view of society that prioritises “unseizable force” over human life (*JR* 137). The novel, then, confronts basic questions about what a person is, how a person is perceived by other people, and how this relates to the writing of character in fiction. “If *Jacob’s Room* is not so much about Jacob himself,” Kazan writes, “it certainly is in part about the problems of

representing Jacob, or anyone else for that matter” (711 - 712).<sup>86</sup> The novel proposes no clear solution to these difficulties, and some critics have interpreted the novel as “implying a Platonic scepticism about the possibility of knowing another person as a ‘character’” (Baldick 201). Bishop, for instance, argues that “it is not just that one can never know another person, it is that we can scarcely be sure what it is to be known. There is not a solid core of selfhood that can be captured [ . . . ]” (“Subject” 156). However, the closing scenes of the novel neither despair of the possibility of knowledge nor reject the possibility of something beyond a character structured and defined by socio-economic realities. As “all the leaves seemed to raise themselves” and Bonamy cries “‘Jacob! Jacob!’” there is a sense that some essence of character exists for Jacob, and by implication for all of the other characters in the novel, although it eludes clear definition or representation (*JR* 155). While some critics read this scene as the return of “a textual ghost,” it at least gestures towards the possibility that the novel has in some way captured the essence of its protagonist (Trotter 94). At some point in the early twentieth century, Woolf argues, human character changed. This indicates in part a transformation in the nature of the self, but also a change in the way that fictional representations of the self, characters, can be created. Part of that change may simply be the recognition of the exceeding difficulty but overmastering importance of representing the self through character.

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<sup>86</sup> Matz argues that the failure of characterisation in *Jacob’s Room* is predicated upon Jacob’s masculinity: “Young Jacob produces no impressions [ . . . ]. In the world of a male protagonist, it seems, impressions have no path to synthesis. [ . . . ] any vision of character in itself becomes impossible” (*Literary* 193). *Jacob’s Room* certainly asserts that Jacob does produce an impression, a central essence which lies at the heart of character, but dramatises the difficulty in recording or capturing this central impression through narrative. It may be more reasonable to attribute part of this difficulty to the difference between the gender and age of the narrator - “Whether we know what was in his mind is another question. Granted ten years’ seniority and a difference of sex, fear of him comes first [ . . . ]” - and the gender and age of the character than to masculinity in general (*JR* 81).

## Chapter 5

If Jacob Flanders is in many ways shaped as a character by the external forces that surround him, by his room, *Mrs. Dalloway*, while remaining focussed on questions of character, moves on different lines to a different destination. Clarissa Dalloway, who played an important role in *The Voyage Out*'s exploration of levels of characterisation, has an "attic room," but it is an impersonal space correlated with "an emptiness about the heart of life" (MD 33). This room provides a venue for the text's exploration of Clarissa, and provides contextual information about her, but it does not define her. Nor is it a source of external information for narrative speculation, offering 'material' clues to 'spiritual' character. Character in *Mrs. Dalloway* is created in very different ways to character in *Jacob's Room*. The novel grew from a 1923 short story, "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street", which "branched into a book" (McNichol 2; WD 58). Woolf's intention was to "adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide, the world seen by the sane and the insane side-by-side," and she saw her new project in direct relation to her previous novel: *Mrs. Dalloway* was to be "more close to the fact" than *Jacob's Room*, which was a "a necessary step [. . .] in working free," presumably from the confines of the Edwardian novel in general and Edwardian characterisation in particular (WD 58).

Many critics have highlighted Woolf's desire to "criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" in *Mrs. Dalloway* (WD 63). While in 1977, Zwerdling could write that Woolf's "provocative statement about her intentions in writing *Mrs. Dalloway* has regularly been ignored," much recent criticism has focussed on social critique, often in terms of gender or feminism ("Mrs. Dalloway" 69; Dowling, *Mapping* 22 - 23). In this sense, the novel continues the social criticism of *Jacob's Room*. However, while the diary entry quoted above is frequently cited, Woolf's next sentence is generally ignored. She wishes to "criticize the social system" and then goes on to write "but here I may be posing" (WD 63). Clearly *Mrs. Dalloway* is critical of social structures, but Woolf articulated other concerns:

It's a question though of these characters. People, like Arnold Bennett, say I can't create, or didn't in *Jacob's Room*, characters that survive. My answer is - but I leave that to *The Nation*: it's only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now; the old post-Dostoevsky argument. I daresay it's true, however, that I haven't that 'reality' gift. I insubstantize, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality - its cheapness. But to get further. Have I the power of conveying the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself? (WD 63)

Woolf's thoughts revolved around issues of characterisation while she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway*,

in relation to both *Jacob's Room* and the Russians. As Jean Guiguet writes, Woolf “knew the nub of the problem was in the characters” (239). Woolf’s frequently cited “discovery: how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want [. . .] the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment” is central to this reading of the novel (*WD* 65).

This characterising technique has been compared to the work of other modernist writers, including both Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* and Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Monte 592; Dick, “Tunnelling” 186). While Woolf was deeply impressed by Proust’s work, and impressed and repulsed by Joyce’s during the writing of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the conflation of these three authors and their uses of memory is imprecise.<sup>87</sup> Memory is the very stuff of Proust’s work, its content and form. Memory is woven into the texture of *Ulysses*, but in an apparently scattered and fragmentary manner.<sup>88</sup> Memory in *Mrs. Dalloway* is less omnivorous, more selective. This comparison situates memory, crucial to Woolf’s conception of *Mrs. Dalloway*, as part of an exploration of time - modernist “hostility to the clock” - and memory (Stevenson 90). Woolf’s “tunnelling process” through which she tells “the past by instalments” thus links the novel to larger currents in twentieth-century thought and offers entry into character in *Mrs. Dalloway* (*WD* 66).<sup>89</sup>

The presence of a lived relationship between the past and the present is a striking difference between *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, which explores the centrality of memory as both a “process” and a “storehouse of experience” to “human consciousness” (Dick, “Tunnelling” 186). Jacob grows from childhood to manhood, a progress from past to future. While *Jacob's Room* is itself a memorial act, as the repeated

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<sup>87</sup> Woolf’s earliest reference to Proust is in a letter to E. M. Forster dated 21 January 1922, in which she describes herself as “shivering on the brink,” afraid of being “submerged” (*L* 2 : 499). Later, she explicitly contrasted Proust to Joyce, describing herself as being “in a state of amazement; as if a miracle were being done before my eyes,” while reading Joyce is “far otherwise”: Woolf must bind herself to *Ulysses* “like a martyr to a stake” (*L* 2 : 566). In 1923 while writing *Mrs. Dalloway* she wonders if her next “lap” or section of the novel, “will be influenced by Proust,” but suspects that it can only be by inspiration rather than imitation (*D* 2 : 234). Four years later she still regards Proust as the “greatest modern novelist” (*L* 3: 365).

<sup>88</sup> Wyndham Lewis, writing on *Ulysses*, characterises the novel’s relationship to the past as being obsessed with “*stuff* - unorganized brute material,” objects which are the signifiers of the past, “the sewage of a Past twenty years old” (*Time* 89). Lewis also criticises the novel’s characters, which stripped of “technical complexities” are “of a remarkable simplicity” and the “most conventional stuff in the world [. . .]” (*Time* 93, 94).

<sup>89</sup> Susan Dick links this discovery to Woolf’s desire to strip the novel of unnecessary narrative and create character in the same way that real people know and remember each other in the real world (“Literary” 51).

references to “tombstones” makes clear, memory is not a component of narrative as it is in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which concerns itself largely with older characters more oriented towards the past than Jacob; at the very least they have more past to look back on (*JR* 29). John Mepham argues that Clarissa has lost “youth, rapture and sexuality,” a loss predicated upon completing youth, which Jacob is unable to do (149). The effect of memory in *Mrs. Dalloway*, many critics argue, is to link the past and the present. Clarissa’s “present is composed of her past,” writes Susan Bennett Smith, while Dick argues that in the novel as a whole “the present is inseparable from the past” (317; “Tunnelling” 187). Bradshaw describes Clarissa and Septimus as “held in suspension by the past” (Review 540). These arguments may minimise the complexity of memory in the text.<sup>90</sup> What is clear is that memory is a key feature of the novel’s characterisation. As Sybil Oldfield has written, “after *Mrs Dalloway*, almost the whole history of English fiction can strike one as two-dimensional with its memory-less protagonists constantly living in forward-moving time” (15).

One of the ways past and present interact in *Mrs. Dalloway* is through temporal association, what Stevenson describes as “involuntary” memory: a physical or mental event in the novel’s present triggers a memory of a related event in the past (93). This catalytic linkage of a character’s past and present is perhaps most familiar from Proust’s “madeleine soaked in [. . .] decoction of lime-blossom” and the structure of memory stimulated by a moment of sensory recognition, but is also present in *Ulysses* (54). In ‘Lestrygonians’, for instance, Bloom’s consciousness moves in clearly demarcated steps from a visual impression of field glasses in Yeates and Son’s shop front, to a memory of “travelling to Ennis” (366). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa re-experiences her feelings for Sally Seton through a physical catalyst. At first unable to “get an echo of her old emotion,” Clarissa is limited to memory: “she could remember going cold with excitement,” but a physical gesture - “she took out her hairpins” - leads to emotion - “the old feeling began to come back to her” - instead of memory of emotion (*MD* 37). The linkage of a present and a past action recalls a vanished emotional state.

Memory also allows characters access to other characters from their pasts, characterising them for each other and the reader. Clarissa, thinking of Peter, feels that “it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and,

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<sup>90</sup> “Narrative exclusions,” Elizabeth Abel points out, mean “there is no past” in the novel “anterior to Clarissa’s adolescence at Bourton,” which means that the “earliest remembered scenes become homologous to a conventional narrative point of departure” (98 - 99). In narrative terms, Clarissa’s life begins at Bourton.

when millions of things had utterly vanished - how strange it was! - a few sayings like this about cabbages” (*MD* 3). This memory establishes the conflict between desire and dislike, intimacy and estrangement, which defines Clarissa and Peter’s relationship. It also highlights the selectiveness of memory, which rejects the mass in favour of minutiae, a process similar to that which goes on in characterisation: a limited set of features and traits are taken to represent a complete individual. Clarissa’s memory also textually links the remembered Peter of Bourton to the Peter of this day in June, for at Clarissa’s party, Peter again uses the saying about cabbages: “But no; he did not like cabbages; he preferred human beings [. . .]” (*MD* 211). Finally it reflects back on Clarissa, whose memory of Peter’s saying is characteristically imprecise, wavering between cabbages and cauliflower (*MD* 3). Thus one character’s memory of another character shapes the character remembering, the character being remembered, and the relationship between them.

While this type of characterising memory shapes individual characters, it also contributes to a form of collective memory. At Lady Bruton’s lunch party, Peter Walsh is mentioned: “Peter Walsh! All three, Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard Dalloway, remembered the same thing - how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper; made a mess of things [. . .]” (*MD* 117). Peter is here the object of communal memory. This supports the contention that “characters’ mental activities are homogenous” in the novel (Haring-Smith 143). Tori Haring-Smith writes that “the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* show remarkable agreement about each other’s personalities,” and believes that the reader is guided to share these communal perceptions (153). “In this sense,” she argues, “Peter has an objective reality [. . .]” (153). Peter is what he is considered or remembered to be by the other characters in the novel. His character is the product of collective memory.

However, other forms of memory are available in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Clarissa’s memories of Peter differ from the social consensus, and even at Lady Bruton’s party reminiscent unanimity breaks down. The consensus is questioned by Milly Brush: “[. . .] Richard Dalloway had a very great liking for the dear old fellow too. Milly Brush saw that; saw a depth in the brown of his eyes; saw him hesitate; consider; which interested her, as Mr Dalloway always interested her, for what was he thinking, she wondered, about Peter Walsh?” (*MD* 117). The narrative moves from public to private consciousness: while Milly cannot share in a communal memory of Peter, her presence outside the group puts their consensus into perspective: it is limited rather than universal. Milly’s speculations open up

the possibility of individual memory just as her attentiveness to Richard implies the existence of an interiority separate from the group. The narrative moves from Milly's speculations about Richard's thoughts to Richard's thoughts. Milly's unspoken question "what was he thinking, [. . .] about Peter Walsh?" is answered: "That Peter Walsh had been in love with Clarissa; that he would go back directly after lunch and find Clarissa; that he would tell her, in so many words, that he loved her. Yes, he would say that" (*MD* 117). Richard's memory of Peter is private; while referring to the public memory of Peter's love for Clarissa, it focusses on the element of public memory that is most relevant to Richard, and projects forward into anticipated personal action. As Haring-Smith points out, as "private consciousness remains private" the sense of an objective character is illusory (153). Thus public memory and public definition of character are questioned by private memory which exists in relation to, but separate from, it.

Memory in *Mrs. Dalloway* frequently centres on the First World War: "[. . .] Woolf demonstrates the cost of war [. . .] through the memories and thoughts of all her characters," but these memories too are both private and public (Bazin and Lauter 18). The novel opens with Clarissa thinking "the War was over," establishing an apparent contrast between "this moment in June" and the war. However, the war is not over for people like Mrs Foxcroft "eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed" or Lady Bexborough who opens a bazaar "with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed" (*MD* 4 - 5). For these characters, the war is a lived present, not a remembered past. Even those, like Clarissa, who think the war is over find their memories structured by it. She buys gloves in a shop where "before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves" (*MD* 11).<sup>91</sup>

Septimus Warren Smith is the clearest example of the continuing presence of war; his name literally carries war within it. His war has ended and yet not ended: "now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunder-claps of fear. He could not feel" (*MD* 95). Septimus is particularly affected by the death of his friend Evans, who haunts the present. "He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself -" (*MD* 76). Grammatically, there are two possibilities here: most probably, the dead waited until the war was over and are now returning, but it is also possible that they continue to wait for the war

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<sup>91</sup> This is also clear in "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street", in which "gloves have never been quite so reliable since the war" (*MDP* 22).

to end, when they will return. This ambiguity is another indication of the continuance of war-in-peace. Even Septimus' wife, Rezia, is a reminder of the war where he met her, and of Evans' death.<sup>92</sup> She is herself also structured by the war, contrasting the post-war present to the pre-war past, one of the "golden eras" which "recur throughout Woolf's texts" (Moran 151).

Not all memories of the war are attributable to particular characters. The war "ploughed a hole in the geranium beds" of Mr Brewster, while during a dialogue between the evening sky and London, the city "rushed her bayonets into the sky" (*MD* 94, 177).<sup>93</sup> These are instances of the text itself remembering the war, of the narrative world within which the characters are located exhibiting traces of conflict. This also occurs through memorial geography. Peter sees "boys in uniform, carrying guns" march through the city to "the empty tomb," the Cenotaph unveiled in 1920 in memory of the war dead, which, initially intended as a temporary structure, was built in response to an overwhelming public response (*MD* 55 - 56; Trumpener 1097). Miss Kilman prays in Westminster Cathedral "as people gazed and shuffled past the tomb of the Unknown Warrior," in which was interred the representative corpse of an unidentified soldier from the war (*MD* 146). By 1923, the tomb had become part of the standard tourist itinerary in London (Trumpener 1098). These memorial monuments are physical manifestations of collective memory and mourning, and as such operate in relation to the private memory and mourning of characters within the text.<sup>94</sup> Thus, they are subject to the same questioning that all collective memory - and consciousness - undergoes in the novel. It is in this sense that "monumental London" can be said to signify "the desire for power that stops at nothing" (Tambling 61). Collective memory obliterates individual

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<sup>92</sup> Opinions on Septimus' sexual orientation differ. Some critics see him as homosexual, and read this as a key to understanding his place within the narrative structure: "Septimus accepts the prevailing homophobia, envisioning his homosexuality [. . .] as a crime against human nature" (Barrett 153). Johanna X. K. Garvey attributes Septimus' suicide to "society's inability to accept 'deviant' desires" (60). These readings draw parallels between patriarchal government, compulsory heterosexuality, and militaristic social tendencies. Another reading recognises the presence of homosexual or homosocial elements within Septimus and Evans' relationship, but denies this a major determining role in his character. Mark Spilka, for instance sees no textual evidence that "Septimus feels guilt about his attraction to Evans," while Bazin and Lauter describe the relationship as "ambivalent" (329; 18). In terms of Septimus' relationship to the past, the way memory conditions and constructs his character, this is something of a non-issue, as his horrified awareness of the endless war is not dependent on the kind of love he feels for Evans.

<sup>93</sup> This is an image shared with *Jacob's Room*, in which "the lamps of London uphold the dark as upon the points of burning bayonets" (*JR* 83).

<sup>94</sup> Bradshaw has described this sort of war memorial as "the necrolatry of the state," a formulation which highlights the ways public memory operates to reinforce official versions of history ("Vanished" 107).

difference and identity, reducing character to, in the case of the Cenotaph, a literal vacancy.

The two forms of memory present in *Mrs. Dalloway* are both instrumental in the formation of character. Individual characters are developed through their private memories and through the memories of other characters. At the same time, these characters are situated within collective memory. Neither is, however, valorised; memory in *Mrs. Dalloway* is not an exploration of a static past; it is the active relation of a past to the present. As characters move through time, the past moves with them. Memories of the war, for example, do not refer to a static event. The children who lay a wreath at the Cenotaph, “on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England,” do not merely remember the past: they bring it into the present and prepare it for the future (*MD* 55). They have been written upon, inscribed, by the collective memory, the “codes of culture,” within which they exist (Peach 91). The legend written on their faces is not just a metaphor for a collective cultural inscription, it is a socially accepted false memory of the past, “an unauthentic or non-historical story [. . .] handed down by tradition” (“Legend,” def. 6b). Christopher Herbert identifies the two temporal orientations existing in the text as the “prophetic and the recollective,” and argues that they are “essentially equivalent” as “the traumatic memory that haunts the minds of Woolf’s characters does constitute a kind of prophecy [. . .]” (108). Collective memory of the last war prepares society for the next, but these memories are not objective - rather they are the active creations of the present moment.

The same sort of doubt exists as to the value of individual memory. While much of the novel is structured around the main characters’ memories of their pasts, it is unclear whether this is laudable. When Peter considers his relationship with Daisy, a younger woman whom he intends to marry, he wonders if

[. . .] it might be happier, as Mrs. Burgess said, that she should forget him, or merely remember him as he was in August 1922, like a figure standing at the cross roads at dusk, which grows more and more remote as the dog-cart spins away, carrying her securely fastened to the back seat, though her arms are outstretched, and as she sees the figure dwindle and disappear [. . .]. (*MD* 173)

Peter has carried his memories of Clarissa with him through life; she has not remained motionless in the past as he has moved into the present. But this remembering, this carrying of the past into the present is, in the passage above, not clearly demarcated as superior to abandoning the past. On the contrary, Peter and the “good sort and no chatterbox” Mrs. Burgess feel that Daisy should not be burdened with either Peter’s presence or the memory of it (*MD* 172). He should recede. David Lodge contends that Peter’s “psychological

rhythm” alternates “between love and aggression, optimism and pessimism, life and death” (“Virginia” 29). This system of oppositions should include the tension which exists in his character, and throughout the novel, between the past and the future, memory and forgetting.

Doris Kilman, that “thoroughly unpleasant person,” focusses many of the dangers of memory (Hoff 190). Her unpleasantness is linked to memory: “She had been cheated [. . .] and she had never been happy” (*MD* 135). She is “bitter and burning,” consumed by memory, and unable to find solace in spirituality or corporality (*MD* 136). While the text supports a reading of Kilman as unpleasant, some critics attribute this severity to Woolf herself. What appears to some to be “Woolf’s scorn for [. . .] impoverished and bitter Miss Kilman [. . .]” is not snobbery, but a representation of the dangers of memory both private and public (O’Dair 348). Kilman’s private memories are linked to the text’s structures of collective memory: as Froula has argued, Kilman represents defeated Germany and its collective memory of suffering and injustice, and here both types of memory are questioned (“Postwar” 139).

Memory is inevitably related to time, and as Paul Ricoeur has argued, *Mrs. Dalloway* is a novel that is very much “about time” (Ricoeur 101). He traces the contradictory narrative flow of the novel: it is pulled forward in time by both the “numerous small events” that occur and the “the powerful strokes of Big Ben and other bells in London” (102, 103). On the other hand, it is “pulled backward” by the action of memory (103). Ricoeur - along with many other critics - identifies two types of time in the narrative: “Chronological time” as represented by the striking of Big Ben and the other clocks, which indicate “the sameness of clock time for everyone,” and “internal time”: in other words “the time of consciousness and chronological time” (105, 107). Internal time is the private, while chronological time is linked to Nietzsche’s “monumental history” (106).<sup>95</sup> Thus time shares in memory’s division between private and public.

This reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* is closely related to the influential early twentieth-century philosophy of Henri Bergson, who launched an “attack on materialist explanation on the grounds that it neglects or distorts crucial aspects of conscious experience” (Levenson,

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<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche’s vision of monumental history was split between an ideal which “encourages present action” and is thus “in the service [. . .] of life” and the more frequent formalist or academic deadness which is “a disservice, a ponderous weapon against creativity” (Zilcosky 23). Ricoeur is linking chronological time to the deadness and weight of the past, of “authority and power,” not to the ability of superlative individuals to inspire present action (105).

*Genealogy* 40). Bergson explores the relationship between duration, or psychological time, and external or mathematical time, in terms broadly comparable to Ricoeur's. "Pure duration," Bergson writes, "is the form which the succession of our conscious states assume when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. [. . .] it [. . .] forms both its past and its present into an organic whole" (100). It is the condition which allows successive "states of consciousness" to "permeate one another" so that even "in the simplest of them the whole soul can be reflected" (98). In what Bergson calls "the deep-seated self," successive moments are merged by the recognition of the essential unity of past and present (169). For the "the outer crust," on the other hand, time exists in its quantitative form (169). Bergson essentially divides the self into two, "one of which is [. . .] the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation" (231). Only through "deep introspection" can we "grasp our inner states as living things, constantly *becoming*, as states not amenable to measure [. . .]" (231). While Bergson's "vitalist monism" is complex, the essential point here is that the 'true' self is radically distinct from the self projected by social function, and that each form of selfhood is associated with a different form of time (Rabaté, "Philosophy" 13). The 'real' or essential self merges past and present in a unity, while the social self accepts the linear sequencing of time.

Many interpretations differentiate between Big Ben with its "dominance and insistence on order," and the chimes of St. Margaret's as a sign of "the relative nature of time" (Forbes 41; P. Brown 43). This can also be read in gendered terms: In contrast to the masculine Big Ben, St. Margaret's is "Clarissa herself," the perfect "hostess," either, "complementary [. . .] or lightly mocking [. . .] or challenging" patriarchal hegemony (*MD*; Bowlby, "Thinking" 73 54). These formulations share an insistence on a temporal division between the public and the private. Private and public memory, then, is one element - perhaps the element most closely associated with character - of a larger pattern of alteration between public and private time.

Elizabeth Dalloway is the only major character in the novel who lacks a "retrospective orientation" (Dick, "Tunnelling" 189). Rather than dwelling in a present supersaturated with the past, she faces the future:

And now it was like riding, [. . .] and to each movement of the omnibus the beautiful body in the fawn-coloured coat responded freely like a rider, like the figure-head of a ship, for the breeze slightly disarrayed her; the heat gave her cheeks the pallor of white painted wood; and her fine eyes, having no eyes to meet, gazed ahead, blank, bright, with the staring incredible

innocence of sculpture. (*MD* 149)

This passage establishes Elizabeth as a character free from the past.<sup>96</sup> She sees no people and her gaze meets no other eyes. She is removed from the human association of characterisation outlined in “The Mark on the Wall”, where “as we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror [. . .]” (56). Elizabeth by her choice of seat breaks out of this sort of reflective speculation about character. She becomes instead an equestrian, a wild animal, and a figure-head. This sculptural quality is reminiscent of Jacob Flanders, who is also likened to “one of those statues” and “the figure-head of a wrecked ship” in his distance and impersonality (*JR* 67, 63). Of course, Elizabeth’s post-war ship is not wrecked like Jacob’s pre-war vessel. This is a character of the absolute present, located on the cusp of futurity. The noise of the streets, “[. . .] this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out, [. . .] this vow; this van; this life; this procession, [. . .] as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on,” envelopes Elizabeth and carries her - and everything else - inevitably into the future (*JR* 151 - 152). This temporal orientation is not, however, praised. The impersonality of the grinding force of time is fearsome, and Elizabeth’s statuesque immobility and inhumanity is not a totally reassuring image.

Time is not used in *Mrs. Dalloway* to contrast youth and age, nor to valorise a retrospective or prospective orientation; instead, the past and future situate characters more firmly in the present, a Bergsonian present supersaturated with temporal significance. The minor character Maisie Johnson demonstrates this intersection of past, present, and future. In an example of the novel’s “multivalence of the narrative point of view,” the narrative focalization shifts “fluidly between characters” from Septimus and Rezia, sitting in Regent’s Park, to Maisie Johnson, who asks them for directions (Hanson 57). “Both seemed queer,” thinks the young woman (*MD* 28).

In London for the first time, come to take up a post at her uncle’s in Leadenhall Street, and now walking through Regent’s Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer; so that should she be very old she would still remember and make it jangle again among her memories how she had walked through Regent’s Park on a fine summer’s morning fifty years ago. (*MD* 28)

This temporally dextrous passage provides information about Maisie’s past, the present

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<sup>96</sup> It also situates her within the modernist literary tradition by mirroring Dorothy Richardson’s Miriam, who also rides at the top of an omnibus through London, feeling secure “in the tranquil sense of being carried securely forward through the air away from people and problems” (194).

moment, and the future. The present circumstances mark her, and even in fifty years she will remember this moment. The future predicted in this passage is grammatically conditional, but this narrative uncertainty, while an interesting example of what has been described as Woolf's "rejection" of the "tyranny" of "the conventional narrator and his posture of self-confident pronouncement," does not discount the role of this possible future in situating a character (Mepham 141). The passage continues, providing more information about her past, and an external view of Septimus and Rezia. Her future is then referred to again through the textual proximity of another minor character, Mrs Dempster, an old woman who has had a "hard life" and explicitly situates her present as Maisie's future: "then you'll know" (*MD* 29). The old woman who lives across the street from Clarissa, "an unnamed character who only functions in the novel as an object of Clarissa's awareness" and thus as "a perspective on the future" is a similar figure (Able 110).

Even minor characters, *ficelles* within a Jamesian typology, are in *Mrs. Dalloway* poised between a past and a future. The *ficelle*, which means literally a thread or a stage-device, and figuratively a dodge or trick, was for James a functional figure who "is but wheels to the coach" of the work as a whole (Veeder and Griffin 411; James "Portrait" 296). *Ficelles* fulfil a functional role within the overall structure of the work; they are not "true agents," a distinction which resonates with Aristotle's definition of characters as moral agents: they are not morally capable entities, but functional personages within a narrative structure (James "Portrait" 297). Their main purpose is to present other characters more effectively than would be possible without them: Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors* allows James to present "the whole lumpish question" of Lambert Strether's past through scenic composition rather than through narrative exposition (James "Ambassadors" 373). *Ficelles* are thus characters-as-means serving characters-as-ends, and the novel requires both. Maisie's function as a *ficelle*, then, which in turn requires the support of another *ficelle*, is to establish the temporal location of the major characters as they balance between past and future.

Another way to approach character in *Mrs. Dalloway* is through narrative technique. There has been a great deal of critical interest in the novel's use of free indirect discourse, the merging, intermingling or intentional confusion of a character's voice - thoughts or words - and the narrator's voice (Snaith, *Virginia* 63).<sup>97</sup> The opening lines of the novel

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<sup>97</sup> For a full discussion of Woolf's use of free indirect discourse, and an analysis of the ideological implications of this choice, see Anna Snaith's *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*.

indicate how this technique functions:

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 [. . .]. (*MD* 3)

The first sentence is third person narration, but Clarissa's spoken words are embedded within the sentence as reported speech rather than set off with quotation marks. The reader is given access to Clarissa's grammatically implied spoken words, 'I will buy the flowers myself,' by the narrator. The next sentence is more challenging. The conjunction "for," the logical connection between Clarissa's reported speech and the reasons for her speech, is part of the syntactical structure of the narrative and is thus attributable to the narrator. This narrative conjunction is followed by the statement that "[. . .] Lucy had her work cut out for her" (*MD* 3). This feels more like a transcription of Clarissa's thoughts; here, and in the third sentence, transforming the verbs from past to present tense yields something that can be read as such. The narrative movement here is thus from the narrator's third-person reportage towards access to Clarissa's interiority. The re-emergence of the narrative voice in the fourth sentence, especially the narrative tag "thought Clarissa Dalloway" situates the narrator outside Clarissa, yet allows for an apparently closer approach to her thoughts (*MD* 3). Grammatically, "and then [. . .] what a morning - fresh as if issued to children on a beach" contains no temporal indicators, due to the elision of the grammatically implied 'it is' or 'it was' before the word 'fresh'. While 'it is' would indicate direct access to Clarissa's interiority, 'it was' would indicate reported thought and narrative mediation of character. The exclamations "what a lark! what a plunge!" are also ambiguous, although moving towards the direct presentation of thought.<sup>98</sup> The remainder of this sentence, from 'for so it' to 'the open air' is once again clearly situated as reported thought by the presence of third-person pronouns and past tense verbs. The last sentence, beginning 'How fresh' is, however, a transcription of Clarissa's thoughts, as indicated by the comparative clause and the pronoun 'this', an instance of *deixis* or a word meaningless without an implied context outside the discourse within which it appears and to which it refers (Cobley 177). This brings the story's

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<sup>98</sup> Snaith points out that "dichotomies such as speech/thought, character/narrator, mimesis/diegesis and style/content become blurred" through Woolf's employment of free indirect discourse (*Virginia* 71). This is an example of this blurring, for it is not clear if Clarissa has spoken aloud.

present, “this moment of June” into alignment with the reader’s experience of the narrative (*MD* 4). The sentence then moves back towards the perspective of the narrator, again using third-person pronouns and other markers of reported speech.

The narrative pattern thus oscillates between narrative distance and direct access to characters’ interiority, a mingling of “the voice of the narrator with those of the characters” (Reed 127). These are not, however, binary opposites, but extremes of a subtle, ambiguous and unstable relationship between the narrative voice and the imagined selves of the characters.<sup>99</sup> What develops out of this relationship is a renewed sense of the speculative nature of characterisation. The narrative voice of *Mrs. Dalloway* has a much higher degree of access to the interiority of the characters than the self-consciously constrained narrator of *Jacob’s Room*. Nonetheless, the techniques used to portray this consciousness persistently drive the narrative back outside the characters into the spaces between them. For some critics the difficulty in locating thought “calls into question the usefulness of the category of the ‘character’, or autonomous ‘full’ subject, for the reader of *Mrs Dalloway*” (Hanson 58). While the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* may appear deeper, more internal, more like ‘real’ characters than those of *Jacob’s Room*, this is persistently questioned by the novel’s narration.

This uncertainty also exists between character and character, as indicated by Clarissa’s refusal to characterise: “She would not say of anyone in the world now that they were this or they were that” (*MD* 8). This explicitly contrasts judgemental youth with reticent age - she has been remembering her youthful arguments with Peter - but the text reflects ironically on her claim. Far from having achieved a mature impartiality, Clarissa judges in the arbitrary way she has theoretically renounced, describing, for instance, Peter’s “Indian women” as “silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops” (*MD* 8). Similarly, Clarissa “would not say of Peter, would not say of herself, I am this, I am that,” while at the same time she knows people “almost by instinct. If you put her in a room with some one, up went her back like a cat’s, or she purred” (*MD* 9). These contradictory positions regarding knowledge of other people are reflected in a broader series of characterising contradictions: “She felt very

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<sup>99</sup> Garvey writes that “in attempting to distinguish between a character’s thoughts and the narrator’s commentary or description, the reader often discovers sentences that could belong to either - or to no one” (60). This, and positions such as Naremore’s that “[. . .] the reader is almost never certain whether the narrator or a character is speaking” are extreme (100). The reader can locate textual elements of the novel as the ‘property’ of either a character or the narrator. However, these elements are interwoven at the level of clause, phrase, and word rather than sentence.

young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense [. . .] of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day” (*MD* 9).<sup>100</sup> Both Clarissa and the text simultaneously refuse to judge people and judge them, refuse to characterise and characterise. As a marginal notation in the holograph draft puts it, “fed from a thousand sources as her life was, how pretend to judge another” (*H* 262). While the ironic contrast between Clarissa’s theory and practice is present in the manuscript, it is considerably sharpened by textual proximity in the published version of the text; her refusal to judge and her judgements are literally next to each other. This duality is evident in Clarissa’s appraisal of Miss Kilman. Clarissa clearly views Kilman in very particular, very personal, and very negative ways. Yet Clarissa and the text remain open to a more relative vision, “for it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman” (*MD* 12 - 13).<sup>101</sup> Clarissa’s response to Kilman focusses the novel’s exploration of the relativity of character - the theoretical impossibility and moral inappropriateness of judgement clashing with the imperative to judge - and opens up a new area of concern.

