

"BREAKING THE SURFACE OF SILENCE": THE ESSAYS AND
JOURNALISM OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

1995



ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the non-fiction of Virginia Woolf, a writer who is viewed primarily as a novelist. In so doing it shifts the critical perspective on Woolf as a literary figure and on her often overlooked non-fiction works. Through an analysis of the historical and material circumstances which conditioned her non-fiction — looking at the prose as 'journalism' — it locates Woolf in ^{the} culture of the period known as Modernism, thus positioning her as a figure capable of both commenting upon, and revealing, the relationship between 'literature' and 'literary history'. Through an analysis of Woolf's textual practice — looking at the prose as literary 'essays' — this thesis examines the relationship between gender and genre in writing, determining whether Woolf succeeds in creating a gendered subjectivity in writing. Because it is concerned with notions of culture and language in relation to a major woman writer in the twentieth century literary canon, this thesis also engages with the works of cultural and post-structural theorists, especially as they intersect with feminist literary theory. Working on Virginia Woolf as an essayist and journalist, therefore, allows the critic to audit and contribute to contemporary debates in critical theory, whilst reassessing the writings by, and construction of, a canonical woman writer.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own unaided work.

Leila Mary Brosnan.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Berg Berg Collection, New York Public Library
- BtA *Between the Acts*, ed. by Frank Kermode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1941])
- CDB *The Captain's Death Bed and other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1950)
- CR2 *The Common Reader: Second Series*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986 [1932])
- D1-5 *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979-85 [1977-84])
- DoM *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942)
- E1-4 *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, 6 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1986-)
- EJ *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals*, ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1990)
- JR *Jacob's Room*, ed. by Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1922])
- HL 'A Letter to a Young Poet' in *The Hogarth Letters*, intro. by Hermione Lee (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985 [1932])

- L1-6 *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980-3 [1975-80])
- LWP Leonard Woolf Papers, University of Sussex
- M *The Moment and other Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1947)
- MD *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Claire Tomalin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1925])
- MHP Monks House Papers, University of Sussex
- MoB *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (London: Grafton, rev'd edn, 1989 [1976])
- O *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. by Rachel Bowlby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1928])
- P *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years*. ed. by Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Hogarth Press, 1978)
- Room *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. by Morag Schiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1929])
- SF *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. by Susan Dick, (London: Hogarth Press, rev'd edn, 1989 [1985])

- TG *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, ed. by Morag Schiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992[1938])
- TtL *To the Lighthouse*, ed. by Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1927])
- W *The Waves*, ed. by Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1931])
- WF *Women and Fiction: The Manuscript Version of 'A Room of One's Own'*, ed. by S.P. Rosenbaum (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991)
- Y *The Years*, ed. by Hermione Lee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1937])

All works by Virginia Woolf unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION: BREAKING THE SURFACE OF SILENCE

life expressed itself chiefly in the intricacies of behaviour, in what men said and what women did not quite say, in poems that break the surface of silence with silver fins (E4, 265-6).

To 'break the surface of silence with silver fins' — to those familiar with the imagery and phraseology of both her public and her private writing, this quotation is identifiably vintage Virginia Woolf. It releases a multitude of Woolfian resonances: echoes of Rachel Vinrace's description of her life as a 'short season between two silences',¹ of Bernard's characterisation of a moment in *The Waves* as one when it was 'as if a fin rose in the wastes of silence' (W, 228), of 'that fin in the waste of waters' (D4, 10) which is, as Pamela L. Caughie suggests, 'the germinal image of *The Waves* and a commonly accepted metaphor for Woolf's artistic quest'.² The image of fish-like poems piercing the surface of the water which encloses them recalls multiple references to membranes, envelopes — semi-transparent or otherwise — and screens, which recur throughout Woolf's writing;³ it recalls her fascination with the relationship between surface, depth and identity which is

¹This phrase is only to be found in the American edition of *The Voyage Out* (New York: George H. Doran, 1920), p. 82 but has been popularised on this side of the Atlantic through its use as the title of Madeline Moore's book *The Short Season Between Two Silences: The Mystical and the Political in the Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

²Pamela L. Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 30

³See, for example her discussion of the 'screen making habit' (D3, 104)

probed in private musings like that written in 1926 where Woolf describes how

one goes down into the well & nothing protects one from the assault of truth. Down there I cant write or read; I exist however. I am.^{Then} I ask myself what I am? & get a closer though less flattering answer than I should on the surface (D3, 112).

The interplay between life and literature, the verbal and the animate, developed in the figure of the woman artist as angler (Fisher Queen perhaps, rather than Fisher King) in *A Room of One's Own* and 'Professions for Women', and the relationship between gender and language, finds an airing with the silver-finned fish. Life, literature and gender divisions are all included in one brief twist of a sentence. We are in a familiarly silent, aqueous, membranous, gender conscious and eminently Woolfian world.

Yet, should the facts surrounding the piece from which this quotation is taken be known, then familiarities begin to crumble. The quotation comes from an article published in the special Scottish issue of *Vogue*, July 1925, a journal to which Virginia Woolf contributed five articles in the 1920s;⁴ the article is a review of Arthur Waley's translation of *The Tale of the Genji* by Lady Murasaki; Waley's edition was supposedly the 'most talked of publication of the day';⁵ Woolf's manuscript draft of the piece

⁴The others being 'Indiscretions', Late November 1924, pp. 47 & 88; 'George Moore', Early June 1925, pp. 63 & 84; 'The Life of John Mytton', Early March 1926, pp. 61 & 85; and 'A Professor of Life', Early May 1926, pp. 69 & 94. 'Flying Over London' was published posthumously in *Vogue*, New York on 1 March 1950, pp. 132-3

⁵Contents page of the Late July 1925 edition of *Vogue*

contains no mention of the silver fins, merely the barely decipherable and cryptic marginal reference 'poetry';⁶ and she thought her own review '[ran] a little too easily from my pen & must be compressed & compacted' (D3, 31). Readers, both scholarly and popular alike, find that, like the silver fin, they are breaking through the surface of silence into the relatively unfamiliar world of Virginia Woolf's journalism and essays.

Previously, like many an object perceived through the distorting meniscus of a confined body of water, Woolf's non-fiction oeuvre has been viewed from an angle that disguises its true dimensions. Virginia Woolf herself is viewed primarily as a novelist, part of the literary movement characterised posthumously as Modernism, and as a feminist, initiating feminist literary history and literary criticism with *A Room of One's Own* and providing a textual backdrop for the political movement of the 1970s in *Three Guineas*. More recently she has been reborn as a diarist and letter-writer, chronicling her historical and social milieu. Her prodigious and lifelong career as a journalist — her first published piece was a review of a novel published in the *Guardian* in December 1904 (E1, 3-9) and the last publication issued during her lifetime was a review of a biography of Mrs Thrale which appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation* in March 1941 (M, 45-9) — is largely ignored.⁷ Woolf's essays and

⁶Berg, M1.1, p. 101

⁷This contradicts Daniel Albright's argument, in his article 'Virginia Woolf as Autobiographer', *Kenyon Review (New Series)*, 6 (1984), 1-17, that Woolf began and finished her 'serious literary career as an autobiographer'. He uses the memoir 'Reminiscences', written in 1907/8, as the starting point in Woolf's literary career and thus perpetuates the

articles, as Rachel Bowlby points out in the introduction to the first volume of the selected essays published by Penguin, are selectively read for the light that they can shed upon the two popular poles of her career — as Modernist and feminist.⁸ Now accepted as a pioneer of literary Modernism alongside T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, and invoked as an idol of feminism, Woolf's non-fiction pieces are mostly read for their comments on the Modernist aesthetic of her fiction and/or her feminist agenda.⁹ They are a pathway to her fiction or sallies in her battle against masculine oppression, and occasionally both. They are even occasionally resurrected by her detractors who, in the tradition of *Scrutiny*, cite the essays as examples of her deplorable tendency to write charming and superficial prose.¹⁰

assumption made by many critics that Woolf's journalism does not constitute part of a 'serious literary career'.

⁸This is a practice Bowlby goes on to follow herself. 'The essays in this volume,' she writes, 'all look, in different ways, at these many kinds of tie — literary, familial, social — and with an emphasis, as we shall see, which shows that the two topics for which Woolf's essays have been known — modern writing and feminism — are intimately connected'. From the introduction to *Virginia Woolf, A Woman's Essays: Selected Essays Volume One*, reprinted in *Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works*, ed. by Julia Briggs (London: Virago, 1994), p. 255

⁹For works that mention the essays in relation to Modernism and Woolf's fiction see N. Takei da Silva, *Modernism and Virginia Woolf* (Windsor: Windsor Publications, 1990), Mark Goldman, *The Reader's Art: Virginia Woolf as Literary Critic* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976) and Jean Guiguet, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, trans. by Jean Stewart (London: Hogarth Press, 1965); for the feminist connection see, *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing*, ed. by Michele Barrett (London: The Women's Press, 1979), the many works of Jane Marcus (see bibliography), and Barbara Currier Bell and Carol Ohmann, 'Virginia Woolf's Criticism: A Polemical Preface', *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (1974-5), 361-371, which is feminist in that praising a lack of system and an aesthetics of sympathy as 'defiantly feminine' (p. 363) was bound up with the concept of feminism circulating in the mid 1970s.

¹⁰See 'The Whole Contention Between Mr Bennett and Mrs Woolf', by Samuel Hynes in his collection *Edwardian Occasions: Essays on English Writing in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 24-38. For example, 'As so often in Woolf's criticism, the point is blurred by fancy' (p. 28).

They have, however, as this summary suggests, received a degree of critical and popular attention. In breaking the surface of silence on the essays and journalism, therefore, it is important to establish that this study is not the first voice speaking into an unbroken void. During her lifetime Woolf's journalistic expertise was well recognised, by reviewers of her collected essays in the two *Common Readers*, and in the wider context of the British and American literary world. Not only was she a regular reviewer during the early part of her career and a sought-after contributor to periodicals in the latter half, but one reviewer accorded her the triumph of having 'discovered how to write for newspapers without ceasing to be an artist'.¹¹ Another, as Woolf herself noted with some pride, described her as 'our best critic since M. Arnold & wiser & juster' (D5, 313).¹²

After her death, historians of twentieth century literary and social life, like John Gross in *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, and Raymond Williams in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, continue to note her presence as a feature of a passing and past age.¹³ Unfortunately such writers as do recognise her

¹¹H.I.A. Fausset, 'The Art of Virginia Woolf', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 May 1925, cited in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 151

¹²This was John Buchan

¹³Samuel Hynes and John Mepham, in *Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991), also situate Woolf within an historical context. S.P. Rosenbaum, in his proposed three volume literary history of the Bloomsbury and his edited collection of their memoirs, shares this perspective; see his *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), *Victorian Bloomsbury: The Early History of the Bloomsbury Group, Volume 1*

contribution to the journalism of her era do little to enhance her reputation, or promote study of her non-fiction in its cultural context. Gross gives Woolf scant mention in his book on 'Aspects of English Literary Life', mentioning her in her relation to her father Sir Leslie Stephen or her fiction, and referring to her journalism only to say that 'the typical Virginia Woolf essay [...] is a brilliant circular flight, which, as criticism, leads nowhere'.¹⁴ Woolf is dismissed in the same sentence as Lytton Strachey, and in the section on 'Modern Times' her contributions to the periodicals of the age are never mentioned; she fades into the background of a literary landscape which is dominated by T.S. Eliot, Desmond MacCarthy and John Middleton Murry.

Raymond Williams's appraisal, though, is generally more sympathetic, locating Virginia Woolf in a complex 'social formation' which includes a political dimension.¹⁵ Williams is therefore much more useful than Gross as a starting point for an historical or cultural approach to Woolf's journalistic career, as he highlights the need to

see the significance of the cultural group over and above the simple empirical presentation and self-definition [of Bloomsbury] as a 'group of friends'. It is to ask what the group was socially and culturally, as a question distinct from (though still related to) the achievements of

(London: Macmillan, 1987) and *Edwardian Bloomsbury: The Early Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group, Volume 2* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

¹⁴John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life since 1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 202, 275 & 266

¹⁵Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980). See p. 168 for the social, and p. 155 for the political dimensions

individuals and their own immediately perceived relationships.¹⁶

He initiates an approach which S.P. Rosenbaum follows up in his monumental literary history of the Bloomsbury Group. In this project, Rosenbaum considers the writings of Bloomsbury in context because of 'the Group's relevance to modern English literary and cultural history',¹⁷ and because the 'basic premise of a literary history of the Bloomsbury Group is that their writings are historically interrelated in ways important if not essential to their interpretation'.¹⁸ But while Williams holds a complex view of culture and Rosenbaum pays admirable attention to the actual texts of 'Bloomsbury', neither is concerned to investigate the interrelationship between cultural politics, either as imagined or historically documented experience, and textual practice. Woolf's publication of her non-fiction in the periodical press positions her as a figure, and her texts, precariously at a point of cultural contestation, between the 'high' art of literature and the 'low' of journalism. The complexities of this borderline position are revealed by both the outline of the material circumstances of her career as a journalist and an investigation of the prose which she provides for that medium, and the language in which she describes the experience of being a journalist.¹⁹ Thus the language of the private laments on the 'horror of writing 1, 2, 3, 4, reviews on end' (D2, 35) and the pleasure of 'refus[ing] 3 articles

¹⁶ibid, p. 151

¹⁷Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury*, p. 16

¹⁸Preface to a Literary History of the Bloomsbury Group', *New Literary History*, 12 (1980-1), p. 331

¹⁹These are the issues I will be discussing in Chapters Two and Three respectively.

[...] & fe[eling] like a drunkard who has successfully resisted three invitations to drink' (D2, 58)²⁰ are equally relevant to a discussion of culture and its discontents as an examination of the prose in its public sphere. Mapping the public domain of Woolf's essays involves charting the editor/contributor relationships which condition the production of the prose and recognising the diversity within that domain, with Woolf publishing in journals which extend from prestigious and highbrow periodicals such as *The Nation and Athenaeum* and *The Criterion* to more popular magazines like *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping*. An investigation of Woolf's journalism as a textual and cultural activity can, then, lead the way to an assessment of her status in the cultural and social history of her time, while questioning both our and her conceptions of what exactly constitutes 'Culture' and how it can be analysed.

Promoting an analysis of Woolf and culture that goes beyond the relentless adulatory or condemnatory rewriting of the history of what T. S. Eliot called the 'esoteric group' of

²⁰It is expressions like this that have provided ammunition for critics like John Carey, who are bent on presenting Woolf as a Bloomsbury snob, suffering from 'intellectual phobias about the mass' (p. 210), 'upper-middle-class obtuseness — or affectation' (p. 175), and being completely divorced from popular culture, and therefore a literary precursor of actual Fascism. Although Woolf's relationship to notions of high and low culture is pertinent to discussions of Modernism, it is more complex than Carey's argument implies (see Chapter Three of this thesis). His method of argument, one of condemnation by affiliation, which he uses quite blatantly with Woolf — at one point linking her to reactionary statements by Clive Bell purely by noting their familial relationship (p. 153) — is devious and distracting, obscuring the importance of Woolf's participation in culture rather than revealing it. All references are from John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London and Boston: Faber, 1992)

Bloomsbury²¹ by looking at texts as well as individuals will also go some way to demolishing the barriers between what are seen as the different strata of culture and developing the literary critical practice of looking 'across the culture as a whole'.²² This enables us to recognise that 'there are many possible literary forms in circulation at any one time and that all of them repay attention and tell us something about each other', a philosophy which Alison Light uses to good effect in order to introduce women's popular fiction to the 'literature' of the Modernist period, and which translates equally beneficially to studies of other 'low' forms of writing like journalism.²³ To investigate the complexities of journalistic writing, especially of an author critically renowned for her fictional and autobiographical works, is to challenge the 'dividing-line between Journalism and Literature', as E.M. Forster puts it in *Howards End*,²⁴ to help to rethink the concepts of Modernity and literature,²⁵ and also, in the case of a woman writer, to consider the interactive role of gender and language in the formation and presentation of culture in early twentieth century Britain.

²¹T.S. Eliot, Obituary notice, *Horizon*, May 1941, pp. 313-316, cited in Majumdar and McLaurin, p. 431

²²Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. ix

²³ibid, p. ix

²⁴ed. by Oliver Stallybrass, Abinger Edition, (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), p. 71. Journalism versus Literature is one of the 'conversational hare[s]' started by Margaret Schlegel at her luncheon party and one which particularly delights the 'delightful people' who are present (p. 71). It is interesting to consider this scene in relation to Woolf, as she and her sister Vanessa have been considered as potential models for the Schlegel sisters. See Stallybrass's discussion of this issue in his Introduction, p. ix

²⁵See Light, especially p. 217

This study therefore attempts to shift the critical perspective on Woolf's journalism and essays, to 'break the surface of silence' on the 'other' professional side of her career and on the often overlooked non-fictional works.²⁶ The use of the word 'essay' in conjunction with 'journalism' in the title of this project is not meant to indicate two entirely separate categories of non-fictional works by Virginia Woolf, but a difference in approach to the one body of non-fiction, excluding biography. The choice of terminology is meant to denote a difference in critical emphasis, a shift from context to text, not an opposition between types of non-fiction. Obviously a piece published by the Hogarth Press, and having no relevant connection to the periodical press (*A Room of One's Own*, for instance) cannot be considered journalism, but in the majority of cases reviews published in journals are treated as 'journalism' when considered in a commercial context and as 'essays' when viewed in an artistic one. The division is unstable, but this itself is relevant since the opposition between literature and the market place is not absolute. Woolf herself tried to resolve the dilemma by asserting a difference between the reviewer and the critic, with 'the function of the reviewer [...] partly to sort current literature; partly to advertise the author; partly to inform the

²⁶Virginia Woolf designates three of her works 'biographies', *Orlando*, *Flush* and *Roger Fry*. Full length biography, although non-fiction, is a genre which falls outside the scope of this thesis. *Orlando*, *Flush* and *Roger Fry* have no connection with journalism, and in bearing a specific generic title are also separated from the essay, even in its longer manifestations. They will therefore not be discussed in what follows. For commentary on Woolf's biographies see Thomas Lewis, 'Combining "the advantages of fact and fiction": Virginia Woolf's Biographies of Vita Sackville-West, *Flush* and *Roger Fry*', in *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays*, ed. by Elaine K. Ginsberg and Laura Moss Gottlieb (New York: Whitson Publishing, 1983), pp.295-324.

public' (CDB, 121) and the critic's task that of 'deal[ing] with the past and with principles' (CDB, 119). The division breaks down in her own work, however, when she published opinions on current literature (for example, 'Modern Fiction' and 'The Modern Essay') in a volume of collected criticism, the first *Common Reader*. The decision to look at the non-fiction from two angles, rather than to separate it into distinct groups, is made in an attempt to recognise differences without wishing to polarise them into oppositions and to acknowledge instabilities. Looking at 'essays' and 'journalism' facilitates the combination of an historical and textually based approach, which, in turn, generates new readings of an established author. This enables us both to reassess the position of Virginia Woolf as a figure of literary and cultural significance, and appraise her potential to stand as a productive model for feminist theory and practice.

Such an undertaking is practically supported and given critical credibility by the recent project to publish Woolf's *Collected Essays* in six volumes, edited by Andrew McNeillie. Publishing the essays in their entirety may be, as Frank Kermode implies, a result of 'the logic of the situation' in which 'no word of hers must escape the care of editors' now that Virginia Woolf has crossed the 'threshold of canonicity' after being brought to it by 'her novels and her sex', but the fact of publication testifies to Woolf's status as an essayist and journalist.²⁷ The extent of McNeillie's undertaking, enhanced by his introductory assertion

²⁷Frank Kermode, 'Virginia Woolf, the uncommon reader', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 July 1994, p. 3

in Volume 1 that Virginia Woolf was 'arguably the last of the great English essayists' (E1, ix) ensures recognition of the scale and skill of her non-fiction repertoire, as well as its placement in the established tradition of the essay and the historical circumstances of journalism. In addition, Rachel Bowlby's two collections, *A Woman's Essays* and *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life*, published in inexpensive paperback formats, and the reissue of Michele Barrett's *Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing* in 1992, ensure that the profile of Woolf as a writer of essays and journalism, who has contributed more than 'Modern Fiction' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' to innumerable anthologies, is maintained at a reasonably popular level.²⁸ Like McNeillie's scholarship, the introductory comments of Bowlby and Barrett give critical credence to the collections and to the essays themselves as individual pieces devoted to specific topics, and as part of an oeuvre, in which the essays relate to each other and to a concept of a generic form. But because the books *are* selections, and because McNeillie's project is unavoidably slow, any assessment or judgement of 'Woolf's Essays' and/or 'Woolf's Journalism' is necessarily incomplete. This is a state of affairs which leads too easily to viewing the essays as minor pieces, as individual documents worthy of inclusion in critical anthologies without recognition of their extraction from a larger body of work, or as negligible fractions of Woolf's total output which may then be relegated to the realms of the unread. Thus we return,

²⁸*Virginia Woolf, A Woman's Essays: Selected Essays Volume One* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992) and *Virginia Woolf, The Crowded Dance of Modern Life: Selected Essays Volume 2* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993); *Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing* (London: Virago, 1992)

potentially, to the notion of Woolf which critics have spent years trying to dispel — the aloof writer of fiction whose literary life was separate from the more practical concerns of the literature and culture of her age, a woman who wrote, rather than a working woman writer.