Kilman, and by implication all of the other characters in the novel, are metaphorically hard to read because they may not be, strictly speaking, themselves; they are more than themselves, accretions of foreign matter “produced from without, from the lived practices [. . .] of a society” (Tambling 61). “Character” in this novel, writes Jeremy Tambling, “is not something merely inherent within a person: it is the result of an interrelationship between individuals and the space they inhabit,” an interpretation that denies the existence of “deep personal subjectivity” (60, 61). This interpretation turns back towards the title of the novel, asking whether it might more appropriately be called *Mrs.*

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<sup>100</sup> The last of these contrasts is not clearly balanced in terms of sense or grammatical structure. Youth and age, inside and outside are antonyms linked by the phrase “at the same time,” while isolation and danger are neither semantically opposed nor linked by anything more than a semicolon. However, its inclusion in the series seems to indicate that it is a contrast reflecting on the emotional security of loneliness and the emotional risks of personal involvement. This is, however, challenged by the holograph draft. Here isolation and danger are situated in a longer series of more developed contrasts, and could indicate a causal relationship between the terms: “[. . .] & a sense of the futility—or rather of being out out far to sea, & alone; & blown on, very dangerously, for if she never lost her feeling that sen sense of danger. sense that it is dangerous, very very dangerous, this living even one day” (*H* 263).

<sup>101</sup> While the uncertainly inherent in free indirect discourse leaves a certain element of doubt, it seems fairly clear that these thoughts are attributable to Clarissa rather than to the narrator.

*Dalloway's Room*. The question is whether this accretion - composed not only of social conditions, but of public memory and time, narrative uncertainty and speculation, and misreadings of character - builds up around individual identity, as a pearl builds up around a grain of sand, or whether character in *Mrs. Dalloway* exists as no more than a collection of disparate elements. Is there a real Miss Kilman underneath the layers of association that have gathered around her? Is there a sense of essence or spirit such as was present in "The Mark on the Wall", "An Unwritten Novel" and *Jacob's Room*, some centre around which the speculative endeavour of characterisation circles?

This question is best addressed by looking again to Clarissa as an imagined subjectivity to determine if she exists "more in relation to others than as an autonomous reality" (Guiguet 240). The metaphor of a pearl is appropriate here, as it refers to an image system revolving around pearls, diamonds, and treasure employed to explore this question. By tracing these images, which are in turn part of a larger system of "poetic points around which the text circulates," a better understanding of the novel's presentation of character as both a contextually determined entity, a composition, and as an unit of identity should emerge (Mephram 155).

As Clarissa walks through Westminster, several narrative elements are introduced: Septimus's plunge, Peter's pocket-knife, clocks, omnibuses, motor cars, and "shopkeepers [. . .] fidgeting in their windows with paste and diamonds" (*MD* 5).<sup>102</sup> This reference is followed by the appearance of Hugh Whitbread, who later shops for "Spanish jewellery" with Richard Dalloway, who cannot tolerate his "perfectly correct" and "unbearably pompous" company or "society" (*MD* 125).<sup>103</sup> The use of the word society to describe Whitbread's company is particularly apt for he is completely identified with the structures of society (Wang 180). Hugh as a perfect product of his society is, as Helen M. Wussow points out, a feature of the published novel; in the holograph he is a more varied character, whose interest in "Freud & Stravinsky & so on" would shock the published Whitbread (xxi; *H* 156). The published Whitbread in a sense occupies the territory evacuated by the fuller characterisation of Richard Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* as compared to his first appearance in *The Voyage Out*. This Whitbread lacks the "sympathetic traits" which are the result of this

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<sup>102</sup> The reference to paste and diamonds is absent from "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" but present in the holograph of *The Hours* (*H* 256).

<sup>103</sup> Molly Hoff reads this scene as suggesting "that unbeknown to Hugh, his wife has been sleeping around" (194). Another reading of Hugh Whitbread identifies his silver pen as ironically phallic (Zunshine 280). It is hard to account for the way this character attracts sexually alert readings from some critics.

fuller characterisation of Richard as a suitable mate for the 'new' Clarissa, his "tender ineffectualness" contrasted with the 'old' Richard's "substantial reality" (Dowling, *Mapping* 101; Wolfe 51; Sherry 241). In the earlier novel Richard is closely associated with the dominant structures of society, seems to lack interiority, and is a type rather than an individual. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Whitbread occupies this position. During Clarissa's meeting with him in Hyde Park, for instance, which is linked to the shopping scene by paste and diamonds, he appears "with his back against the government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal arms" (*MD* 5). For Richard, the displayed jewels are "coloured paste," part of the "wreckage" thrown up by life (*MD* 124). His enthusiasm for these meretricious jewels thus links Whitbread and paste with the socially conditioned aspects of life, and those elements of character dependent upon context. In contrast, real jewels should be aligned in the text with elements of character that exist in some way independently of determining social factors. As Richard thinks in the shop, "Let him give it to a girl, if he must buy jewels - any girl, any girl in the street" (*MD* 124). This is an action independent of Hugh's social position, and thus unthinkable for him, but it does align jewels with a notion of authenticity opposed to the "worthlessness of this life" (*MD* 124).

Diamond imagery appears in the text as Clarissa remembers a key moment in her youth:

She and Sally fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it - a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (*MD* 38 - 39)

This associates two states of being with diamonds: isolation and inversion. In addition the diamond is part of something of enormous, even sacred value: precious, private, radiant, and revelatory. The holograph version of this scene has a different emphasis, altogether more physical; Sally gives a flower to Clarissa, puts her arm around her shoulder, and kisses her (*H* 49). Clarissa's reactions are also notably more physical. "The body," Woolf writes, "must be a finer instrument than people know. For The physical change was so extraordinary" (*H* 50). Little of this corporal alertness is present in the published novel, where the motif of the diamond is introduced in place of the holograph's emphasis on the body. Lesbian readings,

such as Eileen Barrett's contention that the diamond, the "core of Clarissa's self," is her lesbian identity, could look to the holograph for support (161). While it seems clear that the diamond in some way represents Clarissa's self, Woolf's withdrawal from the carnal implications of this scene weakens the link between her homoerotic experiences and the diamond. Her relationship with Sally contributes to, but does not determine, the diamond's signification.

While in this scene Sally gives the diamond to Clarissa - although the text's use of the passive voice weakens this association - the novel offers alternate accounts of its presence. Three characters, Clarissa, Septimus, and Lady Bruton, are described as in some way composing their own characters in an act of contraction which produces a version of self associated with diamond imagery. The most important of these creations of self is Clarissa's, while the other two instances modulate or reflect on her experience. Following Clarissa's memories of the kiss at Bourton, the novel returns to the narrative present, via a passage of free indirect discourse which reveals Clarissa wondering "what would" Peter "think [. . .] when he came back?" (*MD* 39). The question is what Peter will think about her, rather than about what he will think in general. The narrative then moves from the representation of Clarissa in a moment of self-conscious regard to a reported action: "Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm [. . .]" (*MD* 40). The transition between Clarissa's memory of Sally's kiss and the diamond, and the ensuing passages which offer an alternative account of character, is thus carried out through a reference to a brooch, or jewel. This structural link between narrative excursions into the past and the present thus also functions as a thematic link in the text's exploration of character.

The novel's second formulation of diamond character emerges out of this transition in stages:

[. . .] Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there - the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, 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 woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (*MD* 40)

This passage occurs in the present, but is influenced by both the past and the future, by memory and anticipation, for "all the other mornings" stretch both backwards - "she was not old yet" and forwards into "June, July, August!" (*MD* 40). Froula has discussed Sally Seton's gift to Clarissa in terms of this temporal relationship between the past and the present, arguing that there is a fruitful semantic overlapping between notions of present as gift and

present as temporal indicator: the gift of Sally's kiss is the memory of a present moment now past ("Postwar" 135 - 136). The narration of the scene at the dressing table reflects this intermingling of temporal categories, and gestures towards the text's exploration of time. It is similar to Bergson's description of pure duration as the experience of the self when the present moment is saturated with every past moment, a folding together of generally separated temporal categories. The passage also depends on reflective viewing, both as a visual phenomenon and a form of thought. Finally, it is associated with concentration. These points develop as the passage continues:

How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self - pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room [. . .]. (*MD* 40)

The concentration of self is a willed activity carried out under social pressure, an abstract reduction of self to a single point. But this reduction is not a limitation; rather, it is described in positive terms, "one centre, one diamond, one woman" (*MD* 40).<sup>104</sup> Tony E. Jackson has even argued that this is a "metaphoric condensation that must occur if *any* presence of self is to be secured" (*Subject* 128). Without composition, self is radically dispersed. The process the novel outlines seems to be analogous to the geological formation of diamonds from carbon under pressure; that which was diffuse and dark becomes ordered and transparent. This diamond self is further associated with Clarissa's parties, which have been widely recognised as an "essential key to understanding her character" (Littleton 36). As she assembles "that diamond shape, that single person" she thinks that "all was for the party" (*MD* 41).

Before tracing this metaphor further, it will be helpful to compare *Mrs. Dalloway's* exploration of character to that of another modernist writer. If Clarissa's diamond is metaphorically comparable to the geological products of heat and pressure, a key contemporary reference is D. H. Lawrence's letter of 5 June 1914 to Edward Garnett, in which he defended his approach to character:

"You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There

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<sup>104</sup> An alternate interpretation focusses on the de-personalisation of Clarissa under social pressure: when "effort demands it" she becomes an "image, still possessed of the impersonal radiance and attraction of the jewel" (Freedman 220).

is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically-unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond - but I say 'diamond, what! This is carbon.' And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.)" (183)

A similar set of metaphors are employed in Lawrence's letter and *Mrs. Dalloway* to explore character. For Lawrence, modern character is radically unstable. The individual manifests itself in a series of different forms which are almost unrecognisably, at least by conventional methods, linked as one self. Traditional narrative, Lawrence writes, tells the story of the diamond self, while he will narrate the base substances - carbon, coal, soot - which make up the diamond. It seems that Lawrence associates a different set of ideas with the metaphor of the diamond than Woolf. He is interested in "that which is [. . .] non-human, in humanity" (182) By implication, then, Lawrence's diamond is the human element, what he describes as the way a character "*feels* - in the ordinary usage of the word," that which is associated with the "*ego* to feel with" (183). The carbon, on the other hand, is the character conceived of "inhumanly, physiologically, materially" (183).<sup>105</sup>

Clearly, a different set of meanings circle around Woolf's and Lawrence's metaphors of selfhood: Lawrence associates the diamond with traditional narrative exposition of conscious states of being within a stable and consistent "moral scheme" (182). He contrasts this with a base state of selfhood, the carbon self, which is essentially the same self but is associated with unconsciousness and physical relationship: the self preceding structure. For Woolf on the other hand, while the diamond self similarly represents some sort of composed or structured identity formation, there is no clear sense in which this diamond is false or untrue: on the contrary, it is explicitly contrasted with the notion of paste, and the form of social selfhood which is limiting and false. A continued examination of Woolf's employment of these metaphors will reveal some of these differences.

Septimus and Lady Bruton are also linked to a diamond- or jewel-like self appearing under social pressure. Septimus arrived in London "a mere boy," and the city changed him: "Lodging off the Euston Road, there were experiences, again experiences, such as change a face in two years from a pink innocent oval to a face lean, contracted, hostile" (*MD* 92). While this passage makes no explicit reference to diamonds - and this perhaps indicates

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<sup>105</sup> As Dennis Brown has pointed out, the letter's chain of metaphors - darkness, depth, materiality - are a sign of the difficulty of expressing this sense of a transformed selfhood (75).

some of the issues of class that are at play in the novel - it is related to Clarissa's similar experiences of self-definition. Septimus, too, is formed and shaped by the pressures of the world around him, but with negative results (*MD* 92). Similarly, Lady Bruton is presented as composing a self. During lunch with Whitbread and Richard, she is frustrated by their lack of focus on emigration, "that subject which engaged her attention, and not merely her attention, but that fibre which was the ramrod of her soul, that essential part of her without which Millicent Bruton would not have been Millicent Bruton [. . .]" (*MD* 119). For Lady Bruton, "this object round which the essence of her soul is daily secreted becomes inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking-glass, half precious stone" (*MD* 119). Here, the concentration of self into jewel is treated ironically, but the principle remains: character is composed of diffuse elements that are, at times, focused into a stable formation. I would argue that a reading emphasising the link between the diamond image and "the complacent, uncaring, and almost sinister Lady Bruton" whose "egotistical obsessions have hardened into a 'core' of self [. . .]" are perhaps not sufficiently alert to the range of meanings referred to by this image structure (Waugh 117). While the diamond self is certainly not proposed as an ideal formulation of identity, reading it as representing "coldness" or "hardness" seems extreme (Waugh 117).

These three approaches to character are not conclusive. Rather, they seem to present differing possibilities of how character can be structured, and different readings of that structuring. In Clarissa's case, the concentration seems generally positive, in Septimus's generally negative, and in Lady Bruton's faintly ridiculous. None of these offer a stable answer to the question of how the self exists in relation to the structures that surround it, nor a stable perspective on what it implies to concentrate a self under the pressure of contact with the outside world. While the diamond self is not paste, not a mere type of socially formed mannequin - neither Clarissa nor Septimus nor Lady Bruton are a Whitbread - it is not clear what sort of image of the self it offers.

Another intertextual point of reference may help clarify some of these issues. Woolf read Walter Pater avidly, although as McNeillie points out she never wrote at length about his work (Bowlby, "Crowded" 242; "Bloomsbury" 6).<sup>106</sup> *Mrs. Dalloway's* jewel metaphors for the self inescapably bring to mind the conclusion of Pater's 1873 *The Renaissance* in which "that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of

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<sup>106</sup> See Perry Meisel's *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* for an account of the impact of Pater on Woolf.

ourselves” which is the essential nature of experience is likened to a “hard, gemlike flame” (196, 197). This gem-like flame is Pater’s symbol of the type of radical attentiveness to the moment and its “concurrence [. . .] of forces parting sooner or later on their ways,” an attentiveness that is “success in life,” the only way to grasp that which “melts under our feet” in its instability (195, 197).<sup>107</sup> It is the sign of this “quickenened, multiplied consciousness” (198). It is also associated with the renaissance, “a many-sided but yet united movement” which, Pater argued possessed a particular - and admirable - personality type: it was “an age productive in personalities, many-sided, centralised, complete” (1 - 2, xxx). The correlation I am drawing here, then, is between Woolf’s employment of jewel imagery and both Pater’s call for attention to the moment in a way that resists the flux of temporal progression, and his formulation of renaissance subjectivity as multi-faceted, responsive, and unified. These ideas about the formulation of the self resonate with *Mrs. Dalloway* as the diamond image complex works through a variety of potential structures and significations.

An instance of this modulation occurs after Richard leaves the jeweller’s shop and buys flowers for Clarissa, linking diamond metaphors to floral metaphors also present in the text. Septimus’ transformation, for instance, is described in floral terms: “[. . .] what could the most observant of friends have said except what a gardener says when he opens the conservatory door in the morning and finds a new blossom on his plant: - It has flowered; flowered from vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds [. . .]” (*MD* 93). On the one hand the novel presents diamonds and pearls, formed either by external pressure, or around a “sharp acute uncomfortable grain” (*MD* 168). On the other hand, the novel figures the human character in floral terms. Sally Seton’s kiss occurs “passing a stone urn with flowers in it” while Sally “picked a flower,” but Sally’s arrival at Bourton is only possible because she “had pawned a brooch to come down” (*MD* 36, 38). The diamond and floral imagery are, then, related motifs in the novel’s figuring of character. Having given his wife the flowers, Richard returns to committee work on “Armenians” or

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<sup>107</sup> Ann Ronchetti argues that Woolf “absorbed from Pater [. . .] the need for a finely honed receptivity to life, the experiences it offers” (7). This receptivity is demanded by “the theories of perception held in common by Pater, James, Woolf, and others” which are sensitive to “the evanescence of self, its sensational make-up, and the life of the streaming consciousness” (Matz, *Literary* 28).

“Albanians,” and Clarissa falls into thought (*MD* 131).<sup>108</sup>

But - but - why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy? As a person who has dropped some grain of pearl or diamond into the grass and parts the tall blades very carefully, this way and that, and searches here and there vainly, and at last spies it there at the roots, so she went through one thing and another [. . .]. (*MD* 132)

Read in the context of the novel’s employment of these images, this indicates that Clarissa has lost a version or formation of her subjectivity. Clarissa realises, while looking at Richard’s roses, that it is his criticism of “her parties” that has distressed her (*MD* 132).

Clarissa’s response to news of Septimus’s suicide indicates a connection between the party and the text’s metaphors for selfhood: “She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away” (*MD* 202). This refers to the opening passages of the novel, in which Clarissa remembers discarding money in the context of knowing people:

Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct [. . .]. Devonshire House, Bath House, the house with the china cockatoo, she had seen them all lit up once; and remembered Sylvia, Fred, Sally Seton - such hosts of people; and dancing all night; and the waggons plodding past to market; and driving home across the Park. She remembered once throwing a shilling into the Serpentine. But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. (*MD* 9)

Here several of the central elements of characterisation in *Mrs. Dalloway* come together: a preoccupation with the relationship between past and present, an epistemological uncertainty regarding other people, and the association between images of treasure - pearls, diamonds, jewellery, money - and notions of character. Clarissa’s reaction to Septimus’ suicide picks up on these ideas. The ‘it’ that he has flung away is not just his life, but his identity, the diamond to which it has contracted under the pressure of experience. Clarissa identifies this ‘it’, central to Septimus’s character, as “a thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about

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<sup>108</sup> This confusion is reminiscent of the narrative indeterminacy over the ram and the rose in *Jacob’s Room*. Here, however, it seems more likely to result from Clarissa’s physical difficulty in hearing Richard as he steps out the door and her lack of interest in abstractions. She has, however, been criticised for her inability to distinguish between nationalities: “[. . .] Woolf’s feminist perspective prohibits unqualified admiration for Clarissa Dalloway - a woman who does not know what the equator is and who confuses Turks and Armenians [. . .]” (Fernald 103). It is true that “Clarissa cared much more for her roses than the Armenians,” but it is possible, given the text’s association of flowers with people, that this contrast a private concern for people with a public concern for peoples (*MD* 132). Another approach is to view this passage as scandalously honest rather than “mercilessly” satiric (Tate 153). It also gestures towards the continuation of the war-in-peace, as 1923 saw the “final act of betrayal” of the Armenians by the Lausanne Treaty (Tate 159).

with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter” (*MD* 202). She believes that something independent of the socially determined, external version of character the novel explores does exist, and that “this” Septimus “had preserved” (*MD* 202). This central aspect of character is further identified with the novel’s diamond imagery: “But this young man who had killed himself - had he plunged holding his treasure?” (*MD* 202). As Hanson points out, this is “a treasure which it is tempting to read as a metaphor for the self” (67). Septimus’ treasure, his private selfhood, is potentially preserved by death, protected from social “corruption, lies, chatter” (*MD* 202). This is not, then, an identical vision of self to that offered by the image of Clarissa reflected in her mirror, or Septimus moving to London, or Lady Bruton contemplating emigration; it has shifted one step further away from the paste of socially constructed character towards some sort of essence or spirit.

Clarissa’s question - “had he plunged holding his treasure?” - relates back to her first experience of diamond-like identity, prompted by Sally’s kiss, through a quotation from *Othello*, ““If it were now to die, ‘twere now to be most happy”” which occurs in both scenes (*MD* 202).<sup>109</sup> Clarissa identifies the unknowable essence of human character - not that which arises under the pressure of society but that which responds to isolation and intensity - as the key to interpreting Septimus’ death. “This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone” (*MD* 202). For Clarissa there is a clear sense in which subjectivity - her own, and that of other people - is structured as a social enclosure around an ultimately private core.

This interpretation is, however, Clarissa’s, not the novel’s. Some critics argue that “the text is ambivalent” about the suicide, reading it as an instance of ““masculine’ egotism and assertiveness” (Hanson 66). Another interpretation has been advanced by Deborah Guth, who points out that “Septimus expresses none of the exalted self-affirmation that Clarissa sees in his death” (19). Compared to Clarissa’s response, Septimus’ mental state at the moment of his suicide is prosaic, even “desperately literal”: “He did not want to die. Life was good” (Webb 292; *MD* 164). According to this interpretation, the weight of the final scenes of the novel lies in Clarissa’s misinterpretation of the world, her “denial of its lived

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<sup>109</sup> The second quotation was added to the novel after the completion of the holograph, while the first quotation is present there (*H* 47, 386 - 387). Woolf’s linkage between the two scenes was carefully considered.

reality” (Guth 20). Other readings take a more positive view: Froula, for instance, sees the mirroring of the two characters’ fates as a triumph of “sanity, happiness, hope” (“Postwar” 138). What is clear is that this narrative moment is both crucial and hermeneutically elusive.

Ultimately, *Mrs. Dalloway* does not resolve the questions it raises about selfhood through the vehicle of characterisation. Self is, the text seems to imply, temporally situated in time in a way that depends on memory and the relationship of past to present to future for its significance. It is a socially constructed artefact, the product of other voices, other pressures, and other definitions. At the same time, it takes part in a process of self-definition, of self-composition, in ways that are elucidated by extensive metaphorical structures in play in the novel. It is multiple, conditioned by its surroundings, and yet in some sense unitary and private.

While Clarissa’s party and Septimus’ suicide close *Mrs. Dalloway*’s mediation on the nature of character and self, offering a last metaphor which has been reduced to a minimum of significance - an indeterminate ‘it’ that can only launch once again into an endless series of metaphors - shillings, treasures, pearls - none of which offer clear or stable definitions of self, Woolf continued to explore these issues, most particularly in what Hermione Lee has described as “the eight stories which formed the bridge between *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*” (Introduction xv). Lee reads these stories as moving from socially contextualized character towards interiority - almost a movement towards a Lawrentian darkness - which is characteristic of *To the Lighthouse* (Introduction xvi). I would argue, however, that the stories offer what Stella McNichol describes as “alternative parallel expressions” of the nature of self and character rather than acting as a direct bridge to Woolf’s next novel (2).

Some very similar processes to those explored in *Mrs. Dalloway* take place in these stories. In “The Introduction”, for example, Lily Everit has written an essay on “the character of Dean Swift” - surely not an accidental topic - and this helps her, temporarily, to maintain a fixed and unitary personality structure, “sharp as a diamond cleaving the heart of life asunder” (*MDP* 36). Once this support has withered under the stresses of public exposure, “the world,” at Clarissa’s party, Lily is instead as “a mist” (*MDP* 36). What seems to be at stake here is one formulation of character - the essay on character, and for Lily “essays were the facts of life” - being overturned by another of “these diminishing and increasing things” which can only be called “impressions of people’s lives” (*MDP* 37). Character by its nature is clear cut, separate and distinct. Eventually, in the face of the overwhelming patriarchal complacency of Mr Brinsley, and in spite of the contrast between “massive masculine

achievement” and her own contribution, the importance of the essay reasserts itself, becomes “more and more obtrusive” as she realises that she too must bear responsibility for her world (*MDP* 39, 42). It is also significant that her essay is on Swift the satirist; this is part of the arsenal she will need to defend herself from Mr Brinsley, surely a relative of *To the Lighthouse*’s Mr Tansley.

Mr Brinsley’s self-assertion links to another element which runs through these stories: the need individuals have in a social context to offer legible versions of themselves for the consumption of others. This is apparent in both “Ancestors” and “The Man Who Loved His Kind”. In the former, Mrs Vallance feels that she “owed it to the world to make men understand how her father and mother, how she too, were quite different” (*MDP* 46). Self-assertion is for this character, and for characters in other stories, a perverse sort of social duty. Ironically, the result of this incessant self-assertion is generally failure of communication: the characters’ insistence on ‘I’ leads them to miss the possibility of ‘we’ - the two philanthropists in “The Man Who Loved His Kind” who part “hating each other, hating the whole houseful of people” are an example of this (*MDP* 33).

One of the reasons the stories offer for this failure of relation is the structure of the self, which is, in a familiar way, divided between what is described in “Together and Apart” as a “true man” and a “false man” (*MDP* 52). The true self is never clearly defined: it is no more than “*that*”, an intangible sum of the parts of life (*MDP* 53). Both “Together and Apart” and “Ancestors” imply that one of the key features of this private and inaccessible self is an extraordinary density linked to memory. For Mrs Vallance, the past is “much more real than the present,” and only a knowledge of that past could reveal her present self: “It is in the past with those wonderful men and women, she thought, that I really live; it is they who know me [. . .]” (*MDP* 48). Similarly, Mr Searle in “Together and Apart” finds Miss Anning’s question about Canterbury ridiculous - “Did he know Canterbury!” - because the city is “all his memories,” a condensed memorial version of himself (*MDP* 53). Ricoeur comments that due to narrative excursions into the past in *Mrs. Dalloway* - and I would argue into the future - “[. . .] the total interval of the narrative, despite its relative brevity, seems rich with implied immensity” (Ricoeur 104). This observation can be productively extended from narrative to character: by situating characters in a dense temporal network, Woolf implies a remarkable fullness of selfhood.

Rarely is effective contact made between these non-social selves, these points of infinitely dense individuality. Mr Searly and Miss Anning finally understand each other, and “their eyes met; collided rather, for each felt that behind the eyes the secluded being, who

sits in darkness while his shallow agile companion does all the tumbling and beckoning [. . .] suddenly stood erect; flung off his cloak; confronted the other” (*MDP* 57). But this meeting of real self with real self is vanishingly brief, and inevitably followed by a “a withdrawal of human affection” which is “desolating and degrading to human nature” (*MDP* 59). Overall, the stories offer a clear articulation - much clearer than in *Mrs. Dalloway* - of the existence of a core or essential self which exists in opposition to a socially structured self, but it offers very little prospect of these selves being able to communicate or relate. In “A Summing Up” a party is at best “the greatest of marvels [. . .]. humming with people coming close to each other, going away from each other exchanging their views, stimulating each other” (*MDP* 77). At worst, it is “nothing but people in evening dress” (*MDP* 79). “The New Dress” offers a starker formulation of what a party means to the people who are caught in it: it is a group of “flies crawling slowly out of a saucer of milk with their wings stuck together” (*MDP* 64).

These short stories, then, written, with the exception of “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street”, between completing *Mrs. Dalloway* and beginning *To the Lighthouse*, both extend and modify *Mrs. Dalloway*’s meditation on the nature of human subjectivity and its representation in fictional character (Dick, Introduction 3). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh thinks that Clarissa “had her reserves; it was a mere sketch, he often felt, that even he, after all these years, could make of” her (*MD* 85). It is impossible to capture the infinite density of a present self composed of past experience, a self both formed by social pressure, forming itself around social pressure, united and fragmented, with anything more, perhaps, than a sketch, that rudimentary form of characterisation. Readers of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Ricoeur writes, are “left holding the scattered pieces to a great game of character identification” the solution to which eludes them “as much as it does the characters in the narrative” (104).

## Chapter 6

Woolf's memories of Talland House in St Ives, Cornwall, are central to *To the Lighthouse* (Bradshaw, Introduction xi). Woolf associated her family's summer home with "days of pure enjoyment," and located "the most important" of her memories there ("Reminiscences" 31; "Sketch" 64). The novel is set, however, on Skye, which Woolf did not visit until 1938 and which is almost as far away from St. Ives as any place in Great Britain (Bradshaw, Introduction xxvii). This relocation, Bradshaw argues, is part of a systematic movement away from the autobiographical, "rendering" the novel "as remote from the contours of her own life as the Hebrides are from London" (Introduction xxviii). This choice, he points out, led to a number of errors in natural geography which irritated some contemporary readers (Introduction xxvii - xxviii). Woolf was alert to the uncertainty of the novel's setting, asking Violet Dickinson "Is it in Cornwall? I'm not as sure as you are" (*L* 3: 389). The fictionalisation of a real place results in instability. This is not "very obviously Cornwall," as a contemporary reviewer wrote; nor is it Skye (qtd. in Bradshaw, Introduction xxviii). Although inspired by Woolf's memories, it is a fictional location, a non-place.

This relationship between reality and fiction is significant for the novel's characterisation, which continues to explore many of the questions that engaged *Mrs. Dalloway* - the figuring of a potential essential self underlying publicly formed versions of self; the representation of a self composed under social pressure; the writing of a self consisting of both past and present. As in all of Woolf's fiction, at least from her first experimental short stories, the question of the self - is there an 'essence' of identity, a core that exists outside of relation and social structures - and how it might be represented in fiction is asked again in *To the Lighthouse*. As in *Mrs. Dalloway*, these questions of identity are explored through the use of image structures that align different characters at different times with different formulations of the self. However, the relationship between fictional characters and biographical representations is also important here.

It is in this context that Woolf contemplated generic re-categorisation: "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new - by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (*WD* 84). This recognises the text's memorialisation of Julia and Leslie Stephen. The death of her mother in 1895 was "the greatest disaster that could happen," and was linked to St Ives, which "vanished for ever" with her death ("Reminiscences" 40; "Sketch" 136). *To the Lighthouse* is thus in part an invocation of the dead. As Woolf recorded in her diary, Vanessa Bell was enthusiastic about this aspect of the novel: "She says it is an amazing portrait of mother [. . .] found the raising of the dead

almost painful” (WD 110). Bell equates Mrs Ramsay with the dead Julie Stephen in terms borrowed from the visual arts; for Bell, a painter, she is the literary equivalent of a portrait. This metaphor lies behind criticism that sees, for instance, “The Window” as providing “an exalted view of Julia Stephen” or the novel as a whole as a “roman à clef” mourning “the death of her [. . .] mother” (Gaipa 13, Clewell 218).

Woolf’s relationship with her father was more ambivalent. In 1928, she reflected that “his life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; - inconceivable” (WD 137). Yet Mr Ramsay stands in the same relationship to Leslie Stephen as Mrs Ramsay does to Julia Stephen, and the process of writing *To the Lighthouse* had similar results in both cases: “I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing the *Lighthouse* laid them in my mind [. . .]” (WD 137). Writing Mr and Mrs Ramsay was a way for Woolf to renegotiate her relationship with her parents, a way of doing for herself “what psycho-analysts do for their patients” (“Sketch” 81). For both of the Stephen daughters, then, Mr and Mrs Ramsay had a clear biographical relationship to the Stephen parents.<sup>110</sup> This raises important questions about character in *To the Lighthouse*.