Working on the essays as individual pieces, or in small groupings related to their subject area, publication history, theories of literary lineage, linguistic idiosyncracies or specific aspects of Woolf's career as a writer of non-fiction prose — as a literary critic, an essayist, or an autobiographer — has resulted in minimal critical attention being paid to the essays and journalism. Until recently this has also been compounded by the difficulties scholars encounter in tracing and assembling all the different articles.²⁹ What is missing from the

²⁹Subject area: Diane Filby Gillespie "'Oh to be a painter!': Virginia Woolf as an Art Critic", *Studies in the Humanities*, 10 (1983), 28-38, and sections of her book *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), Alice Fox, *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Elaine K. Ginsberg, 'Virginia Woolf and the Americans', *The Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, 86 (1983-5), 347-359 and Elizabeth W. Pomeroy, 'Garden and Wilderness: Virginia Woolf Reads the Elizabethans', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 24 (1978-9), 97-508.

Publication history: Pamela L. Caughie, 'Purpose and Play in Woolf's London Scene Essays', *Women's Studies*, 16 (1989), 389-408. This article is more complex than my categorising of it would suggest; the essays it examines, however, are selected because they represent a distinct group published in *Good Housekeeping*.

Literary lineage: Katherine C. Hill, 'Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution', *PMLA*, 96 (1981), 351-362, Virginia R. Hyman, 'Late Victorian and Early Modern: Continuities in the Criticism of Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf', *English Literature in Transition*, 23 (1980), 144-154 and Perry Meisel, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980).

Linguistic Idiosyncrasy: Edward L. Bishop, 'Metaphor and the Subversive Process of Virginia Woolf's Essays', *Style*, 21 (1987), 573-588 and Thomas M. McLaughlin, 'Virginia Woolf's Criticism: Interpretation as Theory and Discourse', *Southern Humanities Review*, 17 (1983), 41-253.

ever-burgeoning scholarly industry devoted to Virginia Woolf, is an investigation of her essays and journalism alone and as a complete corpus; as a corpus that has its own self-determining aesthetic dimensions and its own historical environment.³⁰ Bowlby considers such a project ill-advised, as 'there are great variations between the essays — in their pretensions, their style, their subject matter — which make their consideration as a self-contained corpus little more than a matter of classificatory convenience',³¹ and there is a danger that in looking at an extensive and diverse range of individual prose pieces which were written over a period of nearly forty years, one may seek, critically, to 'turn glimpses into systems'.³² In a postmodern age, though, characterized by 'scraps, orts and fragments!' as Woolf

Literary Critic: Bell and Ohmann, Mark Goldman, Desmond Pacey, 'Virginia Woolf as a Literary Critic', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 18 (1948), 234-44, and Rene Wellek, 'Virginia Woolf as Critic', *Southern Review*, 13 (1977), 41-37.

Essayist: Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), Steve Ferebee, 'Bridging the Gulf: the Reader in and out of Virginia Woolf's Literary Essays', *College Language Association Journal*, 30 (1987), 343-61, Georgia Johnston, 'The Whole Achievement in Virginia Woolf's *The Common Reader*', in *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre*, ed. by Alexander J. Butryn (Athens, GA & London: University of Georgia Press, 1989), pp. 148-58, and Carl H. Klaus, 'On Virginia Woolf on the Essay', *The Iowa Review*, 20 (1990), 28-34.

Autobiographer: LuAnn McCracken, "'The synthesis of my being"; Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9 (1990), 59-78 and Rose Norman, 'A Sister of One's Own: Mothers, Sisters and Narrative Strategy in Autobiographies of Virginia Woolf and Caroline Dall', *Prose Studies*, 15 (1992), 84-98.

³⁰Goldman's *The Reader's Art* is the only book-length study devoted entirely to Woolf's essays but it proceeds along the lines that there is 'a significant relation between Virginia Woolf as a consciously experimental novelist and as a persistent writer of critical essays' (p. 3), an approach which ties the essays too firmly to the fiction. While he does not consider the implications of gender, genre or historical situatedness on the essays, his thorough investigation of Woolf as a literary critic makes his book a valuable one.

³¹Bowlby, in Briggs, p. 253

³²Gillian Beer, Introduction to *Between the Acts*, in Briggs, p. 399

herself puts it in *Between the Acts* (BtA, 173) variation should not, of itself, be an off-putting phenomenon, and the theoretical potential of the glimpse as an alternative to system should be a welcome one. Without wishing to advocate a strictly mimetic relationship between texts studied and the mode of criticism applied to them, investigating a body of writing that is so obviously disparate and wide-ranging liberates the potential for a variety of critical approaches to be pursued, with each one theoretically relevant to the task at hand and not part of an overarching doctrinaire method of 'reading Woolf'. Theories, in this context, are therefore capable of resonating across the boundaries of their own temporarily limited critical remit and commenting on other theoretical positions. This apparent critical pragmatism or, more positively termed, theoretical heteroglossia has, as Pamela L. Caughie points out, a number of advantages. Rejecting the assumption that

if a critic draws on a specific insight or mode of questioning provided by a particular theorist or philosopher, she or he must buy into a whole system of beliefs that characterizes that body of thought,

and knowing that

subsuming new critical work under the rubric of a familiar body of theory again limits the ability of that new work to challenge as well as extend the theoretical positions on which it draws,

allows one to demonstrate that

a new work comes into being within the confluence of a number of theoretical positions and that, as readers, we would do better to attend to the consequences of bringing these

positions together than to assert the priority of those left out.³³

Indeed, it could be argued that this expansion of the critical field is one of the aspects of working on the essays *en masse* which makes it an appropriate project for the present moment.

Examining the essays and journalism as a unit that is fundamentally diverse also reveals advantages beyond pandering to the contemporary penchant for the diverse and fragmentary, and the 'breaking up of the grand Narratives' implied in looking at the disparate 'minor' works of a 'major' writer.³⁴ Working on the essays and journalism in the light of various theorists maintains a tendency for the works of Virginia Woolf to be used as a testing ground for, and legitimation of, critical and theoretical positions.³⁵ But, in keeping with the decision to look at the non-fiction as essays *and* journalism, this thesis looks to initiate a dialogue between critical approaches rather than pursuing the desire to establish one as absolutely predominant.

Once again, however, because of the nature of the enterprise, a certain theoretical bias is inevitable. Working on an author who was a biological woman, who also stands for some as 'the mother of us all'³⁶ — 'us' being radical and feminist writers

³³Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*, p. xv

³⁴Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984; repr. 1992), p. 15

³⁵See Rachel Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), Chapter One

³⁶Jane Marcus, Introduction, in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1981; repr. 1985), p. xiii

and readers — and working on a hitherto unpopular or critically underexamined portion of a major author's writing when that author is a woman, immediately situates such a project in the province of feminist literary theory. Working on the non-fiction as 'journalism', as a collection of pieces intimately linked to the public domain, assists in resituating a writer in relation to the culture of her time and leads to a socio-cultural approach to the relationship of women and writing; working on the prose as 'essays', as a literary genre rather than a commercial phenomenon, serves to relocate critical interest on the internal operations of language — on textual rather than social politics. Both these undertakings involve the critic in debates within feminist theory. In the current literary climate, textuality involves questions of language and subjectivity, both of which suggest the writings of the so-called French feminist school, and concern with socio-cultural conditions suggest the Anglo-American. A dialogue between essays and journalism therefore engages with the ongoing dialogue between feminisms, a dialogue which does not require a conclusion to be productive.

The first speech in the dialogue, advocating the revival of undiscovered or critically unpopular publications of a woman writer, and reassessing her relationship to a particular canon within the literary establishment (the perceived primacy of fiction over non-fiction) is part of the feminist critical practice advocated by those feminists deemed to fall under the unfortunately nationally specific title of Anglo-Americans, as well as a venture that characterises the more general practice of

cultural criticism. This school of criticism, popularised through the writings of such high-profile academics as Elaine Showalter and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, is understood to favour an empiricist approach to the works of women in literary history. Its practitioners look to the socio-cultural 'realities' of actual corporeal women in the history of literature, and the reception or repression of texts by women writers in an inevitably patriarchal society. Sympathetic accounts of the movement acknowledge its ability to remind readers that literature is 'deeply embedded within existing social relations, revealing the workings of patriarchal ideology through its representation of gender and male-female relations'.³⁷ These male-female relations can best be understood, according to Showalter, through the adoption of a dominant/muted model of culture. 'Breaking the surface of silence', then, on the 'muted' portion of a writer's works, a writer who is herself, by dint of gender, already in the 'muted' half of culture, in a 'female subculture' — a concept borrowed by Elaine Showalter from the anthropological theories of the Ardeners — is to participate in the feminist activity that Showalter calls 'Gynocritics'.³⁸ Gynocritics is the term coined by Showalter to cover a remarkably wide range of feminist critical activities that do more than focus on the woman as 'consumer of male-produced literature'.³⁹ It is concerned with '*woman as writer*', and with,

³⁷Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 29

³⁸The two articles in which Elaine Showalter expresses her theories are 'Toward a Feminist Poetics', and 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', both in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986)

³⁹Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', p. 128

amongst other issues, 'the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women [...] the trajectory of the individual or collective literary career'.⁴⁰ Foregrounding Woolf's essays and journalism therefore helps to 'recover a long and often neglected literary history', the history of non-fiction in Woolf's canon, and of the essay as a genre in the more broad-based notion of the canon of English literature as a whole.⁴¹

But such an approach, while it engages with an important aspect of theory falling under the general aegis of Feminism, relies on the validity of the concept of signature for the value of its enterprise, and also on the utility of canons, whether female comprised or absolute, two propositions that have been problematised by postmodern and poststructuralist literary theory. Toril Moi, for instance, attacks Showalter for not questioning the inbuilt patriarchal assumptions of any kind of canon, while Janet Todd fears the implications that an act of closure implicit in canon formation will have on the increasing empirical, archival and theoretical work on women's writing.⁴² This study does not attempt, however, to canonise Woolf's essays, merely to subject them to a more thorough and rigorous critical analysis than has previously been their fate. By including a section on Woolf's juvenilia, thus adding to the archival work on

⁴⁰ibid

⁴¹Quotation from the Introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, ed. by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: Norton, 1985) cited in Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History: A Defence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), p. 47

⁴²Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), p. 78 and Todd, pp. 48-49

Woolf's writing and according equal weight to public and private, published and unpublished writings, it attempts to disrupt notions of canonicity altogether whilst recognising the contradiction inherent in this stance when working on a 'major writer'.⁴³

The perils of a reliance on signature extend the problems raised by the question of the canon. Basing a critical approach on the valorising of women's writing as opposed to men's, and advocating women's experience as a universally recognised and uniform entity, does not escape the male/female dichotomy or the humanist assumptions of universality that have characterised post-Enlightenment epistemology, but merely reinscribes both with a different emphasis. The patriarchal structure remains intact. In addition, concentration on the biologically female author behind the signature — what, in fact, gives the concept of signature its power — tends to limit the producer of the text to a biographical 'character' defined by her experience 'as a woman'. In Woolf's case this can lead, all too easily, to her enthronement as an exemplar, her martyrdom as a victim, or her sentence as a traitor, with the critical focus shifting from the texts to the details of her life.⁴⁴ As Toril Moi points out, this can result in Woolf

⁴³See Chapter One on Woolf's juvenilia, and for a succinct debate on canons, Part One, Chapter One, 'Questioning the "Canon"' in *Literature and the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. by Dennis Walder (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Open University, 1990), pp. 9-41. This chapter contains excerpts from pieces by Marilyn Butler, Frank Kermode, Terry Eagleton, Gilbert and Gubar, and Edward Said.

⁴⁴For the first position see the many works of Jane Marcus; for the second, Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) and Steven Trombley, *'All That Summer She Was Mad': Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors* (London: Junction Books, 1981); and

being rejected as 'insignificantly feminist, or praised on grounds that seem to exclude her fiction'.⁴⁵ Signature, when it results in limiting the concept of authorship to the biographical figure of the author and writing to the ability to convey a common experiential reality, is a notion of restricted theoretical application.

Nancy Miller, however, while noting the challenge to signature posed by poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory,⁴⁶ rebuts the call for its excision from the literary critical vocabulary by asserting that

for me, the signature of the woman writer who is also a feminist writer is the mark of a resistance to dominant ideologies; for the feminist critic, the signature is the site of a possible disruption. To insist on a meaning that attaches to signature is to value the challenge it can bring to the institutional arrangements based on its exclusion.⁴⁷

Thus women as physical entities are not written out of history yet again, the political connections of the feminist movement are not lost and, with regard to Virginia Woolf, the issue of gender is not one excluded from discussions of her work while 'the works of Virginia Woolf' are freed from any critical discourse mired in issues of sexual and mental pathology. In terms of Woolf criticism this means that her works are not politically neutralised

for the last, Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978).

⁴⁵Moi, p. 18

⁴⁶See, for instance, Roland Barthes, 'The death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, ed. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977)

⁴⁷Nancy Miller, *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 17

by being divorced from context, which may occur when all accoutrements attached to the author are discarded; but neither are they subordinated to a fascination with the details of her life, which too often results when signature is unquestioningly accepted. Miller concludes her consideration of signature by stating that 'I want to make claims for the female signature but not in the name of a biocritics of intention',⁴⁸ a critical standpoint which recognises the presence of a woman author behind the text, but simultaneously questions the concepts of authorship and woman. Thus she avoids asserting the Death of the Female Author before she has even emerged from an extended period of gestation while avoiding the pitfalls of adhering to the intentional fallacy.⁴⁹

Approaching the essays as a literary genre and examining Woolf's shorter non-fiction works for their linguistic and structural features and relating these to issues of gender, while remaining aware of the socially-constructed nature of 'gender', and the existence of the same works in the socio-cultural sphere of 'journalism', follows the critical lead established by Miller. It also facilitates the step towards the second mode of feminism — the 'French' school. While more detailed textual analysis does fit into one of Showalter's gynocritical categories — that of 'linguistics and the problem of a female language'⁵⁰ — in

⁴⁸ibid

⁴⁹See also Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) for a discussion of the issue of women and authorship.

⁵⁰Showalter, 'Toward a Feminist Poetics', p. 128

emphasising language and textuality it fits more easily with the general deconstructive and psychoanalytical project (in its post-Lacanian language oriented phase) favoured by the French feminists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, and preferred by Toril Moi in her presentation of a feminist literary critical practice.⁵¹ Focusing on the internal workings of a genre corresponds to the feminist activity of 'locating the politics of Woolf's writing precisely in her textual practice' that Moi deems necessary for 'rescuing Woolf for feminist politics', whilst arguing in favour of extending textual practice to the essays, rather than restricting it to the novels.⁵²

This doubly politicises the enterprise, for the arguments used to justify dealing with the essays of a woman writer when the emphasis is on the 'woman writer' half of the equation, also apply when the weight is transferred to the 'essay' half. The essay has enjoyed fluctuating fortunes in analyses of genre and literary surveys — the critical pond being dominated by the larger fish of novel, tragedy, comedy and satire, for instance⁵³ — and is often seen in terms of pedagogy rather than literature.

⁵¹Rita Felski comments that 'It has been noted that the reception of French feminism in the English-speaking world has been highly selective, focusing on Hélène Cixous and other proponents of *l'écriture féminine* to the detriment of alternative positions, and creating the misleading impression that contemporary forms of French feminism derive exclusively from linguistic and psychoanalytical models' (p. 20). But it is precisely because of these associations that I am using the phrase 'French feminists'.

⁵²Moi, pp. 16 & 8

⁵³See the limited discussion of the essay in Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990). Further analysis of the history of the essay as a genre will be found in Chapter Four.

Analysing all the pieces that have been loosely termed essays — reviews, literary criticism, autobiographical fragments, polemics, the 'essay-novel' — therefore forces a reappraisal of what exactly, or even inexactly, constitutes an essay, and how what are understood as essayistic techniques and tendencies inflect the subject/s under discussion and the role of the reading and writing subject.

Examining the politics of language and gender through tracing the construction and depiction of subjectivity, is one of the definitive features of the essay as a genre and a topic which is dealt with in some detail in many of the essays themselves. Noting the relationship between subjectivity and the essay leads to an investigation of the possibility of discovering 'writing that inscribes femininity', with femininity not limited to the writings of biological women.⁵⁴ In so doing this study intersects with both the main strands of feminist theory and comments on them, exposing their limitations as well as their potential. Like the fish in Lady Murasaki's pond, it inhabits both the aqueous and the airy worlds of feminist literary criticism — the Anglo-American based socio-cultural and the French based psychoanalytic and deconstructive — and is in the enviably liminal position of being able to bob back and forth between the two.

Breaking the surface of silence on Woolf's essays and journalism in the manner thus conceived is a theoretically

⁵⁴Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), p. 248

flexible endeavour, an enterprise that values the principles of heterogeneity and dialogue, rather than limpet-like adherence to a single critical perspective. In this respect, it echoes and replies to the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. Michael Holquist, the translator and promoter of Bakhtin, notes that 'Mikhail Bakhtin made important contributions to several different areas of thought', and regrets the lack of 'a comprehensive term that is able to encompass Bakhtin's activity in all its variety'.⁵⁵ Yet it is this very elusiveness in terms of theoretical classification that makes Bakhtin so relevant, as a theoretical overseer, to a study of Woolf that wishes to include discussions of both historical context and textual practice, include a variety of critical approaches, and posit suggestions rather than impose a critical verdict. The novelty and protean nature of Bakhtinian theory, as Nancy Glazener proclaims, embraces a

combination of linguistic theory, narratology and cultural analysis [which] meshes appealingly with materialist and post-structuralist currents in contemporary literary studies, and [...] appears to be hospitable to the inclusion of gender as an additional, significant social and discursive category,⁵⁶

which bodes well for any study of Woolf that does not want to re-traverse the too well-trodden critical path.

Within Bakhtin's writings and within the context of their application to this study of Woolf's essays, the most important

⁵⁵Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 14 & 15

⁵⁶'Dialogic Subversion: Bakhtin, the novel and Gertrude Stein', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. by Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 109

single concept is that of the dialogic relationship. This mutually interactive and constitutive relationship exists at the level of the word, at the level of speakers of a language (therefore at the level of subjectivity) and at the level of languages as discourse within a larger cultural, historical, literary and linguistic framework. Not only is the word 'shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object' of its contemplation, but 'each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions,' and therefore 'contextual overtones [...] are inevitable in the word'.⁵⁷ Because of its utter pervasiveness — 'the dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse'⁵⁸ — the dialogic accommodates issues of gender and culture, and because these issues are mediated through an investigation of language, the literary is fully implicated as well. Also, through its insistence on grounding historically the two subject positions involved in any dialogue, the dialogic theories of Bakhtin have great potential for an analysis of the relationship between gender and subjectivity. As Nancy Glazener says,

in Bakhtin's conception of the utterance, language always registers not only the subjectivities of its speakers and its intended addressee but also the historical traces of the repeated and varying appropriations of words by individuals who are historically constituted. The concept of the subjectively-defined

⁵⁷M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, and trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 279 & 293

⁵⁸*ibid*, p. 279

utterance ensures that for as long as gender has a share in the social constitution of subjectivity, part of every utterance's social intelligibility will derive from its orientation toward gender.⁵⁹

Not only does a Bakhtinian reading of Woolf help to bring out the feminist implications of the prose and structure of the essays and the cultural grounding of her writing practice, but the connection between Woolf and Bakhtin highlights the potential of his novel- and culturally-based theories for feminist literary criticism. His principle of dialogism, the process in which 'there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others',⁶⁰ whilst remaining aware that interaction is part of an ongoing process, encourages readings that wish to resolve the critical impasse generated by opposing modes of theory (that is, American and French feminisms), without reifying this third position into a dialectically created synthesis.

In this respect, Bakhtin's dialogism corresponds to Mary Jacobus's notion of the 'game' of feminist reading, the third part of the triptych of feminist literary critical strategies, after 'recovery' and linguistic analysis, currently in circulation.⁶¹ Jacobus advocates a practice of liberatory reading which results in a 'textual interchange or dialogue [which] refuses the specular structure of frozen resemblance, turning the unending argument into a game, a play of difference or a liberating exchange; a

⁵⁹Glazener, p. 110

⁶⁰Holquist's Glossary, in Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 426

⁶¹See 'Reading Correspondences', in *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 276-92

correspondence'.⁶² Within this interchange between Woolf and Bakhtin, other voices will be heard telling different stories:

Feminist literary herstory tells one story, 'gynocritics' another,⁶³ to which post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalysis gives yet a different turn. These feminist discourses argue and interrogate the status claimed for each by their practitioners. Feminist criticism is situated within the exchange that constitutes it, within the differences that divide it from any self or essence, any unified position. Feminist reading thus becomes a reading of the internal differences by which the letter refuses any univocal meaning; but it is also a reading that puts the feminist reader's own position as reader on the line.⁶⁴

Being on the line, however, is a critical position that has its advantages. As the anecdote of the Fisherwoman in *A Room of One's Own* demonstrates, being on the line is the only way to catch 'the sudden conglomeration of an idea', however 'small

⁶²ibid, p. 281

⁶³I have conflated 'herstory' and 'gynocritics' into one category, a manoeuvre the imprecision of Showalter's terminology makes possible without imputing false positions to her. Gynocritics actually incorporates all of the following: 'the woman as the producer of textual meaning [...] the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective literary career; literary history; and, of course, studies of particular writers and works' ('Toward a Feminist Poetics', p. 128). In her revision of this essay, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', Showalter expands gynocritics even further: 'the first task of a gynocentric criticism must be to plot the precise cultural locus of female literary identity and to describe the forces that intersect an individual writer's cultural field. A gynocentric criticism would also situate women writers with respect to the variables of literary culture, such as modes of production and distribution, relations of author and audience, relations of high to popular art, and hierarchies of genre' (p. 264) — all tasks which this study attempts to undertake whilst realising that this is not enough to classify the enterprise as feminist.

⁶⁴Jacobus, p. 292

[and] insignificant', that lies submerged in the stream before her (Room, 6). For just as Jacobus's feminist reading works through recognition of differences, and Bakhtin's dialogism through the interaction of one locus of meaning with another, so the critical angler's thought-fish overcomes its insignificance by contact with another pool of thought. 'However small it was', the Fisherwoman recognises,

it had, nevertheless, the mysterious property of its kind — put back into the mind, it became at once very exciting, and important; and as it darted and sank, and flashed hither and thither, set up such a wash and tumult of ideas that it was impossible to sit still (Room, 6).

Setting up a wash and tumult of ideas and honouring the principle of dialogue, because it results in critical and compositional mobility and the avoidance of theoretical rigidities and hierarchies, informs the structure and methodology of what follows. Although this thesis ostensibly moves chronologically from Chapter One's discussion of the juvenilia to Chapter Six's investigation of the unfinished autobiographical fragment 'A Sketch of the Past', dividing the angle of approach between 'journalism' (Chapters One, Two and Three) and 'essays' (Chapters Four, Five and Six) is meant to militate against any notion of biographically-informed teleology. The use of individual theorists in response to issues which appear to call forth their ideas is similarly meant to work against the philosophy of outlining *a* theoretical position and then mapping it onto a series of texts, even though the whole thesis is obviously informed by

feminism and the writings of Bakhtin. So, for instance, Michel Foucault's writings on power are drawn upon in Chapter Two, when Woolf as a journalist is seen to be both influenced by, and exerting an influence on, editorial expectations of journalistic practice. Likewise, Julia Kristeva's work on the abject is introduced in Chapter Three, when Woolf's writing on the experience of journalism is couched in terms that recall Kristeva so directly that the parallel is almost unavoidable. Theorist is meant to speak to theorist, and chapter to chapter across the work, just as concepts of 'journalism' speak to concepts of the 'essay' across the body of a number of individual texts. Breaking the surface of silence on Virginia Woolf as an essayist and journalist releases a multitude of voices, each of which speaks to and comments upon the others, with the result hopefully not a cacophony, nor a rejection of the power of silence, but a recognition of what Woolf repeated in many of her novels, perhaps as an answer to Bishop Butler. Where he declares that 'everything is what it is, and not another thing', Virginia Woolf replies that 'nothing was simply one thing' (TtL, 251).⁶⁵

⁶⁵Butler quoted as an epigraph to G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959 [1903])

CHAPTER ONE: 'OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT': REDISCOVERINGTHE JUVENILE JOURNALISM

'Found this morning on my plate my first instalment of wages — £2.7.6 for Guardian articles, which gave me great pleasure' (EJ, 219). So wrote Virginia Stephen on 10 January 1905. She was then a little over one month into her professional writing career, having published on 7 December 1904 a review of a volume of social history, 'Social England', on 14 December a review of a contemporary novel, W.D. Howell's *The Son of Royal Langbrith*, and on 21 December what is loosely termed a personal essay, 'Haworth, November 1904'. If one adds to this list the note written for F.W. Maitland's biography of her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, composed in part in late 1904 although not published until November 1906, the four corners of the field of Virginia Woolf's non-fictional writing are established.¹ Firstly there is the historical aspect, modulated by the epithet 'social', which meant, as Woolf herself pointed out, that the books so designated 'keep us in touch with the ordinary history' (E1, 370), an area she found consistently fascinating as she investigated the lives of the obscure and the more obscure sides of the lives of the famous. Then there is the fictional (contemporary and traditional, in the case of the Brontës), and thirdly the personal essay, in its various guises, which takes its shape from the perambulations and

¹For the review of *Social England: a Record of the Progress of the People ... by various writers*, ed. by H.D. Traill and J.S. Mann, see Appendix II 'Apocrypha', (E1, 369-371) and (EJ, 219 & n & 274) for evidence that Virginia Stephen was the author of this review; for 'The Son of Royal Langbrith', 'Haworth, November 1904' and 'Impressions of Sir Leslie Stephen' see (E1, 3-5, 5-9 & 127-130)

reflections of an elusive and complex writing subject. Finally there is the auto/biographical fragment, in which the memories of the writer help to construct her present subjectivity as well as her past life, while purporting to describe the dead. Ostensibly, then, when she started writing professionally in 1904, Virginia Stephen began in a manner which mapped the contours of a lifetime's reviewing and essay-writing. It was a remarkable feat for someone who was just entering the profession of journalism and was then only twenty-two years old.

But remarkable though this outline may be, it does not disclose an entirely truthful representation of the circumstances surrounding Virginia Woolf's introduction to journalism. It was in 1891, in fact, when she was nine years old, that Woolf's connection with the world of journalism began, as that was the year in which the first copy of the *Hyde Park Gate News* was issued.² The earliest surviving copy is that of Monday 6 April 1891, and the first literary effort signed, or directly attributable to the young Virginia Stephen, appears in number 47 of volume 1, on Monday 30 November 1891. It is a rather morbid piece of verse, used to conclude a brief article on the ill health of 'the

²According to the volume and issue numbers on the extant copies of the *Hyde Park Gate News* (British Library, Add.Mss. 70725 and 70726) the first issue appeared on either 9 February or 12 January. See note by either Anne Olivier or Quentin Bell on the British Library manuscript: 'If 6th April is vol 1 no 9, the series should start on 9th February [] If 30 Nov 1891 is vol 1, no 47, the series should have started on Jan 12 1891'. All quotations from the *Hyde Park Gate News* are taken from these two manuscripts. Citations will be given in the form: volume, number, date and year. All capitalisation and spelling idiosyncrasies will be retained.

second son' of 'The Materfamilias of the Stephen family'.³ As the description of Mrs Stephen's reaction to the illness reaches its peak, the verse is quoted to add the final, dramatic, touch. 'She is now, her maternal enthusiasm being aroused and as many heart has before felt', writes the author, 'in the words of the poet',

Like the vulture hovers
O'er the dieing horse
thinking ever thinking
that her boy is slowly sinking.

Appended to this citation is the footnote that 'This is taken from [sic] Miss Virginia Stephen's poetical works'. It is a brief and inauspicious beginning, unless one wishes to cite it as an example of Woolf's early and therefore lifelong fascination with the theme of mortality. The words of the poet, however, are followed some weeks later by the words of a more adept prose writer. In an extensive piece entitled 'A MIDNIGHT RIDE by A.V.S.', Virginia Stephen concocts an exotic adventure in which a young boy rides to visit his sick brother, is nearly thwarted in his effort (he becomes stuck in a bog) but is finally successful, and is rewarded by a family reunion. The story is set in America, with Woolf's choice of environment perhaps showing the influence of her American godfather James Russell Lowell on her imagination, and runs over two issues, exploiting the weekly magazine's ability to retain an audience through tempting their curiosity.⁴ Thus was Virginia Woolf's journalistic career initiated.

³Presumably Adrian Stephen as Gerald Duckworth had not yet returned from Cambridge; see *HPGN* for the following week, 7 December, which contains an article celebrating Gerald's return.

⁴*HPGN*, ii, 3 & 4, 25 January & 1 February, 1892

The *Hyde Park Gate News*, along with diaries, letters and essays (extant or mere mentions in other, later, works), forms the bulk of Woolf's juvenilia. The only examples of short stories which were written prior to 1904 appear in the pages of the paper, and even the more advanced productions (technically and imaginatively) by the young Virginia Stephen take the form of journalistic reports, for example 'A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond', or features in the paper.⁵ Short essays appear in both the *Hyde Park Gate News* and the early journals, but longer essays and possible historical works have not survived.⁶ Almost all the creative writing from Woolf's early period, as opposed to transcriptions of events in letters and diaries, is therefore implicated in discussions of the essays and journalism since these are the two formats that govern the mode and manner of presentation of the early pieces. The irony that Woolf's juvenilia is so dominated by the two genres which have received the least critical attention is one, naturally, that most commentators have overlooked. In order to investigate the origins of her writing, and in particular her non-fiction, then, it is appropriate to begin

⁵See, for example, 'A MIDNIGHT RIDE'; an untitled story about one Benjamin Dalton who lives in Cornwall in *HPGN*, ii, 25, 4 July, 1892; *A Cockney's Farming Experience*, announced as joint-authored by 'Miss A.V. and Mr J.T. Stephen' and running in weekly instalments from *HPGN*, ii, 32, 22 August, 1892 to ii, 37, 26 September, 1892; and *The Adventures of a Paterfamilias*, which began in *HPGN*, ii, 39, 10 October, 1892. Features in the journal and 'A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond' will be discussed in sections (i) and (ii) of this chapter, respectively.

⁶See, for example, Woolf's diary entry for 8 December 1929, in which she mentions how, at age fifteen or sixteen 'I was then writing a long picturesque essay upon the Christian religion, I think; called *Religio Laici*, I believe, proving that man has need of a God; but the God was described in process of change; & I also wrote a history of Women; & a history of my own family — all very longwinded and El[izabe]than in style' (D3, 271).

with the works composed before 1904, before Virginia Woolf's first acknowledged published piece.

It is equally appropriate, though, to acknowledge that the question of the status of the juvenile writings of an author in relation to their later works is a troubling one. Mined for biographical information or scoured for blueprints of characters, plots and certain techniques of style in embryo, juvenilia is often the victim of haphazard or overdetermined scholarship which fails to consider the nature of individual works as single entities, or their possible interrelatedness. Scholars who have worked on the juvenilia of Jane Austen and the Brontës admit the dangers of reading uncritically and reading with a premeditated agenda in order to establish direct correlations between earlier and later works.⁷ Caution and readerly self-consciousness are required to position critical enthusiasm in an environment of critical scepticism. Woolf herself touched on this same dilemma when she reviewed an edition of Jane Austen's early novel *Love and Freindship* (E3, 331-5). In this review she wonders whether 'it may be that we are reading too much into these scraps and scribbles' (E3, 334), but the title of her article — 'Jane Austen Practising' — points to the value of investigating the early fiction and is one we may adopt in investigating Woolf's own works. The value of Austen's juvenilia is not only to be found in the fact that isolated examples make 'excellent reading', Woolf declares,

⁷See B.C. Southam, *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A study of the novelist's development through the surviving papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. vii and Christine Alexander, *The Early Writings of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 6.

but also in the fact that in these works we can hear her 'humming a tune beneath her breath, trying over a few bars of the music for *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*' (E3, 334). Both B.C. Southam and Christine Alexander also declare that the main benefit of their scholarship is to reveal the 'apprenticeship' of the writer in question, their 'development', in general or in relation to specific works, and basically 'every stage in the formation of the novelist's art'.⁸ Mitchell A. Leaska comments on the importance of Woolf's early journals to what he calls Virginia Woolf's 'apprenticeship as a novelist' (EJ, xv) and the bulk of the juvenilia, which takes the form of mock journalism and practice essays, serves a similar purpose when the focus of interest is not only the novels but also Woolf's non-fiction. In Woolf's juvenilia, then, following her own analogy, we can listen for the early traces of a melody that will be played with a crisper technique and at a higher volume in the later journalism, while always being aware that what we are hearing is not the fully orchestrated piece.

(i) 'Our most respectable paper': the *Hyde Park Gate News*

Contemplating her childhood two years before she died, Virginia Woolf recalled the 'extremity of pleasure' she experienced when her mother 'liked something I had written' (MoB, 106). That something which sprang to Woolf's mind in May 1939 was a story 'about souls flying round and choosing bodies to be born into' (MoB, 106) — a topic one would quite

⁸Southam, pp. vi & v; Alexander, p. 6; Southam, p. v

readily associate with the more mature Woolf, concerned with the elusive relationship between the aetherial and the material. This is the familiar Woolf who wrote in 'Time Passes' in *To the Lighthouse* about 'certain airs, detached from the body of the wind' which 'crept round corners and ventured indoors [...] entered the drawing-room, questioning and wondering', in search of humanity to 'touch [or] destroy' (TtL, 172-3), and, in 'The Fascination of the Pool' described the pool's charm, which lay in the fact that 'thoughts had been left there by people who had gone away and without their bodies their thoughts wandered in and out, freely, friendly and communicative' (SF, 226). But while the story about souls was the specific and direct cause of Virginia Stephen's intensity of pleasure that was 'like being a violin and being played upon' (MoB, 106), Woolf's adult memory of the childhood incident was provoked by a more general recall of her juvenile journalism — the *Hyde Park Gate News*. Her sense of subjectivity was affirmed through writing mock journalism.⁹

The *Hyde Park Gate News* was one of the 'newspapers' produced by the Stephen children in the period before their mother died. The others were *The Talland Gazette* and *The Corkscrew Gazette*, and possibly the *Pelican News*; all, apparently, were developed by Adrian Stephen, Virginia Woolf's younger

⁹ The story about souls may well be the piece appearing in the *Hyde Park Gate News* on Monday 21 January 1895 which opens with the sentence: 'I have often thought that if fairy godmothers existed and I was fortunate enough to possess one, I should certainly ask her to grant me the power of being able to take possession of other people's minds for a short time, with all their knowledge', *HPGN*, v, 3.

brother, as rivals to the *Hyde Park Gate News*.¹⁰ All Adrian's efforts, according to Quentin Bell, 'soon petered out' (QB1, 116). The *Hyde Park Gate News*, however, was a more stalwart enterprise and a tribute to the perseverance and pertinacity of its author/s, running from 1891 to 1895. Gauging from the remaining copies, an issue appeared regularly, once a week, on Mondays, unless a special occasion like Christmas intervened. Although all the extant copies appear to be mainly in Vanessa Stephen's handwriting and Thoby Stephen is known to be a contributor and thought to have been a co-founder, the paper was primarily Virginia's production.¹¹ According to Vanessa 'Virginia wrote most of it', and it is on the basis of this assertion that the tone of the paper and the details of the majority of its contents are treated as the juvenilia of Virginia Woolf.¹²

In her memoir of Virginia's childhood, Vanessa mentions the whole enterprise with a certain off-hand assurance — 'naturally we produced a family newspaper'.¹³ This was the assurance of a family so steeped in the world of letters that they could assume, in 1891, that 'An Easy Alphabet for Infants' could

¹⁰References to 'The Talland' and 'The Corkscrew' are found in copies of the *Hyde Park Gate News* (see below), but the only mention of 'The Pelican' appears in (QB1, 116).

¹¹See Anne Olivier Bell's piece in the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 39 (Fall 1992), p. 1: 'It is almost entirely — including the "Cockney" serials — written out, not in Virginia's hand, but in Vanessa's'. For Thoby Stephen's contributions see, for example, his poem 'In the darkness of the night' signed 'JTS' in the special 'Christmas Number', *HPGN*, i, 51, December, 1891 and his co-authorship of *A Cockney's Farming Experience*.

¹²*Notes on Virginia's Childhood: a memoir by Vanessa Bell*, ed. by Richard J. Schaubeck, Jr (New York: Frank Hallman, 1974), p. 10; the text as it stands is unpaginated so page numbers refer to my own system of pagination, using the first page of full text as p. 1.

¹³*ibid*

contain 'U' is 'for Fisher Unwin/Who publishes many things' and 'C' is 'for Carlyle/A great author was he', and that such examples were suitable for, and accessible to, the young and semi-literate.¹⁴ Such precocity, however, is not entirely surprising. In the history of literary juvenilia it is not unusual to find imitation papers and magazines. The young Brontës, for example, created a series of imitation *Blackwood's*: *Branwell's Blackwood's Magazine*, *Blackwood's Young Men's Magazine* and the *Young Men's Magazine*.¹⁵ Similarly, the children of the popular novelist Ben Farjeon produced the nursery magazines *Farjeon's Weekly* and *Farjeon's Fortnightly*, which ran consecutively for nearly five years.¹⁶ For the Brontë children the impetus came from reading their father's copies of *Blackwood's*. For the Farjeons, presumably, it derived from being immersed in all the particulars of late nineteenth century popular literary and stage culture, as their father, who wrote serialised novels and consorted with theatrical types, introduced his children to his milieu. For the Stephens there was the additional fillip of having a father who not only contributed to and read the literary periodicals, but was involved with their running at the highest level.

¹⁴The Unwin verse replaces 'U for James ussher/Archbishop was he' in the previous issue's version: *HPGN*, i, 47, 30 November, 1891. The alphabet was repeated 'for the benefit of certain people who did not read it last time'. (In the manuscript both 30 November and 7 December are numbered 47).

¹⁵Alexander, pp. 36-39

¹⁶See Eleanor Farjeon, *A Nursery in the Nineties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 463-477

Writing for the *Saturday Review*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Fraser's Magazine* and the *Fortnightly Review*, amongst others, and editing the *Cornhill* from 1871-1882, Leslie Stephen was integrally associated with the world of mid-Victorian journalism.¹⁷ His status as an editor and contributor may well have been a factor that led the Stephen children to produce a family newspaper rather than, say, 'ballads and plays and historical novels' like Vita Sackville-West, or the eclectic mixture of 'a literary magazine, *The Gazelle Gazette*; a book of songs, *Carmina Exotica*; the beginning of a French comedy; and a play with a sea captain and a detective', plus innumerable poetic works which comprised the juvenilia of Lytton Strachey.¹⁸

Woolf's earliest juvenilia, then, was composed in an attempt to emulate the grown-up, paternal world, and in this sense it followed, almost to the letter, Freud's writings on the purpose of play. According to Freud,

a child's play is determined by wishes: in point of fact by a single wish — one that helps in his upbringing — the wish to be big and grown up. He is always playing at being 'grown up', and in his games he imitates what he knows about the lives of his elders.¹⁹

¹⁷See his own description of his journalistic contributions and the position of journals and journalists during his lifetime in Leslie Stephen *Some Early Impressions* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), pp. 111-152.