Mr and Mrs Ramsay are based on Leslie and Julia Stephen, but they are fictional characters. “One of the challenges” for Woolf was “transforming a selection of her memories of [. . .] her parents [. . .] into a fictional narrative” (Dick, “Literary” 57). Woolf herself rejected the link between her parents and her characters, writing in 1941 that “I dont [sic] like being exposed as a novelist and told my people are my mother and father, when, being in a novel, they’re not” (L 6: 464). There is certainly a strong correlation between Woolf’s descriptions of, for instance, her father as a man who was “extremely sensitive to female charm and largely depended upon female praise” and Mr Ramsay’s pleasure in “golden-reddish girls” like Minta Doyle (“22 Hyde” 165; TTL 81). However, biography contributes to rather than determines the novel; a knowledge of Leslie Stephen is not needed to read Mr Ramsay, a fictional character in a fictional world. Yet behind *To the Lighthouse*’s fiction lies what Woolf described in her 1939 essay “The Art of Biography” as fact and “the peculiar virtue that belongs to fact,” that is to say “the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders” (119, 123). In the context of *To the Lighthouse*, the Stephens are

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<sup>110</sup> Woolf wrote in her introduction to the 1928 Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* that “books are the flowers or fruit stuck here or there on a tree which has its roots deep down in the earth of our earliest life, our first experiences,” a point recently echoed by Mario Vargas Llosa who writes that “all stories are rooted in the lives of those who write them [. . .]” (35; 15). This is certainly the case for *To the Lighthouse*.

fact, the Ramsays what fact suggests and engenders. Woolf's theory of biography indicates that fact must be transformed if it is to be employed in fiction, for biographical and fictional facts "will not mix; if they touch they destroy each other. No one, the conclusion seems to be, can make the best of both worlds; you must choose, and you must abide by your choice" ("Biography" 120).<sup>111</sup>

This contrast between biography and fiction, developed while Woolf worked on her biography of Roger Fry in the late thirties, corresponds to an exploration of the relationship between life and fiction contemporaneous with the composition of *To the Lighthouse*. "Life and the Novelist", first published in 1926 and described as her most succinct expression of the relationship between the artist and the world, contrasts life and art in ways similar to Woolf's contrast between fact and fiction (Ronchetti 1). While the subject-matter of the novelist's art is life, "taste, sound, movement, a few words here, a gesture there, a man coming in, a woman going out," this raw material, these "impressions," must undergo a transformation to become fiction (Woolf, "Life" 41). "Life," Woolf, writes, "is curbed; it is killed. It is mixed with this, stiffened with that, brought into contrast with something else [. . .]. There emerges from the mist something stark, something formidable and enduring, the bone and substance upon which our rush of indiscriminating emotion was founded" (41 - 42). Refinement, omission, reorganisation, and excision - in *Orlando* described as "the cardinal labour of composition" - radically transform real-life sources: "So drastic is the process of selection that in its final state we can often find no trace of the actual scene [. . .]" (*O* 68 ; "Life" 41). The fictional products of this process are structured and durable, yet at the same time limited, even dead. Fiction kills in order to preserve; it is a taxidermy of the soul. In contrast, biographical character is "not destined for the immortality which the artist now and then achieves for his creations" ("Biography" 122). The world of fiction "is rarer, intenser, and more wholly of a piece than the world that is largely made of authentic information supplied by other people," and the result is fictional immortality in place of factual mortality ("Biography" 120). In her elegy for her parents, then, Woolf transforms fact into fiction. She "narrativize[s]" the "actual 'tragedy' of her mother's death," a process demanding a radical restructuring of reality which is ironically tantamount to murder, in order to offer her fictional characters the immortality denied her parents (Walsh 10). As Oldfield observes, Woolf's "deepest need of all was to give her beloved dead [. . .] the

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<sup>111</sup> Llosa again agrees with Woolf, arguing that "the autobiographical material" of fiction must be "transformed [. . .] until it achieves the complete autonomy that fiction must assume to live of its own accord" (18 - 19).

immortality otherwise impossible to hope for in an indifferent, unjust, God-less universe” (11).

When contrasting fact and fiction, Woolf’s terms of reference circle around character. This is inevitable when discussing biography; as Forster points out biographical representations are characters, however different to fictional ones (*Aspects* 65). In “Life and the Novelist” Woolf also argues that writing which depends on the impressions of life fails specifically in terms of characterisation: “When we want to use what we have learnt about one of the characters [ . . . ] we realize that we have no steam up; no energy at our disposal. How they dressed, what they ate, the slang they used - we know all that; but not what they are” (44). This excess of detail, a critique familiar from Woolf’s earliest reviews, means that while everything is “fluent and graphic,” the characters do not appear “cleanly”; they are encumbered with “bits of extraneous matter [ . . . ] left sticking to the edges” (“Life” 44).

This resonates with Woolf’s conception of *To the Lighthouse*, which first centred on her father and his character: a 1924 diary entry refers to “the Old Man,” and in May 1925 she wrote that “the centre is father’s character, sitting in a boat, reciting *We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel*”: the novel was to “have father’s character done complete in it; and mother’s; and St. Ives; and childhood [ . . . ]” (*WD* 73, 81). By July 1925, this vision included “father and mother and child in the garden,” or even “all characters boiled down” (*WD* 84). In August 1925, Woolf wrote in a plan of the novel that “the dominating impression is to be of Mrs. R’s character” (*TTLH* 2). Gradually, vacillation “between a single and intense character of father; and a far wider slower book [ . . . ]” is resolved in favour of both a detailed character study based on both Leslie and Julie Stephen, and a wider novel exploring “all the usual things [ . . . ] life, death, etc.” (*WD* 85, 81). The desire to have “father’s character done complete” in the novel, and to have “all characters boiled down” relates to both a biographical impulse and a novelistic one (*WD* 81, 84). Rather than relying only on “the peculiar virtue that belongs to fact,” Woolf will be also looking to the type of concentrated character that pertains to the fictional world of the novel (“Biography” 119). In “Life and the Novelist” Woolf describes characterisation as a search for synecdoche:

For it is true of every object - coat or human being - that the more one looks the more there is to see. The writer’s task is to take one thing and let it stand for twenty [ . . . ] only so is the reader relieved of the swarm and confusion of life and branded effectively with the particular aspect which the writer wishes him to see. (45)

When Woolf speaks of boiling down character, or of removing matter from its edges, she

refers to the transformation through reduction and reorganisation of the real life of fact into the dense and structured world of art. It may not be going far enough to argue, as Briggs does, that Woolf's "[. . .] personal memories are controlled within an aesthetic form" (*Inner* 160). Rather, they are transformed by their move from the biographical to the fictional, a transformation that should tend towards simplicity in the presentation of character and result in a sort of fictional immortality.

What is clear is the centrality of character to Woolf's vision of the novel.<sup>112</sup> Some critics argue that a reader must remain "open to both the autobiographical and the fictional" (Goldman, *Introduction* 60). Another approach argues that even characters "ostensibly 'based' on real-life 'models'" are fictional constructs bearing "little significant relation to their models," relating instead to the "other elements within the structure of the works in which they appear" (Hochman, *Character* 117). This may be closer to Woolf's own vision of the relationship between reality and fiction: Mr and Mrs Ramsay signify more through their relation to the textual facts of the novel than through their relation to the biographical facts of Leslie and Julia Stephen's lives. While this was not necessarily the case for Woolf or her sister, for readers uninvolved in the family life of the Stephens it is certainly true.<sup>113</sup> Woolf's theory of character demands that a reader remain more attentive to "the fictional characters of Mr and Mrs Ramsay" than to the fact that this is a "heavily autobiographical novel," to the ways it "reaches far beyond autobiography" than to Woolf's "remembrance of things past" (de Gay 96; Bradshaw, *Introduction* xiv). At the same time, the biographical impulses of fact and the novelistic impulses of fiction are both present in the novel, and both are relevant to its exploration of character and self.

*Orlando: A Biography* also interrogates the relationship between fact and fiction. Dick contrasts *To the Lighthouse*, which "made highly selective use of the factual basis of her story" with *Orlando*, which "drew extensively [. . .] on historical facts and on real-life models and events" ("Literary" 62). It is possible to read *Orlando* as Vita Sackville-West -

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<sup>112</sup> This seems to challenge the argument that "the normal frames of reference for fiction, such as plot and character, have given way to consideration of poetic device and philosophy" (Goldman, *Introduction* 60).

<sup>113</sup> This is true of all autobiographically-inspired fiction. What is perhaps more relevant is the extent to which the autobiographical elements of a text are exposed as such. Woolf was certainly aware of the difficulty of establishing a stable demarcation between biography and fiction: in *The Voyage Out*, Hewet says that people only read an author's novels to see "which of his friends he's put in" rather than for "the whole conception, the way one's seen the thing, felt about it, made it stand in relation to other things [. . .]" (*VO* 204). See the discussion of the *roman à clef* below.

for instance, three photographs of her were used as illustrations in the text - in a way that Mrs Ramsay is not Julia Stephen.<sup>114</sup> Vanessa Bell read Mrs Ramsay as a portrait of her mother, but Woolf did not illustrate *To the Lighthouse* with one of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs of her, and in 1926 Woolf wrote an introduction for and published *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men & Fair Women*, so the notion of photographic representation was not far away. The use of the photographs in *Orlando* does not directly equate the fictional character Orlando and the real person Vita Sackville-West, but it does authorise the reader to link, however ironically, the two figures. In contrast, *To the Lighthouse's* exploration of Mrs Ramsay's "incomparable beauty" which is "outlined absurdly by the gilt frame" and its association with the "authenticated masterpiece by Michael Angelo" creates a more tentative association between Mrs Ramsay's beauty and the photographic recording of Julia Stephen's (*TTL* 27 - 28). Again, Mr Bankes' image of Mrs Ramsay as "Greek, blue-eyed, straight-nosed," clearly correlates with Woolf's description of her mother's "head of the finest period of Greek art," but not as overtly as literal visual representation (*TTL* 27, "Reminiscences" 42). Both images instead link Mrs Ramsay to more general questions of the aestheticization of the individual. If both *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse* can be considered *romans à clef*, a primary difference is that the former prominently displays its key, while the latter does not.<sup>115</sup>

Another difference between the two texts is the narrator of *Orlando's* elaborate posture as a biographer reliant on fact. Orlando appears to be the ideal biographical subject:

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<sup>114</sup> This is a simplification of a complex issue. Victoria L. Smith argues that while *Orlando* is "Vita Sackville-West's story," the text also establishes a "movement from the actual [. . .] to the fictional" that "foregrounds a dynamic space between the real and representation" (57 - 58). For Smith, this space, and "the difficulty of representation" it implies is linked to "the difficulty of representing woman for herself, as herself" in "language and in culture" (58). "Woolf's model of biography is," as Smith writes, "an ironic one" (60). The inclusion of the photographs is part of this ironic stance, and, as Smith points out, an "audacious and remarkable" step given the homophobic and anti-lesbian atmosphere of post-*Well of Loneliness* England (63). See Adam Parkes' "Lesbianism, History, and Censorship: *The Well of Loneliness* and the Suppressed Randiness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*" for a discussion of the censorship of Radclyffe Hall's novel in relation to the popular success of Woolf's. For Karen R. Lawrence, the photographs in *Orlando* indicate how "beneath the persistent family resemblance, gender slides from masculine to feminine, creating a kind of androgynous portrait" (270). For Monk, the inclusion of the photos acts in stark contradistinction to the text's status as "pointedly and determinedly unrealistic fiction," arguing that "illustrating the book with pictures of Vita dressed as Orlando and with photographs of Knole, Vita's country estate" made clear to "at least some of her readers" the fact that the book is "quite clearly about a real person" (28).

<sup>115</sup> In his recent *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law and the Roman à Clef*, Sean Latham argues that the separation of fictional character and biographical referent is "*not* a natural way to read" and goes on to trace the influence of *roman à clef* in the development of the "legal, aesthetic, and ethical challenges" of modernist literature (4).

his “candid, sullen face” indicates the biographer “never need [. . .] vex herself, nor [. . .] invoke the help of novelist or poet” for Orlando’s life shall move “from deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office” (*O* 16). His biographer must simply record these factual public events. Biography relies on this sort of information - that which “shows on the surface” - and Orlando’s biographer need not usurp the “the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source” (Forster, *Aspects* 65). When documentary evidence fails at moments of stress and transformation in Orlando’s life, the biographer is “faced with a difficulty it is perhaps better to confess than to gloss over” (*O* 62). While “documents” have allowed the biographer to “plod” on her way “in the indelible footprints of truth” towards biography’s ultimate destination, “the tombstone,” at certain points “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 [. . .]” (*O* 62). Documentary biography is a mortuary process, a funeral procession. Yet in the absence of documentation, when “the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle of the most important sentence,” the reader must make up “from bare hints dropped here and there the whole boundary and circumference of a living person [. . .]” (*O* 110; 69). This process is a form of speculative fictionalisation which transforms dead fact into living fiction, re-routing biography’s journey to the grave. Orlando, the subject of fictional vivification due to the failure of biographical documentation, does not die.

The biographer faces an additional complication. Orlando has “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 as a thousand” (*O* 278). In “The Art of Biography” Woolf writes that “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,” but even when this evidence is available, it is still possible at best to select from it (121). Biography is here presented as unable to contain life, bound as it is to the documentable and limited in the complexity it can endow a figure with. Monk argues that for Woolf “the self can be truthfully described only in fiction,” meaning that “biography can never adequately capture the people it attempts to describe, and that the only way of writing

an adequate biography” is to write “a novel” (28 - 29).<sup>116</sup> This is an extreme reading, but it may be that for Woolf fiction is more capable of giving life and of grappling with the multiple nature of the individual than biography.<sup>117</sup> While *To the Lighthouse* activates both biographical and fictional energies in its representation of self, its most important feature may be its exploration of the relationship between the two.

*To the Lighthouse* represents this multi-faceted self by placing character at the intersection of multiple viewpoints. Woolf had used this approach previously, but not as extensively as here. This is particularly true of the “The Window”, which opens with an expanded dialogue reminiscent of Woolf’s metaphor for thought in Dostoyevsky, a chain “sunk out of sight” (*E* 2: 85). Here, thought is traced from one visible point - spoken dialogue or narrative reference to physical objects - to another, separated by “movements within the consciousness” of characters (Auerbach 529). After the opening line, “‘Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,’ said Mrs Ramsay. ‘But you’ll have to be up with the lark’ [ . . . ],” the narrative moves from James’ euphoric reaction, to the physical action he is performing, to his appearance as interpreted by his mother and her imaginative response to it (*TTL* 7). This is presented through an apparently objective external narrative, in Erich Auerbach’s formulation the voice of “nameless spirits capable of penetrating the depths of the human soul” (532). Character is thus the product of a narrative technique which reaches into the characters’ imagined consciousness and inhabits the spaces between them, offering internal and external perspectives.

This is complemented by the way the characters study each other: Mrs Ramsay looks

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<sup>116</sup> Gualtieri argues that Woolf’s only ‘real’ biography, *Roger Fry*, displays her struggles with the genre; it “reads like a collage of juxtaposed fragments from Fry’s own writings” with “the biographer’s interventions [ . . . ] limited to trying to let the unsaid emerge from the interstices of what can be said” (“Impossible” 359). The phrase “there the fragment ends” is a leitmotif of the text, although fragment is perhaps not the right word for quoted passages that frequently extend for pages (Woolf, *Roger* 144).

<sup>117</sup> This is a limited account of Woolf’s lifelong engagement with biography, intended to emphasise her reservations about the capacity of the traditional biographical approach to encompass life. In her 1927 discussion of Harold Nicholson’s *Some People*, “The New Biography”, Woolf argues that while “truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible” the art of modern biography demands some such combination to capture the “increasingly real [ . . . ] fictitious life” that “dwells in the personality rather than in the act” (100). “Truth” and “personality” are the two poles of biography (“New” 95). Woolf later modified this stance in her 1939 discussion of Strachey’s *Elisabeth and Essex*, “The Art of Biography”, insisting on a more pronounced gap between the two genres, the one the work of the “craftsman,” the other the work of the “artist” (122). See Gualtieri’s “The Impossible Art: Virginia Woolf on Modern Biography” for a succinct discussion of Woolf’s vision on biography as “precariously balanced between irreconcilable possibilities” (349).

at James, who looks at his father, who looks at his wife and son through a window (*TTL* 7). This is interrupted by a movement into Mrs Ramsay's consciousness, interrupted in turn by Charles Tansley's statement that "there'll be no landing at the Lighthouse tomorrow" (*TTL* 10). Then the looks begin again as Mrs Ramsay "looked at him" (*TTL* 10). As Marcus writes, "the novel is above all about looking, perspective, distance, its organization an extraordinarily complex interplay of eye lines and sight lines" (*Virginia* 99).<sup>118</sup> Mrs Ramsay is the focus of these "divergent and complimentary visions," but she is also an active observer, a "percipient": "her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings [. . .]" (Freedman 230, 231; *TTL* 86). All of the characters observe and are observed. Although similar to the process of inter-characterisation in *The Voyage Out*, this is more concerned with the relationship of the self to the other than with levels of characterisation. Rather than establishing a continuum of characterisation ranging from total anonymity to total identification, the network of glances in *To the Lighthouse* helps to establish a contrast between character, or the represented self, as it develops in relation to other characters, other selves, and character as it exists in isolation, the elusive essence of self.

This contrast is developed through the "refracting and reflecting 'beam' and 'ray' of human perception" (Marcus, *Virginia* 99). Lily Briscoe sees Mr Bankes looking at Mrs Ramsay, and "for him to gaze as Lily saw him gazing at Mrs Ramsay was a rapture" (*TTL* 41). Then, "looking along the level of Mr Bankes's glance at her," Lily "thought that no woman could worship another woman in the way he worshipped; [. . .]. Looking along his beam she added to it her different ray [. . .]" (*TTL* 42). Lily looks again at Mrs Ramsay, and her "ray passed level with Mr Bankes's ray straight to Mrs. Ramsay sitting reading there with James at her knee" (*TTL* 44). This physical manifestation of vision provides an explicit shift in perspective which both questions Mr Bankes' characterisation of Mrs Ramsay and represents a physical interplay of lines-of-sight which link the separate characters.<sup>119</sup> It is a

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<sup>118</sup> This looking centres on characters, "people looking and being looked at," a pattern reflecting the biographical sources of the novel: Woolf the daughter looks at - or remembers - her parents (Marcus, *Virginia* 98).

<sup>119</sup> This network of manifest perception is less clear in the holograph, from which the lines of sight are absent. Mr Bankes, for instance, "had ~~at~~ put it out of her head entirely by his rapture" without the published text's repetition of the word *gaze* (*TTLH* 86). Similarly, while Lily agrees that women cannot worship women the way men can, this is articulated simply as "she could not look at Mrs. Ramsay quite in that light," drawing no attention to the gaze (*TTLH* 88). There is no correlating line in the holograph to Lily's "ray passed level with Mr Bankes's ray straight to Mrs. Ramsay" (*TTL* 44). Woolf seems to have systematically strengthened this element between the holograph and the published novel.

textual trace of the characters' efforts to understand each other, and has a "counterpoint," as Marcus points out, in the sweeping beam of the lighthouse, which is in turn analogous to the characterising eye of the reader. As Nussbaum writes, "we read as the characters read one another" (*Virginia* 99; "Window" 750).<sup>120</sup> These interpretations are dependent on perspective, sometimes literally. Lily, "looking up" at Mr Ramsay, sees him as "the most sincere of men, the truest" (*TTL* 40). On the other hand, "looking down" he appears "absorbed in himself [. . .] tyrannical, [. . .] unjust" (*TTL* 40). This formation of character in *To the Lighthouse*, this representation of the self as relative, external, and dependent on perspective is associated with a textually prominent system of interlocked gazes, beams, and rays.

A related element in this exploration of character is the "reddish-brown stocking" Mrs Ramsay knits in the first seven sections of "The Window" (*TTL* 8). Section five begins with another line of vision: "'And even if it isn't fine tomorrow,' said Mrs. Ramsay, raising her eyes to glance at William Bankes and Lily Briscoe [. . .]" (*TTL* 24). She then resumes work on the stocking, "with its criss-cross of steel needles at the mouth of it" (*TTL* 25). These knitting needles are a textual counterpoint to the intersecting glances. They also tie into a larger system of signification. As Mrs Ramsay pours "erect into the air a rain of energy" to meet her husband's need for sympathy, "she flashed her needles" (*TTL* 33). These flashing needles are referred to three times in this passage. They also appear in section 11 of "The Window", in which Mrs Ramsay's "core of darkness" is revealed (*TTL* 53). Here as Mrs Ramsay becomes separated from the external world, she "looked and looked with her

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<sup>120</sup> Nussbaum's arguments are part of an examination of the epistemological and ethical implications of "the problem of other minds", or, more specifically, "the problem of access to the other" ("Window" 733, 734). According to Nussbaum the novel proposes the complexity and rapidity of consciousness and the limitations of language, along with "concealment and misrepresentation," as impeding factors ("Window" 734, 739). The text's initial solution to these problems is a desire to take "morally problematic" possession of the other ("Window" 742). Nussbaum controversially proposes the relationship between Mr and Mrs Ramsay as a model of knowledge inspired by love and trust, where each "learns the idiosyncratic text of the other" in a process analogous to reading ("Window" 745). Her interpretation of *To the Lighthouse* has been criticised for its assumption "that ethics and justice exist [. . .] outside the force of language and representation" and that literature can thus provide a training-ground for real-world ethical decision making, and for the assumption that "literature [. . .] has no performative force; it makes nothing happen through its mode of writing but only through its message" (Caughie, "How" 278; Caughie, "Professional" 429). However, this critique is less concerned with the details of Nussbaum's reading of Woolf than with her 1999 critique of Judith Butler. See Nussbaum's "The Professor of Parody" in *The New Republic* 22 February 1999 for the critique and "Martha C. Nussbaum and Her Critics: An Exchange" in *The New Republic* 19 April 1999 for the ensuing debate.

needles suspended” (*TTL* 54). With needles flashing Mrs Ramsay participates in a social and relational system of characterisation manifested through active gaze and associated with the eye of the reader and the beam of the lighthouse, while with needles inactive characterisation, or the representation of the self, focusses inward.

These needles support a coloured stocking. This relates to a series of images contrasting stability and flux, form and colour, rationality and emotion. While Mr Bankes continues to “gaze” at Mrs Ramsay, Lily looks at her painting, consisting of a supporting structural element and colour: “She saw the colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral” (*TTL* 42). Another instance of this contrast occurs when Mrs Ramsay compares the relation between “masculine intelligence” and the “world,” to “iron girders spanning the swaying fabric” (*TTL* 86). These polarities can be related to the novel’s largest image structure, the contrast between the lighthouse and the “fluidity” of the ocean (*TTL* 80).<sup>121</sup> And they can be related to the contrast between the “granite-like solidity” of “truth” and the “rainbow-like intangibility” of “personality” which informs Woolf’s discussion of biography (“New” 95).

There is a perhaps counter-intuitive relationship, then, between Mrs Ramsay’s needles as a symbol of the multiple perspectives needed to interpret character, an approach to characterisation which gestures towards what Waugh describes as “a relational, collective concept of subjectivity,” and the novel’s primary representation of stability, the lighthouse (108).<sup>122</sup> This can be compared with *Mrs. Dalloway*’s diamond self, which is also formed in

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<sup>121</sup> All of this is part of “the lavish symbolic economy of the novel” (DiBattista 145). While Woolf wrote that she “meant *nothing* by the Lighthouse,” it and other elements of the text have symbolic value (*L* 3: 385). She recognised that “all sorts of feelings would accrue to” the lighthouse, but refused “to think them out,” trusting that “people would make it the deposit for their own emotions” (*L* 3: 385). The lighthouse symbolises intransitively. The potential for symbolic reading is also written into the text: while Lily thinks about the Ramsays “suddenly the meaning, which [. . .] descends on people, making them symbolical [. . .] came upon them, and made them [. . .] the symbols of marriage, husband and wife” (*TTL* 60). This symbolism is extrinsic rather than intrinsic, and is neither stable nor permanent, for it sinks “down again” (*TTL* 61). Beer has described the novel as “post-symbolic” in reference to its simultaneous use and questioning of symbolism (“Hume” 41). While it allows “concepts and object” to be “loaded with human reference,” this reference is neither persistent nor stable (“Hume” 41).

<sup>122</sup> Waugh argues that for Woolf, it is “useless and dangerous for women to assert an identity solely with such a relational, collective concept of subjectivity” without a concurrent assertion of “a sense of autonomy, detachment, and individuality” (108). This reading is developed in the context of Woolf’s “feminist commitment to a view of the self in relationship where autonomy is not the separateness and isolation of getting to the letter R, but a way of perceiving one’s connectedness to others and respecting the separateness involved in their connectedness to oneself” (115).

response to social or relational pressure, and takes a metaphoric shape proverbial for durability. This is contrasted in *To the Lighthouse* with another form of characterisation, another figuration of subjectivity, focussed on internal spaces. These are frequently described as aqueous: when Mrs Ramsay speaks to Cam, “the words seemed to drop into a well, where, if the waters were clear, they were also [. . .] extraordinarily distorting” (*TTL* 47). Similarly, narrative description of Mrs Ramsay’s interiority relies on water imagery: “Bitter and black, half-way down, in the darkness, in the shaft which ran from the sunlight to the depths, perhaps a tear formed; a tear fell; the waters swayed this way and that, received it, and were at rest” (*TTL* 26). These images invert the structure of the lighthouse: wells descend from light into darkness and water, while lighthouses rise from darkness and water into light. Water is changeable, mobile and distorting, in contrast to the extreme visibility and structural stability of the images associated with relational character. Thus the text develops a system of opposing images relating to two versions of character: one relational, structured, and stable; the other fluid, private and intangible. This is a dichotomy shared by Woolf’s discussion of the relationship between fact and fiction, life and the novel. Character is thus in part, as Flint writes, dependent on “point of view, and on the shifting perspectives provided by meeting people and interrelating within society,” but this is only true of the elements of character that are textually associated with surfaces rather than with depths, with the facts that are obtainable from external observation (“Introduction” xxvii).<sup>123</sup> This is the form of characterisation that represents the social or relational self, as opposed to a sort which represents the private aspects of self, or, in other words, the essence of self that *Jacob’s Room* and *Mrs. Dalloway* search for.

This sense of character derived from social interrelation is stable yet unsatisfactory; nor is the form of character associated with depth valorised. In conversation with Mr Bankes, Lily is overwhelmed by a sense of his character:

Suddenly, as if the movement of his hand had released it, the load of her accumulated impressions of him tilted up, and down poured in a ponderous avalanche all she felt about him. That was one sensation. Then up rose in a fume the essence of his being. That was another. She felt herself transfixed by the intensity of her perception; it was his severity; his goodness. (*TTL* 23)

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<sup>123</sup> These textual elements also function within other symbolic economies. Mrs Ramsay’s linking of masculine intelligence to steel girders participates, for instance, in a protracted critique of patriarchy that implicates Mrs Ramsay in the perpetuation of unjust social norms containing “suppressed violence between the generations, and [. . .], between the sexes” (Whitworth, “Virginia” 157). It also corresponds to the novel’s “distinction between men and women,” which is “cast precisely in terms of solidity and flux” (Levenson, *Modernism* 206).

A physical movement unlocks the information acquired by characterisation associated with gaze. The moment splits into two parts: first, a threatening sense of the weight of detailed impression and then a distillation of detail into essence. The language used here is similar to Woolf's description in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" of the "overmastering impression" of character that can only be likened "to a draught or a smell of burning" (*E* 3: 341). As Levenson describes the movement, "impressions accumulated over time may suddenly cohere into an essence" (*Modernism* 208). This potentially essential self exists in contrast to a relational self composed of what characters perceive in each other; it is the self represented by fiction rather than the self represented by biography, the self from the inside rather than the self from the outside. Lily's momentary recognition of essence does not, however, offer resolution: "How then did it work out, all this? How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt or disliking? And to those words, what meaning attached, after all?" (*TTL* 23).<sup>124</sup> This casts doubt on both forms of characterisation, both ways of understanding other people: relying on the detailed facts garnered by the perceptive gaze is unsatisfying unless the detail coheres into essence, but essence is intangible, temporary, and difficult to relate to its causal grounds. It is this questioning of the validity of any sense of character that reinforces what Nussbaum describes as a key element of "The Window", "our epistemological insufficiency toward one another and our unquenchable epistemological longing" ("Window" 732). Within the novel, characters as unknown internalised selves are fixed into a network of glances and are unsatisfied with the results of their readings. In a sense, the text is here attempting to move beyond biographical characterisation, the listing of known and confirmable external facts, to the possibility that these facts can in some way allow access to another version of the self, an essential self that underlies the facts of relational character. This is a movement from the "act" to the "personality" ("New" 100). Yet the text is aware of the extreme difficulty of this attempt, and questions the validity of its results, its 'essence', as soon as it is obtained.

The novel contains two further formulations of character relating the dense network of social relations within which character exists to private interiority or essence. Looking at Mrs Ramsay, Lily speculates about her interiority:

[ . . . ] she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart [ . . . ] were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred

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<sup>124</sup> In "Together and Apart" there is a similar questioning of the categories of like and dislike, which throws "an odd green light on what human fellowship consisted of" (*MDP* 56).

inscriptions [. . .]. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself [. . .] (*TTL* 44).

This passage offers a tomb as a metaphor for the self.<sup>125</sup> Mrs Ramsay's interiority consists of "secret chambers" containing "treasures" or sacred tablets (*TTL* 44). These tablets are a written version of identity that link self with character, and make explicit the connection between reading character and interpreting real people. They also paradoxically imply that beneath the surface of the self lies not an essential self concealed from the perceptive external gaze, but a written version of identity reminiscent of a biographical text. For Woolf the traditional biography, with its steady progression of factual and external information, was a tomb which ironically buried that which it sought to preserve, her father's private memoir of Julia Stephen, written for their children and dubbed by them *The Mausoleum Book*, being the primary example of this "tendency to turn flesh and blood into a marmoreal object" (Zwerdling "Mastering" 170). Reading the tablets of personal information would not be sufficient for Lily; she seeks total internal identification rather than external knowledge, intimacy rather than the knowledge available through reading, unity with Mrs Ramsay rather than understanding of her. This physical, emotional and imaginative unity is at least momentarily valorised, and explains, perhaps, the relegation of social, external, and

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<sup>125</sup> Bradshaw believes this is an Egyptian tomb, perhaps Tutankhamun's, the discovery of which in 1922 triggered a period of interest in Egyptology (Explanatory 182). Heidi Stalla points out that Vita Sackville-West went to Egypt while the novel was being written, and has identified a pattern of "references to the material culture of ancient Egypt" in the novel (27, 33). It may also be relevant that the ancient Egyptians had an elaborate theological system accounting for individual identity splitting the self into seven different components, including the *ka*, or "abstract embodiment of all the attributes of individuality or personality", and the *ba*, or soul (Dimock 626 - 627). Also potentially relevant here is the Egyptian sarcophagus, with its nested series of representations of the dead, similar to Lewis' vision of the self as "a painted mummy case" containing other smaller cases (*Tarr* 58).

biographical character to a tomb.<sup>126</sup> As the narrator of “An Unwritten Novel” imaginatively occupies the body of Mr Moggridge “to lodge [. . .] on the person, in the soul,” Lily seeks ways of knowing that allow for this fictional level of personal identification (33).

The unity she seeks remains, however, out of reach: “Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing!” (*TTL* 44). “How then, she asked herself, did one know one thing or another about people, sealed as they were?” (*TTL* 44). In answer, the text provides “Lily’s picture of the self as a hive, an enclosed interior containing the muted hum of personality” that is aligned with the relational, social forms of characterisation exemplified by the network of gazes in “The Window” (Levenson, *Modernism* 173). The hive is not, however, Lily’s image; it is also used by Mrs Ramsay to picture the interior spaces of other characters and as such belongs to the narrative as a whole.<sup>127</sup> One can understand other people only in a limited fashion:

Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste, one haunted the dome-shaped hive, ranged the wastes of the air over the countries of the world alone, and then haunted the hives with their murmurs and their stirrings; the hives which were people. (*TTL* 44)

This metaphor is aligned with the text’s conception of relational character: there is a visual parallel between the sight lines that cut through “The Window”, and the flight paths of the bees, which connect hive to hive, self to self, character to character. Bees are also proverbially collective animals. They live in hives, operate within strict power hierarchies,

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<sup>126</sup> According to Nussbaum, this form of identification is ultimately rejected as ethically inappropriate: Lily’s “project of knowing [. . .] has itself something of the desire for power in it” (“Window” 742). Nussbaum’s ethical objections to this form of total intimacy can be linked to the discomfort displayed in *The Voyage Out* with the aggressive nature of characterisation and the dangers of excessive intimacy. Jessica Berman has situated Woolf’s ethical position in relation to Levinas’ “insistence that ethics not give way to any incorporation or usurpation of the other by the self” and his refusal of “any semblance of relationship between the self and the other,” and the feminist critique of “Levinas for his refusal to consider intimacy as a potentially ethical relation” carried out by Luce Irigaray and Tina Chanter (152). This form of “social subject” is, Berman argues, closer to Woolf’s ethical explorations than male models of ethics which exclude “women’s private ethical experience” (154, 152). For Waugh, Lily’s longing is for union with a “pre-oedipal mother” in contrast to the “Law of the Father,” which the text gradually recognises as a “suicidal impulse” (113 - 114).

<sup>127</sup> Mrs Ramsay is, as Lee points out, particularly associated with domes: “[. . .] as she sat in the wicker armchair [. . .] she wore, to Lily’s eyes, an august shape; the shape of a dome” (Introduction xxi; *TTL* 44). In the holograph, it is unclear if this dome shape is associated with Mrs Ramsay or the chair in which she sits: “She had been sitting in a wicker arm chair in her drawing room like a dome” (*TTLH* 91). There might then be a visual association between the wicker chair and the appearance of a beehive.

and are identified by their social roles.<sup>128</sup> However, the “sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste” to which these bees are drawn is associated again with the intangible essence of character. Like the tomb-self, the hive-self simultaneously gestures outwards and inwards.

While writing *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf wrote in “On Being Ill” that “we do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others. Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way” (*E* 4: 320). In an essay on De Quincey also written during this period, Woolf complained that novelists ignore “all that side of the mind which is exposed in solitude [. . .]. They ignore its thoughts, its rhapsodies, its dreams, with the result that the people of fiction bursting with energy on one side are atrophied on the other [. . .]” (“Impassioned” 34). This is the side of character associated with depth, darkness and water, the part of the self that eludes biographical fact or external perspective, and which can only intermittently be summoned as an impression of essence. The key passages here deal with Mrs Ramsay who, having spent the afternoon with her son James and comforted her husband “need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself” (*TTL* 52). This prepares for the appearance of non-relational character.

What emerges is a vision of inactivity, inertness and solitude:

And that was what now she often felt the need of - to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.<sup>129</sup> (*TTL* 52)

This core of darkness initially seems to be related to permanence, stability, privacy, and authenticity, implying that this is the ‘real’ self that underlies the relational self of action, a self of being rather than doing.<sup>130</sup> On the other hand, this image “is so radically at odds with Mrs Ramsay’s social and familial self that it can appear as a negation of identity” (Marcus, *Virginia* 100). A more extreme reading of this passage argues that Mrs Ramsay’s “experience

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<sup>128</sup> This sociability of bees was exploited by Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees*, which Woolf cites in *Three Guineas* (*TG* 178). Woolf used this association in *Jacob’s Room*, comparing life at college to a “hive full of bees” (34).

<sup>129</sup> This image is not present in the holograph draft, which describes Mrs Ramsay’s “twofold nature” without providing a clear image for it (*TTLH* 106).

<sup>130</sup> At this point, it is easier to discuss Mrs Ramsay as a ‘self’ rather than as a ‘character’, although this ‘self’ remains embedded in the textual system which creates character in the novel. The ‘character’ is the fictional representation of an imagined self, and at times the novel demands attention to the textual aspects of character, at others to the represented subjectivity.

[. . .] is presented as the consequence of her [. . .] being so totally dependent on others for self-definition that solitude can only be experienced as disintegration of identity”: without relational self, she has no self (Waugh 17). Another reading emphasises the way this renders the self “unknowable” (de Gay 109). These interpretations identify the core of darkness as “an absence” (de Gay 108). However, it can also be read as an assertion of alternate identity, although one so removed from the “the novelistic surface” which constitutes Mrs Ramsay’s relational character that it looks like a negation (DiBattista 148). Thus the term essential self can only be used provisionally to describe something that gestures so generously towards the not-self. Mrs Ramsay’s core of darkness rejects thought, perhaps most specifically the reciprocal thought of interchanged characterisation. It then rejects sound, and this in a novel where the main sounds are human voices: Mr Ramsay chanting poetry, Charles Tansley complaining, the children talking. The relational and the “vocal” disappear, and “oneself” remains, a “wedge-shaped core of darkness,” invisible to other people (*TTL* 52). This is “exultant” in its rejection of the ties of society, its sense of freedom achieved, yet “troubled” in the sense that it is an evaporation or shrinkage; loss rather than gain (DiBattista 148). Diction is significant: evaporation is not distillation, shrinkage not concentration.

The results of this diminution are surprising, and shift the text’s concept of essential self away from the tropes of stability and permanence described above. “This self,” the narrative insists, “having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures [. . .]. the range of experience seemed limitless” (*TTL* 52 - 53). This self is not, however, *the* self; not “essential being, a featureless reality” of “freedom, peace, stability” and oneness with the beam of the lighthouse (Price 324). Rather, it is an alternative formulation of selfhood, neither absolute nor ultimate. Freedom is certainly a feature of this experience: “And to everybody there was always this sense of unlimited resources [. . .]” (*TTL* 53). Mrs Ramsay’s “core of darkness” can travel anywhere, “for no one saw it” (*TTL* 53). For Maria DiBattista this results from the cutting of the “bonds of habit and of social custom that tie consciousness to the visible, sensate world,” thus freeing her “mind? Soul? Consciousness? - freeing *something* within her” (149). This formulation does not attempt to identify the core of darkness as a specific element of Mrs Ramsay’s self, but emphasises instead the severing of relation between it and the external world.<sup>131</sup> However, the text proposes a complex

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<sup>131</sup> Bette London describes this core of darkness as “a kind of magic talisman conferring unlimited power and full authority,” and, as it “invokes the fantastical flying carpets of storybook legends, childhood memory, and fairytale fantasies” rejects interpretations that insist on reading these passages as a triumph of core identity (139). While my reading differs in many respects, London’s rejection of simplicity in reading this passage is important.

interrelation of states of selfhood rather than complete separation between outside and inside, relational and essential.

The essential Mrs Ramsay speaks under the influence of “the long steady stroke” of the lighthouse beam, “her stroke”: “‘Children don’t forget, children don’t forget’ - which she would repeat and begin adding to it, It will end, It will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the Hands of the Lord” (*TTL* 53). This speech belongs not only to Mrs Ramsay, but also to the lighthouse associated in the text with relational character and the enquiring gaze, for it lifts “up on it some little phrase or other which has been lying in her mind” (*TTL* 53). The lighthouse appears to be an active participant in this structuring of Mrs Ramsay’s essential self. It fills the silence of the core of darkness with the prophetic murmur of the sea. This, the voice says, this moment, this era, will end, and it, the war, the future, death, will come. This is not strictly a relational voice. Although it purportedly addresses the Ramsay children, it is unuttered, fantastic, almost inhuman. It is followed, however, by the unexpected biblical tag, which annoys Mrs Ramsay “instantly” (*TTL* 53). “Who had said it?” she asks herself: “not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean” (*TTL* 53).

This is a collision between two characters in the novel, two differing formulations of the self, the relational Mrs Ramsay who exists within and as a product of the text’s network of gazes, and the essential Mrs Ramsay. The appeal to God is the relational self’s response to the essential self’s prophecy, an “insincerity slipping in among the truths” (*TTL* 54). Yet the essential self’s prophecy is in turn a product of the lighthouse, which is associated with the gaze of relation. Following several lines charting the reassertion of relational self, during which the narrative moves towards Mr Ramsay as he studies her from a distance, Mrs Ramsay’s essential self is reasserted, but “with some irony [. . .] for when one woke at all, one’s relations changed” (*TTL* 54). The lighthouse again plays a key role here: “stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain” it triggers a rapture, “waves of pure delight” (*TTL* 54 - 55).

These sealed vessels refer to the jars and chambers used previously as metaphors for the inaccessibility of Mr Ramsay’s interior spaces. The lighthouse thus plays a major role in the articulation of an essential self, but is situated within an image system referring to and reflecting on relational self, developing a counter-intuitive linkage between a socially constituted self on the one hand and an essential self on the other. Neither exists independently, and neither is valorised. With “flashing [. . .] needles” Mrs Ramsay operates in a system of characterisation which emphasises the relational aspects of her self (*TTL* 33).

With “her needles suspended” she operates within a system of characterisation that emphasise the essential or private aspects of her self (*TTL* 54). Both systems of characterisation are in operation throughout “The Window”; neither supplants the other. While Nussbaum and other critics emphasise the “the tremendous gap between what we are in and to ourselves, and the part of the self that enters the interpersonal world,” *To the Lighthouse* invites readers to consider the intimate relationship between the two (“Window” 733). This link between the lighthouse and Mrs Ramsay’s interiority also implies an unexpectedly strong connection between biography and fiction, for external facts and internal states are shown to be intertwined. In “The New Biography”, Woolf writes that Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* connects the external and the internal elements of biography; “We can no longer maintain that life consists in actions only or in works. It consists in personality” (96). Boswell’s “obstinate veracity,” his reliance on the external world of biographical fact, the “world of brick and pavement; of birth, marriage, and death” allows the reader access to this mysterious personality (100).<sup>132</sup> In *To the Lighthouse*, something similar occurs as the image systems associated with relational and essential character are linked in the passages surrounding Mrs Ramsay’s core of darkness. The divide between external and internal, biography and fiction, relation and essence, is perhaps not insurmountable.

*To the Lighthouse* is divided into three parts: “The Window” set during a single pre-war day and “The Lighthouse” set ten years later during a single post-war day, linked by “Time Passes” which Woolf described as “the most difficult piece of abstract writing [. . .] an empty house, no people’s characters, the passage of time, all eyeless and featureless with nothing to cling to” (*WD* 92). “Time Passes” has been read as narrating “the gaps between acts of history” (Caughie, “Virginia” 312). This is true in terms of the real history to which the narrative refers, specifically the “radical break with Victorianism after the First World War” (Lee, Introduction ix). It is also true of narrative events, Lily’s first and second

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<sup>132</sup> Monk’s critique of Woolf’s “picture of biography” is in part based on a reading of these passages from “The New Biography” (34 - 35). Woolf, he argues, by recognising the effectiveness of the external in the portrayal of the internal “effectively undermines the overly rigid dichotomies between outer and inner, the concrete and the rainbow that dominate her entire oeuvre” (35). My reading of *To the Lighthouse* indicates that Woolf challenges rather than accepts these dichotomies.

painting, or the planning of the trip to the lighthouse and its realisation.<sup>133</sup> This section also transforms the novel's exploration of character.

Some critics have followed Woolf's lead in reading "Time Passes" as containing "no people's characters": according to Levenson, for instance, "time becomes the leading character" here (*WD* 92; *Modernism* 206). While this section opens with a dialogue following Mrs Ramsay's dinner party, the conversation's thematic weight distances it from the characters. When Mr Bankes says that "we must wait for the future to show," or Prue comments that "one can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land," they are, as characters, operating under extreme structural pressure (*TTL* 103). Mr Bankes is literally referring to the political future, Prue to the darkness of the night, yet both of these comments contribute to the thematic patterning of the novel.<sup>134</sup> As Banfield points out, "the problem of the future structures all of *To the Lighthouse*," and Bankes' remark refers to this problem ("Tragic" 55). Prue's remark in turn emphasises the "total dissolution represented in 'Time Passes'" (Cousineau 140). Characters are thus present in "Time Passes", but under textual conditions very different to those in "The Window". One way of describing this change is to say that while the later offers an extended study of ways of knowing selves, the former

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<sup>133</sup> Banfield argues that the "The Window" and "The Lighthouse" are comparable to "Prelude" and "At the Bay", as "Mansfield's two stories [. . .] consist of moments, the first of several summer days and the second of one day in the life of the same family, the two stories separated by an undefined lapse of time. At the center of both is the family house [. . .]" ("Time" 489). While the reading of the first and third sections of *To the Lighthouse* as short stories offers an interesting alternative vision of the novel's structure, and indeed of the relationship of the short story as a genre to the novel, the connections Banfield draws between the works in question seem potentially coincidental: stories dealing with childhood often include houses for obvious domestic reasons. Briggs offers a more revealing connection between "Prelude" and *To the Lighthouse* when she writes that "The example of Katherine Mansfield's 'Prelude', which celebrated scenes from her childhood while exposing the grown-up tensions that lay beneath, was a liberating one" (*Inner* 165).

<sup>134</sup> The darkness is strange, as Mrs Ramsay sees the "yellow harvest moon," or a full moon (*TTL* 94). The harvest moon allows the action of "The Window" to be located fairly precisely in a way that seems to contradict critical consensus. Bradshaw argues that references to the Armistice indicate that "The Lighthouse" is set in September 1919 (Explanatory 192). "The Window" is set, as Lily says, "ten years ago" in 1909 (*TTL* 122). Again according to Lily, it was "the middle of September" (*TTL* 20). This gives a date of mid-September 1909 for "The Window" and September 1919 for "The Lighthouse", a view shared by Mark Gaipa (14). However, the harvest moon occurs near the autumnal equinox, which fell on September 23 in 1909. The full moon nearest to the equinox, the harvest moon, occurred in 1909 on 29 September, while the new moon was on 14 September, or in the middle of the month (*Whitaker's 1909*). September 1910 would provide a closer match with a harvest moon occurring on 19 September (*Whitaker's 1910*). Woolf was familiar with *Whitaker's Almanac*, which she condemned as representative of the "masculine point of view which governs our lives" in "The Mark on the Wall" (57).

focusses much more explicitly on fictional characters.<sup>135</sup>

These conditions are revealed by the placement of major plot elements - major life events for the characters - inside brackets. The first of these is innocuous although thematically relevant: “[Here Mr Carmichael, who was reading Virgil, blew out his candle. It was past midnight]” (*TTL* 104). This sets apart a minor narrative observation from the material surrounding it. However, the next bracketed passage is different: “[Mr Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before he stretched his arms out. They remained empty]” (*TTL* 105). This offers information that would within a traditional novel be the focus of the narrative.<sup>136</sup> Mrs Ramsay, the centre of both the network of gazes and the core of darkness, is removed from the text in a way that equates her death with the most casual of narrative incidents, the blowing out of a candle. As Lee writes, brackets “create an unsettling ambiguity about the status of events” (Introduction x). Is Mrs Ramsay’s death presented here as unimportant, a parenthetical indication of “the inconsequentiality of even the richest life,” or, as Marcus argues, do the brackets invert traditional narrative priorities as “the words between brackets become more, not less, significant [. . .]”? (Stevenson and Goldman 174; *Virginia* 105). The text offers no answer; Mrs Ramsay’s death is both unimportant in the context of the “nights [. . .] full of wind and destruction,” and supremely important as indicated by the second shocking feature of the bracketed passage: the fractured syntax in which her death is reported (*TTL* 105). As Stevenson writes, “cause and effect, logic and consequence are deranged in ways which suggest an almost incomprehensible aspect to the death itself” (Stevenson and Goldman 174). Death dislocates language, which stumbles from clause to clause, ignoring the logical connections implied by words like ‘but’ and ‘before’.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> James Phelan identifies “three simultaneous components” of character: the mimetic, the thematic, and the synthetic. In his terminology, in this section of the text the thematic, or character as representative of larger idea structures, and the synthetic, character as textual construct, have outweighed the mimetic, character as imagined individual (*Living* 214).

<sup>136</sup> A comparable incident is the death of Glencora Palliser in the first sentence of Trollope’s *The Duke’s Children*: “No one, probably, ever felt himself to be more alone in the world than our old friend, the Duke of Omnium, when the Duchess died” (Trollope, *Duke’s* 1). Here, too, syntax assists impact by deferral. Another instance of the bracketed death of a central character occurs in Hjalmar Bergmans’ *Markurells i Wadköping*, a 1919 Swedish novel translated as *God’s Orchid* in 1924: “(he died of blood poisoning in the autumn of 1916)” (174).

<sup>137</sup> While the 1927 American edition offers a different, more syntactically conventional version of this passage - “[Mr Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty]” - the 1930 Uniform Edition is closer to the British version, with commas added after ‘but’ and ‘before’ (*TTL* (1955) 145; Briggs, “Between” 153).

These passages both reduce the characters' lives to "parenthetical asides within time's endless monologue," and paradoxically increase their importance by separating them from the main narrative (Levenson, *Modernism* 171). Also, the bracketed events remain connected at a thematic level to the narration of the passing years. When "[Prue Ramsay, leaning on her father's arm, was given in marriage [. . .]" the main narrative describes the "spring without a leaf to toss, bare and bright like a virgin fierce in her chastity, scornful in her purity [. . .]" (*TTL* 108). This has a clear lexical connection to marriage; similarly, there is a relationship between the main narration of stormy winter nights and Mrs Ramsay's death. This sort of connection also applies to Prue and Andrew's deaths. Prue's death is preceded by "flights of small rain" as the spring "seemed to have taken upon her a knowledge of the sorrows of mankind," while Andrew's follows "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers" (*TTL* 108, 109).<sup>138</sup> Thus while superficially absent from this section, character remains linked to the main narrative.

Two other characters appear in "Time Passes", Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast, upon whom a great deal of critical energy has been expended. The main issue is whether "the narrative appropriates" their voices and produces "stereotyped" images of them (London 151; Briggs, *Inner* 177). The strong form of this argument reads these two characters as a failure of imagination: Woolf is "so distant from her working class characters that she describes them as half-witted troglodytes [. . .]" (Lee, Introduction xxv). At the least, "Woolf's attempt [. . .] to present the thoughts of the cleaning lady suggests [. . .] that Mrs Bast's consciousness is not as interesting as that of the more central characters [. . .]" (Flint, "Introduction" xviii). Others argue that the two are central to the novel's "notion of civilization" (Bradshaw, Introduction xxxvi).<sup>139</sup> Their "days of labour" save the house, "which would have plunged to the depths" without their care (*TTL* 115, 114). Another argument recognises that while the narrator may portray McNab "simplistically and condescendingly," she is also able to speak for herself and thus undercut the narrator's

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<sup>138</sup> The deaths of these two characters also relate to the novel's critique of Victorian and Edwardian social structures. Prue's death can be read as a result of her "too complete [. . .] obedience to her mother's wishes" in marrying and having children, while Andrew's death can be related satirically to Mr Ramsay's heroic aspirations (Viola 271).

<sup>139</sup> Bradshaw contrasts this to Clive Bell's *Civilization*, a book published in 1928 but written from the remnants of an abortive project entitled *The New Renaissance* which Bell had worked at intermittently since approximately 1909 (Bell 9-11). Bell argues that civilisation depends upon the work of the many to sustain the leisure and creativity of the few (Bell 140 - 180). Woolf, to whom *Civilization* was dedicated, would have been familiar with its arguments, and thus able to integrate a critique of them into *To the Lighthouse*.

authority (Snaith, *Virginia* 77 - 78).

Also of interest is the relationship between these traditionally 'minor' characters and the bracketed 'major' characters. While Mrs McNab is "directed" by the absent voices of the Ramsays, the textual energy with which she sweeps through the house is a forthright assertion of character starkly contrasted with the etiolation of the Ramsays (*TTL* 106). "Nothing it seemed could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence" except Mrs McNab (*TTL* 106). There is a conflict here between the narrative's longing for the silence of death and the recognition that only Mrs McNab can restore life; this perhaps explains the undoubted anger the narrative expresses towards her. She is disturbing what Woolf describes in "On Being Ill" as the "indifference" of nature, which is "divinely beautiful" and "divinely heartless" (*E* 4: 321 - 322). The situation in "Time Passes" is similar to that outlined in this essay: "If we were all laid prone, frozen, stiff, still the sky would be experimenting with its blues and golds" (*E* 4: 321). It is the necessary but intrusive interruption of this indifferent beauty that leads the narrator to characterise Mrs McNab as "witlessness, humour, persistency itself" (*TTL* 107).

Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast move with the passage of time, while the bracketed characters are atemporal and ghostly. Mrs McNab, a representative of the blank fact of "this world she had known for close on seventy years," introduces the text's exploration of memory and the presence and absence of characters (*TTL* 107). Mrs Ramsay exists in "Time Passes" largely in the memory of Mrs McNab, who "could see her with one of the children by her" (*TTL* 111). On the other hand, she has forgotten the Ramsay's cook, "Mildred? Marian? - some name like that" (*TTL* 112). Mrs McNab operates from a temporal present in relation to a vanishing or vanished past that must be actively recreated. Mrs Ramsay is remembered in a way that is reminiscent of both the projecting beam of a cinema and the questing ray of the lighthouse: "faint and flickering, like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of a telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall, up the dressing-table, across the washstand" (*TTL* 112). In "The Window", Mrs Ramsay is an object of contemplative gaze, the centre of a network of interlocking characterising glances, just as she is the focus of the text's exploration of essential character, the self turned inwards. These formulations of the self are in "The Window" intimately related, yet unable to encompass the complexity of the self. In "Time Passes", however, Mrs Ramsay becomes an active reconstruction of a vanished past, an embodiment of "the concept of memory as projection" (Marcus, *Virginia* 104). She becomes a simple sign of character rather than a complex internal and external subjectivity. The gaze,

“Time Passes” indicates, is as much a means of reconstructing absent character as it is of interpreting present subjectivity; the lighthouse beam, which illuminates the core of darkness in “The Window” can also project a vision of character into the empty spaces of “Time Passes”. This introduces a third category of character to *To the Lighthouse*, which might be referred to as projected character, character that is the product of projection from the viewer rather than the result of information gathered to the viewer.

“The Lighthouse” opens as Lily ponders the absence of Mrs Ramsay: “what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs Ramsay dead?” (*TTL* 121). “Time Passes” is, as Marcus points out, “a ‘passage’ in the novel through which the past travels to the present and the present to the past” (*Virginia* 94). The third section of the novel thus attempts to establish a link between past and present, a link that exists in textual form in “Time Passes” but is not recognised as such by the characters in “The Lighthouse”. Absence, because of this link, can be understood “as ‘invisible presence’” (Marcus, *Tenth* 115). The new type of character proposed in “Time Passes” is a potential solution to the problem of these invisible presences.

Lily’s second painting is almost identical to her first. The difference is absence, for “the step where” Mrs Ramsay “used to sit was empty” (*TTL* 124). Lily’s achievement is to momentarily triumph over absence by subduing “the impertinences and irrelevances [sic] that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people” (*TTL* 130). In order to bring Mrs Ramsay back, Lily must strip away the connections that define her as a particular stable and identifiable person. She must suppress her relational self by losing “consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality,” enabling her mind to throw “up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, while she modelled it with greens and blues” (*TTL* 132). This fountain is a textual reappearance of “the fountain and spray of life” Mrs Ramsay offers her husband in “The Window”: here it enables Lily to paint over the place of absence (*TTL* 32). On the other hand, Lily remembers a “scene on the beach” with Charles Tansley and Mrs Ramsay (*TTL* 132). Here, memory and creativity converge. Lily as an imagined individual can both remember scenes across the gap of ten years and paint successfully. As a character, a textual entity, she creates the scene on the beach: unlike the fountain, it does not appear in “The Window”. In addition to being “extremely self-conscious about its efforts to narrate the past,” *To the Lighthouse* is here conscious of its creation of a new past (Caughie, “Virginia” 311). As Marcus argues, this is an exception to the more frequent return of “Words and

images from the past (the first part of the novel)": it is "not a repetition, a scene 'remembered' by the narrative, and it is thus distinct from the images and memories which travel from 'The Window' to 'The Lighthouse'" (*Virginia* 110, 111). This textually new past, "which survived, after all these years complete," is "almost like a work of art" (*TTL* 133). Memory is for the imagined individual, as it is in *Mrs Dalloway*, retrieval from a storehouse, but here it is also a work of creativity, a making anew. The result is a past "temporally and spatially coterminous [. . .] with the present" (Marcus, *Virginia* 111). In part 5 of "The Lighthouse", for instance, "Mrs Ramsay sat silent" (*TTL* 141). Although this is part of Lily's memory of Mrs Ramsay and the scene on the beach, its grammatical status is identical to the surrounding passages describing Lily painting in the narrative present. Projection, or the creative recollection of vanished character, can overcome absence and align the past with the present.

Cam and James Ramsay also have a complicated relationship with absence. For them, temporal absence becomes physical as they sail from the island to the lighthouse: time is "converted into space" (Levenson, *Modernism* 209). Cam notes how the familiar island, "those paths and the lawn, thick and knotted with the lives they had lived there, were gone; were rubbed out; were past; were unreal" (*TTL* 137). Both the island and its inhabitants are erased by temporal interpretation of distance. James in turn searches "among the infinite series of impressions which time had laid down [. . .] incessantly upon his brain" for memories of his mother, but the transformation of impression into essence that occurred for Lily in "The Window" does not happen here (*TTL* 139). The projection of a creative reconstruction of the past in response to absence is not always successful.

Lily's creative projection or reconstruction extends to other characters. She thinks about the Rayleys, collecting "her impressions" until "their lives appeared to her in a series of scenes" (*TTL* 142). Like James, Lily's impressions do not cohere into an essence. While the results of this activity are effective in terms of characterisation, the text immediately undercuts her conclusions:

And this, Lily thought, taking the green paint on her brush, this making up scenes about them, is what we call 'knowing people, 'thinking' of them, 'being fond' of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same. She went on tunnelling her way into her picture, into the past. (*TTL* 142)

Knowing another self is an act of creativity analogous to painting, or remembering the past, or to the writing of fictional character. The first part of the novel establishes two categories of character, two articulations of the self, the relational and essential, and then looks at the ways

they overlap and intersect. The third part of the novel undermines this structure, for knowledge of other selves here depends neither on relational nor essential features, but is a projected act of creative characterisation. The text does not reject the relational or essential characters, or the possibility of ‘knowing’ another self. These observations are Lily’s, and are part of her characterisation rather than narrative dictate; also, they are part of a series of formulations and reformulations of character, not a replacement of all that has come before. Mrs Ramsay, for instance, eludes Lily’s attempts to characterise her, for she has “a faint touch of irony” that makes her “slip through one’s fingers” (*TTL* 144). Even the Rayleys can resist Lily’s creative characterisation: the “reddish light” that issues “from Paul Rayley,” his sexuality, cannot be safely handled like her vision of his “coffee-houses” and “chess” (*TTL* 144). Yet a new element has entered the text, one built around making character rather than revealing self.

The texts’ exploration of the self and its representation are continued in two scenes emphasising absence and presence. As she paints, Lily experiences “physical sensations” relating to the “extraordinarily empty” steps where Mrs Ramsay sat in “The Window” (*TTL* 146). This results in a fusion of alternate notions of identity:

To want and not to have [. . .]. how that wrung the heart [. . . ]! Oh Mrs Ramsay! she called out silently, to that essence which sat by the boat, that abstract one made of her, that woman in grey, [. . .]. It had seemed so safe, thinking of her. Ghost, air, nothingness, a thing you could play with easily and safely at any time of day or night, she had been that, and then suddenly she put her hand out and wrung the heart thus. Suddenly, the empty drawing-room steps, the frill of the chair inside, the puppy tumbling on the terrace, the whole wave and whisper of the garden became like curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness. (*TTL* 146)

This passage initially focusses on absence in relation to characterisation. Mrs Ramsay is at once an essence, a formulation that relates to the notions of essential character explored in “The Window”, and an abstraction, a product of creativity. However, the essential Mrs Ramsay here refers to the scene on the beach which Lily has creatively remembered, “almost like a work of art,” rather than to anything that appears in “The Window” (*TTL* 133). This is a memory for Lily as imagined individual, but a creation for Lily as character in a novel. Mrs Ramsay is a woman in grey, just as she was for Mrs McNab in “Time Passes”, and as such a projection of creative memory. Whatever this character is, however composed, created, and made-up, her absence is every bit as powerful as her presence: she remains in the novel, the vacancy around which the textual world is structured. This is, as Bradshaw and Beer have pointed out, a shared compositional principle for several of Woolf’s novels (Introduction

xxvi; “Hume” 29). In *To the Lighthouse*, this organising gap is a compositional element of both the painting Lily is working on and of the novel, which can be read as arabesques surrounding an absence.

“What does it mean?” Lily asks, repeating the question that opens “The Lighthouse” (*TTL* 147). There is no answer, and this seems to Lily to be an injustice. If, she thinks, she and Mr Carmichael “got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation [. . .] beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into space; if they shouted loud enough Mrs Ramsay would return” (*TTL* 148). While this is within the narrative frame an almost religious plea, a demand that an indifferent universe recognise the significance of the individual, it is also an attempt by a character within the text to break the frame of the narrative and question the author of the novel. In another passage, however, Lily interferes in the “cosmogony” of a colony of ants, reducing them “to a frenzy of indecision” in the same way that within the cosmogony of the text she is reduced to a frenzy over the status of the individual (*TTL* 161). Lily resents the meddling of an invisible god, but at the same time acts the invisible god to the ants. These two scenes equate the primary loss around which the text is structured, the pain of Mrs Ramsay’s death, with the confusion and distress of a colony of ants. Similarly, while part five of “The Lighthouse” stresses the absence of a beloved figure and imbues character, or human identity, with meaning, part six is a shocking reminder of the obverse. The section consists of a single brief bracketed passage, a typographical reference to the bracketed lives of the Ramsays in “Time Passes”. Here, however, it is a fish that finds its life compressed and disfigured by its position within the text: “[Macalister’s boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.]” (*TTL* 148). This passage, or “interruption,” counterbalances what Pamela L. Caughie reads as “the tendency to sentimentality and subjectivism the narrative at times evokes,” the narrative’s focus on the importance of the present or absent human subject (“Virginia” 315). By sharing a textual frame with the death of Mrs Ramsay, this mutilated fish is the text’s reminder that life and identity are objectively trivial.

At this point, *To the Lighthouse*’s vision of self has become extremely tense. A scene in which Lily considers Mr Carmichael offers characterisation as a potential solution. Lily sits “looking at Mr Carmichael” and “thinking how many shapes one person might wear,” a reference to the inquiring gaze of relational characterisation (*TTL* 158, 159). She begins to speculate about his interiority or essence based on the information she acquires through gaze,

waiting for impression to cohere into essence. However, this process is short-circuited as she realises that “this was one way of knowing people [. . .] to know the outline, not the detail” (*TTL* 159). Neither the complexity of interchanged perspective required to establish relational character, nor the detailed sympathetic identification of intimate characterisation is required. While Carmichael may have an essential self, it is not necessary for Lily to know it. Nor does he require the incessant study of relational characterisation. He is neither an overpowering absence, nor a marker of human futility. Instead, it is possible “to sit in one’s garden and look at the slopes of a hill running purple down into the distant heather,” to “know him in that way” (*TTL* 159).<sup>140</sup> This acceptance of a minimally detailed, distanced and aestheticized characterisation as a means of ‘knowing’ other selves relates to Woolf’s desire to have “all characters boiled down” in the novel (*WD* 84). For Woolf, this reduction is a characteristically fictional enterprise, the pursuit of character condensed to a minimum.

This version of characterisation as a solution to the problem of other people does not reject the notions of relation and essence established earlier in the text. Attempts to know other people are often, Lily reflects, failures, because “half one’s notions of other people were, after all, grotesque,” serving “private purposes” (*TTL* 161). To properly understand Charles Tansley, she must see him from Mrs Ramsay’s perspective (*TTL* 161). Similarly, Mrs Ramsay herself remains an interpretative conundrum: “One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with [. . .]. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get around that one woman with” (*TTL* 161). More than this, “one wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone [. . .]” (*TTL* 161). These two desires relate to the two forms of characterisation that were under question in “The Window”, the multiple gazes of relational characterisation and the intangibility of essential character. The reference to Mrs Ramsay sitting in the window works in two ways - it is both Lily’s memory of her from ten years ago, and it is an explicit reference to the first part of the novel, “The Window”. This seems to authorise a turn away from the mimetic or representational level of the text, its status as an imagined world or “cosmogony,” towards a sense of the text as a constructed and ordered literary artefact (*TTL* 161). This in turn gestures outwards to the autobiographical dimensions of the text; there is a sense in which Woolf as author seems to be expressing a powerful desire to know her vanished mother across the gap of years, both from the multiple perspectives or relation

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<sup>140</sup> This somewhat peculiar metaphor for a mode of access to other people is linked to Mrs Ramsay’s stocking, which is “heather mixture,” and to Lily’s representation of her as a “purple shape” (*TTL* 25, 45).

and through the powerful identification of essence.