¹⁸See *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West*, Victoria Glendinning (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 24 and *Lytton Strachey: A Biography*, Michael Holroyd (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 63

¹⁹From 'Writers and Day-Dreaming' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, volume 9 (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 146

Freud refers to elders, and Virginia Stephen's reaction to her juvenilia was in response to both parents' influence, indicating the extent to which she had perceived the implications of writing in sexual and familial politics. Her own early writing was equally informed by a desire to gain maternal approval as to emulate the paternal profession. Vanessa Bell recounts the story of placing the copy of the *Hyde Park Gate News* on a table by their mother's sofa and waiting, in hiding, to overhear the parental verdict. Vanessa, too, mentions Virginia 'trembling with excitement', and her delight at the restrained comment of 'rather clever, I think'. This was enough to 'thrill her daughter; she had had approval and been called clever'.²⁰ Like her father, who needed female approval to bolster his sense of self-worth, Virginia Stephen was sustained by maternal praise. For Leslie Stephen, writing itself was not deemed sufficient to establish or maintain a firm sense of self and was therefore subordinated to the power of the feminine for validation. However, both parents' sense of femininity subordinated it to the prestige of male work. It was 'a woman's duty [...] to serve' and a man's to work.²¹ Journalism was therefore an extremely complex psychological event for an individual conditioned by both parental role models. To the extent that Woolf's later attitude to journalism reveals an intricate and contradictory understanding of the relationship between gender and writing and manifests a desire to escape

²⁰Vanessa Bell, pp. 10-11

²¹See Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (New York: Random House, 1984), on Julia and Leslie Stephen's attitude to women, p. 110

from traditionally constructed notions of subjectivity, the circumstances of her juvenilia play a significant shaping role.²²

Pleasing her parents did more than give Virginia Woolf personal delight, it partly ensured the survival of the paper. Observing her parents's reaction to brother Adrian's literary efforts and the subsequent failure of all of his journals, one may assume that Virginia Woolf learnt a valuable lesson in the benefits of tailoring one's efforts to suit an audience. The *Hyde Park Gate News* records the lukewarm response (mainly from Leslie Stephen) to Adrian's first effort — *The Talland Gazette* — and politely decides to support parental authority in venturing its own opinion:

The author and editor (those two functions being fulfilled by Master Adrian Stephen) has been strongly advised to give up writing by himself but to join with this respectable journal. We have not yet had time to look over 'The Talland Gazette' with a view to criticism. We hope that Master Adrian Stephen will take the advice of his parent and give up the 'Talland Gazette' altogether.²³

Some months later they record its demise: 'a little newspaper (which however did not have a very long existence).'²⁴ In the same article they note the creation of a new paper, 'The Corkscrew Gazette' which, equivocally, they hope 'will get the success it deserves.' But, once again, parental approval is

²²See Chapter Three

²³*HPGN*, ii, 24, 27 June, 1892

²⁴*HPGN*, ii, 45, 21 November, 1892

mentioned and somewhat archly connected to the chances of success and longevity:

It will not be underrated by Mrs Stephen nor overrated by Mr Stephen [...] It seems that at St Ives Mr Stephen tried to extinguish Master Adrian's desire to have a newspaper by himself but now a spark of his former enthusiasm has returned and the only thing which can damp his love of writing is experience for as the proverb says 'Experientia docet.'²⁵

In the next issue came the inevitable news of the 'Corkscrew's' failure to appear:

Mr Adrian Stephen's little 'squitty' paper was supposed to come out on Thursday but as we feared he is not blessed with the spirit of punctuality which may be called the foundation stone of a paper as well as the beginning of a business man's life.²⁶

Secure in the certainty of her own superior punctuality and parental approval, Virginia Stephen could afford to be pompous and patronising in print. A later issue of the *Hyde Park Gate News* records more publication problems with the 'Corkscrew', this time owing to the Editor's illness. 'We do not know whether his little weekly production will be able to appear' wrote the *Hyde Park Gaters*, but 'he desires us to inform our readers that his "Cork Screw Gazette" will appear upon Christmas day but not upon the previous Thursday!²⁷ In the remaining issues of the *Hyde Park Gate News* for 1895 there is no mention of a rival journal whatsoever. This is not unusual considering that both

²⁵ibid

²⁶*HPGN*, ii, 46, 28 November, 1892

²⁷*HPGN*, ii, 49, 19 December, 1892

Adrian and Thoby Stephen would be away at school and therefore lack the time and the opportunity to write, a further factor which may well have influenced Virginia Woolf's later attitudes to journalism and complicated its relation to gender in her psyche.

As far as circumstances in the junior echelons of the Stephen family went, journalism, in the form of the *Hyde Park Gate News*, was a feminine activity, something that the unoccupied daughters did while their brothers were engaged in more recognisable academic pursuits at public school. Journalism was therefore 'play' rather than 'real' learning. Yet at the adult level it was a major component of their father's professional life, albeit one that he did not value highly.²⁸ Journalism could be seen as part of both the feminine world of domesticity and relative idleness and the masculine world of creativity and work, in which it was an activity that needed, yet was worthy of, approval. This equivocal position in cultural and gender hierarchies provoked a complicated response that found expression in Woolf's later appraisals of the status of journalism.²⁹

Nevertheless, the involvement of Leslie Stephen as an emblem of the world of professional journalism in the existence and continuance of the *Hyde Park Gate News* — he later guiltily made the point that he 'had not discouraged his son but he had

²⁸See Chapter Three

²⁹ibid

simply said that he had better join our most respectable paper'³⁰ — can not be underrated. Through his presence the importance of the author/audience relationship, and the power of the established literary figure to affect publication was impressed upon Virginia Woolf from a very young age. As her later comments on her own style and the responses of her editors show, it was a lesson that had not lost its impact even when she herself was the established figure.³¹ Maintaining a 'tea-table' manner (MoB, 164) kept Woolf employed at the *Times Literary Supplement* for nearly forty years, allow[ing her 'to slip in things that would be inaudible if one marched straight up and spoke out loud' (MoB, 164). However, challenging audience, editorial and general establishment mores resulted in a fate similar to Adrian Stephen's, losing Woolf her one chance to appear in *Picture Post*.

The article on 'Royalty' which was to appear in *Picture Post* magazine in 1939 is the first of the two pieces of that title found in the collection *The Moment and Other Essays* (180-2). Judging from the correspondence relating to the piece, *Picture Post* commissioned the article and Virginia Woolf suggested the topic.³² Woolf was attracted to the project because of the fee involved — 'I've said I'll write an article on Royalty for P.P. for £25 by way of a sop to our income & our liabilities' (D5, 222) — and *Picture Post* by the prospect of having a famous and reputable author appearing in its pages early in its publishing

³⁰*HPGN*, ii, 46, 28 November, 1892

³¹See Chapter Two

³²MHP, letter to Virginia Woolf from Tom Hopkinson, Assistant Editor, 11 August 1939; all quotations are taken from this letter.

life.³³ Surprisingly, Virginia Woolf so misjudged her audience and the boundaries of current propriety, not to mention the sensibilities of the actual proprietor, Mr Hutton, who was a 'staunch conservative',³⁴ that she wrote an article which would 'be widely taken as an attack on the Royal family, and on the institution of Kingship in this country' according to the Assistant Editor, Mr. Hopkinson. His was a paper that was 'strongly democratic' and 'at the present time our business is more the building up of symbols round which democratic sentiment has gathered, than the destroying of them'. Using 'democratic' to mean popular and opposing to this Woolf's article, which was more suitable to a 'paper for the minority used to speculative thought', he rejected Woolf's piece although still sending her the fee. Even though *Picture Post* aimed to be 'provocative and controversial' and 'applied itself to the issues which most concerned the young and thoughtful people of its time',³⁵ it also ran features which exhibited a consistently conservative bias. The article under the 'World Affairs' heading for 3 December 1938 directed opinion which such sub-headings as 'Democracy is Best' and 'These Isles of Freedom',³⁶ while the edition of 10 December 1938 carried an article on women which contained the paragraph

Her approach to a problem is fresh, being through instinct rather than logical process. She has no undue faith in theories. She

³³The first copy came out on 1 October 1938.

³⁴See the Introduction to *Picture Post 1938-50*, ed. by Tom Hopkinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 9

³⁵Hopkinson, p. 8

³⁶*Picture Post*, volume 1, no 10, p. 42

brings us down to earth. But she also points us to heaven.³⁷

Virginia Woolf's approach to her article was indeed fresh, as she described Queen Victoria as 'an old body in black with a pair of horn spectacles on her nose' (M, 183), theorised on the decline of the House of Windsor as an emblem of the pomp and ceremony of majesty since they proved themselves human by loving a Smith and a Simpson (M, 184), and floated an argument based on the juxtaposition of a Princess with a caterpillar, royalty to science. Publishing these sentiments in a paper which had previously asserted that 'it was Victoria's character, with its strength, its devotion to duty, its virtue and its dignity that helped to make the Victorian age',³⁸ shows that, regardless of her extensive experience as a journalist, Woolf was still capable of misreading a situation. It also illustrates the power of the editor, and of establishment values, in the public domain of journalism.³⁹

Despite this temporary lapse of judgement in the 'Royalty' article, Virginia Woolf almost always managed to tailor her vocabulary and her tone to suit the exigencies of the publishing world. Part of the ease with which she entered that world and maintained her position in it was due to the youthful training gained on the *Hyde Park Gate News*. Not only could she read and

³⁷*Picture Post*, volume 1, no 11, p. 81

³⁸*Picture Post*, volume 3, no 4, 29 April 1939, p. 42

³⁹See Chapter Two for further exposition of the effects of this exercise of power.

hear the language that was appropriate to journalism at home, but she also produced it, weekly, for five years. In his comments on the *Hyde Park Gate News*, Quentin Bell notes that Woolf 'apes the grandest journalistic style' (QB1, 28) and any number of examples from the paper uphold this assertion. Technical terminology and high diction were indulged in with relish. The *Hyde Park Gate News* swims with references to 'the Editor' and 'the Author', 'our next issue' and 'a recent number'; the Stephen children usually refer to themselves as 'the juveniles', their parents as 'pater-' and 'materfamilias', their house as 'the venerable mansion', and, at one point, to a bird as a 'feathered songster'.⁴⁰

At times, however, the diction becomes too grand and the possibility of double-edged mockery is raised: ridiculing not only the subjects of elaborate paragraphs of description, but also the pretensions of journalists who manipulate such vacuous and hyperbolic language. Passages like the following, describing the arrival of a relative at St Ives, are so ornate as to be ridiculous:

The felicious family of Stephen were posed on a convenient bank awaiting the arrival of the locomotive. In due time it came. Paterfamilias, Materfamilias and family rushed down to meet their renowned relation. Oh 't'was a happy sight to see! We leave the rest to imaginations vivid course as we are sure dear reader that you possess that faculty in its highest degree.⁴¹

⁴⁰For most of the references see any edition of the *Hyde Park Gate News*, but for 'the venerable mansion' see *HPGN*, ii, 8, 29 February, 1892, and for 'the feathered songster' *HPGN*, ii, 39, 10 October, 1892.

⁴¹*HPGN*, ii, 32, 22 August, 1892

One recalls the inflated language of the *Jane Eyre*-esque scene of meeting in *Orlando*, in which Orlando, after lying 'content' with a 'broken ankle' on the 'spongy turf' of a moor, murmuring to herself 'I have found my mate [...] It is the moor. I am nature's bride' (O, 236-7) is then met and married in an instant by Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, who arrives, on horseback, 'towering dark against the yellow-slashed sky of dawn, with the plovers rising and falling about him' (O, 239). Here the style and subject matter of a certain type of Victorian 'romantic' prose is suitably exposed by emphasizing the extravagance of its diction and the implausibility of its content.

Similarly, in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, calling the unbelievably boring General Beadle the 'Prince of Talkers', nearly filling one issue with an extended report of his visit⁴² and recording verbatim such gems of his conversation as 'he remarked on the heat and said that it was almost too hot but that it was pleasant to perspire freely'⁴³ served the same satirical purpose. Performing the offices of a dutiful reporter and letting General Beadle speak for himself prove how adept Virginia Stephen was at both upholding and undermining the expressions of Victorian dignity and self-regard.

This technique of mimicry, learned early, was a skill Virginia Woolf never lost and never failed to use when it was appropriate. In 1921, when reviewing the book *The Things*

⁴²Both in *HPGN*, ii, 43, 7 November, 1892

⁴³*HPGN*, ii, 18, 9 May, 1892

Which Are Seen, by A. Trystan Edwards, for example, Virginia Woolf maintains a distinctly decorous and respectable rhetorical register in discussing a patently absurd book. Thus she exposes both the inanity of the book in question and the limitations and pomposity of the language expected in reviews. The review opens, formally, with the sentence 'If the readers of the *New Statesman* will buy Mr Edwards' book they will hear of something to their advantage' (E3, 312), contains such sober statements as 'But our proficiency in the art of being beautiful is much determined by the accidents of birth' (E3, 313), and leads to a conclusion with the reserved and punctilious prose of

As for the final and most striking example of duality resolved, to wit, the Holy Trinity, the questions which Mr Edwards decides are too grave to be touched on in a review (E3, 314).

The reviewer is highly conscious of her role, it seems, and at pains to demonstrate that she is fulfilling it professionally. So she quotes without apparent comment Mr Edwards's views on the aesthetics of bow legs. 'There is only one physical defect', she writes,

which is completely damning, and that is bow legs. 'Bow legs are an abomination. The reason is that, being arranged in two equal and opposite curves enclosing a space, they create at about the level of the knees where the space is widest a marked focal centre' — in short, the bow-legged are inevitably ill-bred; no one can help looking at their legs, and discord and rebellion result. The parents of the bow-legged, Mr Edwards is of opinion, 'ought to be visited with a severe penalty' (E3, 313).

The full incongruity of Edwards's prose and the reviewer's professional aloofness is only fully brought out in the following sentence, in which the focal centre of the syntactic unit, contained in the two equal and opposite curves of the parentheses, places bow legs inside the solemn professional language of the reviewer: 'Nevertheless, however scurvily Nature may have behaved, you can temper her severity (short of bow legs) by attention to the art of manners' (E3, 313). The parentheses, like the last three words of the review itself, disclose a slight shift in tone and register towards a greater informality, and thus ironise the manner and matter of the rest of the review. Woolf concludes by writing,

We need only say that the origin of the Holy Ghost, long a subject of dispute among theologians, is now accounted for — quite simply too (E3, 314).

The article, by treating its subject with almost uniformly deadpan professional restraint mocks the respectable reviewer and the equally sincere Mr Edwards. Only the parentheses, the extensive quotations and the final clause hint at the echo of irony that underlies the surface sobriety. We can detect here an early example of the ironised voice of the later Woolf, and an instance of the 'double-acented, double-styled hybrid construction' noted by Bakhtin.⁴⁴ A hybrid construction is

an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed

⁴⁴Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 304



within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages' [with] no formal — compositional and syntactic — boundary between [them].⁴⁵

This double-voicedness suggests a new way of reading the 'we' of Woolf's essays and realising their comic and ironic subtext. As Woolf maintains the traditional 'we' of the impartial reviewer and essayist, she also includes in her prose a voice which mocks and questions the seriousness of 'we's' surety. As she came to write on subjects of increasing idiosyncrasy in a style that leapt from the prosaic to the metaphoric and back again, the 'we' of the essays heightens the mockery of her mimicry of journalistic dignity.⁴⁶

Woolf's perception and deployment of ironised mimicry mirrors Irigaray's writings on the feminist potential of a strategy of mimicry, in which, as the notes on selected terms in *This Sex Which is Not One* outline, 'the woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her within this [masculine] discourse in order to uncover the mechanisms by which it exploits her'.⁴⁷ Much of the prose in the *Hyde Park Gate News* is being overtly manipulated in a parallel manner, with Victorian journalese (which in itself is very much a part of

⁴⁵ibid, pp. 304-5

⁴⁶For Woolf's penchant for writing on obscure subjects in articles see 'Miss Ormerod' (E4, 131-45) and 'John Skinner' (CR2, 100-7). See the opening paragraphs of Woolf's essay on 'The Novels of George Meredith' (E4, 525-36) for evidence of her ability to leap from one prose register to another.

⁴⁷Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catharine Porter, with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 220. See Toril Moi, pp. 142-3, Janet Todd, p. 60 and Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 229 for critiques of Irigaray's position.

masculine discourse) substituted for the more universal 'discourse' of Irigaray's theory. In her later writing, Woolf's mimicry is more subtle, but present nevertheless. In her essay on 'Dorothy Osborne's Letters', for instance, Woolf makes her reviewer's duty to mention the book very obviously a duty by concentrating all the reviewer's stock terms in the opening paragraph, before moving on to retell Dorothy's life, which is her main interest. She literally gets her pleasantries out of the way before proceeding to more pertinent and interesting matters, satirising the formalities of semi-scholarly reviewing in the process:

It is pleasant to find the Clarendon Press putting its fine print and paper at the service of Dorothy Osborne, and Mr Moore-Smith bestowing on her such scholarship and devotion that there is scarcely a date lacking where dates were very dubious and scarcely a reference left obscure where references were very elusive. Thus she enters among the classics. Thus a new generation confirms the insight of Judge Parry by whose perspicacity her letters were first brought to light, and proves the truth of Macaulay's contention that 'the mutual relations of the two sexes seem to us to be at least as important as the mutual relations of any two governments in the world' (E4, 553-4).

As in her juvenile mockery of General Beadle, Dorothy Osborne's reviewer, with her 'thus'es, proofs, scholarly references and appeal to acknowledged authority, remains just outside and behind her mockery. She is 'elsewhere'.⁴⁸ The family, and the General, two emblems of Victorian culture, and the discourse which supports them and perpetuates their ideology, and later

⁴⁸Irigaray, p. 76

the professional reviewer with 'his' accompanying ideology, are exposed. Imitation, the command of another's diction and vocabulary, a Bakhtinian double-voicedness, was a useful technique for Woolf in her essays and also a practical aid to her in her journalism.⁴⁹

This youthful imitation of high-Victorian journalese allowed Woolf to come to actual journalism with a ready-made voice, and provided her with a method for transforming her actual opinions, and encoding her judgements and criticisms into statements acceptable to the reading public. Thus, while she could say in her notebooks of a book on *The Dickens Country* whose author was fascinated by such facts as 'the bed where D[ickens] slept', 'Oh Lord what a waste of time & trouble',⁵⁰ and in her letters that it was one of 'two trashy books' (L1, 178), by the time the review came into print as 'Literary Geography' in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 10 March 1905 (E1, 32-6), exasperated and blunt criticism was modified into 'but Mr Kitton, whose mind was a unique storehouse of facts about Dickens, lets us have the benefit of his curiously minute scholarship' (E1, 34). Similarly, the verdict of 'weak stuff' in the reading notes on *The Tower of Siloam*,⁵¹ metamorphoses, in *The Guardian* review of 20 December 1905, into 'but it must be confessed that in whatever light you consider her character it is difficult to believe in the

⁴⁹See Bakhtin's discussion of parody as an example of heteroglossia in 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, especially p. 301 ff. See Chapters Four, Five and Six for the implications of introducing additional voices into non-fictional prose.

⁵⁰MHP, B. 1. a) 1, p. 24

⁵¹ibid, p. 67

fidelity to life' (E1, 79-80). Such a diplomatic approach to converting unpalatable particulars into acceptable language is evident in the reports and, most importantly, in what could be called the feature articles of the *Hyde Park Gate News*.

Most of the editorials deal with family activities, reporting them in a fairly direct manner, with little comment. What inflection does appear in certain phrases usually represents the acceptable face of internal family criticism. In reports on family outings, for example, Woolf's prodigious appetite is often recorded (thus providing an interesting and little known precursor to her later phobias about food),⁵² with the humour obviously at her own expense:

they took of a very slight refreshment though Mrs Worlsey on passing by remarked that Miss Virginia had taken in a good supply. But apparently Miss Virginia did not think so for she took another piece of cake as soon as she got home.⁵³

It is in the feature items, primarily the fictional correspondence columns, that Virginia Stephen exercised her penchant for social satire. In a technique that she was to use with great subtlety and political intent in later life, Woolf manipulated the letter form in order to convey her potentially covert, but obviously trenchant criticism of familial and societal, and therefore gender, relationships. At this early stage of her writing life she was already experimenting with forms traditionally given minor status and therefore gendered feminine to carry her social and

⁵²See Chapter Three

⁵³*HPGN*, ii, 21, 30 May, 1892

literary criticism, both of which often dealt with issues of gender. In the *Hyde Park Gate News*, Woolf used the letter and the diary; in her later writing she was to add the conversation, a modification of the aspect of women's life usually known as gossip. Once again we can see the value of the *Hyde Park Gate News* as a training ground.

To make such grandiose claims for, and attribute a sophisticated political awareness to, an adolescent who was only thirteen when the *Hyde Park Gate News* ceased publication may seem dubious, until one looks closely at the contents of the letters in that paper. In a manner reminiscent of the somewhat sinister antics of Sandy and Jenny in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* with their 'My Own Delightful Gordon' letter,⁵⁴ issue after issue of the *Hyde Park Gate News* has a correspondence section which deals with marriage, money and social and moral matters. Commentary is also frequently filtered through Virginia Stephen's depictions of her own family's characteristics. The emphasis in these pieces is placed firmly on marriage and money and their interrelatedness and then, as in later life, Woolf's attitude was predominantly cynical. Woolf was frequently appalled by the promotion of marriage as the only profession open to women and responded to her husband's proposal with legendary vehemence — 'By God, I will not look upon marriage as a profession' (L1, 496).⁵⁵ Given the actual circumstances of her youth, in which her mother was a confirmed matchmaker and

⁵⁴Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965 [1961]), p. 73

⁵⁵See also *Three Guineas*

her half-sister Stella Duckworth was seen to be searching for 'a prize in the "matrimony market"',⁵⁶ it is little wonder that her interest in this issue was so intense. Woolf's juvenile interest in marriage, however, was much more critical than simple youthful curiosity. While Virginia Stephen noted Stella's participation in the game of husband-hunting in the regular family news section, she did so with minimal comment; in the correspondence features she experimented with fictional devices and manipulated characters and vocabulary with humour and dexterity, mentioning no family names and maintaining a high degree of caustic commentary. She wrote a 'Letter from a Mother who wants to get a husband with plenty of money for her daughter', 'Love-letters between Fanny Smith and John Lovegate' (and numerous other pairs of lovers, including a 'My own delightful David') and a series of three letters from 'a fond Mother', a 'fond Father', and a 'sister' to a 'brother who is going to be married'.⁵⁷ The characters speak in the language of late Victorian sentimental romance — 'Good bye O rose in the prime of girl-hood and in the bud of womanhood'⁵⁸ — but their effusions are tempered and satirised by acerbic plain-speaking. 'Let us now turn to a less sentimental subject', says one of the lovers, 'namely my pecuniary matters my father has promised to give me £5000 to start me with and I have numerous aunts to die any moment for my benefit'.⁵⁹ In these letters money and class and a sense of

⁵⁶*HPGN*, ii, 20, 23 May, 1892

⁵⁷Found in, respectively, *HPGN*, ii, 20, 23 May, 1892; ii, 2, 18 January, 1892; and ii, 12, 13 & 14, 28 March, 4 & 11 April, 1892.