Within the world of *To the Lighthouse*, the reward for this complexity of understanding is the appearance of the vanished past in the present. After Lily has considered both of the Ramsays and their relationship, remembering scenes from the past, and while she insists “she was not inventing,” making others up, Mrs Ramsay reappears (*TTL* 162). This takes place in two stages. First, Lily is sharply aware, for the second time in “The Lighthouse”, of her absence as a physical pain. Lily, “feeling the old horror come back” is shocked that Mrs Ramsay “could [. . .] inflict that still” (*TTL* 165). However, this scene does not develop, as the scene discussed above does, around an organising absence; rather, absence is reconciled with presence:

And then, quietly, as if she refrained, that too became part of ordinary experience, was on a level with the chair, with the table. Mrs Ramsay - it was part of her perfect goodness to Lily - sat there quite simply, in the chair, flicked her needles to and fro, knitted her reddish-brown stocking, cast her shadow on the step. There she sat. (*TTL* 165)

This is a textually literal reappearance of Mrs Ramsay in the narrative present, no longer a memory of a character, but the character herself. And it is a character that is presented in terms notably different to those which have preceded it. This Mrs Ramsay bears the markers of representational character, her knitting needles. She also casts a shadow on the step, a shadow related to the “triangular shadow over the step” which allows her to begin painting, the “triangular purple shape” or “purple shadow” which represents Mrs Ramsay and James in “The Window” and, as Bradshaw has pointed out, to her “wedge-shaped core of darkness” and “the essence of Mrs Ramsay” (*TTL* 164, 45, 52; Introduction xlii). This is a site of reconciliation of opposing visions of self; it is a matter-of-fact character, an irreducible whole which simply exists: “There she sat” (*TTL* 165). Fifty pairs of eyes are not needed to see this Mrs Ramsay, who sits “quite simply” (*TTL* 165). This is closer to Lily’s vision of Mr Carmichael as an outline, a character who, despite “the number of shapes one person might wear,” can be perceived as “the same as he had always been” (*TTL* 159). Both Cam and James have similar moments in “The Lighthouse”, in which the complexity and variability of visions of the past are replaced by a simplicity coterminous with the narrative present. Cam, looking back to the island, realises “it was like that, then,” surprised at its prosaic tangibility (*TTL* 154). “It lay like that on the sea, did it, with a dent in the middle and two sharp crags [. . .]. It was very small [. . .]” (*TTL* 154). This is no longer the setting for a reconstruction of a vanished romantic past, but a prosaic element in contemporary narrative. Similarly, James’

vision of the lighthouse balances between a past lighthouse, “a silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening” and a present tower as angular, prosaic and uncompromising as Cam’s island, “stark and straight [. . .] barred with black and white” (*TTL* 152). While James does not accept the new lighthouse as the true one, “for nothing was simply one thing,” the presence of this alternative is revealing in the ways it ties into the text’s wider exploration of issues of character (*TTL* 152). The returned Mrs Ramsay is a site of reconciliation between absent and present character, essential and relational character, a reconciliation that short circuits the complexities of vision proposed by the text into a sort of transcendental simplicity of vision.<sup>141</sup>

“The Window” offers an exploration of the linkage between two articulations of subjectivity, two aspects of identity, the relational and the essential. This vision is modified in “Time Passes” by the introduction of the concept of character re-created from memory and projected outwards from the characteriser. The conclusion of “The Lighthouse” offers a form of reconciliation between the past and the present, an easing of the strain between the living and the dead, between present and absent characters through an acceptance of character revealed in outline, through simplicity rather than complexity. Mrs Ramsay sitting on her steps is an example of this achieved quiddity. Mr Ramsay, “springing lightly like a young man” onto the lighthouse rock is another embodiment of this reconciliation of character (*TTL* 169). Throughout the section, his narrative present, a bereaved old man in a boat, his narrative past, an emotionally necessitous and grasping Victorian patriarch, and his pre-narrative composed past as a participant in an “old-fashioned scene” of courtship have been running in parallel (*TTL* 162).<sup>142</sup> In the youthful leap “into space” he seems to transcend these temporal categories. Similarly, Lily’s final “vision” which leads her to finish her painting with a “line there, in the centre” seems to gesture towards a type of achieved balance between the demands of complexity and simplicity, past and present, memory and

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<sup>141</sup> For Beer, the ending of the novel indicates a rejection of the symbolic freighting of people and objects, which is a form of “self-gratulation” (“Hume” 43). The last pages of the novel “pare away symbol,” thus “freeing characters and text from the appetite for symbol” (44, 46). Beer reads this as an attempt to move “language and persons beyond subjection to Patriarchy” (46).

<sup>142</sup> A description of Mr Ramsay transformed in the third section of the novel “from the tyrannical husband to the sympathetic father” seems to ignore the multiple roles that he inhabits in “The Lighthouse” (Hyman 103).

projection, absence and presence, relation and essence (*TTL* 170).<sup>143</sup>

This chapter began by looking at the relationship between biographical character and fictional character, and will conclude by looking at Woolf's 1933 *Flush: A Biography*. Like *Orlando*, this is a book that challenges generic categorisation. It is explicitly a biography, but the biography of a dog, and hence lacking in the most important feature of its purported genre, fact: "It must be admitted that there are very few authorities for the forgoing biography" (*F* 103). This lack of information drives the narrative into a speculative recreation of character based around sympathetic identification, and explicitly raises questions about the way the self can be defined. When Flush sees his reflection in a mirror, his confusion leads to narrative speculation about the status of the self:

Was not the little brown dog opposite himself? But what is 'oneself'? Is it the thing people see? Or is it the thing one is? So Flush pondered that question too, and, unable to solve the problem of reality, pressed closer to Miss Barrett and kissed her 'expressively'. *That* was real at any rate. (*F* 32)

Some of the key issues surrounding character and self in both *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse* are involved in this passage. The fundamental question concerns the nature of the self and its representation. Is the reflection, or representation, the same as the self? Is it relational, structured by the encounter with other people, or essential, the thing in itself? Is it best approached with the external tools of biography, or does it demand the sort of imaginative recreation which lies within the domain of fiction? Can the question be answered, or is the best approach to cut short this sort of ontological speculation and focus instead on relation with other people? *Flush's* answer to these questions lies both in the relationship it charts between Flush and Mrs Barrett, and in the relationship the biographer-narrator establishes with Flush. First, the type of sympathetic identification Lily attempts to use to approach Mrs Ramsay is here used to cross an even wider gap, that between species, and is successful insofar as Flush comes to identify completely with his master: "Every start she gave, every movement she made, passed though him too" (*F* 66). On the other hand, this identification is

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<sup>143</sup> Other readings of this scene argue that it represents precisely the impossibility of reconciling visions of past and present. Clewell argues that this "division highlights Lily's awareness that past and present cannot be seamlessly joined together. Put differently, the painting's central line distinguishes a time characterised by Mrs. Ramsay's presence and another by her absence, inviting us to read Lily's final gesture as a sign of the impossibility of fully assimilating the past in the name of a redeemed present" (218). My position is closer to that Sue Roe takes up when she argues that "one reason for Lily's difficulty in depicting Mrs Ramsay is that she cannot admit the past into the present: when she eventually finishes the painting, it is because she can finally juxtapose Mrs Ramsay seen with Mrs Ramsay remembered" (183).

not reciprocal, and it is cut off by Flush's death and his failure to haunt: "The drawing-room table, strangely enough, stood perfectly still" (*F* 102). Flush is no Mrs Ramsay. The second point concerns the biographer-narrator's approach to her unusual subject.

Difficulties abound in the narration of a dog's life, from the sparsity of sources mentioned above, to the inability of language to grapple with Flush's "world of smell" (*F* 83). Indeed, to write the life of a dog is to instantly distort experience, for none of Flush's "myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words" (*F* 85). These difficulties are in effect extreme examples of what any biographer of any subject will encounter - however full the sources, they remain external, and however precise the language, it remains an approximation of experience rather than experience itself. Yet the biography of Flush succeeds through the narrator's attempts to transcend the limits of biography, to fictionalise her subject through sympathetic identification and imaginative recreation. As Flush can transcend the gap between species and identify with Mrs Barrett, so too can the biographer transcend this most difficult gap and create Flush. This is the process of characterisation that restores Mrs Ramsay to Lily. *Flush* rejects spirituality, table-rocking, crystal-gazing and the quest for the dead, as *To the Lighthouse* rejects both excessive detail and essence in character for a simple recognition of personal quiddity.

## Chapter 7

The *Times* review of *The Waves* identified its characters as recognisable individuals, each with an “idiosyncrasy of nature” surprising in a work so “singularly unconventional” (Majumdar 265, 263). Moreover, the novel reveals both the “silence” underlying “speech” and “the flickering of that inmost flame of personality - call it spirit or ego” often absent even from “novels of character” (Majumdar 265). Woolf, however, rejected this: “[. . .] *The Waves* is not what they say. Odd, that they [. . .] should praise my characters when I meant to have none” (WD 171). Woolf here rejects praise for achieving her long-standing goal, the capture of the “vivid [. . .] overmastering impression,” the “smell of burning” which is the essence of character (*E* 3: 431). This rejection has resonated in the novel’s reception. Cixous, for instance, asks how it is possible “to study ‘character’” in *The Waves*, given the text’s “vacillation” between “‘nobody’ and all the possible individualities” (388 - 389). Elicia Clements also puts “‘characters’ in quotation marks because Woolf reformulates how subjectivity can be represented in the novel,” while J. W. Graham writes that “such critical terms as [. . .] ‘character,’ [. . .] are the wrong instruments for exploring” the novel (176; 95).

Woolf’s claim must be set in context; her response to the *Times* review is part of a longer diary entry. Pleased by a telephone call of praise from Harold Nicolson, she smokes a triumphant cigarette before “a return to sober composition,” and her rejection of character (WD 171). These comments are thus explicitly self-critical; Woolf’s celebration happens off-page, her critique on. In the same diary entry, Woolf rejects Nicolson’s published review: “*The Waves* is not what they say,” includes both the anonymous *Times* reviewer and Nicolson (WD 171). Nicolson, in contrast to the *Times* reviewer, argues that “Mrs Woolf has not attempted to [. . .] isolate human characters” (Majumdar 266). Instead, she aims to “convey the half-lights of human experience and the fluid edges of personal identity. Her six characters fuse towards the end [. . .]” (Majumdar 266). If both reviewers are wrong, the novel’s characterisation becomes particularly troublesome. A brief look at the genesis of the novel may help clarify this issue.

*The Waves* developed gradually from a vision of “a fin passing far out” in 1926, through an idea for a “play-poem,” *The Moths*, in 1927, into the “series of dramatic soliloquies” that closely resembles its final form (WD 104, 110, 157). While it has been suggested that information about “Woolf’s objectives [. . .] is notoriously scant,” her diaries and two separate holograph drafts indicate that clues are not so much scant as contradictory

(Clements 163). Woolf herself had difficulty expressing her “reach after that vision”: the novel itself, with all its formal and thematic challenges, is Woolf’s attempt to articulate meaning, and her own attempts to summarise or encapsulate it cannot be taken as infallible interpretative guides (WD 156). Still, there are indications that at points during the composition of *The Waves* character was integral to her vision. In an early reference to *The Moths*, Woolf writes that “all sorts of characters are to be there” (WD 143). “Then the person,” Woolf goes on, “who is at the table can call out any one of them at any moment; and build up by that person the mood [. . .]” (WD 143). Character is organised around a central narrating consciousness, and constitutes the emotional quality of the work. Later, while writing the first version of *The Waves*, Woolf writes “I must canter my wits if I can. Perhaps some character sketches” (WD 154). Finally, approaching the end of her first draft, Woolf’s sense of achievement is articulated in terms of character: “What I now think (about *The Waves*) is that I can give in a very few strokes the essentials of a person’s character. It should be done boldly, almost as caricature” (WD 154). These character-caricatures are the strength of Woolf’s novel-in-progress. She sums up this sense of accomplishment with an image that also appears in the novel: “But I think it possible that I have got my statues against the sky” (WD 155).

Character was, then, an element in Woolf’s conception of *The Waves*. A letter written to John Lehmann on 17 September 1931 - two weeks before she read and rejected Nicholson’s and the *Times*’ reviews - indicates some of the complications. She intended to “keep the elements of character; and yet that there should be many characters, and only one; and also an infinity, a background behind - well, I admit I was biting off too much” (L 4: 381). While Woolf’s comments do not necessarily clarify what character is in *The Waves*, they do indicate that the novel does not simply reject it.

Part of this complexity concerns genre. In her 1927 essay “The Narrow Bridge of Art”, Woolf argues that the “variety of the novel which will be written in time to come will take on some of the attributes of poetry” (19). Her vision of the novel of the future anticipates *The Waves*:

It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. [. . .]. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. [. . .] It will give, as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail. [. . .]. It will tell us very little about the houses, incomes, occupations of its character [. . .]. With these limitations it will express the feeling and the ideas of the characters closely and vividly [. . .]. It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people’s relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general

ideas and its soliloquy in solitude. (18 - 19)

There is a great deal of overlap between Woolf's descriptions of *The Waves* and this speculative description of the future novel: it is dramatic, yet poetic insofar as it is general rather than specific, particularly in terms of character, an "abstract mystical eyeless book: a playpoem"; it will omit, "for why admit anything to literature that is not poetry?"; and lastly, it will be impersonal - "I wanted to eliminate [. . .] my self" (WD 136, 138; L 4: 381). As Woolf wrote in 1927, her new book could be "prose yet poetry; a novel and a play" (WD 107). As always, Woolf's literary criticism reflects on her fictional practice.

In a 1926 essay on De Quincey, "Impassioned Prose", Woolf compared prose's mastery of "facts" with its inability to grapple with "that side of the mind which is exposed in solitude," in other words "its thoughts, its rhapsodies, its dreams," a contrast similar to her distinction between biographical and fictional character (33, 34). This stance devalues the quotidian realities beloved of the "sociological novel or the novel of the environment" (Woolf, "Narrow" 18). The idea appears again in her 1929 "Phases of Fiction", "that long impending book on fiction," which she was writing as her ideas for *The Waves* developed: "truth-telling is liable to degenerate into perfunctory fact-recording [. . .]" (WD 110; "Phases" 103). Woolf contrasts the poetic novel, "impersonal, generalized, hostile to the idiosyncrasy of character" with the individually specific sociological novel ("Phases" 137). The notion of impersonality is also present in her 1929 "Women and Fiction": women novelists should embrace "the poetic spirit" to shift their focus from "personal and political relationships" to the "wider questions" of poetry, "our destiny and the meaning of life" (83). In this period, then, Woolf's non-fictional writings contrast the individualising specificity of fact-based fiction and the generalising capacity of prose poetry, the individuality of traditional prose and the impersonality of prose poetry, and both in ways that are directly related to character, for "one element," she argues, "remains constant in all novels, and that is the human element" ("Phases" 141).

Clearly, something odd is happening to characters in *The Waves*, a work "unusual by any generic standards" (Jackson, "Writing" 124). The text is divided into three parts: ten "interludes," seven sections of "dramatic soliloquies," and "Bernard's final speech" (WD 159, 157, 159). The relationship between these three elements is complex, and an understanding of character in the novel depends on them individually and on their interaction.

The dramatic soliloquies are the largest part of the text. They follow the main

characters from childhood to adulthood, thus fulfilling one of the traditional roles of narrative and situating *The Waves* as a sort of *bildungsroman* (Marcus, *Virginia* 117). Similarly, Rosemary Summer views the soliloquies as the conventional element of the text which situates the characters as “social beings” (13). Conventional is, however, a relative term:

‘I see a ring,’ said Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.’

‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.’

‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and down.’

‘I see a globe,’ said Neville, ‘hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.’

‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads.’

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps.’ (W 2)

While the conventional notational system of the novel - both the “monosyllabic convenience” of ‘said’ and the indentation of the line for a new speaker - indicates that the characters speak aloud, this is hardly credible as dialogue (Summer 13). Naremore attributes this implausibility to word choice, rhythm and the liturgical nature of the speech (154). Not only are the speech tags inflectionless - as Beer has pointed out they bear none of the usual indicators of emotional modification - but the level of discourse does not correspond to the characters’ age: “even the most precocious children would never talk like this” (“Roughness” 22; Graham 95). Another peculiarity of this ‘speech’ is that it is in the present simple tense rather than in the past simple, a standard narrative tense, or the present continuous, often used for reporting events as they happen. Beer has pointed out that the present simple generally indicates “habitual and repeated acts” and does not place “the event in a single moment of time” (*Waves* 82).<sup>144</sup> Thus the present simple does not, as Dick argues, focus “our attention, like that of the speakers, on the present moment,” for the present simple is the tense of no-time and repetition (“Remembered” 38). However, while the speech tags indicate timelessness, and “the characters inhabit a world devoid of close historical markers” their no-time is still a “recognisable present day” (Beer, “Body” 56). These are characters in a timeless now that gestures towards an always.

The text offers, then, three male and three female voices speaking out of a timeless

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<sup>144</sup> Beer argues that this emphasis on the habitual, “repetition and recurrence,” is linked to “the wave-motion of the universe” as described in James Jeans’ *The Universe Around Us*, a book which Woolf read during the composition of *The Waves* (“Gillian” xvii).

present, in language that is formally identified as speech but possesses few of the linguistic features of spoken language. Nor, as Snaith argues, is this a highly-structured direct interior monologue - note the presence of speech tags - or the “the unconscious ramblings of inner thought” (*Virginia* 83). It is extremely difficult to say with certainty what these voices are. Woolf’s term, ‘soliloquy’, is helpful, but without a structuring dramatic context a soliloquy does little beyond indicating the presence of a listener, an audience, or a reader. These are, then, in some sense “descriptive stories presented to a listener,” but they are located at a distance both spatially, emotionally, and temporally (Snaith, *Virginia* 83). All of this works to create a strong sense of impersonality and abstraction, creating a mode of discourse arguably suited to the exploration of “our destiny and the meaning of life” (Woolf, “Women” 83).

Many readers feel that the six soliloquists are inseparable. In an essay on Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, Woolf writes of the dangers of the “the novel-poem” which generically precludes “the slighter, the subtler, the more hidden shades of emotion by which a novelist builds up [. . .] a character in prose” (208, 211). This diminishes character, as “change and development, the effect of one character upon another [. . .] is abandoned. The poem becomes one long soliloquy, and the only character that is known to us [. . .] is [. . .] Aurora Leigh herself” (211 - 212). Similar observations have been made of *The Waves* based on what one critic has described as “the dour uniformity” of the text (Minow-Pinkney 175) Snaith argues, for example, that “the similarity of each character’s tone suggests that, in part, they are one person: the many selves of which Bernard speaks,” while Goldman believes that “to talk of separate people in *The Waves* is perhaps [. . .] to miss the point” (*Virginia* 83; Introduction 71). The six main characters in the novel are, when viewed from this perspective, manifestations of a single self represented by the text as a whole.

However, it is also possible to read the six characters as just that - six imagined individuals, who, while connected in fascinating and subtle ways, are separate. At a basic level, each voice is associated with separate personality traits and patterns of behaviour: Jinny is an urban socialite, while Susan is a rural maternal figure. Many critics have attempted to summarise the traits associated with each character, attempts themselves indicative of the presence of individual character in the novel; if the six characters were simply facets of Bernard’s personality, or of the text’s, what Naremore describes as “one observant spirit,” it would not be necessary or possible to differentiate between them

(175).<sup>145</sup> The urge to separate and label characters also speaks to a need to identify with discrete representations of individuals, and to move, comfortably or not, from textual character to imagined human being. A reconciliation of these opposed readings would view the characters as separate fictional individuals, while remaining alert to the text's simultaneous challenge to the notion of individuality on both linguistic and thematic levels.<sup>146</sup>

The six voices do not respond to each other conventionally: instead of dialogue there are parallel monologues. Moreover, the six characters share neither a sense nor object of perception (Phelan, *Narrative* 36). They do, however, share a mode of perception, viewing the world surrounding them without the benefit of habitual categorisation. The sound Rhoda hears is no doubt bird-song, but she identifies it only as a sound without categorising it by type; similarly, Susan's pale slab of yellow and purple stripe may be sunlight and shadow in a bedroom, or perhaps a view of sunrise, but it is perceived and reported in terms of strict sensory perception.<sup>147</sup> This form of unprocessed perception corresponds with theories developed in the early twentieth century. José Ortega y Gasset writes in his extremely influential 1930 *The Revolt of the Masses* of the human tendency to apply "an outline, a concept or framework of concepts" to reality in order to "obtain an approximate vision of it" (100).<sup>148</sup> This idea was developed by Viktor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay "Art as Technique". Shklovsky argues that perception, as a "general law" becomes "habitual" and "automatic" over time (279). This leads to a form of perception he describes as "algebraic", which allows us to recognise objects "by their main characteristics" rather than "in their entirety"; this is akin to seeing "the object as though it were enveloped in a sack" (279). For Shklovsky, the role of art is to recover the world - "works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war" - from the devouring force of habitual vision: "[. . .] art exists that one may

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<sup>145</sup> One of the most effective of these summaries is one of the earliest. See Winifred Holtby's *Virginia Woolf*, pages 187 - 189 for her re-presentation or extraction of the six characters.

<sup>146</sup> Another way of framing this is to read the characters as "at once individual, representative, and a unity" (Gorsky 221).

<sup>147</sup> Jinny's sight of a red tassel does not share in this mode of perception. While she does not associate the tassel with a larger structure, perhaps part of a bed canopy, neither does she see it as a purely visual phenomenon.

<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, Ortega y Gasset applies this principle directly to the perception of other people: "When we see our friend coming up the garden path, and we say: 'Here's Peter,' we are committing, deliberately, ironically, an error. For Peter implies for us a complex of way [sic] of behaviour, physical and moral - what we call 'character' - and the plain truth is that, at times, our friend Peter is not in the least like the concept 'our friend Peter'" (100).

recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (279). The six characters of *The Waves* see the world in just this way, with eyes free of the habitual and categorical. While this initial form of unfiltered perception passes as the characters mature, the pattern of parallel but separate voicing continues more or less consistently throughout the soliloquies. Despite this, the voices are not monadic, but interact socially, linguistically, and thematically.

The social interaction of the six characters does not occur conventionally; they do not participate in narrated action, nor do they respond directly to each other. They do, however, think and speak about each other. This ranges from individual perceptions or characterisations of the other characters, as when Susan says that “Louis is alert and not a wool-gatherer,” to more expansive formulations of group identity, as in Bernard’s observation that “we have come together (from the North, from the South, from Susan’s farm, from Louis’ house of business) to make one thing [. . .]” (W 13, 82). Thus while the soliloquies are separate, they are often about the other soliloquists. The six voices define and refine their perceptions of each other in a constant process from childhood to adulthood in a way similar to Woolf’s earlier novels. Character is made by character.

This is also a process of group definition, the story not only of six individual characters, but of a group of friends and their collective life, as Bernard describes it “the groups we [. . .] made, how they came together, how they ate together, how they met in this room or that” (W 191). The dense interweaving of the individual voices reflects the dense interweaving of group life. This is comparable to the activities of the Memoir Club, which met from 1920 to produce and perform a collective autobiography of the Bloomsbury group. As Brosnan writes, Woolf’s contributions to the club generally “describe a past shared with other members” rather than focussing on individual memories, a description of a “common past” which is “representable from a variety of different angles” (153, 154). Woolf writes in “Old Bloomsbury” that she sees “Bloomsbury only from my own angle - not from yours,” but she always remains alert to the existence of other perspectives (181). Thus the social interaction of the six characters functions both to characterise them individually, and to represent them as part of a close-knit social collective, a group of friends.<sup>149</sup>

The next area of intersection is linguistic. Each of the six voices has a repertoire of phrases. This is one of the ways that the text asserts identity; as Beer argues “repetition

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<sup>149</sup> This representation of a group of friends also has biographical overtones, as characters in the novel can be linked with real people: Susan with Vanessa Bell, for instance, or Louis with T. S. Eliot.

delineates personality” (“Body” 70). The first soliloquies introduce motifs which “foreshadow the characters” (Freedman 248). Jinny’s description of a tassel, for instance, relates to her later interest in clothing. In a prominent instance of this repetition, Louis says he hears “something stamping” in his first line in the novel, a phrase modified and repeated a few lines later when he identifies the sound as “the great brute on the beach” stamping (W 2). At a school leaving ceremony, the noise has become more specific: “I hear always the sullen thud of the waves; and the chained beast stamps on the beach. It stamps and stamps” (W 36). On the train leaving school he hears the noise again: “the chained beast stamps and stamps on the shore” (W 42).<sup>150</sup> He remembers this noise years later, at the farewell dinner for Percival: “the chained beast stamping” (W 83). This is the last time that Louis refers to the stamping of the great beast, a phrase closely associated with his character, working both to delineate it - he is fearful and lives with a perpetual sense of danger - and identify it: Louis is the character who hears stamping. The other characters have phrases that work in the same way, although not all of them draw attention to themselves so insistently. Thus the phrases individuate character: while Louis hears beasts stamping, Jinny hears birds singing.

These phrases, do not, however, remain static. Bernard, for instance, describes children preparing for bed using Louis’ word: “‘We troop upstairs like ponies,’ said Bernard, ‘stamping [. . .]’” (W 15). Rhoda, too, uses Louis’ word: “The train now stamps heavily” (W 41). These are examples of the sharing of phrases that occurs throughout the book. The phrases passed among the six voices are not identical, changing with voice and situation, but enough similarity exists to bind the separate characters together.<sup>151</sup> Words in *The Waves* are contagious. Sometimes, one voice catches an identical or nearly identical phrase from another voice. More frequently, one voice adopts a portion of a phrase and integrates it into their own discourse. Both processes textually bind the seemingly separate characters together.

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<sup>150</sup> Initially, Louis’ childhood sound is relatively pure, described by metaphor but not associated with any physical source. Then it becomes linked with the sound of waves breaking, an association which runs through the text and links into the broader patterns of *The Waves*. In this case, however, it seems likely that the actual physical sound is from the train, yet Louis sorts it into its habitual category.

<sup>151</sup> The presence of this linguistic community among the six voices in *The Waves* has been widely recognised, and described in a variety of ways. Gabrielle McIntire sees it as a Bakhtinian “‘family jargon’,” which leads to “their phrases” bleeding “into one another by being reiterated and recirculated among their community for a lifetime” (32). Beer describes the voices as “dipping into each other’s lore, assembling symbols from a common wealth” (“Body” 67). Minow-Pinkney argues that this erodes “the conventional concept of character” as “the same rhythm and images traverse all six figures and blur the boundaries of self [. . .]” (175). Perhaps the most ambitious formulation refers to this as “cosmic communication” or “the internalization of another’s unexpressed thoughts and experiences” (Gorsky 221).

While the majority of the soliloquies thus operate within a formal pattern of separate yet linguistically interlinked responses, sometimes, as Naremore has pointed out, “one character seems to be finishing another’s sentence” (169). Also, as Snaith argues, “the characters do appear to hear each other” on some occasions (*Virginia* 83). These more overt linkages between the voices are related and tend to occur at the same points. This does not happen arbitrarily, but in response to the development of broader thematic issues within the novel. A discussion of this more explicit linkage must account both for formal features and its role within the meaning-structure of the novel as a whole.

The soliloquies are punctuated by two meals at which the six characters meet, a farewell party for Percival, and a middle-aged reunion at Hampton Court. At the farewell party, the six voices overhear and respond to each other in a shift towards dialogue. With the arrival of Percival, the voices begin to align themselves into an even more intimate relationship. As Bernard says, “we who have been separated by our youth [. . .] who have sung like eager birds each his own song [. . .] now come nearer” (*W* 80). Formally, this proximity is established as the voices respond directly to each other. They first rehearse their shared growth from childhood to youth, a process Louis associates with individuation:

‘We changed, we became unrecognisable,’ said Louis. ‘Exposed to all these different lights, what we had in us (for we are all so different) came intermittently, in violent patches, spaced by blank voids, to the surface as if some acid had dropped unequally on the plate. I was this, Neville that, Rhoda different again, and Bernard too.’ (*W* 81 - 82)

This theme of progressive individuation runs through the text, both in the interludes and in Bernard’s final speech. The process is essentially one of differential character formation. The presence of the silent Percival has created a type of interaction as the separate voices respond to a single stimulus, but they remain separate. “‘We differ, it may be too profoundly,’ said Louis, ‘for explanation. But let us attempt it’” (*W* 83). This recognition of difference is followed by lengthy parallel expositions from each of the six voices attempting to define themselves both autonomously and in relation to the other characters. To this point, the characters have heard each other, and focussed their individual discourse around similar external stimuli, but have remained discrete. Following these individual summations, however, a change occurs.

Bernard finishes his self-defining soliloquy by describing himself as “a voice that once wretched the fruit into phrases” (*W* 88). Then Rhoda responds directly rather than in parallel to Bernard’s soliloquy, describing the “bloom and ripeness” that “lie everywhere” (*W*

88). Jinny then replies even more directly to Rhoda: ““yes [. . .] our senses have widened [. . .] making the air tangible and catching in them far-away sounds unheard before”” (W 88). Louis in turn then remarks on the “roar of London,” the sound that Jinny has heard (W 88). This sequence continues through all of the six voices. Linguistic intermingling becomes dialogue.<sup>152</sup> This condition is, however, temporary, “before the chain breaks, before disorder returns” (W 93).

The six soliloquies thus fluctuate between isolation and interchange. They provide both what Woolf described as “the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquy in solitude” and a sense of how these separate minds can interact (“Narrow” 19). The next stage of this exploration is to place the soliloquies in the context of both the interludes and Bernard’s final speech, with a particular focus on their interaction in shaping character. The interludes present a particularly interesting problem, as they embody the text’s preoccupation with the impersonal.

The ten interludes follow the course of what some critics read as a single day (McIntire 33). This day also traces the progress of the seasons: by the eighth interlude “the tree, that had burnt foxy red in spring and in midsummer bent pliant leaves to the south wind, was now black as iron, and as bare” (Phelan, *Narrative* 40; W 138). The time-frame of the interludes is neither a single day nor a single year: it is both and more. The interludes trace a cyclical arc from nothingness into being into nothingness. Both the course of a day and the course of a year allow the interludes symbolic access to, or resonance with, this conceptual progression. These temporal matrices map onto the progress of the characters’ lives as revealed through their soliloquies; they are born, age and die - or will die. In this sense, the interludes establish the characters as individuals living specific lives and as abstractions representing generic human experience.

The interludes and the soliloquies also relate linguistically. Flint has argued that the interludes “offer fragments which catch up images that occur in the speeches of all the characters” (Introduction xiii). In the seventh interlude, for instance, an image central to Woolf’s conception of the novel appears: “*Through all the flowers the same wave of light passed in a sudden flaunt and flash as if a fin cut the green glass of a lake*” (W 120)<sup>153</sup>. The

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<sup>152</sup> This sort of direct exchange is even more obvious in the private conversations between Louis and Rhoda, whose position as outsiders seems to offer them the possibility of even more direct communication.

<sup>153</sup> On 7 February 1931, after finishing the last passages of the novel in a state of “intensity and intoxication,” she noted that she had “netted that fin in the waste of water” (WD 165).

fin reappears five times in the text, always in association with Bernard. The image is, however, transformed: “Leaning over this parapet I see far out a waste of waters. A fin turns” (W 125). This is no longer a pastoral image describing the interplay of light, wind and flowers. At first a “bare visual impression [. . .] unattached to any line of reason,” it becomes part of Bernard’s literary collection: “I note under F., therefore, ‘Fin in a waste of waters’ (W 125). The connection between the interlude’s linguistic fragment and the character is real but attenuated. The interludes provide a textual equivalent of a sensory matrix within which the characters operate, taking and modifying, giving meaning to, the impersonal objects of the natural world.<sup>154</sup>

In addition, the impersonal interludes offer images that are thematically reflected in the following soliloquies.<sup>155</sup> The simplest example of this is the correlation between the ages of the characters and the time of day represented in an interlude. The first interlude describes dawn; similarly, the first group of soliloquies presents the childhood of the characters. By the fifth interlude, when the sun has “*risen to its full height*,” the characters have reached maturity (W 96). In this sense it can be said that the interludes state the themes which the soliloquies develop.<sup>156</sup> One of the key themes introduced by the interludes develops from images of birds and bird song. The birds establish a paradigm for the relationship between characters in the following soliloquies. In the first interlude, “*one bird chirped high up; there*

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<sup>154</sup> The interludes are literary texts of extraordinary metaphoric richness: the horizon clearing “*as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green*,” the sun rising “*as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp*” (W 1). One possibility this raises is that the writer of the interludes may be an elusive homodiegetic narrator. There are two candidates for this role: Bernard, whose status as a writer and whose summary final speech situate him as the possible author of the text called *The Waves*, and the lady of Elvedon, who “sits between two long windows, writing” (W 8). Goldman recognises both of these possibilities, and while John Hulcoop presents perhaps the most persuasive case for this reading of the lady of Elvedon as author of the text, he can do little more than “hazard a guess” (Introduction 70; 475). Snaith argues that the soliloquies are the product of both the characters themselves, for “they tell their own stories” and of the lady at Elvedon who “is creating them” (*Virginia* 84). Boone argues that she is “the *magna mater* of matriarchal creation myths,” a link between the creative and the gravid (127). The text encodes all of these possibilities without providing sufficient evidence to determine between them.

<sup>155</sup> Phelan has observed how the impersonality of the interlude’s voice, “provides a context of distance within which we read the voices of the characters,” and argues that this drives the reader’s attention from a “developing story” towards “the thematic connections we can make between the juxtaposed scenes” (*Narrative* 35 - 36).

<sup>156</sup> Musical metaphors are apt: Woolf made a key decision about the structure of the novel while listening to a Beethoven quartet and famously described herself as “writing to a rhythm and not to a plot” (WD 159; L 4: 204). For an ambitious discussion of the relationship between *The Waves* and music, see Elicia Clements’ “Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*”.

*was a pause; another chirped lower down*" (W 2). The birds sing in a discrete sequence, and the first soliloquies are voiced in discrete sequence. In the second interlude, "*the birds [. . .] now sang a strain or two together [. . .] and were suddenly silent, breaking asunder*" (W 16). The soliloquies in this section centre around school and its more structured social environment. The three male voices verge on a coherent narrative: Bernard tells of "the good-byes in the hall" and "the booking-office," Louis of their train journey behind a "bottle-green engine," and Neville celebrates the end of their journey: "This is indeed a solemn moment" (W 17). This coherent narrative sequence reflects the choral singing of the birds as individuality is submerged in collectivity. The female voices at the start of this section react to different elements of the same scene. Susan sees "Miss Lambert who sits under a picture of Queen Alexandria reading from a book before her," Rhoda sees that "Miss Lambert's ring passes to and fro across the black stain on the white page," while Jinny's Miss Lambert "sits under a picture of Queen Alexandria pressing one white finger firmly on the page" (W 19).<sup>157</sup> The characters' voices either tell a sequential narrative or hover around the same image. These formal parallels to the choral birdsong are then picked up in the content of this section's soliloquies. The relationship between Queen Alexandria and authority is clear. She operates as the female equivalent of the school boys "trooping after" Percival "to be shot like sheep" (W 22). Both of these scenes inquire into the relationship between unity and authority, an exploration prefigured by the birds singing together in the preceding interlude. The birds sing in chorus, however, only briefly before "*breaking asunder*" (W 16). So too the chorus of boys. Louis tries "to fix the moment in one effort of supreme endeavour," an act of will that is at once the expression of a poetic impulse and a recognition of the transitory nature of the unity shared in the preceding moments. His conclusion indicates a direction forward: "The time approaches when these soliloquies shall be shared" (W 23).

This relationship between the birds in the interludes and the characterisation in the soliloquies continues throughout the text. The thematic connection point between the interludes and the soliloquies is thus relationship. At the beginning of the fourth interlude, the bird song has become fierce and self-assertive, "*no matter if it shattered the song of another bird with harsh discord*" (W 70). In the following soliloquies, Bernard remarks that "one cannot extinguish that persistent smell [. . .]. one's identity," a familiar Woolfian formulation of selfhood (W 74). At the end of the fourth interlude, the picture of fierce

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<sup>157</sup> While these soliloquies can be read in the context of the bird-imagery of the preceding interlude as exploring connection and formal organisation, the text never stops building individual characterisation into the soliloquies: Here Susan balls her handkerchief, Rhoda has no face, and Jinny studies dresses.

independence is modified: “*Now and again their songs ran together in swift scales like the interlacings of a mountain stream [ . . . ]*” (W 71). The following soliloquies occur during Percival’s farewell party, during which the characters come “together like separate parts of one body and soul” (W 89). The pattern established by the interludes is thus in part developmental, tracing the alterations in character from youth to age, and habitual, tracing a repeated movement between isolation and unity, an instance of the “continual oscillation of extremes and opposites” in the novel (Flint, Introduction xiii). The birds sing together, and then separately, and then together again, as do the six voices.<sup>158</sup>

Woolf was particularly concerned with the final portion of the novel, Bernard’s last speech:

It occurred to me last night [ . . . ] that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard’s final speech and end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes and having no further break. This is also to show that the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance: but I am not sure of the effect artistically; because the proportions may need the intervention of the waves finally so as to make a conclusion. (WD 159 - 160)

The merging of the interjected passages refers to the soliloquies subsumed in Bernard’s final speech. The interludes and the alternating voices are suppressed to avoid breaking the flow of the final section. Woolf then highlights the way that this section of the novel is to restore focus to the theme of effort, rather than the waves, to the personal rather than the impersonal, to character, for what is character but a literary manifestation of personality? Ultimately, it is this notion of effort against the waves that becomes the master sign of character in this section of the novel.

Bernard’s final speech is introduced by the familiar narrative tag “said Bernard,” but it is specifically addressed to an interlocutor, a “you” (W 158).<sup>159</sup> “Now to sum up,” says Bernard, “now to explain to you the meaning of my life” (W 158). There is a momentary shock here, as Bernard seems to be addressing the reader directly from within the text, an impression corrected by the next sentence: he is addressing a stranger, met, perhaps, “on

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<sup>158</sup> This discussion is necessarily restricted; the interludes are rich in imagery centring around four main elements: the waves, the garden, the birds, and the house. Each of these elements in turn interacts with the six soliloquies.

<sup>159</sup> Who may or may not be there: Beer writes that Bernard’s final speech occurs during a “long evening alone in a restaurant” (“Gillian” xviii).

board a ship going to Africa” (W 158).<sup>160</sup> This shock does, however, by briefly dislocating the reader’s sense of how the text functions, draw attention to difference. Rather than reporting on events, feelings, sensations, and thoughts from within an eternal present, Bernard offers a retrospective re-narration of his life and the lives of the other five soliloquists. He is telling their story: “In the beginning, there was the nursery [. . .]” (W 159).<sup>161</sup>

Bernard tells his story, but his ability to tell it affects the text as a whole. His final speech is on a different register to both the soliloquies of the other five characters, and to his own previous soliloquies. If the soliloquies are “a stylized lyricism,” Bernard’s final speech is a discursive monologue that sounds more like articulated speech (Snaith, *Virginia* 83). Phrases such as “sometimes indeed” or “by any means” are part of the clichéd lexis of social intercourse and are not present in the soliloquies (W 160, 165). Also, images are transformed between the two sections. In his first soliloquy, Bernard sees “a ring [. . .] hanging [. . .]. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light” [. . .] (W 2). In Bernard’s final speech this becomes “I saw something brighten - no doubt the brass handle of a cupboard” (W 16). “Plates of bread and butter” become “plates of innocent bread and butter” (W 13, 160). The sensory images of the soliloquies are subject to rational interpretation and categorisation. Part of this is due to the disparity in age between Bernard as a child and Bernard as a old man, but it also represents an important shift in the type of discourse employed. Bernard’s final speech no longer inhabits the realm of the lyrical eternal; it participates in the time-bound world of discursive, evaluative, and rational prose. This is in itself a first step towards the representation of effort, something only possible in the quotidian world.

“Much of the reception of *The Waves*,” Fernald writes, “hinges on how critics have read its final chapter” (147). Bernard “who long wanted to be a writer [. . .] has the chance [. . .] to take artistic control of the book” and this questions the status of the text: “Is it a straightforward summary by the novel’s artist-figure, or an ironic adieu to the individual (male) author?” (147). Bernard’s final speech can be said to contain or enclose the soliloquies of the other five main characters. He appears to occupy a position of narrative

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<sup>160</sup> This is strange, for while Rhoda “shall see Africa” from the top of a Spanish hill, Bernard says “Rome is the limit of my travelling” (W 123). He later modifies his supposition: they met on “the gangway of a ship bound for Africa,” a statement that does not imply Bernard has been to Africa himself. The text generates uncertainties about the characters at the level of language - who is talking to whom? - and narrative fact - who has done what? - without resolving them.

<sup>161</sup> This formulation relates parodically yet appropriately to the Bible: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1.1).

authority. A scene from their childhood, which in the soliloquies is related by several voices and perspectives, is rendered as a complete and transparent narrative event: to say that “Susan cried and I followed her” is to tell a closed story with an internalised interpretation (W 160). Bernard also assumes access to the minds of the others. He ‘knows’ that Neville hated their schoolmaster, while Louis revered him (W 161). McIntire has argued that the final speech represents a narrative highjacking of a polyphonic “community of speaking voices” (31). She goes on to argue that this mono-vocal conclusion “asks us to consider what it means to speak of and for others by reducing plural lives to a suddenly decipherable and tellable ‘order’” (33).

The soliloquies do not, however, disappear from the text, are not replaced by Bernard’s monologue. Nor does Bernard impose his perspective on the group; on the contrary, he is alive to the differences between the six friends in ways that build upon the thematic structures of the soliloquies. Bernard remembers Susan crying: “It was Susan who cried, that day when I was in the tool house with Neville; and I felt my indifference melt. Neville did not melt. ‘Therefore’, I said, ‘I am myself, not Neville’, a wonderful discovery” (W 160). Bernard’s interpretation of this scene is very much his; it ignores or elides Neville’s reaction to his departure after Susan - “he leaves me in the lurch” - of which Bernard was, and is unaware. However, the reader is able to situate Bernard’s retrospective interpretation within a wider textual setting (W 9). The reader of *The Waves* knows that Bernard’s narrative is not complete.

Bernard’s obsession with difference is explored in a passage that provides additional context for his final speech:

‘But we were all different. The wax - the virginal wax that coats the spine melted in different patches for each of us. The growl of the boot-boy making love to the tweeny among the gooseberry bushes; the clothes blown out hard on the line; the dead man in the gutter; the apple tree, stark in the moonlight; the rat swarming with maggots; the lustre dripping blue - our white wax was streaked and stained by each of these differently. [. . .]. We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies.’ (W 161)

This passage picks up on the oscillation between unity and isolation. The characters become different on contact with unique experiences. In *A Room of One’s Own* Woolf describes the spine as “the seat of the soul,” and here it is the exposure of the soul through experience which produces individuation or characteristic difference (R 11). Susan saw the servants kiss, Neville overheard a conversation about a murdered man, Bernard and Susan saw a dead rat, and these experiences form their characters. However, this selection of experience does not indicate narrative omniscience on Bernard’s part. Rather, he is retelling events that he

remembers - the rat - or that he may have been told about by Susan and Neville. The “story of the boot boy,” for instance, is part of his narrative repertoire in school, but is originally part of Susan’s soliloquy (*W* 22, 13). However, there is one image that reveals even more clearly the constructed nature of Bernard’s monologue. The “lustre dripping blue” does not appear during the childhood soliloquies, but for the first time a few lines previously as part of Bernard’s imaginative reconstruction of childhood: “Then more bread and butter [. . .] while the pointed fingers of the lustre dripped blue pools on the corner of the mantelpiece” (*W* 161). Bernard’s monologue, which appears at first to potentially submerge the other characters, is a rhetorical composition. Dick writes that “Bernard’s memories are [. . .] a mirror of the previous narrative, but they are a reflection that clarifies and focusses, not merely replays it” (“Remembered” 50). However, rather than refocussing, Bernard at times reformulates, rewrites, or even makes up the past. Bernard is the novel’s teller of stories, and this is one more story, with no more narrative validity than any other element of the text.

Once Bernard’s memories of the past are revealed as constructions, the status of the characters he remembers in his monologue is shifted. These are not simply different manifestations of himself. Nor does Bernard have any sort of hegemonic narrative access to their internal mind spaces or ‘true’ stories: he is a limited narrator who attempts to tell his story and the story of his friends through the dramatic recreation of the past. This means that the characters in Bernard’s monologue are recreations of memory, very much in the way that Mrs Ramsay becomes the active creation or projection of Lily. This occurs within the imagined world of the text, yet refers to real-world knowledge of others: remembering is remaking, knowing is projecting. Bernard is initially a proponent of what Jackson describes as the “most accepted convention of realism,” the secondary nature of narrative to the external reality it seeks to imitate, the primacy of the “sun on the window-sill” over the phrase “butterfly powder” which is to describe it (*Subject* 143; *W* 21). But by the time of his final monologue, this certainty has been abandoned: he now doubts “the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now” (*W* 193). This produces an awareness of the pretence involved in the characterisation of oneself - “for I changed and changed; was Hamlet, was Shelley [. . .]” - and of other people (*W* 166 - 167). In order to describe the characters of his friends, Bernard must first “pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe,” he must pretend that he can tell “a plain and logical story” (*W* 168). Bernard’s re-negotiation of his and his friends’ past casts doubt on the status of people and the world around them. As Jackson argues, they “take their form from narrative rather than the other way around” (*Subject* 143). Bernard’s active recreation of character is a recognition of the compositional element both of memory

and knowledge.

The text of *The Waves* also actively recreates the past. While the “pointed fingers of the lustre” which “dripped blue pools on the corner of the mantelpiece” have no textual forebears within *The Waves*, and as such exist as Bernard’s creative reconstruction of the past, they do remember another Woolf text, the experimental “Blue & Green” published in *Monday or Tuesday* in 1921 (*W* 161). In 1930, only months before she finished her manuscript of *The Waves*, Woolf described the story as “mere tangles of words; balls of string that the kitten has played with” or the “wild outbursts of freedom, inarticulate, ridiculous, unprintable mere outcries” (*L* 4: 231). Yet there are unmistakable connections between the story and the novel. In “Blue & Green”, “the pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble” (66). The story also includes an image redolent of *The Waves*: “[. . .] the aimless waves sway beneath the empty sky. It’s night; the needles drip blots of blue” (66). Woolf frequently recycled phrases and images from text to text, but this seems to be a particularly striking example of intertextual parallelism, an image ‘remembered’ - or recreated - from a 1921 short story in a 1931 novel. There is a strong parallel here between Bernard’s notebooks full of phrases and “the true story, the one story to which all the phrases refer” and Woolf’s own reprocessing of earlier images in her novel (*W* 124). The past for the characters in *The Waves*, as in other Woolf novels, is an active reconstruction, and the texts themselves play out this active reconstruction, not only within single works but across different texts.

In *The Waves* character exists both as a particular fictional individual and a representative of a structuring of human life, as a present and an eternal repetition, as an isolated individual and as a participant in a group. On the other hand, it is extremely simple. Woolf’s wrote that “what I now think (about *The Waves*) is that I can give in a very few strokes the essentials of a person’s character. It should be done boldly, almost as caricature” (*WD* 154). Some critics have been sensitive to this element of the novel. Beer, for instance, while arguing that the characters are used to emphasise and analyse “community” writes that “in retrospect, we have a strong sense of the individual identities of her people” (“Body” 64). Writing on the nature of the prose-poem, Woolf argued that caricature was the natural and appropriate response of the genre to its limitations: “Characters [. . .] if they are not shown in conflict but snipped off and summed up with something of the

exaggeration of a caricaturist, have a heightened and symbolical significance which prose with its gradual approach cannot rival” (“Aurora” 212 - 213). The loss of the detailed accretion of information so typical of the novel yields to a stronger, simplified version of character that is able to link more successfully into larger structures of meaning within their fictional world.<sup>162</sup> In a discussion of popular fiction, Trotter has pointed out that “caricatures can be mistaken for real because the anxieties they crystallize are real anxieties” (168). Although a comparison between *The Waves* and popular fiction is perverse, something similar is going on here, as the caricature-like simplicity of the characters allows for easier access to the textual themes, the anxieties about the individual’s relationship to the group, around which the novel circulates.

Woolf has thus restructured character in part to access her thematic material. The relationship between the soliloquies, the interludes and the monologue indicates this theme, the fluctuating relationship between individual character, the other characters in the novel, and the broader social setting within which they function. Characters in *The Waves* operate at times in solipsistic seclusion, at other times in relation, and at still others in such intimate alignment that the boundaries between one character and another are not clearly demarcated.<sup>163</sup> This shifting between isolation and relation is embodied not only through the structural elements of the text, but through its content: what the characters say and experience rather than how they say and experience it. Louis and Neville, for instance, according to Bernard, “feel the presence of other people as a separating wall” (*W* 42). Jinny, as a young woman, believes that “our differences are clear cut as the shadows of rocks in full sunlight” (*W* 92). These comments represent one end of a spectrum of selfhood, a selfhood here defined by separateness and solitude. This isolation is not always presented within the text as negative: while Louis’ perpetual sense that “I am not included” is clearly a painful recognition of separateness, of his situation as “alien, external,” Jinny’s strong sense of independent, differentiated selfhood is a key to her sexuality, as it allows her to “say to him,

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<sup>162</sup> This is related to the perspective which appeared in Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* in which caricature is presented as one possible avenue of access to the presentation of character and the understanding of other people as exemplified by Austen’s characterisation which “runs like a knife” or Dickens’ characters which were “very simple” and “immensely alive,” made up with “three strokes of the pen” (Woolf, “Phases” 114; Woolf, “Sketch” 73).

<sup>163</sup> As McIntire has argued, “[. . .] there is a profound tension at play between sameness and otherness” in *The Waves*, “as the characters circle around issues of identification and disidentification through the novel” (42). Matz has identified three dangers for modernist character: solipsism, dispersal of self, and absence of self (*Modern* 50 - 51). All three play a role in *The Waves*.

‘Come’” (W 60, 61, 92). One of the preconditions for unity is the existence of separate individuals: “[. . .] differentiation is not necessarily separateness [. . .] but a form of *connection* to others” (Waugh 11).

At the other end of the spectrum we find moments of near total identification between the separate characters. At Percival’s farewell dinner, for instance, Louis says that “the circle in our blood, broken so often, so sharply, for we are so different, closes in a ring” (W 95). Here the range from difference to unity is contained within one phrase. When difference is momentarily not a factor, the closeness between the individuals, the friends, is literally physical, a shared part of their bodies, their blood. The other characters are equally sensitive to this temporary unity, yet each formulates “it” in individual terms (W 95). For Jinny it is “youth and beauty,” for Rhoda “moonlight falling on some high peak,” for Neville “a table, a chair, a book” (W 95). The moment of identification, however intense, is articulated by the six characters in terms that are uniquely theirs. Their mutual identification leaves room for independent existence.<sup>164</sup> The text, like *The Voyage Out*, establishes a spectrum of individuation running from almost total isolation to almost complete identification.

In order to participate in this spectrum of individuation, however, characters must possess personal identity, a selfhood which in *The Waves* is simultaneously stable, fluid, and diverse: the text’s formulation of the individual both remains essentially the same and changes over the course of the novel, yet at the same time differs for different characters. The first point can be established by looking at the ways character represents individual subjectivity. Each character is associated throughout the text with a relatively stable set of phrases and images: experience is articulated through linguistic patterns.<sup>165</sup> However, each character’s mode of identity is different. Jenny’s sense of individuality is corporal: “they are one, my body and my head” (W 25). Susan, on the other hand, has a sense of self that is expansive. Her identity is constituted by her home and her family: “I possess all I see. [. . .] I have seen my sons and daughters [. . .] walk with me, taller than I am, casting shadows on the grass” (W 126). Jinny’s body and Susan’s possessiveness are both textual identifying tags

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<sup>164</sup> An alternate reading would identify ‘it’, the union of selves, as an illusion insofar as each individual defines it, responds to it, differently.

<sup>165</sup> Snaith highlights this aspect of the novel when she points out that “the novel is in part about [. . .] the articulation of identity,” while Flint focusses on the relationship between this articulation and the linguistic matrix through which it is performed when she writes that “identity [. . .] is primarily constructed from within, through an individual’s deployment of language” (*Virginia* 83; Introduction x).

and alternate formulations of identity. For Jinny to talk about her body in her soliloquies is both to identify her as a linguistically-constructed character, and to explore a formulation of selfhood that embraces the body as an integral part of identity. Bernard says “it is only my body [. . .] that is fixed irrevocably” (*W* 144). It would be unthinkable for Jinny to say this, for her identity is corporal. Likewise, Susan’s formulation of identity rooted in place and people is totally different to Rhoda’s, who feels she has “no face” or place (*W* 25). Of the six characters, Bernard is the least closely tied to a particular repertoire of phrases or mode of being. Rather, he is associated with the act of “making phrases”: Bernard is “the character most seduced by language” (*W* 8; Monson 178). Addressing Susan as a child, he says that “we melt into each other with phrases,” a formulation that links language as an articulation of identity, and language as a mediator between separate subjectivities (*W* 7). The other characters do not necessarily perceive Bernard’s phrases in the same light: Susan, for instance, says that “[. . .] you trail away [. . .] making phrases. Now you mount like an air-ball’s string [. . .] out of reach” (*W* 8).<sup>166</sup> What is for Bernard a tool for relationship is for Susan and Neville a form of distance.

Bernard’s central linguistic preoccupation remains constant, but his relationship to it changes over time. Bernard can be shaped by the language of others; for instance, as a student, he “was Byron” (*W* 53). As Bernard grows up he begins to mistrust narrative, for he has “never yet found the true story, the one story to which all the phrases refer” (*W* 124). By his final speech, this mistrust has become radical: “How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! [. . .]. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement” (*W* 159). Language is figured here as ultimately incapable of expressing the experience of lived reality, both as story and phrase. Beer describes this as “a vein of satire in human utterance, a longing to reach down past it to primal sounds” (“Gillian” xiv). Coherent speech should be replaced with the linguistic equivalent of physical action or music. To describe Percival, to tell his story, Bernard wants “music, some wild carol [. . .]. a hunting-song” (*W* 162).

Bernard’s individuality is thus figured in the text through a central preoccupation with language and narrative, a marker of identity which remains fixed throughout the book. Thus it can be said that identity is relatively stable: the text “seeks to show continuities rather

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<sup>166</sup> While Bernard does not possess a particularly strong set of phrases to identify himself, the other characters do in their soliloquies provide him with identifying images: Susan’s string is analogous to Neville’s “dangling wire” (*W* 9).

than developments” in its characters (Marcus, *Virginia* 138). On the other hand, while the central preoccupation, or image system, remains fixed, the characters’ relationship to it does alter with time.<sup>167</sup> As the characters age, the centre around which they revolve remains the same - Jinny is always concerned with the corporal, Susan with possessive love, and so on - but their interpretations of and reactions to these tropes shift and transform. It should also be noted that each character possesses more than one focus: while the characters are, as Warner has argued, “generalized,” in a way that Woolf herself identified as being related to caricature, this generalisation does not prevent a level of complexity in the formation of their subjectivities (Warner 46).

Woolf also explored the continuity of identity in her next novel, *The Years*, which traces the development and stasis of character as “slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searchlight, the days, the weeks, the years passed one another across the sky” (Y 2). This searchlight, like the lighthouse beam in *To the Lighthouse*, is a means of illuminating and projecting character, here focussed on the effects of time. While as Briggs has pointed out the text “documents the Pargiters’ progression from the oppressive atmosphere of life at Abercorn Terrace to a much more open existence [. . .],” the novel is as much concerned with continuity as with development (“Novels” 80). The main point here lies with the notion that things and people occur “as usual” or in “recurring scenes” which take place “over again, over and over again!” (Y 51, 69, 115). As in *The Waves*, the main characters are associated with a set of traits, actions, or, on a textual level, groups of words, which reappear over the almost sixty years represented in the text. Eleanor is shown “adding up figures” in 1880 and doing multiplication in 1891 (Y 16, 78). Rose is associated with “Pargiter of Pargiter’s Horse” both as a young girl in 1880 and as an old woman in the present day section of the novel (Y 22, 364). Martin hums the same “little song” in 1907 as in 1914; a song learned from “Pippy [. . .] as she wiped his ears with a piece of slimy flannel” (Y 205, 197). For the young Kitty of 1880, “shoes were always too tight; white satin shoes in particular”; for Kitty 34 years later “satin shoes were always too tight” (Y 51, 233 - 234). Examples of this sort of consistent identifying feature over long periods of time could be multiplied. A similar

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<sup>167</sup> Phelan has noted this in relation to his discussion of the lyric nature of the characters in *The Waves*: “[. . .] the same material will sometimes be revisited and rendered differently. This movement helps Woolf adapt the lyric utterances to her larger narrative purpose because it shows the speakers in a changed relation to the original material as they move through life. Nevertheless, the sense of lyric remains strong because the new relation is not presented as more valid than the old; it is different in a way that reflects the different stage of the speaker’s life” (*Narrative* 39).

structure exists in the novel with reference to shorter periods of time. Martin realises at a party that he has forgotten to buy a new pair of shoes: “That was what he had forgotten, he thought, seeing himself again in the cab, crossing the bridge over the Serpentine,” a scene which has occurred textually only one page, and temporally perhaps thirty minutes, previously (Y 219). Similarly, when Eleanor visits her brother Morris, the “old victoria” stops at the fishmongers to pick up “a damp white parcel” (Y 168). During dinner a few hours later, “they ate the fish that had been brought up in the damp parcel,” a formulation that emphasises the identity of this particular fish despite its transformed state (Y 174). The connection is made even more explicit in context: Eleanor wonders how “Dubbin,” an old friend who has spent years in India, “had become Sir William Whatney [. . .] glancing at him as she ate the fish that had been brought up in the damp parcel” (Y 173 - 174).<sup>168</sup> *The Years* circles around the question of the continuity or lack of continuity between moments, hours, and years.

Part of this is carried out through physical objects. The “spotted walrus with a brush in its back” and the “great crimson chair with gilt claws” are fixed reference points which signify through the changing set of circumstances which surround them (Y 29, 100).<sup>169</sup> When Rose recognises “a crimson-and-gilt chair” in Maggie and Sara’s “poverty-stricken” flat, it signals the change in social status of its owners (Y 143). Similarly, the reappearance of the walrus in Crosby’s lodgings indicates her extreme allegiance to the material culture of the Victorian age - the walrus was rescued from the waste bin the day “the guns were firing for the old Queen’s funeral” - and internalised submission to a particular social system (Y 191). In contrast, Eleanor in the present day section is “suffused with a feeling of happiness” because something non-material, a “keen sensation” has outlasted the “solid object” as represented by the Victorian walrus (Y 373). Essentially, both characters and objects are caught up in the flow of history, and while they remain relatively stable in terms of identity, their contexts redefine them.

Much of the text’s exploration of these themes is focussed through Eleanor, who in the present day section mediates on the nature of her life: “Oughtn’t a life to be something you could handle and produce,” she wonders, offering something like the stability of the physical objects embedded in the text (Y 320). In contrast to this stability, Eleanor has only the sensation of “the present moment” in all its evanescence (Y 320). What does offer some

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<sup>168</sup> This may allude to *Vanity Fair* and the transformation of ““Old Figs”” Dobbin into “Captain William Dobbin, of His Majesty’s - Regiment of Foot” (Thackeray 28, 29).

<sup>169</sup> These claws are quickly, if briefly, transformed into “gilt paws” (Y 113).

object-like solidity to her is her sense that “a long strip of life lay behind her” (Y 320). The passage of the years offers her memories and experiences that together make up a life, but to have this life she must possess some sort of personal stability over time, a persistence of self. While “atoms danced and massed themselves” this physical rearrangement of flux into transitory patterns does not offer the security she requires (Y 320). Instead, she relies on a comparison to the permanence of objects: “She clenched her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perhaps there’s an ‘I’ at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre; and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper, digging little holes from which spokes radiated” (Y 320 - 321). This is a reference to one of the characterising habitual actions the text associates with particular individuals: Eleanor has always drawn on “the blotting-paper” images of circles “surrounded with strokes” (Y 154).<sup>170</sup> Thus the central core of identity, that which guarantees its continuity over time, is a function of habit and repetition.

In *The Waves*, identity also remains stable yet develops over time. These disparate characters always function in relation to the other characters in the text. That is to say they are situated, at different times in the text, at different places along the continuum of identification outlined above. While at times the text seems to idealise the community of selves, there are alternate formulations of communication, unity and togetherness present in *The Waves*. Percival’s farewell party is one of the key textual locations for the exploration of this unity:

‘It is Percival,’ said Louis, ‘sitting silent as he sat among the tickling grasses when the breeze parted the clouds and they formed again, who makes us aware that these attempts to say, “I am this, I am that,” which we make, coming together, like separated parts of one body and soul, are false. Something has been left out from fear. Something has been altered, from vanity. We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath.’ (W 89 - 90)

The individual characters’ awareness of their potential for unity requires the presence of Percival, who Goldman aptly describes as the “voiceless centre of their circle” (Introduction 69).<sup>171</sup> Here, difference is not an essential trait of the individual, but a product of fear and

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<sup>170</sup> In *Night and Day*, Ralph Denham draws “blots fringed with flames meant to represent - perhaps the entire universe” (ND 415).

<sup>171</sup> This is Louis’ soliloquy, and he does not speak for the group. The other characters recognise the presence of Louis’ chain, but offer their own interpretations.

vanity; it is a self-willed state, while the chain of unity exists beyond or beneath rational control. This implies that unity is a natural or base state which attempts at individuation - or characterisation - move away from. However, this passage also refers to another formation of unity that undercuts this interpretation. Louis' memory of Percival as he "sat among the tickling grasses" refers to the characters' school years (W 89). Here they meet Percival for the first time. As he "never tells his own story" a picture of Percival can only be assembled through the soliloquies of the six main characters: he is a mediated figure, both idealised and the product of the other characters' dreams and fantasies (McIntire 39). This is an extreme form of the creative process that underlies all characterisation in the novel, a stronger form of the tendency the characters exhibit to make each other up. Despite his silence and tenuousness, Percival, as critics have noted, acts as a focal point for the group, which meets both physically and emotionally around him (Whitworth, *Virginia* 128). This centrality extends to the text's engagement with issues of unity.<sup>172</sup>

Percival is an ambivalent figure, both a focus of love and a figure aligned with tradition and authority. As Fernald has pointed out, readers must both accept and question this love (148). Neville sees Percival as a "churchwarden" who "should have a birch and beat little boys for misdemeanours," while for Louis "his magnificence is that of some mediaeval commander" and he is both simultaneously, a bully and a hero (W 20 - 21). Percival creates a sense of unity, but an authoritarian unity that the text is uncomfortable with. "Look at us trooping after him, his faithful servants, to be shot like sheep," Louis observes, highlighting a relationship unity and militaristic conformity that also appears in *Jacob's Room* (W 22). Percival's attractiveness encourages submersion of individuality. He "flicks his hand to the back of his neck" and the other boys, "flick their hands to the back of their necks likewise," a form of mimicry or identification which is also present in the adult community of the schoolmasters, who "try to imitate" Dr Crane (W 21). This sort of conformity creates unity, but its value is highly problematic.<sup>173</sup>

Even Louis, who responds strongly to Percival's appeal, saying that "'Could I be 'they' I would be'," recognises that his presence destroys other types of unity (W 21). In an important passage, Bernard's story-telling is figured as a potential means towards a non-

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<sup>172</sup> Alternative readings highlight his role as a representative of empire, an emblem of "power in modern British culture" (Hinnov 9).