⁵⁸*HPGN*, ii, 8, 29 February, 1892

⁵⁹*HPGN*, ii, 1, 11 January, 1892

family responsibility are clearly paramount in negotiating marriage, and the epistolary dialogues a means for airing discussions of contemporary sexual politics.⁶⁰

In one episode, the fictional Amelia Sheepshanks explains to her lover David Morgan, who has addressed her as 'Oh lovely Virgin Amelia/Only to think I have not had a sight of thy blessed countenance for a week', that the reason she has not written is because she has been nursing her rich old aunt, who has, unfortunately, failed to die. She ends her epistle with the following:

But perhaps when she really does die she will leave me more money in her will than if I had not nursed her through her illness. And now I must say that I wish you would write to my Father in the most polite terms and ask for my hand meanwhile making a rather exaggerated account of your income.

Your true-hearted lover
Amelia.⁶¹

The mercenary Amelia is not unique amongst the cast of Virginia Stephen's fictional fiancées. A Miss Fanny Smith is in 'great perplexity' because her mother has 'quite set her heart on my marrying another young man who has 8 times your money but none of your charms',⁶² and only the pointedly named Annie Foollhard writes to her erstwhile fiancée,

⁶⁰See also 'Letter from a model little girl at school to her mamma' (*HPGN*, volume ii, no 18, May 9, 1892) and its reply (*HPGN*, volume ii, no 19, May 16, 1892) and 'Love-letter from Timothy Troutbeck to Alice Downs' (*HPGN*, volume ii, no 23, June 13, 1892)

⁶¹*HPGN*, ii, 11, 20 February, 1892

⁶²*HPGN*, ii, 2, 18 January, 1892

In spite of your pecuniary matters which I think is the only thing attractive about you I tell you plainly that I am engaged to another young fellow with twice your attractions and half your money.⁶³

The most pertinent comments on the marriage question, though, come in the series of letters from fictional parents to their children, in which the characteristics of the Stephen family themselves surface in the descriptions. Thus a 'Letter from a Mother who wants to get a husband with plenty of money for her daughter' proposes to

tell you how I got your Papa. I asked him to my house and never objected to his smoking [...] I let him tramp though I knew it was bad for him [...] in this way I gained him and a lot of money.⁶⁴

Innocuous though such comments may seem, they acquire a different valency when one realises that Leslie Stephen was a notorious smoker and an intrepid walker.⁶⁵ Veiled criticism falls equally on a fictional Sir Leslie figure, though. In a 'Letter from a Father to his son who is going to be married', the Father gives his son two items of advice: firstly, to join a club, and secondly, to 'belong to some Library for it is indeed a blessing to be able to get some books with out having the doeful thought of the bill haveing been paid resting on you like a night mare'.⁶⁶ It appears that Leslie Stephen's children were equally well aware of their

⁶³*HPGN*, ii, 1, 11 January, 1892

⁶⁴*HPGN*, ii, 20, 23 May, 1892

⁶⁵See (MoB, 132) for Woolf's comment on her father's smoking that he 'smoked incessantly as he wrote'; and Noel Annan, pp. 97-8 for a description of The Sunday Tramps, the walking club founded by Leslie Stephen.

⁶⁶*HPGN*, ii, 13, 4 April, 1892

father's (later President of the London Library) money fixation as their mother's tendency to matchmake. Virginia Woolf, when she was still Virginia Stephen, was also aware of her father's inclination to withdraw from the pressures of family life and her mother's propensity to sharpness, and she expressed her perceptions mainly through the letter form (she later acknowledged both in her memoirs in *Moments of Being*). In later life she was to return to the letter as a means of expressing discontent with social issues, firstly in her actual correspondence with various papers on matters like the position of women in society,⁶⁷ and secondly in her sophisticated use of the letter as a shaping device for more carefully structured pieces like 'A Letter to a Young Poet', the Introduction to *Life As We Have Known It* and *Three Guineas*.⁶⁸

This method of fictionalising opinion and deliberately hiding the actual author behind other named speakers, gives criticism immediacy and the critic distance. By enclosing criticism in the letter form, the opportunity for debate and response are injected into the discussion. Dialogue is guaranteed either through the orchestration of a response, ensured by the very nature of the exercise (a letter is always *to* someone), and by the opposition between epistolary and regular prose. By publishing fictional letters in an organ like the weekly journal that aimed to reflect contemporary trends and opinions, and by slipping between high and low diction, Virginia Stephen created a

⁶⁷See her letter 'The Intellectual Status of Women' (9 October 1920) and her reply of 16 October 1920 both in Appendix III (D2, 339-42)

⁶⁸See Chapter Five

situation in which the style of one format highlighted and commented upon the other. But because both extremes were equally fictional, the author was elusive, her position and authority realised temporarily through dialogue, not fixed to, or by, either pole.

Woolf later developed the potential of this technique to more sophisticated ends, but the basic elements of her later practice were discovered and honed in the juvenile writing in the *Hyde Park Gate News*. The letter features were more than just an amusing component of a childish game, they were the origins of a involved language and genre game that Woolf played adeptly as a professional journalist and accomplished essayist. The *Hyde Park Gate News* enabled her to exploit a range of appropriate and serviceable voices with which to express layers of opinion in an acceptable manner.

(ii) Extracting meaning from the *Huntingdonshire Gazette*:
Rescuing 'A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond'

Between 1895 and 1904 — the years in which the *Hyde Park Gate News* ceased publication and she wrote her first published piece — Virginia Stephen continued to write, but not in the manner or the format established by the juvenile mock journalism. When the writer of the *Hyde Park Gate News* reported of a fictional creation that 'I believe that the Author produced some hundred verses with the help of a rhyming dictionary. We have decided not to reproduce them here', the

decision not to reproduce further writings in the paper was absolute.⁶⁹ The last surviving issue of the paper is dated 8 April 1895. By 5 May Julia Stephen was dead and, as Virginia Woolf wrote in 'Reminiscences', 'her death was the greatest disaster that could happen' (MoB, 47). Not only was the atmosphere lost in which a family newspaper could flourish, due to the new mood of 'Oriental gloom' (MoB, 47) which descended on the Stephens, but one of the main purposes of writing — to please her mother — was removed. The paper died with its most important reader. Virginia herself suffered 'my first breakdown' and this, in turn, led to an abrupt halt in her writing.⁷⁰ The stoppage, according to Woolf and deducible from the lack of manuscripts from this period, lasted two years. 'I never wrote', she recalled; 'For two years I never wrote. The desire left me; which I have had all my life, with that two year break'.⁷¹ By the time she came to write again, in 1897, her aims, ambitions and abilities had changed along with her circumstances.

In 1897 Virginia Stephen started a journal, which she kept more assiduously than she had previous efforts, and it is from that year, the first of the 'seven unhappy years' (MoB, 149) that her correspondence starts to burgeon. The expansion of the authorial voice that had characterised the writing in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, with its combination of reporter, fictional correspondents, the 'Author', the 'Editor' and the unnamed writer,

⁶⁹HPGN, v, 14, 8 April, 1895

⁷⁰Quoted by Martine Stemerick, 'Virginia Woolf and Julia Stephen: The Distaff Side of History', in *Virginia Woolf: Centennial Essays*, p. 57

⁷¹Stemerick, p. 61

solidified into a public/private divide amongst Virginia Stephen's later juvenile writings. Her private journals contained practice essays and personal observations, while her public letters provided scope for displays of different writing personae. The vocabulary and diction of journalism as a shaping force dwindled in importance and three voices, or three tones of voice, emerged.

Firstly, the purely private voice of the journals, which recorded daily incidents such as people visited and books read, personal feelings and opinions, but which relied, in the 1897 journal, on the use of an invented character, Miss Jan, to embody Virginia Stephen's activities. Secondly, the multiplicity of accents available to the one voice of Virginia Stephen the letter writer, whose correspondence proves her adherence to the theory that a letter was written 'partly [^{...}] to give back a reflection of the other person' (L4, 98). Woolf as correspondent therefore, is a multi-voiced subject. Thirdly there are the first soundings of the voice of Woolf the essayist, who, in the journals, practised writing — using short pieces of exploratory and descriptive prose as the lexicological definition of the essay suggests, as an attempt.⁷²

Only once, during this period, did Virginia Stephen return to the manner of her early journalism, and once again, as in the last feature in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, her writing is as much an attempt to question the methods and pretensions of

⁷²See EJ for the years 1899, which has journal entries under the headings 'Warboys Distractions', 'A Chapter on Sunsets' and 'An Old Curse'; and 1903, which has individual entries indexed under titles, and personal experiences and daily incidents shaped into distinct prose units.

journalism as to emulate them. In keeping with the expansion and exploration of various voices in her non-fiction during this period, Woolf structured the piece — 'A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond' — on the foundation of multiple perspectives, thus situating the prose in the ongoing investigation of subjectivity and writing in her non-fiction.

'Academic' criticism of this piece reveals, however, the exclusion of Woolf's juvenilia from debates on the relevance of textual representations of gender and contemporary historical and literary practises to Woolf's writing. The issues and implications of an article which, if not official journalism, is so fully saturated with its vocabulary and format that it falls under that heading, have been lost or ignored in the pursuit of more popular critical leads. In Louise De Salvo's analysis of 'A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond', the elements of journalism as a means of constructing a gendered subjectivity are not sacrificed to the more usual critical interests in the higher genre of fiction, but the more salacious interests of biography — in this case spiced by sexual irregularity. Rescuing 'A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond' from its entanglement in a limited and limiting critical discourse and paying attention to the implications of its language and structure — 'my peculiar words' (L1, 28) — as Woolf requested, is therefore as much a matter of necessity for what it reveals as a model of the fate of Woolf's journalism in critical circles as it is for an investigation of the parameters of that journalism.

'A Terrible Tragedy' exists in three forms: one a draft in Virginia Stephen's Warboys Journal for 1899, now published along with the remainder of the early journals and edited by Mitchell A. Leaska (EJ, 150-2); secondly, a 'long account' sent to Emma Vaughan in September 1899 of which Virginia Stephen kept the manuscript (L1, 28-9); and thirdly, a fair copy of the 1899 manuscript once again sent to Emma Vaughan, this time in 1904, which is published in *The Charleston Magazine*.⁷³ The two published versions, 1899 (journal) and 1904, differ markedly, the second being much longer and, in fact, complete, containing a full 'Extract from the Huntingdonshire Gazette' and a second part, 'A Note of Corrections and Additions to the Above by One of the Drowned'. In keeping with the nature of her assessment of Woolf's writings in general in her book, Louise De Salvo sees the revisions as part of an attempt by Virginia Woolf to emphasize the culpability of her Duckworth half-brothers as perpetrators, and her own vulnerability as a victim, of sexual abuse.⁷⁴ The expanded story in the 1904 version was sent 'to try to communicate to Emma the cause for her [i.e. Virginia's] suicide attempt' — that is: incest.⁷⁵ The point of the piece, originally and in all its manifestations, according to De Salvo, is to predict 'what

⁷³1 (Spring 1990), pp. 36-42, hereafter cited as TT within the text. Virginia Stephen resent the piece to Emma Vaughan for her amusement and to remind her of 'the joys of an English summer' (L1, 150) while Vaughan was in Germany. The draft of this 1904 fair copy can be found in MHP, A. 10. The last page of the manuscript proves it to be the 1904 version: 'Written, I suppose, in September 1898 or '99 — quite illegibly: deciphered by me now from the faithful manuscript which has stuck in my writing case in the intervening years — this month of October, 1904. The Porch. Cambridge. A.V.S.'

⁷⁴*Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989)

⁷⁵*ibid*, p. 260

will happen to her if no one comes to her rescue and allows her to continue to be subjected to abuse'.⁷⁶ The validity of this viewpoint has been questioned, as has the quality of the scholarship on which the controversial readings are based,⁷⁷ but investigating 'A Terrible Tragedy' for its coded revelations about childhood sexual abuse is blinkered by its narrow focus on Virginia Woolf's writing practice, overlooking the implications of couching the piece as journalism.

In the early journalism of the *Hyde Park Gate News*, the voice expressed in the articles was relatively stable, but equally open to manipulation. As juvenile journalist, Woolf had access to an established and recognisable language, the language of mid to late Victorian journalism, which she could hyperbolise for satiric purposes. The potential for expressing dissenting or controversial opinions was also catered for in the 'fictional' items — the correspondence columns and the serials — with both techniques demonstrating Virginia Stephen's almost instinctive knowledge of what revelations were appropriate to what metier. They also demonstrate an early ability to fragment the writing subjectivity, to give each aspect of the writing persona its own voice, a procedure which allowed a detailed expression of individual angles on a subject, yet acknowledged the plurality and interconnectedness of perspectives on any event and simultaneously revealed a new and more complex vision of a writing subjectivity.

⁷⁶ibid, p. 251

⁷⁷See the ongoing debate in the *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 34 (Spring 1990), pp. 1-2; 35 (Fall 1990), pp. 3-4; and 38 (Spring 1992), pp. 2-3

This worked to the advantage and ease of the writer but it also, implicitly, revealed the inadequacies of the medium. If the voice appropriate, or deemed appropriate, to the expectations of the readers, or set by the nature of the vehicle, were unable to express the full intentions of the writer, or what she perceived to be the truth of the matter, then more circuitous methods had to be found. In some cases the fragmenting of the writing subject was as much a comment of the inadequacies of the medium as the complexity of the writer. Reading 'A Terrible Tragedy' for its observations on the ability of journalists to pursue and report truth is a case exemplifying the limitations of journalism. For all that they may or may not reveal about the so-called fact that 'Virginia Woolf was a sexually abused child; she was an incest survivor',⁷⁸ the versions of 'A Terrible Tragedy' expose and question the capabilities of journalism.

Woolf manages this task with ease, creating, as she was to do quite regularly in her later writing life, a divided perspective with which to comment on events. De Salvo comments on this 'duality of vision', noting that it is 'an important feature of the piece' which allowed Woolf the possibility of 'imagining her own death by drowning and [...] reporting it as if it had occurred'; she can therefore be both 'victim' and reporter.⁷⁹ But what De Salvo fails to mention is how the details of the report indicate the inability of the reporter to correctly or even adequately convey

⁷⁸De Salvo, p. 1

⁷⁹ibid, p. 256

the truth of the victim's experience. 'A Terrible Tragedy' is not a 'coherent and cogent analysis of the threat that had been posed to her safety', as it is structured on the very notion that coherent and cogent analyses are just what is lost in journalistic reporting. The textual division between the writing of the 'Reporter' and 'One of the Drowned' highlights the perplexed notion of perspective and the complex nature of any writing subject's access to truth, a dilemma Woolf was to explore in greater detail in her later non-fiction.⁸⁰

In the journal version the divisions exist primarily *within* the piece as it stands. Written by 'Our special correspondent' from the 'Huntingdonshire Gazette', who originally purports to have 'unrivalled [sic] opportunities of investigating the details as well as the main facts of the disaster' (EJ, 150), the account proceeds steadily until the point of the capsizing and the drowning of the three passengers in the punt: 'Miss Emma Vaughan, Miss Virginia Stephen & Mr Adrian Leslie Stephen, niece, daughter and son respectively to the distinguished author Mr Leslie Stephen' (EJ, 151). Despite the qualifying 'seems', 'are said to have', and 'it is supposed', used freely in the description of the circumstances leading up to the capsizing, once the event occurs the reporter encounters difficulties, and questions his ability to represent, even seemingly, what ensues (EJ, 150-1).⁸¹ 'How can we describe the scene that follows?' he laments (EJ, 151). In

⁸⁰See Chapters Four, Five and Six

⁸¹The gender of the journalist in the journal version is unclear. Neither 'he' nor 'she' is used, only 'we'. I have used 'he' because this is the gender attributed to the journalist in the later version of the incident (TT, 40), not because I assume a universal male subject.

order to attempt the description, he indulges in all the high rhetoric associated with sensational accounts of disaster to mask the inadequacies of his perspective and language in general: 'The angry waters of the duck pond rose in their wrath to swallow their prey — & the green caverns of the depths opened — & closed. The cold moon light silvered the path to death' (EJ, 151). And so it goes on, until the writer admits his own inadequacy, 'But why continue this harrowing tale? Let us resume our narration of well authenticated facts' (EJ, 151), upon which decision he turns his attention to those on shore who must discover the tragedy. Description follows easily but the correspondent draws himself together: 'Let us hasten our tale. No one can bear to dwell on such a story as this; but it is one of the most gruesome & heartrending that ever had to weigh down'. Here the journal manuscript version ends (EJ, 152). It stops sharply in mid sentence, but Virginia Stephen notes in her journal that '(This harrowing tale stops abruptly here; but a fuller & improved version will be found somewhere, which I have, with great labour, concocted for the benefit of Emma Vaughan)' (EJ, 152).

That fuller and more improved version takes the fact of the journalist's inability to capture and portray the truth of events as its starting point, and develops it through focusing more precisely on the mechanics of journalism, giving two perspectives on the one event. 'Our special correspondent' appears again (TT, 37), but this time he makes a point of 'shortly mention[ing] the groundwork of facts with which it is necessary for the reader to

be acquainted before we proceed to the story itself' (TT, 37). Therefore the Rectory and its surrounds are described and information received is attributed to an acknowledged source 'by name Mary Roberts, from whom we obtained the greater part of our information' (TT, 38). Further description ensues, of the pond, the punt and the lead-up to the tragedy, because, as the journalist declares, 'the details of the story can only be guessed at, but my informant Miss Mary Roberts has supplied me with the outline and I fill in the events to the best of my ability' (TT, 38). With this assurance he describes the three 'victims', and then moves on to events. Once again, when it comes to the capsizing, objective reporting is the first victim: 'let us picture to ourselves the scene' (TT, 38). Rhetoric takes over, in this personal picture, with the careful insertion of supposedly factual details (the Latin name for the weed, for example) presumably given as a bolster to authenticity actually highlighting the tenuous nature of the whole event:

Alone, untended, unwept, with no hand to soothe their last agonies, they were whelmed in the waters of the duckpond, shrouded in the waters of the green weed (we believe it to be a species of *Anseria Slimatica*) which we have mentioned above. Thus much we may affirm, but the exact manner and incidence of their deaths must be supplied by each of us according to the fervency of our imagination (TT, 38).

This is the point at which reportage returns to the 'factual' — those left on shore. 'Our informant Miss Roberts' returns, material objects are mentioned in a manner befitting a factual report: 'lighted by the flame of a stable lantern (of which we wished to make a reproduction, but the said lantern being in use

at the time we were obliged to refrain)', and an attempt to infer conclusions from established premisses is made (TT, 39). The time of writing is established as after the event by the statement 'next morning, I am informed by Miss Roberts', and the whole piece is given official and respectable status by the concluding paragraph. 'A Terrible Tragedy' ends:

The inquest, we are told by Dr Middlebrooke (Coroner for the Northern Division of the County of Huntingdon) must be deferred till the bodies are recovered; at the inquest we will resume and conclude our melancholy narrative (TT, 40).

On the surface, then, this 'extract' bears all the credentials of a genuine piece of journalism. The factual elements are recorded unrelentingly: people are named, evidence is marshalled, sources are quoted; the language is admittedly lavish in its description of the capsizes but not unusual for the type of paper in which it appeared and not outrageous when supported on all sides by 'facts'. The piece is not journalism at its best, but it is a recognisable emulation of contemporary style, and shows that Virginia Woolf was correct when she described it, somewhat immodestly, as 'the great work' which 'is written with an imaginative elegance which few can rival' (L1, 29).

But this assessment could refer to the second part of the manuscript, the 'Note Of Correction and Addition to the Above by One of the Drowned'. This addendum, almost the same length as the extract, proves the falsity of the whole of 'Our special correspondent's' report. The credibility of the journalist is

questioned, as is the ability of journalism as a medium to capture the truth. 'One of the Drowned's' opening explodes all that has been previously written:

The reporter from the Huntingdonshire Gazette seems to have been a gentleman of considerable imagination. The excellent Mary also can hardly be described as a trustworthy informant and among her many good qualities the intellectual faculties are not pre-eminent (TT, 40).

After this demolishing introduction, everything that the Reporter has said (he becomes a capitalised individual in this version) is, like the punt, overturned. The dominant note is not tragedy but hilarity — an emotion significantly overlooked by De Salvo in her reading of the story and in her contextualising of the whole incident. She forgets to mention Woolf's verdict on the summer: 'this summer ranks among our happiest I think' (EJ, 162), which are hardly the sentiments one would expect from a child who used the journals of this period to '[attest] to the suffering which she endured', and evidence the 'testimony and the process of survival' which allows these volumes to 'take their place among those documents which record the triumph of the spirit and of the human will'.⁸² While 'fear — craven fear — must be recognised' as Woolf says (TT, 40), laughter is as much a part of the incident as terror, and comedy as much a component of the article as tragedy. The victims recognise 'the intense comedy of the whole thing' and 'stopped dead, and yelled, shouted, screamed with laughter' (TT, 41). The reader, too, must surely recognise the slapstick humour of capsizing a punt, trying to

⁸²De Salvo, p. 261

emerge from the water up a steep and sticky mudbank, and then oozing trails of brown water over the bedroom floor (TT, 41). De Salvo, in her reconstruction of the story as 'a collective tragedy, a family tragedy',⁸³ edits out the humour and ignores the journalistic context. She limits her investigation of the 'peculiar words' to the implications of the word 'duck', failing to consider that the 'peculiarity' of the description may reside in the dual reportage by 'One of the Drowned' and a fictional 'Reporter' from the *Huntingdonshire Gazette*.

Where De Salvo fails to mention anything other than the incest plot in relation to 'A Terrible Tragedy', the main failing of the Reporter, demonstrated convincingly by 'One of the Drowned', is not his inability to capture the mood of the occasion but his sheer inability to represent the facts truthfully. Journalism is utterly inadequate to its task. Quite obviously, if 'One of the Drowned' is writing, then the tragedy is not quite so terrible as originally asserted. The 'feeble pen' (TT, 40) of the first person writer is, however limited, much more capable than the journalist of trying to

write briefly, concisely and with no sentimental enlargements, the history of that night as it appeared to me, and [...] hint[ing] as well as I can, though I shall always be liable to correction, [at] the sensations and experiences of my companions (TT, 40).

Although the 'history' ends with a brief disquisition on the inadequacies of 'the human method of expression by sound of

⁸³ibid, p. 257

tongue', being so 'elementary' that it 'ought to be substituted for some ingenious invention which should be able to give vent to at least six coherent sentences at once' (TT, 42), this version has the distinct advantage of recognising the difference between a mortal tragedy and a comic misadventure. Touching on a theme that was to recur in Woolf's later fictional writing, 'One of the Drowned' recounts, philosophically, that 'I see no chance that the theme, with all its infinite variations and motives and submotives, will ever become translated to the world', but concludes in praise of her own efforts, and by dint of comparison, with what has gone before that

I can affirm I think with some decision that the analysis of our sensations - how we felt under the water — how we felt when we came to the top, what we saw — how we scrambled out — how we sat on the bank and laughed — &c &c &c — will for us at any rate never lose its excitement and charm (TT, 42).

For her later readers, too, the excitement is there, fuelled by the frisson of reading a first hand account of drowning by a writer who was to commit suicide by that method. But for those readers interested in more than the sensational aspects of her life the excitement of 'A Terrible Tragedy' is also generated by the light it throws on Virginia Woolf's opinions of journalism and journalists, and how she responded to them in her writing practice.

In the 'Terrible Tragedy', as in her later contributions to the *Hyde Park Gate News*, Virginia Stephen evinces an awareness of

both the limitations and potential of journalism. In a description of the 1895 Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, the correspondent reports of 'the Press boat crowded with a scrambly lot of journalists whom I want to respect, but whom I am forced to condemn'.⁸⁴ But although the reporter condemns the journalist, and the editor of the *Hyde Park Gate News* distances herself from the writer by making him or her her 'cousin', the power and pleasure of playing the writer as a journalist in the paper are indulged in with relish, demonstrating the ability of play to liberate writing subjectivities.

In a letter feature on a visit to an aunt, for example, the Editor aborts an 'exceedingly long and minute account' by interrupting it with '(We regret to say that the rest of this has to be cancelled for want of time. Ed.)',⁸⁵ exposing the tedium of the account which in turn reflects the tedium of the experience described. Obliquely, Virginia Stephen manages to display her critique of boring family visits and boring family members. The entire construction of this issue, in fact, goes into establishing this critique, demonstrating the complexity of the juvenile journalism and highlighting its ability to stand as a starting point for an investigation of the voices of Woolf's non-fiction.

The news columns, written in the prim style of official journalese, relate how

⁸⁴*HPGN*, v, 13, 1 April, 1895

⁸⁵*HPGN*, v, 11, 18 March, 1895. All subsequent quotations taken from this issue.

Master A.L. Stephen's illness, which we mentioned in our last number, has [assured?] his removal to 22 Hyde Park Gate. He arrived on Saturday, being still measly enough to chase Miss A.V. Stephen out of her home into Miss Duckworth's, where she stayed till Monday. A description of her visit will be found in our correspondence. We are glad to say that Mrs Leslie Stephen continues to improve.

Placing the description in the correspondence section, attributing it to a fictional cousin, then withdrawing it through the intervention of an editor, illustrates the oscillation between a plethora of subject positions, all of which are conditioned by the circumstances surrounding the act of writing, which was to recur in Woolf's later non-fiction. The editor in the juvenilia is serious and professional; the 'author' is shaped firstly as foolish, by her own description of her activities (attributing Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems to Charlotte Brontë), and secondly as boring, by the intervention of the editor. Yet readers know that both figures are created by the same writer, not only because of biographical 'facts' but because this edition of the *Hyde Park Gate News* is structured to make it obvious, with the editorial introducing the correspondence. Juvenile journalism, therefore, afforded Virginia Woolf the opportunity to develop a satirical and subversive vocabulary and armoury of writing techniques and a means of exploring the implications of deploying multiple voices in writing. And while the juvenile journalism was professedly play and not work, it does foreground Woolf's lifelong relationship with the public and professional face of non-fiction — journalism — and prefaces what follows.

CHAPTER TWO: 'TEA-TABLE TRAINING': THE ENGENDERING
POWER OF THE EDITOR

The editor was not an ordinary person. She knew her Author very well. She knew that a sufficient amount of persuasion could induce the Author to believe in anything.¹

The fictitious Editor, for this is yet another of Virginia Woolf's adolescent inventions for the *Hyde Park Gate News*, does indeed know her Author very well. She knows her because, as the readers of the paper were fully aware, both were the creation of a single figure, an individual who acted simultaneously as editor of the actual paper and author of its fictional contents. Virginia Stephen, aged thirteen, was author and editor, both in their capitalised and lower case manifestations and, as she not so disingenuously pointed out, she was not an 'ordinary person'. But even if we disregard this precocious self-reflexive archness that revels in drawing attention to the intimacy between separate characters and the interdependence of literary roles which is bound to exist in a paper where all of those roles are created and filled by one person, the tale of the 'Author' and the 'Editor' has not exhausted its critical potential. The Editor, and her relationship with the author are, in terms of the story narrated in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, and the story of Woolf's professional career as journalist and essayist which it anticipates, indeed extraordinary.

¹*HPGN*, 8 April 1895. All quotations taken from this issue.

Within the narrative as detailed in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, the Author and the Editor engage in an amusing and revealing dialogue. The fictitious Editor, a 'middle aged lady' who possesses 'the sort of smile manufactured especially for dentists', manages, after a brief conversation, to convince the hitherto barren Author to write. The Author, a 'lank female' who wishes to be poetical but is faced with a blank page and a distrust of her own abilities, reacts with such alacrity and facility to the Editor's persuasion that the Editor receives as her due 'some hundred verses'. The 'sufficient persuasion' which results in this outpouring of copy is itself quite brief and remarkably apposite. 'All those things are more or less a matter of practice', explains the Editor, in a voice 'beaming with geniality':

I had a friend who could not write a line to save her life. I offered her a shilling a stanza — behold 20 stanzas ready in an hours time! Marvellous! quite passable ones too — she had a rhyming dictionary, a very useful thing my dear.

Two elements, it appears, are necessary to induce the Author to write: firstly familiarity with editorial expectations, to be achieved through 'practice' and the help of a guide to the appropriate technicalities of the language, as understood by the Editor and, presumably, expected by the readership of her paper, and secondly the promise of a fee. The mention of money and the rhyming dictionary are spur enough; the Author, accordingly, 'believes' in the 'system' of poetry the Editor advocates, as opposed to the poetical style she originally desired, and writes profusely. The Editor, whose paper covers such topics as 'History

— & Philosophy — Womens Suffrage — Vivisection — & Poetry', is consequently rewarded with more than enough material to fill the poetry section of any journal. The exercise of her powers of influence by the Editor results in material and ideological success — she receives what she wants in the form she desires, and she receives it in bulk. The Author, too, is relatively successful: she is no longer barren, but productive, exercising her writing capabilities if not her poetic potential. Ironically, however, the achievements of Editor and Author result in no such material benefit for the actual reader of the journal in which the success story appears. For Virginia Stephen, the supreme editor, author and publisher of the *Hyde Park Gate News*, exercises any editor's ultimate power and declares of the hundred verses, in a conclusion of sophisticated irony, 'we have decided not to reproduce them here'.

And here, on this note of journalistic and poetic potential solicited, influenced, extracted and finally withheld through the indirect and direct wielding of editorial power, the *Hyde Park Gate News* closes. After the issue of 8 April 1895, records of its production cease and the seven unhappy years of non-being which Virginia Woolf records in her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past', intervene. Not until late 1904, when her first article was published in the *Guardian*, did Virginia Stephen break the silence and reconvene the meeting of the Author and the Editor.

In 1904, however, certain circumstances had changed. Fictional characters were transformed into physical beings, and

the previously invisible writing of the 'Author' was now the only sign of an otherwise obscure aspiring writer. With that transformation came a change in the experience of power circulating in the relationships between editor and author, mostly at the expense of the author. Virginia Stephen was no longer in control of both sides of the conversation she had depicted in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, nor of the context in which it was held, nor, initially, of the exact manner in which she herself participated in the dialogue. The editor, who had previously enjoyed the dual status of powerful fictive construct within the text and all-powerful external controller of the text, was now a separate person, the Honourable Mrs Arthur Lyttleton, whose appellation symbolised her actual power. Similarly, Virginia Stephen as the creator of the in-text 'Author' and 'Editor', who had thus been able to speak in as many different voices as she chose, and simultaneously comment on the process of creation, was no longer in a position to luxuriate in demonstrations of her own wit and ability. Now she was part of a world in which a real editor could ask for something as vague as a 'literary article' (L1, 193), as precise as '7 or 800 words' on Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* (EJ, 235), or as stringent as a review of a biography written in such a fashion as to 'bring out the human side, [the] unswerving loyalty, alike to subordinates and chief, — in a word the high qualities of head and heart' of the subject (L1, 327). And just as in her youth Woolf had declined to let the verses of the fictional Author ever reach the reader, so a real editor could decline to let his or her readers peruse her offerings, an option taken up by a number of editors. Reginald Smith of the *Cornhill*,

for example, 'sen[t] me back my Article [...] without a word, but a printed slip' (L1, 171).²

Having her article on Boswell's letters rejected by the editor of the *Cornhill* made Virginia Stephen 'so cross today, crosser than ever' (L1, 171), but given her early perception of the role and power of the editor it was not a move that should have unduly surprised her. So uncannily accurate was Virginia Woolf's juvenile description of the 'Editor', that editors in fact, as she experienced them throughout her career, corresponded almost exactly to their fictional ancestor in the *Hyde Park Gate News*. In most cases the editor did know Woolf very well, and in most cases Woolf did experience a degree of editorial intervention and influence in the prose she produced for the periodical press. Her ability to 'believe in anything' her editor suggested or represented, however, remained less susceptible to influence than her fictional creation's. Belief, or literary integrity, and professional expediency were to remain troubled partners for Woolf for many years, belying the smooth convergence of the two portrayed in the *Hyde Park Gate News* and assumed by readers of the essays who ignore the location of Woolf's prose in 'the cultural, economic, aesthetic and ideological' underpinnings of early twentieth century society; in the 'sway and bustle of the market-place as well as the tower'.³ The combination of social

²Bruce Richmond, of the *Times Literary Supplement*, rejected a review of Edith Sichel's *Catherine de Medici and the French Revolution* (March 1905) and the *Academy & Literature* rejected an essay entitled 'Magic Greek' (March 1905). See EJ for details.

³Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 32. In the first quotation Brake is referring

familiarity, necessary editorial control and a striving for literary independence turned an ordinary professional editor/contributor relationship into something far more complex. Structures of influence and control over what was written are often reflected in the form and content of the pieces, and the means of access to the different forums in which it could be published were mediated and inflected by bonds of friendship, ideological affinities or divergences, and even familial connections.

So while it is essential to look at the structure of the texts Virginia Stephen and later Virginia Woolf submitted to journals, it is also equally necessary to investigate the actions and responses of the editors of those journals in relation to Woolf. It is important to consider the extent to which Virginia Woolf constructed and/or modulated the voices of her journalism through self-censorship, either by the omission or codification of suspect material, the extent to which she pre-empted the need for censorship by tailoring her material to the particular journal for which it was intended, and whether she succeeded in developing tactics that enabled her to say what she meant without compromising the editor/contributor relationship. Comparing notes and drafts with published versions, comparing the style of pieces submitted to various journals with widely differing readerships, and checking the editor/contributor/reader relationships (the latter not only with Woolf occupying the contributor position of the triad, but also with her male and

to Victorian journalism, but her comments transpose easily to the situation in the early twentieth century.

especially female contemporaries) facilitates an investigation of interlocking networks of power, politics, gender and writing at the point at which they intersect in the works of a writer who was, as one critic has said 'a pioneer in establishing the concept of Modernism and a true Modernist', yet to one of her contemporaries was an original outside literary history, one 'so like herself & so unlike other people'.⁴ The essays and articles which Woolf published and equally importantly, wrote but did not publish, have an importance, therefore, which exceeds their cachet of being the documents of Modernism — essays as commentary on literary 'high art' — or being 'by Virginia Woolf' alone — works identified with an unproblematised and exemplary 'Author'.⁵

Therefore, placing what later literary critics read as Virginia Woolf's or 'literary' essays in the context of journalism, with journalism understood as an historical practice, problematises critical assumptions as to what constitutes 'literature' or 'high art' and is subsequently deemed worthy of study. As Laurel Brake observes in her collection of essays on Victorian journalism,

in the desire to establish English as an academic subject, it was attempted to sever the link between literature and journalism, and to

⁴da Silva, pp. 3 & 168 and Letter from Lady Robert Cecil to Kitty Maxse, 24 February 1905 in the West Sussex County Records Office, Maxse Papers, 435/101

⁵This construction of authorship not only tends to posit a seamless and coherent entity (e.g. ['Woolf']) but also circulates notions of self-determinism, untrammelled individualism, unique genius and personal psychology. It denies the constituting and defining factors of language, history, culture', Brake, p. 63

obscure their intimate material involvement and intertextuality.⁶

We should not overlook the fact that 'authors and texts are part of a process of cultural production in history'.⁷

With this now complex reading of the text and the author comes a more theoretically open and politicised reading of literature and history. Historicising the essays as journalism and situating journalism in a network of power relations, where power is figured primarily in terms of gender relationships (as it was for Woolf) serves to introduce the essay to intersecting discourses which influence readings of its construction, deployment and theoretical possibilities.

Such a reading relies on Foucault's notion of power, in which power is understood as 'the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organisation'.⁸ 'Power's conditions', he goes on to say,

must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations [...] it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere.⁹

⁶Brake, p. xiv

⁷ibid, p. 56

⁸*The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, An Introduction, trans. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 92

⁹ibid, p. 93

Everywhere, when it comes to looking at the non-fiction prose of Virginia Woolf, includes recognising the role of the world of journalism in writing, especially as that world foregrounds the troubled issue of gender. Without wishing to assert a direct correlation between the historical situation of Woolf as a journalist in a network of power with the internal textual politics of the essay as genre, recognising the importance of circumstances of historical production relocates readings of the essays in a more theoretically charged environment. Considering the intersection of the essay as genre with notions of subjectivity and writing, Woolf's own use of the genre to comment on writing and gender,¹⁰ makes reading the essays as journalism an important critical gesture. Reviewing, as Woolf was aware, is 'not done even in these days of innumerable books, in airtight chambers'.¹¹ And for Woolf, in the days when review books were not innumerable, the chambers seemed mostly to be inhabited by women.

Interestingly, for one who was later to become such an icon for feminism, Woolf's initial introduction to journalism was an entirely female affair.¹² Looking for money and fame, Virginia

¹⁰See Chapters Five and Six

¹¹Berg, M.13, p. 97

¹²This would appear to situate her early work in the 'special female world' noted by the critic Ellen Hawkes in her article 'Woolf's "Magical Garden of Women"', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 31-60 and supported by many of the writings of Jane Marcus, for instance 'Thinking Back Through Our Mothers', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, pp 1-30 and the essays in *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). As with much of Marcus' work, this desire to establish a Woolf generated from a matriarchally rather than a patriarchally inspired heritage, ignores the complexities of Woolf's

Stephen was introduced by a mutual friend, Violet Dickinson, to Mrs Lyttleton, the 'supervisor' of the women's supplement to a respectable and established High Church newspaper.¹³ Mrs Lyttleton was, fortunately, able to accommodate her friend's request and employ Virginia Stephen as a reviewer of contemporary fiction and writer of the type of occasional essays, appearing under the heading of 'Principal Contents' which were likely to be of interest to the women to whom Virginia Stephen, in a moment of exasperation, referred as 'the Parsonesses [who] I suppose, prefer midwifery, to literature' (L1, 178). This procedure of establishing an introductory connection to the world of journalism, except for the elements of personal acquaintance and patronage, was typical for the young female journalist at the turn of the century. Arnold Bennett considered an all-female association the situation most likely to lead to professional employment for the female journalist, as women's papers were 'in the natural order of things, written chiefly by women', and 'all women's papers of any reputation whatever give a considerate ear to the outside contributor'.¹⁴

reactions to and involvement in any 'heritage: constructed or unearthed' by late twentieth century scholars. See Bette London, 'Guerilla in Petticoats or Sans-Culotte? Virginia Woolf and the Future of Feminist Criticism', *Diacritics*, 21 (1991), 11-29. Rosenbaum, in *Edwardian Bloomsbury*, also comments on the female focus of the *Guardian* and its relationship to Woolf's early reviewing: 'it is important to realise she began by writing essentially for women' (p. 149)

¹³See the heading to the supplement for the issue of 21 December 1905, p. 2158, the first to contain a contribution by Virginia Stephen: 'The *Guardian* with which is incorporated *The Churchwoman*. Pages under the supervision of the Hon. Mrs. Arthur Lyttleton.'

¹⁴*Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide* (London & New York: John Lane, 1898), pp. 84 & 87

Although she was 'delighted' to be asked to become an outside contributor, and promised to 'do my best to make a good impression' (L1, 155 & 158), within a year Virginia Stephen was avowing that 'if I could get enough work elsewhere I dont think I should bother about the Guardian' (L1, 214). Indeed, as her commissions from the *Times Literary Supplement* increased, so her contributions to the *Guardian* dwindled. But the paper had served its purpose, it had introduced Woolf to the literary world at a professional level, giving her money and a base from which to branch out into other papers. By 1905 she had been published in not one, but four, journals.¹⁵

This relatively smooth entry into the literary world and swift progress to the position in which she did 'get enough work' was not, for a person of her youth and gender, at all typical. Her reasons for embarking upon journalism, however, were entirely consonant with her contemporaries. She wanted to earn — '[I] hope to make a little money' (L1, 160) — and she wanted, from earliest childhood, to become a writer. Journalism was a simple and inexpensive first step. In thus taking to journalism with the motives of making money and gaining entry to the literary world Virginia Woolf was not displaying an unusual approach; again, her choice of action was representative. Literary primers, such as Walter Besant's *The Pen and the Book*, written 'for the instruction and the guidance of those young persons [...] who are thinking of the Literary Life', gave advice which mirrors Woolf's

¹⁵The *Guardian*, the *National Review*, the *Academy & Literature* and the *Times Literary Supplement*. See her letter to Emma Vaughan of 23 February 1905, in which she celebrates this achievement (L1, 180)

experience and desires. Mr Besant recommends that the 'beginner in the life of letters' should '[attempt] to scale the fort by means of journalism'; it is, he continues, 'impossible to over-estimate the assistance which journalism has rendered the profession of letters.' For a start it 'gives him the means of livelihood', and if the writer is not a him but a her, it gives the woman some chance of success in a world where opportunities for recognised employment were otherwise limited, for 'many women now belong to the profession'.¹⁶ As Woolf mentions in her 'Professions for Women' speech, 'in my own profession — literature — the way was cut long ago' (P, xxviii). Those pioneering women, who cleared the path for Woolf, earned the right to do so because, as Arnold Bennett pointed out, even though journalism was considered a profession, it was open to women because

any woman of understanding and education, provided she has good health and the necessary iron determination, can become a competent journalist of sorts if she chooses to put herself into hard training for a year or two — and this is irrespective of natural bent.¹⁷

Virginia Stephen, officially uneducated, recovering from poor health, determined, and backed by the 'hard training' of the *Hyde Park Gate News* and the practise essays in the *Early Journals*, became a 'competent journalist' of sorts but not through the system of education advocated by Arnold Bennett and his

¹⁶All quotations taken from Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), pp. v, 23 & 24

¹⁷Bennett, p. 22

colleague Walter Besant. She was favoured by a fortunate set of class and familial circumstances. This privileged combination established a pattern that was to recur, with minor variations, throughout Woolf's writing life, affecting the way she thought about journalism, the actual journalism she produced, and how others constructed her as a literary figure. She became a journalist mainly through the beneficences of her friends, although her status as the daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, Editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Cornhill* was obviously also pertinent.