<sup>173</sup> Gabrielle McIntire's "Heteroglossia, Monologism, and Fascism: Bernard Reads *The Waves*" proposes a reading of the novel which highlights parallels between the text's desire for unity and the political urge for national unity implicit in the fascist movements of the 1920s and 30s: "The question is whether Woolf might be implying that this 'oceanic' oneness the characters sometimes feel comes dangerously close to the oneness of the crowd and the State that fascism demanded" (42).

authoritarian unity. While Percival plays cricket, Bernard “goes on talking” (W 22). His listeners are united in liberation:

Yes, for when he talks, when he makes his foolish comparisons, a lightness comes over one. One floats, too, as if one were that bubble; one is freed; I have escaped, one feels. Even the chubby little boys (Dalton, Larpent and Baker) feel the same abandonment. They like this better than the cricket. They catch the phrases as they bubble. They let the feathery grasses tickle their noses. (W 22)

This is not Percival’s militant conformity, but it does produce a sense of togetherness through individual freedom, both for Neville, whose soliloquy this is, and for the small boys more frequently associated in the text with conformity to authoritarian structures. This moment is shattered by the arrival of Percival, whose curt “No” rejects the possibility of individuals aligning themselves in ways which preserve the integrity of individual selfhood. Louis compares the two types of unity: the ring of boys hints “at some other order, and better, which makes a reason everlastingly. This I see for a second, and try to-night to fix in words, to forge in a ring of steel, though Percival destroys it, as he blunders off, crushing the grasses, with the small fry trotting subservient after him” (W 23). The type of unity created through Bernard’s narrative is temporary, and exists under constant threat from the appeal of Percival’s authoritarian unity.

It may be worth diverging from the main line of argument in order to set the ways in which *The Waves* addresses issues of individuality, unity, and authority in a broader context. One of the primary points of reference for this discussion is the text’s use of Percival and his authoritarian unity to critique the militaristic impulses of the British educational system. As Whitworth has pointed out, one of the novel’s “key concerns” is this militarism and its place in education (*Virginia* 157). “Between the wars,” Whitworth writes, “the political values instilled by schools became a contentious issue [. . .]” (*Virginia* 161). The Hogarth Press, for instance, published Mark Starr’s *Lies and Hate in Education* in 1929, (Whitworth, *Virginia* 165). It should be noted, however, that these were continuations of older debates; J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism* of 1902 had already attacked the school system for mechanising children’s “free play into the routine of military drill,” describing this, among other ills, as “as foul an abuse of education as it is possible to conceive” (217). A striking, and early, example of this militarisation of education is H. W. Moss, Headmaster of Shrewsbury School in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Shrewsbury was one of the first schools to establish a Cadet Corps which included almost all pupils (Mangan 119). As Whitworth points out, the boys in Bernard, Louis and Neville’s school, “always forming into fours and

marching in troops,” may well belong to just such a military training organisation (*Virginia* 158 - 159; W 28).

This context for the discussion of authoritarian unity in *The Waves* is quite clear, and is relatively familiar from other elements of Woolf’s work. Complicating the issue, however, is both the positive form of non-authoritarian unity mentioned above, and a certain uneasiness with the results of this unity that is perhaps harder to define and contextualise. What I am referring to here is the sort of unity described by MacIntire as “oceanic” (42). Woolf was not alone in her exploration of this sort of transcendent unity. As has been frequently recognised, *The Waves* “foregrounds the relation of the individual to the group” (Whitworth, *Virginia* 166). Some critics locate this relationship in the context of unanimism, a French school of writing which attempted to articulate a sense of group consciousness, and other contemporary explorations of this theme, including the work of Gustav Le Bon, whose early nineteenth-century study of mass consciousness, *The Crowd*, was translated in 1920, Wilfred Trotter, whose *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* was published in 1916 and Freud, whose *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* was translated in 1922 (Whitworth, *Virginia* 144 - 145). In 1936, unanimism was described as part of a “revolt against nineteenth-century individualism and all the involved subjectivisms” (Walter 863). It is an attempt to relocate the focus of literary interest from the individual to the group.

Whitworth attempts to establish lexical connections between unanimism and Woolf’s work, particularly in *The Waves*, arguing that the text’s “‘ripples’ and ‘vibrations’ [. . .] seems to derive from unanimism” (Whitworth, *Virginia* 146). However, these lexical connections are somewhat tenuous. Rippling is indeed common in *The Waves*, but it is generally associated with Jinny’s physical sense of self - “I dance. I ripple” - or with descriptions of the text’s ubiquitous waves, “rippling small, rippling grey” (W 5, 137). There is only one reference to vibration in the text, albeit one which clearly gestures towards the very type of group consciousness unanimism explores: “Am I not, as I walk, trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy, which, unmoored as I am from a private being, bid me embrace these engrossed flocks [. . .]” (W 74). Other critics follow a perhaps safer path by simply indicating that Woolf’s exploration of this group consciousness can be situated in the “intellectual historical context” of “the notion of a ‘group mind’ which was current in the early part of the twentieth century” (McLaurin 115). This formulation situates Woolf’s interest in the relationship between the individual and the group as part of a wider interest in the phenomenon of the mass, without attempting to uncover a “systematic elaboration of

unanimist ideas in Virginia Woolf's fiction" (McLaurin 116). Instead, there is a shared focus on "the group as unit" (Walter 865). This reading can also be used to justify readings of the text that follow Woolf's lead in denying the presence of character in the novel; "her aim was to portray a 'group mind'" rather than to portray individual characters (McLaurin 122).

On the other hand, *The Waves*, like other works by Woolf, manifests a certain discomfort with this notion of group identity. The problem lies in the contrast between the individual or the member of a small group, and the mass or crowd. At times this is related to the militarised authoritarian unity discussed above, but it also occurs in less structured and organised forms. At university, Bernard describes his fellow students as a "rollicking chorus [. . .] smashing china" (W 58). This group is, in Bernard's formulation, opposed to the past, "like a torrent jumping rocks, brutally assaulting old trees," and explicitly linked to unity: "All divisions are merged - they act like one man" (W 58). This is comparable to what Ortega y Gasset's describes as "the mass" (12). "There are no longer protagonists," he writes, "there is only the chorus" (10). Bernard's chorus, with its violent unanimity illustrates Ortega y Gasset's definition of the mass as "[. . .] man as undifferentiated from other men, but as repeating in himself a generic type" (11). A further characteristic of the mass, again according to Ortega y Gasset, is that it rejects or is unaware of the past. While "historical knowledge is a technique of the first order to preserve and continue a civilization already advanced," the mass is an example of the "retrogression towards barbarism, that is, towards the ingenuousness and primitivism of the man who has no past, or who has forgotten it" (69, 70). Louis describes the "average Englishman" in terms that again relate to this observation: "Supple-faced, with rippling skins, that are always twitching with the multiplicity of their sensations, prehensile like monkeys, greased to this particular moment, they are discussing with all the right gestures the sale of a piano" (W 60). The mass is a creature of the absolute present, and as such slave to the impulses and sensations of the moment, which it is unable to put into meaningful relation to past sensations. This "absence of standards to which appeal can be made" is for Ortega y Gasset another of the marks of mass culture (55).

I have used *The Revolt of the Masses* as my primary point of comparison here, largely because it is so reflective of anxieties in wider circulation in the early twentieth century. When translated, it was described "as the twentieth-century equivalent of what Rousseau's *Social Contract* had been in the eighteenth century and Marx's *Capital* in the nineteenth" (Maldonado-Denis 682 - 683). Geoffrey Clive writes that the "favorable reception" of the book "must be ascribed not to the novelty of his central thesis, but to its peculiar relevance at a critical juncture in European history" (77). It was only one of a

number of works published around this time exhibiting this dread of the mass. Karl Jaspers' *Man in the Modern Age* with its description of a modern world "cut adrift from a really vital tradition" was published in English in 1933, Karl Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* argued in 1936 that "in a society in which the masses tend to dominate, irrationalities [. . .] may force their way into political life," and T. S. Eliot wrote in 1939 in *Christianity and Culture* that "the culture of Europe has deteriorated visibly with the memory of many who are by no means the oldest among us," linking this decline to mass education (138; 63; 185). In addition, as Zwerdling points out Ortega y Gasset's work is comparable in tone to Bell's 1928 *Civilisation* (*Virginia* 102). Thus both the attraction towards, and the discomfort with, notions of group identity exhibited by *The Waves* are related to larger social changes in British, and indeed European, society.<sup>174</sup>

Character in *The Waves* exists, then, on multiple and intersecting levels. While Woolf indicated that this novel was not about character, that she "meant to have none" in it, this statement needs to be balanced against other claims she made regarding the novel, and against the textual evidence itself (*WD* 171). The soliloquies, despite a similarity in tone that some critics read as indicating the absence of separate character, create a sense of separate fictional individuals identifiable both through textual patterns and associated character traits. A key factor here is the way these individuals are portrayed as developing over time while simultaneously remaining associated with a relatively stable set of identifying factors. While these characters have an independent textual existence, they are also intimately related to each other through a sort of textual overlap or bleeding between their voices: images and phrases are contagious, and spread from one character to another in a way that binds them closely together. They also share a common orientation towards the impersonal world of the interludes, a fixed backdrop against which their individual and collective stories unfold. The interludes also offer linguistic and thematic motifs which are explored or developed in the soliloquies. Finally, the characters of the soliloquies are repositioned by Bernard's final speech, viewed through one consciousness, and situated within one interpretative scheme rather than through six separate ones. This does have the effect of to a certain extent

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<sup>174</sup> While the fear of mass culture discussed here is an early twentieth-century phenomenon, it also appears in the late nineteenth century. Ibsen's 1882 *An Enemy of the People*, for instance, attacks the "doctrine that the common herd, the crowd, the masses [. . .] have the same right to condemn and sanction, to govern and counsel, as the intellectually and spiritually distinguished few" (215). See Michael Tratner's *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats* for a discussion of the relationship between modernism and turn of the century crowd theory.

subordinating the five other characters to Bernard, but not to the extent of submerging them in one totalizing consciousness. Instead, what the text offers is a creative re-interpretation of both the past and of character. The knowledge one character has of another character is always mediated through perspective and distance. This exploration of character is employed to investigate alternating notions of unity. The characters strive to differentiate themselves from each other through differing responses to experience. On the other hand, they seek to align themselves in more unified structures at particular points in the text. This quest for unity is in turn situated against a backdrop of authoritarian and militaristic homogeneity centred around Percival, a version of unity which the text figures as simultaneously attractive and menacing.

This does not, however, offer a clear resolution to the questions of character proposed by *The Waves*. Part of the difficulty lies in resolving the three different elements of the text, the soliloquies, the interludes and Bernard's final speech into a coherent approach to character. While the interludes and the soliloquies interact in a powerful exploration of character and relationship, Bernard's final speech offers a different perspective. Part of this is related to the ways Bernard's memory of the other characters contributes to the sense of characterisation as a creative process, that understanding other people is an active process. This is in many ways similar to the conclusions reached in *To the Lighthouse*. On the other hand, Bernard also offers a powerful meditation on the nature of the self in solitude.

Part of this is related to the continuity of the self over time, to ageing: "this elderly man whom you call Bernard" is forced to "dig furiously like a child rummaging in a bran-pie to discover my self" (W 144). This may in turn be related to Bernard's acceptance of the biographical style of self definition, which while it does no more than "tack together torn bits of stuff" must be accepted as the only form capable of bringing order, "phrases laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives" (W 173). This style of self-narration suits habitual behaviour and the mechanisation of self as Bernard "pins" himself "down most firmly" (W 174). This mechanised habitual self is questioned and challenged most powerfully in the passages describing Bernard's loss of self, an experience that is "like the eclipse when the sun went out" (W 191). The eclipse is both an eclipse of the sun and an eclipse of the self. Once the self, which "has been so mysteriously and with sudden accretions of being built up" vanishes, Bernard becomes "a man without a self," no more than "a heavy body leaning on a gate" (W 190, 191). This loss surrounds Bernard with vacancy; he will "no more[. . .] hear echoes, no more [. . .] see phantoms, [. . .] conjure up no

opposition” (W 190 - 191). Phantoms in *The Waves* are other people: “And I, too, am dim to my friends and unknown; a phantom [. . .]” (W 184). The loss of self Bernard experiences entails a loss of the other.

This passage relies on Woolf’s experience of the 29 June 1927 eclipse, which is also the source for her essay “The Sun and the Fish”. Here, the eclipse is employed in ways different to, but resonant with, *The Waves*.<sup>175</sup> One of the essay’s key points is its emphasis on the construction of a form of unity around the experience of the eclipse. While embarking on the journey north to view the eclipse, the crowd exhibits “that moving and disturbing unity which comes from the consciousness that they (but here it would be more proper to say ‘we’) have a purpose in common” (178 - 179). The essayist’s simultaneous discomfort and elation at the inclusion of herself in a collective enterprise is palpable here, demanding a parenthetical aside. As the assembled crowd waits, this unity becomes even more powerful, and is associated with a positive loss of individuality reminiscent of *The Waves*. Waiting for the sun to be extinguished “[. . .] we had put off the little badges and signs of individuality” (180). Individual identity here is an option that overlays the fundamental reality of sameness, of unity - this is the same point that is made by Louis when he says that he and his friends have “tried to accentuate differences” due to a “desire to be separate” (W 89). The observers awaiting the eclipse are described as monolithic outlines: “We were strung out against the sky in outline and had the look of statues standing prominent on the ridge of the world” (“Sun” 180).<sup>176</sup> This is very similar to the terms that Woolf used to discuss her characterisation in *The Waves*, and in the language used within the novel to describe its own employment of character.<sup>177</sup> In her diary Woolf wrote “but I think it possible that I have got my statues against the sky” (WD 155). In *The Waves*, Neville wonders if “it is not enough to wait for the thing to be said as if it were written; to see the sentence lay its dab of clay precisely on the right place, making character; to perceive, suddenly, some group in

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<sup>175</sup> Goldman has explored the feminist contexts of Woolf’s writing of this event in her *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual*. See in particular chapters 4 to 8 which offer a detailed feminist interpretation of the essay.

<sup>176</sup> In her original diary entry, written the day after the eclipse, there is some sense of this unity, but it is much less developed, resting largely on a contrast between “everyone [. . .] standing in long lines, rather dignified, [. . .] like very old people, in the birth of the world - druids on Stonehenge” and their return to individual normality after the eclipse as “now we became Ray in a blanket, Saxon in a cap” (D 3: 143, 144).

<sup>177</sup> There is also a passage in *The Years* which employs this imagery: “The group in the window, the men in their black-and-white evening dress, the women in their crimsons, golds and silvers, wore a statuesque air for a moment, as if they were carved in stone. Their dresses fell in stiff sculptured folds” (Y 378). This statuesque immobility and permanence is contrasted with the change and movement of life.

outline against the sky,” while Bernard sees “the populous undifferentiated chaos of life” as a backdrop to “the outlines” of his friends (*W* 131; 166). Rhoda in turn sees “two people without faces, leaning like statues against the sky,” interpreting it as a sign of a “world immune from change” (*W* 69). In Jinny’s soliloquy this image is reduced to a vanishing point of significance, as people are transformed into “a line of chimney-pots against the sky” (*W* 65).

If sameness underlies personal difference, the eclipse itself, as described in both the essay and the novel, presents another underlying reality, an image of the world as “a frail shell; brown; dead; withered” (“Sun” 181). In the novel, the effects of this vision are protracted, as Bernard continues to “walk unshadowed,” having lost his self, the other, and language at the same time (*W* 192). In the essay, however, the return of light and the realisation that “the earth we stand on is made of colour; colour can be blown out; and then we stand on a dead leaf” is interrupted by the introduction of a new and unexpected theme, the fish (181). The abrupt switch of the observing eye from the scene of the eclipse to an aquarium offers perhaps a way of resolving some of the conflicting impulses at work in these scenes.

Stunned by the beauty of the fish, the essay’s narrator focusses on their quiddity: “For what other purpose except the sufficient one of perfect existence can they have been thus made [. . .]” (182). Each fish is different in its particular form - “their shape is their reason” - and the vivid details of their individuality are described at length, from “radiating fins” to “huge whiskers” (182). This particularity stands in contrast to the viewers of the eclipse who put off their assumed individuality to reveal an underlying unity; the fish could not give up their identity for it is innate and perfectly conterminous with their being. If fish here function as a sort of marker of innate and individuated identity that lies beyond the capacity of humans, Bernard’s image of loss of self, of the extinguishing of identity, is significant: “[. . .] now there is nothing. No fin breaks the wastes of this immeasurable sea” (*W* 190). This is the master image of *The Waves*, a fin breaking the water, inverted in an image of absolute negation and defeat. “The Sun and the Fish” ends on a strange note: “The eye shuts now. It has shown us a dead world and an immortal fish” (183). Only the world of fish - particular, innately differentiated and aesthetically structured - offers eternal life, while the undifferentiated mass of human kind is condemned to death.

A major part of Woolf’s fictional project is to give life to character - a step that is clear in the tensions between biography and fiction in *To the Lighthouse*, but also in her other

works. This is often figured by Woolf as opposition to the transitory nature of quotidian life. The immortality that the fish possess through their innate self-identity, simplicity, differentiation and aesthetic structuring, for they are “shaped deliberately,” is what Woolf seeks to give to her characters (“Sun” 182). This is a major focus of characterisation in *The Waves*. Woolf wrote that her decision to end the book with Bernard’s extensive monologue rather than with six separate voices was a way to “show that the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance [. . .].” (WD 159 - 160). This effort is directed first against the aimless forces of nature and mortality - a theme Beer has identified, writing that to attempt to “set [. . .] people against time and the sea” suggests both perspective and resistance (WD 147; “Gillian” xix). This form of resistance is clearly present in the text, most often expressed by Bernard, who, for instance, says “sitting down on a bank to wait for my train, I thought then how we surrender, how we submit to the stupidity of nature” (W 180). From this perspective, Bernard and the novel’s closing cry of defiance “Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!” is directed against natural mortality (W 199). The brief closing interlude, “*the waves broke on the shore,*” can then be read as an affirmation of natural continuity - as Bernard feels that “the wave rises” in him, he is linked to the persistence of the natural environment figured in the interludes (W 199). On the other hand, it can be read as yet a further display of natural indifference to humanity; Bernard can fight, but this battle is always lost.<sup>178</sup>

The resistance Woolf identified as central to the novel is also associated, however, with “personality” (WD 160). In this sense, the text’s resistance and effort is directed not against nature and mortality, but against the undifferentiated mass of humanity, which in contrast to the immortal individuality of fish is “under our tweed and silk [. . .] nothing but a monotony of pink nakedness” (“Sun” 183). This version of resistance is tied in with Bernard’s struggle against the forces of nature, sharing a common setting and a common lexis. In contrast to the countryside, the city is a place of resistance: “The clay-coloured, earthy nondescript animal of the field here erects himself and with infinite ingenuity and effort puts up a fight against the green woods and green fields and sheep advancing with measured tread, munching” (W 181). While this is on one level simply an image of nature and its indifference to human concerns, the inclusion of the sheep refers to the text’s exploration of authority and its capacity to produce unity through submergence and

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<sup>178</sup> If the metaphorical richness of the interludes is read as an attempt by the narrator to impose human meaning on nature, this final interlude with its complete lack of metaphor takes on a new significance, signaling not the continuity of humanity but the triumph of nature.

effacement of individual identity. Percival's authoritarian charisma produces a sheepish conformity in his followers which is linked to the threat of war and death. This structure is also found in the fantastic metaphors of the interludes: "*The waves drummed on the shore, like turbaned warriors, like turbaned men with poisoned assegais who, whirling their arms on high, advance upon the feeding flocks, the white sheep*" (W 47 - 48). The city becomes for Bernard a place of personal identification, of diversity and of resistance to sameness; it is also the place where the group of friends - with the exception of Susan - are placed. Thus, it is through differential characterisation of the group of friends, through definition of the self and other that the sort of immortality Woolf seeks for her characters might be achieved.<sup>179</sup>

The type of characterisation that may be able to achieve this resistance is that which Woolf identified as pertaining to the prose-poem and the novel of the future: a character at once generalised and specific, vivid yet lacking in detail, and shaped with the rapidity and simplicity that Woolf identifies with caricature. A "very few strokes" capture "the essentials of a person's character," a process likened to "statues against the sky" (WD 155). Caricature is what separates the group of friends from the undifferentiated masses surrounding them. Bernard meets "great quantities" of people, but they are "not cut out, like the first faces" of his friends "but confused, featureless, or changed their features so fast that they seemed to have none" (W 170). This caricature is an assertion of self in its simplest form against the blankness of undifferentiated nature: Louis and Rhoda agree that the characters wish to assert themselves in this way: "'They are saying to themselves [. . .]. My face shall be cut against the black of infinite space'" (W 151). For Rhoda, who feels herself to have no face, this sort of self-assertion is impossible, and her death read in this light seems inevitable.

*The Waves* thus seems to offer the caricature, a version of character reduced to a limited number of essential features, as both a literary solution to the problem of the representation of individual subjectivity in fiction, and as an ontological answer to human mortality. The novel does not ignore, however, the limitations of this form of characterisation - or of any form for that matter. Bernard's descriptions of his friends are "minute objects which we call optimistically 'characters of our friends' [. . .]" (W 163). The attempt to understand other people - even other people as closely interlinked as this group of friends - is

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<sup>179</sup> This differentiation needs to be balanced with the dense network of connections the text draws between the characters in the soliloquies, and with Bernard's recognition of identity with his friends: "I am not one person; I am many people; I do not know altogether who I am - Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs" (W 185). Waugh describes this as the "articulation of a more radically 'collective' concept of subjectivity" (123). This exists in contrast to the authoritarian structures embodied by Percival.

difficult: “Thus I visited each of my friends in turn,” says Bernard, “trying, with fumbling fingers, to prise open their locked caskets” (W W 178). Other people remain locked caskets - a formulation of the self reminiscent of those offered in *To the Lighthouse* - and these caskets remain closed in the face of fumbling attempts at understanding. These attempts, are, however, not benign. A locked casket which has been prised open has been plundered; that which is exposed by its opening has been violated. Caricature, then, becomes a way not only of preserving life, but a morally acceptable form of relationship, based neither on the authoritarian structures of externally imposed unity, nor on the loss of self inherent in ‘oceanic’ unity, nor on the excessive inquisitiveness of intimate or detailed characterisation. As Neville says, “After all, we are not responsible. We are not judges. We are not called upon to torture our fellows with thumb-screws and irons [. . .]. It is better to look at a rose, or to read Shakespeare as I read him here in Shaftesbury Avenue. Here’s the fool, here’s the villain [. . .]” (W 130).

Shaftesbury Avenue was named after Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, a noted early nineteenth-century politician, philanthropist, and evangelical crusader (“Shaftesbury Avenue”; Wolffe). As such there is an allusion here to the scandalous late nineteenth-century street improvement scheme which drove the street through “some of the worst slums in London” while for many years failing to provide housing for the displaced residents (“Shaftesbury Avenue”). This offers a new perspective of the street’s “insignificant and scarcely formulated faces” whom Bernard pities and Percival would have “protected” (W 162). However, there is also an allusion here to Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, author of *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, a text which questions the nature of identity in terms similar to *The Waves*. Part of this concerns the question of the continuity of the self over time, as debated by Theocles and Philocles. Theocles holds that while “our own marble or stuff [. . .] wears out in seven, or at longest twice seven, years [. . .]” we remain “ourselves still much as before” (Shaftesbury 2: 101). Philocles in reply argues that the self is perpetually and incessantly mutable, and “a year makes more revolutions than can be numbered” (Shaftesbury 2: 101). The resolution offered to this dilemma is first a recognition of “a strange simplicity in this you and me” that carries identity even when “neither one atom of body, one passion, not one thought remains the same” (Shaftesbury 2: 101). This persistent simplicity at the heart of mutable diversity cannot be identified, and must, ultimately, be a product of faith: “I take my being upon trust” (Shaftesbury 2: 276). The allusion here not only coincides with *The Waves*’ persistent exploration of the nature of self over time, but also gestures towards the sort of simplicity in

characterisation that the text seems to propose as an ethically acceptable alternative. By allowing other people to remain within the broad outlines of caricatured types, Neville and *The Waves* as a whole both recognise them as persistent entities and allow them a degree of individual integrity that other forms of characterisation deny.

## Chapter 8

*The Waves* has often been seen as the high point in Woolf's work. Cyril Connolly, for instance, described it as Woolf's "masterpiece," while for a more recent critic it represents "the summit" of Woolf's exploration of "subjective truth" (49, Connor xv). In the years that followed *The Waves*, British literature became, broadly speaking, more directly involved in the political and social struggles of its time. While as Keith Williams and Steven Matthews point out a "narrow genealogy of polarised relations between aesthetics and politics, [. . .] difficulty and accessibility, textuality and content" is unsustainable, there was a shift in literary emphasis during the 1930s towards politically engaged writing built around fact, a phenomenon clearest in the rise of new reportage, but perceptible in much literature of the period (Williams and Matthews 1). As Keith Williams writes, "an impulse towards a factual art" or "documentary" was "virtually the Jakobsonian 'dominant' of thirties culture, since even perhaps the bulk of thirties fictional literature was magnetised towards it" (164). While the relationship between fact and fiction had long been important for Woolf, she recognised the increasing importance of social fact in her 1936 article "Why Art Today Follows Politics" in which she explained that "[. . .] almost every book that is now issued, brings proof of the fact [. . .]. The novelist turns from the private lives of his characters to their social surroundings and their political opinions" (133). As always, during this period Woolf formulated her literary objectives in her critical writings. A key piece is a 1933 essay, "The Novels of Turgenev". Here, Woolf both marks her continued interest in character as a critical category, and indicates possible directions forward for her own work. This essay is an overtly retrospective exercise, yet "after years of absence" Turgenev's stories remain relevant: "[. . .] they are about ourselves at the present moment" (54).

Woolf's essay is built around a contrast between "fact" and "vision" (56). Turgenev, Woolf writes, "is asking the novelist" to both "observe facts impartially" and to "interpret them" (56). These two functions are generally split between different types of novel, the "photograph" and the "poem," but "few combine the fact and the vision; and the rare quality that we find in Turgenev is the result of this double process" (56).<sup>180</sup> The combination of fact and vision in one work represents an ideal, although not one without a cost: "The great characters with whom we are so familiar in our literature, The Micawbers, the Pecksniffs, the Becky Sharps, will not flourish under" the balance of fact and vision, Woolf argues, for "they

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<sup>180</sup> As Marcus notes, "the contrast between" fact and vision, or fact and fiction, for Woolf's terms shift, "was of central importance to Woolf" particularly during this period of her life, when she was writing the novel that became *The Waves* and the polemical *Three Guineas* (Virginia 152).

need, it seems, more licence; they must be allowed to dominate and perhaps to destroy other competitors. [. . .] no one character in Turgenev's novels stands out above and beyond the rest so that we remember him apart from the book" (57). Instead, they "shade off into each other, making, with all their variations, one subtle and profound type [. . .]" (57). Here, some familiar terms from Woolf's early criticism of character return, although in different form. In 1905, she argued that exaggerated characterisation marred Elizabeth Robins' *A Dark Lantern*, while here she mourns the seemingly necessary absence of the strongly drawn Victorian character. This towering figure is replaced in the work of Turgenev by "a succession of emotions radiating from some character at the centre" who, "seen in the flesh, perhaps, once in the corner of a railway carriage, becomes of paramount importance and acts as a magnet which has the power to draw things mysteriously belonging, although apparently incongruous, together" (57 - 58). This is another key image from Woolf's theoretical engagement with characterisation, the figure of Mrs Brown in her railway carriage. The remainder of the essay sets out two elements of Turgenev's characterisation. These, taken with Woolf's attention to the reconciliation of fact and vision, offer an outline of Woolf's literary priorities in the last decade of her life.

Turgenev's characters are, according to "The Novels of Turgenev", deeply embedded in their context, for "the individual never dominates; many other things seem to be going on at the same time. We hear the hum of life in the fields; a horse champs his bit; a butterfly circles and settles" (58). The reader's engagement with the characters is strengthened rather than weakened by this contextualization: "And as we notice, without seeming to notice, life going on, we feel more intensely for the men and women themselves because they are not the whole of life, but only part of the whole" (58). "Turgenev's people," Woolf goes on, "are profoundly conscious of their relations to things outside themselves" (58). The world around the character is equally important to the character itself, and this both defines and strengthens individual characters. Part of this context is, as the examples above indicate, natural. In addition, Turgenev's characters exhibit intense national awareness, brooding "over the question of Russia" (59). Importantly, Turgenev is "never a partisan, a mouthpiece" as "there is always the other side, the contrast" (59). National awareness and nationalism are not identical.

The second key element Woolf identifies is the elimination of the artist from the artwork. Woolf gestures towards anonymity as a potential if unrealisable ideal. Turgenev's "aloofness" allows his works to affect the reader "more powerfully," yet "no theory, as

Turgenev's novels abundantly prove, is able to get to the root of the matter and eliminate the artist himself; his temperament remains ineradicable" (59). While a distant artistic stance is desirable, it is inevitably incomplete: "birth [. . .] race [. . .] the impressions of [. . .] childhood [. . .] pervade everything" (60). There remains, however, a choice that writers can make to distance themselves from their material:

But, though temperament is fate and inevitable, the writer has a choice, and a very important one, in the use he makes of it. 'I' he must be; but there are many different 'I's' in the same person. Shall he be the 'I' who has suffered this slight, that injury, who desires to impose his own personality, to win popularity and power for himself and his views; or shall he suppress that 'I' in favour of the one who sees as far as he can impartially and honestly, without wishing to plead a cause or to justify himself? (60)

The personality of the artist leaves an inevitable impress on his or her work, but the form of this impression is negotiable. Rather than using personal drives, ambitions, and emotions, the self should be as far as possible effaced in favour of a rational impersonality. Only by avoiding "hot and personal emotion" can a work hope to be other than "local and transitory" (60).

These perspectives on character offer a rough guide to a reading of character in *The Years* and *Between the Acts*. I have already indicated some of the ways character in *The Years* demonstrates similar concerns to character in *The Waves*, particularly in terms of the exploration of the continuity of self over time. Another way of looking at this novel, begun in 1931 and published in 1937, is through the opposition of fact and vision Woolf established in her essay on Turgenev.

Woolf first intended *The Years* to be an "essay-novel" which would "take in everything, sex, education, life, etc." (WD 184). It was to consist of a narrative alternating with "interchapters," essays about the developing story, but in February 1933 Woolf decided to leave them out, "compacting them into the text" (WD 190).<sup>181</sup> These essays are explicit regarding the role of fact in the novel as a whole. In the first of them, based on a speech given to the London and National Society for Women's Service in January 1931, Woolf writes that "we cannot understand the present if we isolate it from the past" (P 8). She argues that fiction can be more true than history: her novel *The Pargiters* gives "a faithful and detailed account" of a fictional family, yet "there is not a statement in it that cannot be verified" (P 9). It is at once fiction and fact. The essays themselves analyse the fictional

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<sup>181</sup> These interchapters are reminiscent of the historical-philosophical essays which Tolstoy included between narrative chapters of *War and Peace*.

situations of Woolf's characters in terms of the prevailing social conditions of the nineteenth century: Milly, Delia, and Eleanor do not go to college, for instance, because "the women's colleges were only just in existence; there was a great prejudice moreover against them" (*P* 28). This is the type of fact upon which the novel depends for its "effectiveness" (*P* 33). It relies on the "truth of fact, as distinct from truth of vision" for its effect (*P* 33).

After writing the sixth interchapter, Woolf abandoned this alternating structure.<sup>182</sup> Parts of these essays were eventually used in *Three Guineas*, her 1938 political polemic (Marcus, *Virginia* 150). Still, even after these essays, a "torrent of facts," had been removed, Woolf wanted to "give the whole of the present society - nothing less: facts as well as the vision" (*WD* 185, 192). Woolf's abandonment of her initial plan for the novel was not a retreat from her interest in fact, but a reassessment of the best way to use fact in fiction. Fact remains very much a prominent element in *The Years*. First, its pages are filled, as Colonel Pargiter notes in his mistress' rooms, with "little objects," such as "cushions and covers [. . .]. Pocket handkerchiefs, screwed up bits of paper, silver and coppers" (*Y* 4). These things create a dense, at times claustrophobic, material environment surrounding the characters. There is also a place for the facts of socio-historical structure in the published version of the novel, although the issues under examination are explored less overtly than they are in the excised interchapters. Colonel Pargiter drinks tea with his family every day: "He detested tea; but he always sipped a little from the huge old cup that had been his father's" (*Y* 9). Here, an everyday action is transformed by narrative implication into a form of social commentary; Colonel Pargiter is a fully paid-up member of the patriarchy, and it is his duty, albeit a revolting one, to embrace paternal continuity in a cup of tea. In another scene, he gives his son Martin sixpence as an award for academic achievement, fumbling for it with "mutilated fingers," just as years later Martin "slipped coins into the hands" of a group of working class children as a reward for entertainment (*Y* 10, 376). In an excised essay, Pargiter's status as loving but domineering patriarch is made explicit - the Colonel "held his money in trust for his children" and loves his children "with a mixture of pride and

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<sup>182</sup> As Mitchell Leaska has pointed out, "what went wrong during the novel's early months [. . .] must remain a matter of conjecture" ("Introduction" xiii). His conjecture is that the "weighty substance" of the essays "collided with the artistic design" of the novel ("Introduction" xiv). Marcus argues convincingly that the conflation of fact and fiction not only impaired the novel's design, but also eroded the strength of the fictional narrative (*Virginia* 151 - 152). It might also be worth considering the ways in which Woolf's essays at times approach a form of narrative exposition of character that is antithetical to her overall approach to characterisation. Statements like "she was practical by nature" are hard to associate with a writer as sensitive to the nuanced presentation of character as Woolf (*P* 150).

protection” (P 31, 32). In *The Years*, this is implied through narrative rather than stated as fact, shown rather than told.

Some critics read this focus on fact as one of the main features of the novel’s characterisation: “[. . .] the inner selves of the characters are given only as much weight as their ineffectual social gestures or as the political forces and domestic pressures that press in on them” (Lee, *Virginia* 630). On the other hand, many characters in the novel exist in ways that challenge this factual basis. Even Colonel Pargiter, for all his embodiment of Victorian patriarchy, can tell stories “crisp, and at the same time romantic,” implying an interiority which extends beyond the facts of his social position (Y 30). Another example of this is Sara Pargiter, who has been described as “the novel’s most charming and enigmatic character” (Linett 342).<sup>183</sup> Her “free imaginings and lyrical conversation,” her ability and propensity to repeat or mimic other characters “emptied of all meaning,” and discourse composed of snatches of song, chanting and quotation move her well beyond the realm of exterior fact (Linett 342; Y 109). Rather, she is a sort of textual muse whose internal spaces although strongly implied by the text are not clearly articulated. Sudden shifts in narrative perspective also challenge the factual basis of the novel. When, for instance, Rose and Sara go to a meeting together, they purchase a bunch of violets in a scene that is narrated from a strangely external perspective which is unable even to identify the participants beyond a physical description: one is “short and stout,” the other “tall” (Y 151). And this is only moments after the narrative has had access to Rose’s thoughts, as she wondered “Did she mean me?” (Y 151).

The relationship between fact and vision in *The Years* leads directly into the next element Woolf laid out in her essay on Turgenev: the role of the fully imagined and articulated context in the creation of character: what Woolf describes as social fact is another way of describing social context. Woolf pointed out that “the individual never dominates [. . .] We hear the hum of life in the fields; a horse champs his bit; a butterfly circles and settles” (58). This is an approach that displaces the individual from the centre of the narrative. A comparison between the opening passages of Woolf’s earlier novels and *The*

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<sup>183</sup> A description of Sara Pargiter as charming seems ironic given her participation in the scene of “the Jew having a bath,” which has caused considerable critical discomfort (Y 296). This scene must be viewed as part of a novel “preoccupied” by stains, dirt, and skin-disease, and, as I argue below, part of the politico-national context of the novel (Connor xxvi). Maren Linett’s linkage of Woolf’s anti-Semitism, her concerns about freedom, and her antifascism offers a thorough reading of the scene (342).

*Years* is instructive: *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse* all open with a narrative focussed on a single figure: Mrs Flanders, Mrs Dalloway, and Mrs Ramsay respectively. They are described in each case as doing something and saying something - active and communicative individuals who are the centre, or near the centre, of their narrative worlds. *The Years*, on the other hand, begins with a page-and-a-half long narrative description that contains not an individual, but "thousands of shop assistants" and indeed an entire city (Y 1). Each of the novel's nine chronological sections begins with a similar scenic word-painting separated by a space from the main narrative with its individual characters, a technique reminiscent of the interludes in *The Waves*. The characters are thus in each part of the novel placed in a specific temporal and physical milieu before they even begin to function as imagined human beings; they are contextualized. Another example of this is the enormous role played by sound in the novel, the way it penetrates the spaces surrounding characters and thus embeds them in the world around them. The text at least gestures towards giving equal attention to the "hum of life" as to the individuals who experience it (Woolf, "Turgenev" 58).

Part of the contextualization Woolf refers to in her essay on Turgenev concerns national awareness. In an overtly political book such as *Three Guineas* this manifests itself as a stringent questioning of appeals to national patriotism, particularly from the perspective of a woman and "outsider" (TG 123). While recognising the "obstinate emotion" which attaches her to England, she subjects its institutions, structures, and attitudes to a trenchant critique (TG 125). *The Years* reflects in many ways on the relationship between its individual characters and the state in which they live. Its very structure, tracing the lives of an extended family through more than fifty years of British history, allows a wider meditation on the nation than a novel such as *Mrs Dalloway*, taking place in a single day, can accommodate. In the 1891 section, for instance, the death of Parnell is "written in very large black letters" (Y 97). This affects the novel's characters: both Eleanor and Colonel Pargiter spend the bulk of this section thinking about and responding to this public event. The 1910 section concludes with another announcement of death: "'The King's dead!'" (Y 166). The 1917 section responds to the First World War as the characters adapt to its new conditions, and in the Present Day section the "circle [. . .] with a jagged line in it" of the British Union of Fascists appears (Y 270). This social fact - the rise of British Fascism under Sir Oswald Mosely's leadership - is not relevant in its own right, but in the way it connects to other parts of the novel, perhaps most significantly the troubling and troublesome scene of the Jew in the bath,

and participates in what Woolf would describe as vision or interpretation. The jagged chalk circle is also associated, for instance, with the “chalk cages” children use in the 1880 section to play games, chalk lines that are also Woolf’s symbol of arbitrary division in *Three Guineas* (Y 7). The meaning of the fact lies both in itself and in its connections to other elements of the text.

The last of the directions Woolf mapped out concerns the impersonality of the artist. Woolf’s “Anon”, an essay intended to be the first chapter of a history of English literature, is an important reference point here. Anon, the anonymous artist of literature before print, drew upon a rich “reservoir of common belief that lay deep sunk in the minds of peasants and nobles” (384). Anon presents a world “without comment [. . .]” (384). “Anonymity,” Woolf writes, “was a great possession. It gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality. [. . .]. It allowed us to know nothing of the writer: and so to concentrate upon his song. Anon had great privileges. He was not responsible. He was not self conscious” (397). This historical anonymity is not, however, relegated to the historical, almost pre-historical past, for in a significant shift in tense, Anon “is not self conscious. He can borrow. He can repeat. He can say what every one feels. No one tries to stamp his own name, to discover his own experience, in his work” (397). Anon belongs here grammatically to modernity as much as to antiquity, but ironically, “keeps at a distance from the present moment” (397). Anon seems to be for Woolf both a historical reality and a contemporary ideal.

A reading of *Between the Acts* is needed to trace this element in Woolf’s fiction. Woolf’s first ideas for the novel focussed on just this suppression of self: “[. . .] anything that comes into my head; but ‘I’ rejected: ‘We’ substituted: to whom at the end there shall be an invocation? ‘We’ . . . the [sic] composed of many different things [. . .]” (WD 276). The novel contains one of Woolf’s major artist-characters, Miss La Trobe, about whom “very little was actually known” (BA 46). While a commanding figure in the creation of the village pageant, Miss La Trobe has little interest in superficial manifestations of personality: “Only the roots beneath the water were of use to her” (BA 51). She avoids attention, and feels that “it was in the giving that the triumph was” rather than in public recognition or personal pride. Her works are destined to be forgotten, and all that she possesses - or is possessed by - is the mystery of creation, “words without meaning - wonderful words” (BA 153).<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> As Brenda Silver points out, “the portrayal of Anon in the essay enlarges her portrait of the artist, Miss La Trobe - often referred to as ‘Miss Whatshername’ - in the novel she was then revising, and provides an historical ancestry for the creator of the mid-summer village pageant in *Between the Acts*” (380).

*Between the Acts* is also concerned with the contrast between fact and vision. If in *The Years* Sara represented a strange and unsettling turn inwards into a self radically disconnected from its social and textual context, this type of activity occurs again in Woolf's last novel. Isa's world of imaginative fantasy is one of the texts' clearest embodiments of this. The facts of the textual world she inhabits are rapidly if not instantly transformed into private images and metaphors: she sees, for instance, herself and the object of her admiration Haines as "two swans" floating "down stream" at the same moment as she sits "her body like a bolster in its faded dressing gown" (BA 8). Isa's metaphorical richness exceeds the bounds of fact - she and Haines barely know each other - and can also be said to exceed the metaphors of the novel's narrator, whose quotidian simile - Isa is like a piece of furniture - operates in marked contrast to her own. Isa's inner life, composed largely of muttered phrases of poetry which only William Dodge "the lip reader" can hear, is often starkly contrasted to the external quotidian of fact (BA 150). Her dialogue with the fishmonger is a case in point: "'There to lose what binds us here,' she murmured. 'Soles. Filleted. In time for lunch please,' she said aloud. 'With a feather, a blue feather [. . .]'" (BA 15). This is, to adopt the novel's own mocking terminology, a contrast between the "soul sublime" and the "soul bored" (BA 16). The same sort of contrast exists for many of the major characters in the novel: Mrs Swithin has difficulty separating Grace "with blue china on a tray, from the leather-covered grunting monster that was about, as the door opened, to demolish a whole tree in the green steaming undergrowth of the primeval forest" (BA 11). As Giles watches the pageant "words came to the surface," but he remains separated from the activity around him, wondering "what were they laughing at?" (BA 66).<sup>185</sup>

This sort of explicit and peculiar interiority is contrasted in the novel with another form of characterisation that focusses on exteriors and superficial impressions. The first character in the novel, Mrs Haines, "a goose-faced woman with eyes protruding," is completely characterised by her appearance and affectation (BA 7). Less satirically, there are

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<sup>185</sup> Fact and vision, are not, however, completely isolated in the textual economy of *Between the Acts*; rather, facts influence vision and vision in turn influence facts. As Isa reads in the newspaper the story of a rape, she moves from the "fantastic" and "romantic" to the "real," the fact of the rape as related in the newspaper: "and she screamed and hit him about the face" (BA 19). This fact is then transformed into vision as Isa projects the scene of the rape in vivid detail onto "the mahogany door panels" (BA 19). Vision becomes fact again as the door opens - "for in fact it was a door" - and Mrs Swithin enters with a hammer (BA 19). Isa then conflates this fact with the fact of the rape to create a new fact, a fact that lies on the border of vision: "'The girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer'" (BA 20)

a large number of characters identified by type, such as the “young men and women - Jim, Iris, David, Jessica” who decorate the barn (BA 23). Many of the audience members at the pageant are typified. Major and Mrs Mayhew, for instance, are members of the military patriotic caste, unable to understand the omission of the army from a pageant: ““What’s history without the army, eh?”” (BA 115).<sup>186</sup> This is in many ways reminiscent of Woolf’s exploration of character in her early novels, from the unnamed characters in *The Voyage Out* to the excess of named characters in *Jacob’s Room*. Here, however, the typifying gaze is also focussed on the characters possessed of the visionary interiority discussed above. Mrs Swithin, for instance, is “Old Flimsey” to the villagers, a two-dimensional figure of fun (BA 24). For Giles, William Dodge, who is acutely sensitive to the complex interiority of Isa, is no more than a hated type, a “toady; a lickspittle; [. . .] a teaser and twitcher [. . .] simply a -,” a series of pejorative types ultimately resolved in the one publicly unmentionable type, the homosexual (BA 48). Important here is the recognition that typification is simplification, the reduction of a complex individual to a basic category.

This raises the issue of the ethical implications of characterisation: *Between the Acts*, like many other of Woolf’s novels, asks through the medium of literary character the question of how people can and how people should know one another. Is it possible, and if so admirable, to attain a level of intimacy with another self that includes the internal vision of fantasy described above? On the other hand, is the reduction of the other to a type a morally acceptable approach? As with other Woolf novels, *Between the Acts* provides no certain answer to these questions. The immediate answer provided by the text is that judgement - specifically the type of hostile typification that labels Dodge - is unethical. “Why judge each other? Do we know each other?” Isa asks herself rhetorically (BA 49). On the other hand, Isa herself assembles a picture of Dodge that uses external factors to correlate an unknown figure with a known type: “He was of course a gentleman; witness socks and trousers; brainy - tie spotted, waistcoat undone [. . .]” (BA 32). Even in more intimate relationships, typification plays a powerful role. For Isa, Giles is ““the father of my children’,” an “old cliché” which produces and shapes her emotional reaction to him (BA 39). Even more shockingly, Mrs Manresa’s very self-image is a product of typification. She is a “wild child of nature,” and she unremittingly performs this role (BA 34).

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<sup>186</sup> The Major is demoted over the course of the novel. He is reported in the local paper as a Major, probably loans his old frock coat as a Major, but grumbles about the absence of the army as a Colonel, which remains his rank for the rest of the novel (BA 110,113, 115).

On the other hand, the text offers no clear vision of intimate or detailed characterisation. For the reader, the experience of the characters' interior worlds is unsettling, based as it so often is on snatches of poetry or song, or presented in incomplete form, as when Mrs Swithin leaves a "sentence unfinished, as if she were of two minds and they fluttered to right and to left" (BA 58). Nor is their experience of each other any clearer for the characters in the novel: Bartholomew Oliver can find no answer to his question "why, in Lucy's skull, shaped so much like his own, there existed a prayable being?" (BA 22). Even when characters engage in some sort of relationship, there is very little contact between them. Like Isa and Dodge they perform a sort of habitual intimacy based upon their types - "then they talked as if they had known each other all their lives; which was odd, she said, as they always did, considering she'd known him perhaps an hour" - a repetitiousness Dodge is aware of if Isa is not (BA 85). The narrative perspective is significant here - the reader is told none of the things they say, which are instead formulated in yet another cliché. The other possibility for intimate inter-characterisation also occurs, like this exchange, in the greenhouse, but again the reader is left outside. All that is revealed about Giles and Mrs Manresa's meeting is that they have had one: "The door was kicked open. Out came Mrs Manresa and Giles" (BA 115). While the implication is that something of a sexual nature may have occurred, this is by no means certain.

These two scenes offer two related avenues toward characterisation and the relationships between characters that are played out in *Between the Acts*. These might be described as the habitual and the physical. By the first of these I mean that the characters in the novel are presented to the reader in terms of habitual process, and that they encounter each other, relate, through habit. The typified Mrs Haines says "what a subject to talk about on a night like this" twice, indicating both that this novel will talk about metaphoric cesspools, and that it is through habitual thought process and articulation that Mrs Haines exists (BA 7, 8). Part of this is related to an exploration of the continuity of self through time that is reminiscent of both *The Waves* and *The Years*. Bart's mother gave him the works of Byron "in that very room," a conversation about the pageant is like a familiar "peal of a chime of bells" in their inevitable sequence, and nothing at Pointz Hall has changed in a century: "1833 was true in 1939" (BA 8, 20, 42). Even Mrs La Trobe, the text's powerful artist-figure, is displayed as a figure of repetition and habit, "for another play always lay behind the play she had just written" (BA 50).

While this sort of social habit is both a powerful identifier of character, and a major form of connection between characters, it is also related to the physical nature - or the

naturalness - of the character. Part of this is figured in the text's obsession with history and origins. Mrs Swithin reads an "Outline of History" and thinks of primeval "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" (BA 10). Isa is the niece of two women proud of "their descent from the kings of Ireland" and contemplates reading "not a person's life" but "a county's" such as "*The Antiquities of Durham*" (BA 16, 18 - 19). This interest in history focusses the text on the question of origins, and figures people through their relationship with the past. The pageant is the strongest example of this, as villagers simultaneously inhabit their present-day roles and historical ones. Eliza Clark, "licensed to sell tobacco," is Queen Elizabeth (BA 64). Nor is the connection totally fortuitous, as tobacco was first brought to Britain by Sir Walter Raleigh during the reign of Elizabeth, and was intimately bound up in the English hopes of imperial greatness (Knapp 29). The audience, prompted by the pageant, wonders "D'you think people change? Their clothes of course . . . But I meant ourselves" (BA 90). Thus the natural historical origins of the characters tie back into the question of continuity over time, a continuity physically demonstrated by the presence of the barn and the Roman road.

This physical characterisation also links the characters to the physical places that surround them. Mrs Swithin is in a sense Pointz Hall, and as her name may indicate she is strongly associated with the interior spaces of the house, born "in this bed" as she explains to Dodge (BA 55). The "stagnant pool" of her brother's "heart" in which "bones lay buried" links him to the pool where "water, for hundreds of years, had silted down" and a thigh bone was found (BA 89, 35). In both cases, the physical associations of a character gesture towards a transcendent silence at the core of selfhood: the fish in the pond swim "silently [. . .] in their water world," and the centre of the house is "empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent" (BA 36, 31).

The final, and perhaps most obvious, way that nature relates to character in *Between the Acts* is in the animalization of human characters. An early example of this is the appearance of Bartholomew as a "terrible peaked eyeless monster" (BA 13).<sup>187</sup> Later, "as a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered" (BA 158). The strongest example, however, occurs at the conclusion of the novel, when Giles and Isa must resolve the barely articulated conflicts of the day, the ambivalent basis "of love; and of hate" which is their relationship (BA 39). The narrative fills the silence between them with a comparison to the rhythms and patterns of animal life: "[. . .] they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be

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<sup>187</sup> Roger Poole identifies this scene as representative of the intellectual conflict between Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Leonard-Bartholomew representing rational male divisive intellection disturbing the child's unifying vision of the world "entire" (237 - 238; BA 13). Poole also draws a parallel between Bartholomew's beak of paper and Mr Ramsay's beak of brass in *To the Lighthouse* (238).

born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of the night” (BA 158). There is a recognition here - and a powerful one due to its location at the conclusion of the narrative and its association with the central characters of the novel - that characterisation cannot rely strictly on the rational structures of normative human discourse. Instead, it must recognise the extent to which the human character is composed of different and conflicting elements. Lucy Swithin’s *Outline of History* ties this sense of the partially animal nature of the individual back to the way in which character is embedded in a broad context in this novel. ““Prehistoric man,”” she reads as the day of the narrative ends, ““half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones”” (BA 158). Here is the text’s explicit recognition that the human individual is both deeply connected to its physical context, its historical origins, and its sense of place - the great stones in this excerpt correlate to the great stones of Pointz Hall and the barn reminiscent of a Greek temple - and that it can best be understood in terms of its relationship to the animal world.<sup>188</sup>

Character, then, in *Between the Acts* is strange indeed, composed of an odd and shifting mixture of fact and vision, of the quotidian and the transcendent, of deeply private interiority and superficial public typification, of cliché and poetry, of historical and natural setting, and of sustained animal metaphors. Finally, underlying all of this is what might be considered the master metaphor for character in the novel, the contrast between the voiced and the unvoiced, the speakable and the unspeakable, between sound and silence. There are two portraits in Pointz Hall; one of an articulate ancestor with a story, the other an aesthetic object “bought by Oliver because he liked the picture” (BA 30). The first “was a talk producer” who both textually speaks himself “addressing the company,” and is a topic of social conversation for the occupants of the house (BA 31, 30). Mrs Haines would no doubt prefer to discuss the ancestor and his fondness for animals than cesspools, for instance. The portrait of the lady on the other hand, “was a picture” which leads the observing eye, and this is one of the many places, perhaps, where Woolf is alert to the homonym of eye, I, “into silence” (BA 31). These portraits represent two elements in the representation of the human self through character, and this is essentially where the text leaves its picture of the

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<sup>188</sup> In a diary entry of 25 October 1939, Woolf writes of reading Gerald Heard’s *Pain, Sex and Time*, which has “nothing to offer, once he’s done historical accounting” (D 5: 243). Heard’s book offers an account of the history of evolution, and proposes potential future developments in mental evolution: for Woolf it was “a mere tangle” cursed by a sense of “strangled individuality” (D 5: 243 - 244). On 24 March 1940, Woolf wrote of her intention to write an essay on Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* (D 5: 274). These are indications that historical and developmental concerns were present for Woolf at this time.

individual self, as a mysteriously divided and on some level unknowable being. Each character, like Isa, may think that “other people, perhaps . . . Cobbett of Cobbs Corner; the Major; old Bartholomew; Mrs Swithin - them perhaps” can be known and represented through the pageant, “but she won’t get me - no, not me” (BA 130). Yet this sense of the decipherability of the other, and the indecipherability of the self is an illusion; viewing others as types allows us to imagine comprehension, but this remains imagination. The text does not, however, despair at this situation. ““Imagine?”” Mrs Swithin says during the pageant, ““How right! Actors show us too much. The Chinese, you know, put a dagger on the table and that’s a battle”” (BA 104). *Between the Acts* asks its readers and its characters to carry out a similar act of imagination by reconstructing character from the minimal and contradictory clues available.

*Between the Acts* also contains a powerful meditation on the nature of communal identity, and a discussion of character in the text must consider this example of what has been described as Woolf’s “increasing commitment to a post-individualist subjectivity” (Minow-Pinkney 194). This communal identity is particularly strong under the pressure of imminent war. At the conclusion of Miss La Trobe’s pageant, the Rev. G. W. Streatfield, the community’s “representative spokesman,” offers an interpretation of the performance stressing the corporate ‘we’ of the community over the individual ‘I’: “to me at least it was indicated that we are members one of another” (BA 138, 139). His speech, however, is interrupted by the passage of warplanes: “Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. *That was the music*” (BA 140). His “humanistic interpretation” of unity is trumped by a more bellicose version of the conditions under which individuality is effaced (Ames 401).<sup>189</sup> The war against Germany, not Miss La Trobe’s pageant, is the reality which creates an impersonal ‘we’. The flight of the warplanes is compared to music, which during the pageant offers a resolution to conflicting impulses, clashing urges, divergent needs and contradictory demands:

The tune began [. . .]. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. [. . .] from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder; To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge

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<sup>189</sup> This is reminiscent of the way in which Bernard’s benign narrative unity is overpowered by the coercive social unity of Percival in *The Waves*.

of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and others uncrossed their legs. (BA 137)

Here, the individual listeners are compelled to join together by music containing martial elements. The unity is, however, ultimately beneficial, drawing the listeners back from the precipice of disastrous individuation. As Patricia Ondek Laurence writes, “collective ‘music,’ otherwise known as art, draws together and preserves individuals” especially at times of great “cultural disorder” (195).

The planes, however, symbol and manifestation of war, take precedence over music: the planes zoom over, and “*that* was the music” (BA 140). The audience is transformed from a collection of individuals into a collective by war, perhaps asking themselves the same question Eleanor asks in *The Years*: “could you allow the Germans to invade England and do nothing?” (Y 250). At the conclusion of the pageant, after the flyover, *God Save the King* is played and the “audience faced the actors” in a moment of total and inclusive, and explicitly patriotic, unity (BA 141). The individual is submerged here in the mass, and a mass that is explicitly linked - albeit critically - to national identity.<sup>190</sup>

These final passages in Woolf’s last novel summarise the direction her late novels move in. Characters are now situated in a dense context, factual, historical, and national, that moves them away from individual identity, away from the tense relationship between type and individual, relation and essence, that drives so much of Woolf’s experimental modernist fiction, towards a collective group identity responding in fear to the threat of death. As Woolf recorded in her diary in June of 1940, “[. . .] one curious feeling is, that the writing ‘I’ has vanished. No audience. No echo. That’s part of one’s death” (WD 319). At the end of Woolf’s career and life, the creative ‘I’ of the artist is seen to be dependent on the collective ‘we’ of the audience. Yet at the same time her vision of the individual is ever more inward, ever more diffuse. This is a final twist to the tense relationship Woolf explored throughout her career between the one and the many, the individual and the type, the self and the character in an extraordinary literary exploration of what it means to be a self existing amidst other selves, and what it means to write these selves into being.

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<sup>190</sup> Jed Esty has described *Between the Acts* as demonstrating “Woolf’s prickly rapprochement with national heritage” (87). Esty situates the novel in the context of a broader 1930s alertness on the part of artists such as Eliot, Forster and Woolf “to the possibilities embodied in shared national traditions and public rituals,” most specifically the “odd, anachronistic genre” of the pageant (54, 55). As Esty points out, throughout the novel Woolf “reverses course between collective and recuperative ideas of Englishness and her fundamental wariness [. . .] about any kind of national or collective participation” (87). This duality seems to be encapsulated in the playing of the national anthem and the appearance of the war planes.

## Conclusion

Woolf's life-long exploration of and experimentation with character resists easy summary, but it may be worth restating some of the key themes that have been developed and claims that have been made in this thesis. Perhaps the most readily apparent fact to emerge is that Woolf was indeed fascinated by notions of character throughout her literary career. This is evinced both by her continued critical engagement with the question of character from her early journalism to her late criticism, as well as by the central role of characterisation in her short stories and novels. Another important feature which emerges from Woolf's critical practice is the linkage she assumes between literary character and real-world selves. This is not a critical position that has garnered much support in recent years, but it is key to understanding her work. While Woolf is never inattentive to the ultimately textual nature of character, she proposes an intimate bond between character and self. For Woolf, character exists simultaneously as a literary structure and as a reference to the real world of selves. Thus a discussion of character in Woolf blends inevitably into a discussion of subjectivity in Woolf. To neglect either element is to distort the whole. Certainly, Woolf's persistent interest in character, its problems, and the questions it raises challenges critical positions which situate her as a writer uninterested in character.

However, it is equally apparent that Woolf's interest in character does not manifest itself in an uncomplicated or stable manner. Rather than developing a clear and consistent response to the question of character in Woolf, this thesis has traced out a series of centres of interest in her work, focal points between which notions of character circulate throughout her novels and stories. The first of these is the notion of character as an entity that functions on multiple levels: in *The Voyage Out* character occupies a range of levels of identification, from the nameless unknown, to Theophrastan types, to characterisation in the type of depth Woolf associates in her critical writings with Dostoyevsky. This is simultaneously an activity carried out by the reader, and an activity carried out by the characters in the text, whose attempts to know each other, to relate, are analogous to the reader's attempt to know them. Woolf's first novel asks how characters, and by implication selves, can know each other, and explores how the relationships established by this knowledge can be ethically problematic. These are questions that much of Woolf's later fiction attempts to answer.

A second major focal point of Woolf's work is the issue of what a character, and again by implication a self, is composed of, what there is in fact to know. Post-structuralist thought and much contemporary Woolf criticism emphasise the diffuseness, performativity, fragmentation, and social structuring of the self, both in terms of its representation as

modernist character and as an ontological reality. The self according to this view is a fiction, an assemblage of traits, gestures, habits, and language patterns structured around a vacancy, and modernist characterisation, including Woolf's, is a literary representation of this non-self. I argue, however, that while many elements of Woolf's work indeed examine the social, economic, political, and linguistic pressures that are implicated in shaping the self, her work consistently attempts to dig beneath these forces to capture or represent some version of essential character. This attempt results in a range of different formulations of the essential self throughout Woolf's career. These depend upon formal structures in the text which allow the reader to reconstruct notions of essential subjectivity, from the gust of wind that may represent the essence of Jacob to the core of darkness that may lie at the centre of Mrs Ramsay, to the composed diamond which may be Clarissa Dalloway's private self. However, while Woolf's work often proposes the existence of such an essential component of subjectivity, it is seen as existing in a complex and intricate relationship with other elements of self that are linked to external forces and, significantly, other characters. Character develops, it seems, around an elusive yet persistent essence, in relation to formative socio-economic forces and discourses, and, critically, in relation to other characters.

This notion of relation indicates the third focus of Woolf's exploration of character. For Woolf, characters do not exist independently, but in relation to each other. This is in part a product of what feminist criticism has identified as inter-subjectivity, the suppression of the essential or autonomous self allowing other selves to be known. This process, rather than any core self, defines the subject. However, it is also in Woolf's work a process of inter-characterisation, and this type of activity is not a universally beneficent replacement for the "phallic self" of "humanist ideology" which, "gloriously autonomous" rejects "conflict, contradiction and ambiguity" (Moi 8). Rather, inter-characterisation, the ways in which different characters in Woolf's works attempt to know or characterise each other, and based on this knowledge to establish relationships, is presented as ethically problematic at best and as an act of aggressive colonisation at worst. Typification, or the use of broad generalities as a way of knowing, is reductive and fails to do justice to the individual. On the other hand, the quest for intimate and detailed knowledge of the other is frequently portrayed as intrusive, aggressive, and as ironically associated with an ultimate loss of self. Finally, Woolf often associates unity with coercive social structures linked to patriarchy and militarism.

One of the possible solutions Woolf's work proposes to this dilemma is a form of characterisation, a form of knowing other people, that counter-intuitively bears many of the marks of caricature. By knowing people in a simplified way, by accepting broad outlines in

place of detailed depth psychology, by preserving a measure of autonomy in human relations, and all of this without reducing the individual to the status of a type, an ethically acceptable form of relation becomes possible. In addition, this form of relation through character seems to reconcile the tension between self and character that runs through Woolf's work: character is a literary representation of self, and character is the ethically acceptable way of knowing other selves, accepting them as on the one hand infinitely dense points of memory, desire, knowledge, and personality, yet accepting on the other hand that the only way to represent them, both in literary terms and in terms of real-world relationship is to accept a synecdochic sketch, a simple part that stands for the whole.

While Woolf's work does not stand still at any of the points discussed here, it does tend to circulate between them, obsessively reworking and rewriting the questions of character, self, and relation. This alone justifies the use of character as a critical framework through which to read Woolf's work, but it is also a particularly relevant critical approach to adopt in the early twenty-first century. In what might be described as a post post-structuralist or post post-modernist era, questions of ethics and literature are, it seems, returning to the centre of critical discourse. This ethical turn is accompanied by a renewed interest in character. A recent example of this is Blakey Vermeule's 2010 *Why Do We Care About Literary Character?*, which attempts to formulate an ethical criticism "that addresses itself to the importance of what people care about," that is to say other people and thus character (248). While Vermeule's approach to the importance of character, which argues that "interacting with fictional people turns out to be a central human cognitive preoccupation," is very different to the approach adopted in this thesis, the central interest in people, their literary representation as characters, and the ethical implications that can be drawn from this type of reading, are similar (12).

Character is a central human preoccupation, and it was certainly a central preoccupation for Woolf, a centre of interest that moved beyond the strictly literary to the ethical and the human. As Woolf wrote in response to Arnold Bennett's criticism of her characterisation, "to disagree about character is to differ in the depths of the being" (*E* 3: 387). For Woolf, character lay at the centre of what it meant to be human. However complex, varying, and multiple her response to the question of character was, this aspect of her work deserves to occupy as important a position in Woolf scholarship as it does in her own writings.

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