Virginia Stephen was introduced to Mrs Lyttleton through the good offices of Violet Dickinson; she gained access to Leo Maxse, the editor of the *National Review*, through the intervention of his wife Kitty, an established friend of the Stephen family; and her association with the *Times Literary Supplement* began after an 'invitation to dine with the Crums [neighbours of Violet Dickinson] to meet B. Richmond of the Times!' (EJ, 224) and was consolidated by a subsequent series of dinner and tea invitations. She was connected to the *Athenaeum* through her friendship with Katherine Mansfield, wife of the editor John Middleton Murry, and to the *Cornhill* through her father and her aunt Annie Thackeray Ritchie, contributor and daughter of the original editor William Makepeace Thackeray. She negotiated publication in American outlets through her agent Ann Watkins and the editor of the *Yale Review*, Helen McAfee.¹⁸

¹⁸For the letters from Ann Watkins and Helen McAfee to Leonard and Virginia Woolf see MHP and LWP

Journalism for Woolf was, in one sense, accessible through a network of family and friends, especially female friends. Women, in this instance, appeared to possess influence and power. Journalism, therefore, could be associated with the feminine in a positive sense.

But, lest we overlook the politics of such an arrangement by concentrating on its potential as a positive role model for the young woman writer, it should be remembered that the *Churchwoman* was a supplement to the main body of the *Guardian*, and women like Kitty Maxse were only influential through their entirely conventional relationships with powerful men.¹⁹ Either the status of the papers for which Woolf wrote, or the stereotypical roles of the women who helped her to gain access to them, militated against her experience of the influence of the women she knew who were involved in journalism. Their power derived from their social position and their circumscribed freedom in a patriarchal world. Class and gender were therefore connected in Woolf's experience of journalism, but not in any easy equivalence. The uneasy correlation was to cause Woolf many difficulties in accommodating journalism to her feminist sensibilities, and surfaced in the vocabulary with which she attempted to define journalism in general and her journalism in particular. Eventually she came to invert the process of definition and used the figure of the journalist to embody her

¹⁹Virginia Stephen noted and disliked Kitty Maxse's tendency to be a mouthpiece for her husband: 'there is always Leo in every sentence she speaks. Oh damn Leo I say' (L1, 209).

concerns about class.²⁰ The historical circumstances of Woolf's journalism as well as her later symbolic reconstruction of its implications, then, stand as a warning to critics not to indulge in simple equations of gender with class, with Woolf as the spokeswoman for and symbol of the oppressed in both cases. Her potential as a representative figure, as Jane Marcus would have readers believe, is not viable in an environment where Woolf's position is not fixed and her experience of class and gender politics do not correspond exactly or reveal commensurate degrees of power.²¹

Despite the initially positive influence of a female network through which she entered journalism, in entering the literary world through a predominantly class-defined set of circumstances, which revealed the extent of the power of the upper middle class patriarchal family, Virginia Woolf had more in common with her male Oxbridge contemporaries than with the Outsiders with whom she later liked to claim allegiance. Regular journalists of the 1920s and 1930s, like Frank Swinnerton and Robert Lynd, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain, did not ease their way into the professional scene as Woolf did. Swinnerton, for example, without the easy access to a network of upper middle class social relationships, had to conduct his own publicity campaign to try to establish himself as a reviewer. Such is the contrast between his letter and Virginia Stephen's 'would Mrs Lyttleton like a description of a Q[uaker] Meeting from my gifted

²⁰See Chapter Three

²¹See the many essays of Jane Marcus, especially 'Thinking Back Through Our Mothers', in *New Feminist Essays*.

pen, d'you think' (L1, 148), that it bears quoting in full. Writing to St John Adcock, editor of the *Bookman*, he said,

Dear Sir,

I venture to ask whether there is any chance of you being able to give me now, or at any future time, some reviewing for 'The Bookman.' A long and favourable review of my novel 'The Merry Heart' appears in your issue for July; other notices of that book have been very favourable also, as you will see from the enclosed slip; and finally, since the publication of my novel, I have been reading novels and other MSS on literary subjects for Messrs Chatto & Windus. I mention this last fact as being some sort of proof that I am not an amateur where appraisal is concerned. If there is any possibility of getting some general literary work to do, I should naturally like to take advantage of it, so that I trust you will pardon me for approaching you in the matter.

Yours truly,

Frank A. Swinnerton.²²

While Frank Swinnerton wrote begging letters, Winifred Holtby conducted an alternative attempt at 'the journalistic stunt', one which did not seem to have 'leaped into success'. Her policy was to 'keep on sending out stories, articles, and poems', even though they were 'but homing pigeons'. It was not until 1924, three years after she had come down from Oxford, that she made the permanent connection with *Time and Tide* — a woman's paper, but in an entirely different sense to that conceived by Bennett — which was to form the backbone of her journalistic career. That was a result, not of 'connections', for she had worked for the proprietor Lady Rhondda's 'Six Point Group' since

²²British Library, RP 1898, 4 July 1909

1922, but of persistently submitting article after article, even though she feared she did not have 'the article gift', and waiting until one was accepted. Luckily that one made such an impression that it led to permanent employment, the reputation of being 'one of the leading book reviewers of her time' and, eventually, a directorship of the paper.²³

The path to success as a journalist, or even to the point where one could make a 'fairly good living' was, as Robert Lynd, another figure of the 1920s and '30s, remarked, not as easy as one might imagine. Nor, indeed, as easy as Woolf's experience. 'Most editors', wrote Lynd, 'had as many reviewers on their lists as they could employ, and were unable to give work to more than a tiny fraction of the unending procession of applicants for it'.²⁴ One thing, however, was a definite advantage: 'a brilliant reputation at Oxford or Cambridge ensured priority'.²⁵ Intellectual ability bolstered by the social eclat of Oxbridge was inestimably helpful. Thus John Middleton Murry was introduced by his Oxford tutor to J.A. Spender, the editor of the *Westminster Gazette* and 'the most distinguished journalist of my time', and 'on that day [...] became what I have been ever since, a professional journalist'.²⁶ Lytton Strachey, Woolf's friend and

²³For details of Winifred Holtby's career see *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby*, ed. and intro. by Paul Berry and Alan Bishop (London: Virago, 1985), quotations from pp. 18 & 26; and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Friendship: The Story of Winifred Holtby* (London: Macmillan, 1940)

²⁴'Fifty Years of Reviewing', *John O'London's Weekly*, 1 April 1949, p. 173

²⁵ibid

²⁶F.A. Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 192

contemporary, wrote for the *Spectator* and the *Independent Review* whilst still at Cambridge; the *Spectator*, where he was eventually taken on to the permanent staff, was edited by his cousin St. Loe Strachey, and the *Independent Review* was controlled by the Cambridge Apostles, of whom Strachey was a member, holding shares in the paper.²⁷ These figures were the extraordinary individuals, yet their experience had more in common with the young Virginia Stephen's than hers did with the 'ordinary would-be reviewer'²⁸ or the reader of books like *How to Write an Essay*. This enterprising publication, 'by the Author of "How to Write a Novel"', which gave lists of Dailies, Weeklies and Monthlies 'open to consider outside contributions', followed them with the sobering advice that 'most likely he [the novice writer] will never write for the Times or the Spectator'.²⁹

In 1904 her age, gender and inexperience put Virginia Stephen on the outside contributor list, but her connections established her securely on the roll of the insiders. However much she liked to characterise journalism as an 'other' activity, either as an opposition to the more important and worthwhile enterprise of writing fiction, or as a chosen trade pitted against the fulfilling of the natural functions of a 'born writer', her journalism did much to confirm her status as an 'insider' in the literary world at large, where writing was as much a commercial

²⁷Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 272 ff; and Rosenbaum, *Edwardian Bloomsbury*, p. 9. Leonard Woolf, E.M. Forster, Roger Fry and Desmond MacCarthy also published in the *Independent Review*.

²⁸Lynd, p. 173

²⁹(London: Grant Richards, 1901), pp. 98-103

activity as a vocation. In fact, part of the reputation as an influential individual which she gained during the latter part of her life, derived from her perceived position as a Woman of Letters, the 'Queen Bee' at the centre of Bloomsbury, a social grouping that had extensive control, and perceived absolute control, over the opportunities for, and tone of, London's literary journalism in the period between the wars.

If the editorships of various journals are outlined it does appear that the charge of 'coterie power' which was levelled against Bloomsbury by F.R. Leavis has some substance.³⁰ In the 1920s and 1930s, figures associated with the cultural formation 'Bloomsbury' held key positions in the world of journalism. T.S. Eliot was editor of the *Criterion* from 1922-1939; Desmond MacCarthy was literary editor of the *New Statesman* from 1920-1927, editor of *Life and Letters* from 1928-33 and senior literary critic on the *Sunday Times* from 1928 until his death in 1952; the *Athenaeum* was edited by John Middleton Murry from 1919-1923, when it was purchased, in conjunction with the *Nation*, by Maynard Keynes, and from 1923-30, Leonard Woolf was its literary editor; David Garnett was the literary editor of the *New Statesman and Nation* from 1932-5 and Raymond Mortimer from 1935-47.³¹ Bloomsbury's dominance of the journalistic marketplace was such that, at one point in 1919, Virginia and

³⁰F. R. Leavis, 'Keynes and Currency Values', taken from 'Keynes, Spender and Currency Values', *Scrutiny*, 18 (June, 1951), pp. 50-6 and reprinted in Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism*, p. 395

³¹Information gleaned from *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vols 1-5 and Hugh and Mirabel Cecil, *Clever Hearts: Desmond and Molly MacCarthy: a biography* (London: Gollancz, 1990)

Leonard Woolf jointly reviewed two books, both of which were published by their own Hogarth Press, one of which was by their friend T.S. Eliot and the other by John Middleton Murry, the editor of the *Athenaeum*, the very journal in which the piece appeared (E3, 54-7).³²

Thus, when viewing Virginia Woolf as a successful and influential reviewer and literary critic, part of the reason for her success should be attributed to her guaranteed access to places of publication, and, in the latter half of her career, her access to the more congenial jobs in journalism. In later years, especially when Woolf was writing regularly for the *Nation and Athenaeum*, with its literary pages edited by her husband, she enjoyed the power of 'having the pick of new books' (D2, 241) or the more interesting books recommended by friends.³³ Her analysis of her own reactions to this accession to a position of power and security reveals her critical awareness of the change in her personal circumstances, but also her inability to escape from the same paradigms of power she condemned when she was in a subordinate position. It demonstrates her equivocal attitude to her journalism and reflects the equivocal position it occupied in her life:

I like having the pick of new books. My own authority over the reviewing staff is not very

³²Quentin Bell, in *Bloomsbury* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), notes that 'a reader of *The Nation* would discover Bloomsbury on every other page', p. 84

³³See, for instance Desmond MacCarthy's letter to Woolf in which he offers her a 'new edition of "The Private Life of Henry Maitland"' and 'a study of Gissing' by Mr Yates 'which might interest you, & these two books I wd send you, if you feel inclined'. Berg, no date.

exciting. I am a little malicious perhaps. People crowd & crush & press for work. It is mildly amusing to say, now don't worry, I'm not going to give you any. I have been so often in their position. But these delights are not very profound (D2, 241).

Her delight may not have been profound, but Woolf's amusement affords potential comment on the strength of the structures of power to influence even those who were determined to break them, and bears examination. Woolf's situation exemplifies one of the propositions made by Foucault in his discussion of power, and recalls our attention to the relevance of Woolf's journalism as a part of, and therefore a window onto, cultural and historical formations. 'Where there is power', wrote Foucault,

there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. [...] There is no locus of great Refusal [...] Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case.³⁴

Woolf's writing practice as a journalist exposes just this manifestation of power and resistance. She did react against the limitations imposed and represented by journalism, which she experienced as oppression, and rebellion took place at the level of the text. When she was writing for journals where her position was not secured by intimate friendships, her stylistic resistance was subtle and covert; where she had no qualms about damaging her status, her prose was less restrained.

³⁴Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 95-6

Writing for journals controlled by her close friends who were now associated with the avant garde rather than Victorian conservatism exhilarated Woolf: 'its rather fun about the Athenaeum, as every one is to write what they like, and Mrs Ward is to be exposed' (L2, 341), and the delight transferred to the format of the articles which were innovative and daring. In the *New Statesman* and the *Athenaeum* she published reviews in the form of fictional dialogues;³⁵ the *Athenaeum* gave her the opportunity to write on the lives of the obscure without hindrance, unlike the *Cornhill* which had rejected her early efforts in this area;³⁶ and the *Nation and Athenaeum* gave her the freedom to say what she had always thought of Mrs Humphry Ward. After curbing her pen in the first twenty years of her reviewing, when her honest opinions of the works of 'that old mangy hack' (L2, 68) could not be uttered in public, in 1923 she was free to write that Mrs Ward's

novels, already strangely out of date, hang in the lumber room of letters like the mantles of our aunts, and produce in us the same desire that they do to smash the windows and let in the air, to light the fire and pile the rubbish on top (E3, 380).

Thus the stylistic originality, the verve and vigour of expression which has been noted in Woolf's critical prose has much to do with the opportunities afforded her by her privileged position at the heart of literary culture with access to the best journals and the best books. Similarly, its perceived ladylike refinement is

³⁵See Chapter Five

³⁶See Reginald Smith's letter of rejection for the article 'Memoirs of a Novelist', MHP, 10 November 1909

equally conditioned by the restriction of writing for the more restrained and conservative of those journals. But the means of access to the position of power in which Woolf could criticise Mrs Ward freely was the same as it had been in 1904, when friendship with the wife of the editor of the *National Review* meant ease of access to the life of letters. The only difference in 1924 was that as wife of the editor of the *Nation and Athenaeum* the life of letters was more congenial. Knowing the editor in both instances, as in the fictional incident in the *Hyde Park Gate News*, was of tangible material benefit, even if slightly questionable on ethical grounds.

This overt correspondence between youthful fiction and adult fact is mirrored by parallel resemblances implicit in both the 'stories' written by Woolf in the *Hyde Park Gate News* and the 'story' of Virginia Woolf written by historians and literary critics whose versions of her we read today.³⁷ In the *Hyde Park Gate News* tale the two immediately striking features are the exclusive presence of women in the world of the Author and the Editor, and the absence of an actual written product available for the reader at the end of their encounter, both of which foreground the linked issues of gender and writing. In the 'story' of Virginia Woolf the twentieth century writer constructed by literary history, her role as journalist and the texts which resulted from that practice have figured largely as an absence. 'Woolf as journalist' is absent from the many figures constructed to

³⁷See Rachel Bowlby, 'Who's Framing Virginia Woolf', *Diacritics*, 21 (1991), 3-10 for a brief summary of the different Virginia Woolfs in literary criticism.

represent the Woolfs who feature in different canons, and journalism itself is largely absent from the canon of literature. Woolf's journalism, as a complete and separate corpus and a corpus recognised in the context of its production, as opposed to what it has to say on other matters (for instance, the fiction), is also absent from the actual and understood list of her writings. The feminist and modernist critics and even the biographers have, on the whole, 'decided not to reproduce' that professional part of Virginia Woolf the writer for her current readers.³⁸

The association of Virginia Woolf with the magazine *Vogue* is a case in point of this posthumous editing of a literary figure. The brash and transatlantically tinged accent of *Vogue* is not a voice that many associate with the figure of Virginia Woolf: she is read primarily as a figure of high culture while *Vogue* is seen as an organ of low. *Vogue* is primarily a fashion magazine, a publication not renowned, then or now, for its literary status, and hardly one to be associated with Virginia Woolf as a woman or a journalist. Her tastes in fashion and social niceties are usually perceived as being highbrow and independently formulated, not in need of direction from news of the latest fashion innovation in Paris or the latest parties thrown by the young, rich and titled. Intellectually she has always been characterised by her connection to the *Times Literary Supplement*, an affiliation which reflects advantageously on both parties: Virginia Woolf is granted a degree of academic credibility and the *Times Literary*

³⁸John Mepham, *Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991) does attempt to redress the balance by describing, but not analysing, Woolf as a journalist.

Supplement shines a little more brightly in the glow of Woolf's literary fame. *Vogue*, the magazine that could devote two pages to 'The Infinite Variety of Chintz'³⁹ and proudly assert that its 'ROLE' was

To Hold, as't were, the Mirror Up to Fashion; To Show Woman Her Own Figure, Custom Her Own Image, and Every Age Her Own Peculiar Charm,⁴⁰

and Virginia Woolf, the woman who could 'spend 20 [minutes] balancing a sentence' (L1, 252), were an unlikely combination.

But write for *Vogue* she did, submitting five articles during her lifetime, and appearing on more than one occasion as part of a picture feature.⁴¹ *Vogue*, in the 1920s, was consciously 'extend[ing] its territory', finding 'an energetic style quite different from the tone of its first decade'.⁴² For, as both the editors of Woolf's *Letters* and *Diaries* point out,⁴³ Dorothy Todd, the editor of British *Vogue*, was engaged in a campaign to raise the tone, to shed the connotations of 'vulgar' and 'trash', and change the magazine from a catalogue of 'stays and ^{g..j}petticoats' (L3, 158) to a 'stimulating guide to the arts in general' (D2, 319 n 8). This is a brief which *Vogue* believes it has always possessed,

³⁹Early June 1923, pp. 32-33

⁴⁰Early February 1923, p. 84

⁴¹In Late May 1924, p. 49 Virginia Woolf appeared as part of the feature 'We Nominate for the Hall of Fame', and in Early November, 1924, pp 43-45, photographs of her house at Tavistock Square were reproduced as part of the article 'Modern English Decoration: Some Examples of the Interesting Work of Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell'.

⁴²Georgina Howell, *In Vogue: 75 Years of Style* (London: Condé Nast Books, 1991), p.31

⁴³See volume 3 of both

but which it acknowledges as being accentuated in the 1920s.⁴⁴ Featuring a photograph of Virginia Woolf in their nominations for the Hall of Fame in 1924, pursuing 'Virginia Woolf, the brilliant author of *Jacob's Room* and the *Voyage Out*' as a contributor to its pages and publishing articles on high art were strategies considered effective in promoting the desired change in *Vogue's* status and literary credibility. While it may have been this policy that enticed Woolf to work for the paper in the first place, despite some initial misgivings about its literary credentials, it was a policy which most definitely led to Todd's demise as an editor, demonstrating the power of economics in magazine orientation. Trying to change the proportions of the mixture of high fashion and high art did not succeed commercially, thus thwarting the interests of *Vogue's* American owners, and Todd was requested to resign. Once her personal link with the paper was severed Woolf had no more to do with it during her lifetime, and an article she had been preparing for it, 'Cinema', was published elsewhere, in *Art* (New York, June 1926). She did continue to see Dorothy Todd, however, and took a peripheral interest in a scheme to float a new magazine under Todd's

⁴⁴See the comments in *Vogue's* official histories: 'The secret of *Vogue's* success has always been its unrivalled access. Its regular contributors in the twenties included Aldous Huxley, Nancy Cunard and Cecil Beaton, and it called in features by Virginia Woolf, Noel Coward, Jean Cocteau, Evelyn Waugh, D.H. Lawrence, Vita Sackville-West and the Sitwells'; 'By employing the right mixture of classiness and talent [...] *Vogue* early developed a pincer strategy for capturing its prey, the name of the moment'. From Howell, p. 9. Although in terms of the visual arts *Vogue* was very much avant-garde in the twenties, having Osbert Sitwell write on 'Bridal Journeys' and Aldous Huxley on 'The Wedding Breakfast' in the 'Royal Wedding' issue, Late April 1923, was not exactly the ultimate in literary originality. However, with articles like 'Three Women Writers: Notes on the Work of Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson and Gertrude Stein', by Edith Sitwell, Early October 1924, an upgrading of content is evident.

editorship — 'It is to be *Vogue*, only quarterly [...] I gather that she is putting up most of the money herself, and intends to be in complete control' (L3, 463). The venture failed through lack of funds.

Her writing for *Vogue* also highlights the transitional point in Woolf's professional career in the mid 1920s, revealing the mobility of Woolf as a literary figure and the levels of prestige and achievement within journalism. Signed articles for *Vogue*, a popular magazine with a large and eclectic, though inevitably gender-biased, readership, and an American sister-organ, marked and symbolised the change in direction taken by Virginia Woolf's journalism.⁴⁵ It was a change that fed largely off the relative success of her fiction in the 1920s, but led to her fame being equally attributable to her popularity in the periodical press by the time of her death.⁴⁶ During nearly the first twenty years of her career, the bulk of Woolf's journalism, and indeed literary output in any format, had been unsigned reviews in an established literary journal published in Britain (the *Times Literary Supplement*), with irregular forays into signed articles and occasional essays in equally solid and established journals like the *Cornhill* and the *Academy and Literature*. From the 1920s onwards, though, during the time that she wrote four novels, one volume of short stories and *A Room of One's Own*,

⁴⁵American *Vogue* was founded in New York in 1892 and bought by Condé Nast in 1909; British *Vogue* was founded in 1916. Information from Georgina Howell, *In Vogue: Sixty years of celebrities and fashion from British Vogue*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978)

⁴⁶See Leonard Woolf's *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), pp. 63-4 for an outline of Woolf's sales figures in the 1920s.

Woolf wrote more diverse pieces for more diverse outlets.⁴⁷ Especially after the publication of *The Common Reader: First Series*, in 1925, which consolidated her status as a critic and essayist and heralded her in that role to the reading public at large, Woolf herself was increasingly active in shaping the nature and extent of the journalism she produced.⁴⁸

If one takes a bearing on Woolf's journalism from five years on either side of the first *Vogue* piece, in 1919 and 1929, the development is startlingly clear. In 1919 Woolf published in two papers, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Athenaeum*, with the bulk of her work being unsigned reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement*; in 1929 she had pieces published in the *New Republic* (New York), the *Forum* (New York), the *Bookman* (New York), the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Listener* and the *Nineteenth Century and After*, besides the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Nation and Athenaeum*. Her first article in *Vogue*, published in 1924, can therefore stand as a marker of that shift from anonymous reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement*, publishing up to seven articles a month on anything from a novel by Frank Swinnerton, the mystical writings of A.E., or a play on Abraham Lincoln,⁴⁹ to someone who could 'hope to settle in & write one nice little discreet article for £25 each

⁴⁷*Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *Monday or Tuesday* (1921)

⁴⁸The reading public which actually purchased the book was large enough to be of tangible material benefit to Woolf: 'we are having *two* waterclosets made, one paid for by Mrs Dalloway, the other by *The Common Reader*' (L3, 241-2). According to Leonard Woolf, *The Common Reader* sold 1,434 copies in its first twelve months, *Downhill All the Way*, p. 143

⁴⁹See reviews from October 1918, in (E2, 311-14 & 319-23)

month' (D3, 177), content in the knowledge that it would enjoy publication on two continents. This 'little article' was often on a subject of her own choosing, and in a style over which she had a greater degree of control (even though the choice of the word 'discreet' suggests that editorial or self-imposed restrictions were not fully lifted). By the time the 'Tales of Genji' review was written, in 1925, the change was firmly established. As Woolf noticed, somewhat telegraphically but with no abbreviation of satisfaction, in April 1925, a few months before 'Genji' was published: 'my value mounting steadily as a journalist' (D3, 9).

Ironically, it was this issue of value brought to the fore by working for *Vogue* which in turn forced Virginia Woolf to consider her position and politics as a journalist. Focusing on the *Vogue*-Woolf connection therefore stresses the debates going on within culture as to the nature of literary value, and points to Woolf's self-consciousness of herself as a journalist. Value, in the context of Woolf's diary entry, involved monetary worth, public fame and literary integrity, all factors which were rendered questionable when combined directly with journalism.⁵⁰ So, at least, Woolf discovered when she was taken to task by Logan Pearsall Smith for writing for *Vogue*.

Provoked by Pearsall Smith, who opined that 'journalism of this kind might be detrimental to authors of promise' (L3, 154),

⁵⁰In the diary entry Woolf mentions that 'I'm *out* to make £300 this summer by writing', that 'I expect a slow silent increase of fame' and that 'I want as usual to dig deep down into my new stories, without having a looking glass flashed in my eyes — Todd, to wit; Colefax to wit et cetera' (D3, 9).

Woolf responded by analysing what journalism meant to her and how she constructed her prose in relation to its demands. She discussed, in a number of letters to different recipients, what she called 'the morality of writing for *Vogue* and Heinemann, as against the *Times Lit. Sup.* and the Hogarth Press' (L3, 159), whilst enjoying the opportunity to expose the general shortcomings of Pearsall Smith himself, an American born but naturalised English litterateur who published 'collections of much polished observations and aphorisms' and was a founder member of the Society for Pure English.⁵¹ The conflict between popular and literary journalism, as it emerged from this correspondence, was a microcosmic reflection of the general division that characterised Woolf's attitude to journalism itself, regardless of its internal gradations of quality and status, as opposed to the writing of fiction.⁵² The complex relationship between editorial requirements or expectations and the potential held by her own writing revealed in this correspondence indicates not only Woolf's awareness of how 'situated' her writing was, but also how consciously she reacted to and manipulated the networks of power in which she was enmeshed — how complicity and subversion bought their own forms of influence. In this respect, then, writing for *Vogue* condensed and brought to the fore many of the concerns for Woolf which were present, in varying degrees of intensity, from the moment she started writing for Mrs Lyttleton's *Women's Supplement to the Anglo-Catholic Guardian*

⁵¹For example, *Trivia* (1902), *More Trivia* (1921) and *Afterthoughts* (1931); biographical details taken from *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th edn., ed. by Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 914

⁵²See Chapter Three

to her later dealings with John Lehmann's left wing *Folios of New Writing*, in 1940.

Originally, writing for *Vogue* was an adventure that promised not only money but fame. On 17 October 1924 Woolf wrote exuberantly in her diary,

Did I put down my progress towards Perpetual Immortality [...] I asked Todd £10 for 1,000 words: she orders 4 articles at that fee: Harper wishes me (I think) to write an American Browns & Bennetts; & Vogue, (via Dadie) is going to take up Mrs Woolf, to boom her: & — & — & — So very likely this time next year I shall be one of those people who are, so father said, in the little circle of London Society which represents the Apostles, I think, on a larger scale. Or does this no longer exist? To know everyone worth knowing. I can just see what he meant; just imagine being in that position — if women can be (D2, 319).

Money and fame — the two elements that had attracted her to journalism in 1904 — were now clearly assessed as indicators of a position of power. Like Foucault, Woolf understood power not as a single relationship of force, but as an intersection of many different modes and influences: the power of intellectual integrity and exclusivity as suggested by the Apostles' parallel; the actual and symbolic power of the paternal legacy in the remembered words of Leslie Stephen; and the power of being at the centre of an important and recognisable social group. All strands were rendered questionable, though, by the ever-present problem of gender. For the woman writer, practical, political power, although it could be visualised, existed only in the realm

of the imaginary. The oppositions and contradictions, desires and hesitations, personal and professional complexities that thread throughout Woolf's career as journalist are here entangled in the seemingly untroubled enterprise of receiving £10 for 1,000 words from Todd. But before Virginia Woolf even came to submit her first piece to *Vogue* — the appropriately titled 'Indiscretions' (E3, 460-5) — the prospect of writing for that paper led her to question her role as a journalist within the larger context of women in professional and social pre-eminence.

Historically, Woolf's self-examination is situated in the middle of the decade which opened with the bill admitting women to the professions, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, 1919, and closed with the bill extending the franchise to women over 21 in 1928. During this period, Woolf wrote 'A Society', 'A Woman's College From Outside', 'Women and Fiction', and *A Room of One's Own* as well as a number of shorter protest pieces condemning the inequities and prejudices latent and blatant in British society's attitude to women.⁵³ The question of gender was also necessarily highlighted by the prospect of writing for a women's magazine for, as Lady Rhondda, founder of *Time and*

⁵³'A Society' was possibly written in 1920 as a 'counterblast to Mr Bennett's adverse views reported in the papers' (D2, 69) according to Susan Dick in her edition of *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, p. 300; 'A Woman's College From Outside' was originally a chapter in *Jacob's Room* (written c. July 1920) but was eventually published in *Atalanta's Garland: Being the Book of the Edinburgh University Women's Union*, in November 1926 (see Dick, p 301); 'Women and Fiction' appeared in *Forum*, March 1929 and *A Room of One's Own* was also published in that year. See S.P. Rosenbaum, ed., *Women and Fiction: The Manuscript versions of A Room of One's Own* (Oxford: Blackwell, for the Shakespeare Head Press, 1992). See also Virginia Woolf's 'The Plumage Bill', the *Woman's Leader*, 23 July 1920 and 'The Intellectual Status of Women' and a further letter of reply, the *New Statesman*, 9 & 16 October 1929 reprinted as Appendices II & III in D2.

Tide, pointed out to Woolf in the 1930s, 'no woman who tried to run a Weekly Review could remain unaware of how much she was an Outsider'. Not only was it 'the presumption amongst the average general public [...] that that kind of paper cant be run by women' but 'the general public is convinced that what women have to say on public affairs cannot have any real weight'.⁵⁴ If writing for *Time and Tide*, which contained articles on 'Women and Trade Unions' and aimed to

treat men and women as equally part of the great human family, working side by side ultimately for the same great objects by ways equally valuable, equally interesting,⁵⁵

resulted in such an acute awareness of hierarchised difference, writing for a magazine that carried articles like 'A Career For Women: Being Beautiful. A Profession Demanding Courage, Perseverance and Concentration, But One Not Overcrowded'⁵⁶ and was full of the iconography of woman as mannequin, ensured that gender was never inseparable from issues of stereotyping and objectification. Woolf encountered this herself when she appeared in *Vogue's* 'Hall of Fame' feature in 1924. When she was presented, photographed in her dead mother's dress, alongside Elena Gerhardt (lieder singer), the Sitwells, Norman MacDermott (theatre director) and McKnight Kauffer, her actual

⁵⁴MHP, letter from Lady Rhondda, 2 June 1938

⁵⁵For details on and articles from *Time and Tide* see Dale Spender, *Time and Tide Wait for No Man* (London: Pandora, 1984); quotation taken from the first issue of *Time and Tide*, 14 May 1920

⁵⁶by Sydney Tremayne, Early September 1924, pp. 19-21. This article is a strange mixture of tongue-in-cheek effrontery and apparently genuine sexism.

achievements as an author were literally surrounded by her roles as daughter, sister and wife. Woolf was nominated:

Because she is a publisher with a prose style: because she is a daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephen and a sister of Vanessa Bell: because she is the author of 'The Voyage Out', 'Night and Day' and 'Jacob's Room': because in the opinion of some of the best judges she is the most brilliant novelist of the younger generation: because she also writes admirable criticism: because with her husband she runs The Hogarth Press.⁵⁷

She was therefore well aware of *Vogue's* 'angle' on professional women. What is interesting, in the light of Woolf's relation to power and language, is that here Woolf's investigation of women and writing, gender and professionalism, is taken up in relation to her own 'other' professional literary activity — journalism. Not only was she concerned at a theoretical level with the problem of 'being in that position' of power if one were a woman, an issue that she explored in her fiction and non-fiction, but that the whole question of position arose from her own professional experience and was explored in, and in relation to, her journalism.

It was the attack on her professionalism that caused Woolf to analyse her position as a journalist, well in advance of the 'this time next year' that she originally envisaged when *Vogue* was first mentioned. Within three months of the appearance of 'Indiscretions' she was responding to Logan Pearsall Smith and defending her right to contribute to a magazine with the

⁵⁷*Vogue*, Late May 1924, p. 49

reputation of *Vogue*. The profusion of her comments on this issue, to correspondents who had no direct involvement with the contretemps whatsoever (Jacques Raverat and Vita Sackville-West), the recurrence of the terms of the dispute long after the issue had been resolved⁵⁸ and Woolf's continued antipathy to Pearsall Smith — 'he's coarse and rank and would, if he were a fish, stink, to put it plainly' (L5, 139) — indicate how deeply the whole incident affected her, and how it caused many of the submerged concerns in her attitude to journalism to rise to the surface. At the time, the 'stink' of the argument with Pearsall Smith was so toxic that, she declared, it 'gave [her] the influenza' (L3, 159).

Woolf first mentioned the debate, only mildly infected with the microbes of discontent, rather light-heartedly, in a letter to Jacques Raverat on 24 January 1925. 'I've been engaged in a great wrangle with an old American called Pearsall Smith', she wrote,

on the ethics of writing articles at high rates for fashion papers like *Vogue*. He says it demeans one. He says one must write only for the *Lit. Supplement* and the *Nation* and Robert Bridges and prestige and posterity and to set a high example. I say Bunkum. Ladies' clothes and aristocrats playing golf don't affect my style; and they would do his a world of good. Oh these Americans! How they always muddle everything up! What he wants is prestige: what I want, money. Now my dear sharp pointed and Gallic Jacques, please decide between us (L3, 154).

⁵⁸See (L3, 200) in which VW defends 'whoring after Todd'.

While Pearsall Smith's questioning of Woolf's ethics may have revealed many of her not too well-disguised prejudices about things and authors American, it was not such a comic affair as she implied.⁵⁹ Pearsall Smith's terms of rebuke, that if one 'habitually wrote for trashy people [one] would very likely end by writing trash' oneself (L3, 154 n 2) mirror many of Woolf's own early prejudices towards *Vogue* and towards the influence of journalism in general. In an earlier letter to Raverat, commenting flippantly on her fame once again, Virginia Woolf wrote 'I will send you a picture of me done for a vulgar paper called *Vogue*' (L3, 130). Pearsall Smith's 'trash' is unwittingly close to Woolf's 'vulgar', which no doubt caused her to investigate her attitude to overtly commercial writing all the more intensely.

The very fact that terms like 'vulgar' and 'trash' are as much social as literary judgements is an inadvertently perceptive comment by Pearsall Smith on the role of journalism in Woolf's life and in her imagination. Writing for *Vogue*, like most of Woolf's journalism, arose out of a social engagement, much of Woolf's contact with the editor, Dorothy Todd, took place in a social environment,⁶⁰ and *Vogue* itself was, of course, very much a 'society' paper, all of which reflected qualities Woolf was anxious to separate from her more serious writing but which force of circumstance prevented her from dissociating from journalism. The self doubt that Woolf endured over her status as a journalist — '[I] protested that all the same I'm not a hack' (D1,

⁵⁹See Elaine K. Ginsberg, 'Virginia Woolf and the Americans', *The Bulletin of Research in the Humanities*, 86 (1983-5), 347-359

⁶⁰See, for instance, the references to dress buying with Todd (D2, 78 & 91)

277) — is part of her concern that if she let the social and commercial aspects of writing embodied in journalism merge with the purely imaginative she may very well end by 'writing trash'. It is Pearsall Smith's echoing of her own fears that may well have bred much of the virulence that characterised her response to his original charge.

In the final analysis, however, Virginia Woolf eliminates the nationalistic and much of the class elements from her argument, and withdraws from establishing a final position on *Vogue's* own literary merits. She reduces the point of contention to the linked questions of style and context and who has the ultimate power of expression in an article — her ability to write 'my style' regardless of the context in which it was published. Outlet does not affect content, she asserts, and in the remainder of her correspondence with Pearsall Smith this is the issue at stake. How she deals with this issue — one which had been a major cause of discontent in her younger days and was to disturb her again in the future — shows how the strategies of resistance she had developed were now so well established and well-developed as to be internalised and part of her means of self-definition. Her confidence as a journalist was such that she was now capable of asserting 'my style' and defending it against the 'stuffy' Logan Pearsall Smith.

Hence on 25 January Woolf wrote to him:

Did you read my article in *Vogue* — 'Indiscretions'; and if so did you think, as an

impartial critic, that it was inferior to/or in any way differed from articles that I write for *The Nation*?

Much depends on your answer (L3, 157).

Much did depend because, as Woolf later revealed,

I had planned ^{such} a trap for you — I did send one article to *Vogue*, but it was intended for *The Nation*, and just about to be printed, when Todd became clamorous, and rather than write specially for her, I snatched it from Leonard [Woolf, literary editor of the *Nation and Athenaeum*], to his fury. And I hoped you would detect signs of Todd and *Vogue* in every word (L3, 157-8).

Pearsall Smith replied that 'No, I had seen nothing of yours in *Vogue*, & didn't know you had written for it when I had mentioned the subject'. What grieved him was 'to see Bloomsbury descend from the heights & scatter its pearls in Mayfair'.⁶¹ He was distressed by the destabilisation of cultural hierarchies when highbrow literary success could co-exist with equally successful commercial journalism.

Woolf's self-confidence in the face of his attack was however, somewhat disingenuous. She adopted Pearsall Smith's simple high/low opposition when, in fact, gradations within journalism were much less clearly stratified, as 'Indiscretions', the pearl in question which was written for the *Nation and Athenaeum* and published in *Vogue* in late November 1924 (and in America on 1 June 1925) points out. It is an essay on the indiscretion of readerly affection for established authors, and

⁶¹MHP, letter from Logan Pearsall Smith, 26 January 1925.

while it could very easily have appeared in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, it expressed just the sentiments that the *Times Literary Supplement* would *not* allow to appear in print in its pages. There, when Woolf wanted to say in a review that she 'felt strong affection' for George Moore, 'the Times went and cut it out' (L2, 396). This was one of many examples in which Woolf experienced the differences between her view of writing and value and the *Times Literary Supplement's*.

Initially the *Times Literary Supplement* imposed its own language on her through direct external censorship, a process which eventually led to Woolf internalising the lesson and developing her own system of self-censorship. Where a review was 'originally long and vigorous', the Times 'cut it down and tamed it' (L1, 295). Where Virginia Woolf used language inappropriate to the journal's standard of propriety (the choice of the word 'lewd', for instance, in a piece on Henry James), the editor contacted her and requested her to 'think it over, & ring me up in 20 mins'; in response to which she 'thought it over and came to the required conclusion in twelve minutes and a half'. 'Lewd' went.⁶² By 1924, when she was reviewing *The Weekend Book* for the *Supplement*, she was able to save Bruce Richmond the trouble of the telephone call. In manuscript she wrote of the book which provided its own bookmark with 'Have you forgotten the salt' on one side and 'Have you forgotten the corkscrew' on the other: 'And now, instead of [] going through the farce of

⁶²See (D2, 151-2) and (E3, 319-26) for details of this incident and the published version of the essay

reviewing', but crossed it out before completing the sentence. The next line in manuscript begins 'But now, instead of reviewing', as it does in the printed version.⁶³ 'Farce', though probably appropriate for a book full of

good poems and bad poems and games and
songs and recipes and quips and cranks and
blank pages for more games and songs and quips
and cranks (E3, 414),

would not have been acceptable to the sober and respectable, or 'milk and water' paper, the *Times Literary Supplement* (L6, 403).

In the *Nation and Athenaeum*, where her husband was Literary Editor and his policy was

not to interfere in any way with the liberty of
expression of an author whose name is to be
signed, provided that he [sic] keeps within
certain bounds of decency and courtesy,⁶⁴

Virginia Woolf's freedom of expression was virtually guaranteed, as it was in *Vogue*. If, as Virginia Woolf assured Pearsall Smith, signs of Todd and *Vogue* were invisible in 'Indiscretions', signs of Leonard and the *Nation* certainly were not. Contrary to Pearsall Smith's reservations that writing for *Vogue* would taint Virginia Woolf's style and compromise her integrity, writing for *Vogue* offered her more freedom of expression than did her work for the *Times Literary Supplement*, regardless of its policy of keeping contributors anonymous. 'Todd lets you write what you like, and its your own fault if you conform' (L3,158) she told

⁶³For the published version see (E3, 414-6) and for the manuscript versions, British Library, Add. Mss. 51045, p. 75^v.

⁶⁴*Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. by Frederic Spotts (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 293

Smith, whereas the *Times Literary Supplement*, under the morally rigid control of Bruce Richmond — a man whose one listed publication is, ironically, *A Pattern of Freedom in Prose and Verse* ⁶⁵— cut 'a very mildly irreverent story' from one young man's review and interfered both substantially, through requesting alterations, and insubstantially, through creating a certain all-pervasive muted moral tone, in her own pieces for that paper. *Vogue*, for all its vulgarity, 'which is open and shameless' (L3, 158), allowed Virginia Woolf to write 'what she liked', a freedom upon which she played with no small degree of relish.

In her review 'The Tale of Genji', for instance, she mocked the literary pretensions of Todd's attempt to elevate the intellects of her readers, assuming that they knew the significant dates from tenth century British history: 'Our readers will scarcely need to be reminded that it was about the year 991 that Aelfric composed his Homilies' (E4, 264). In her review of the letters of Sir Walter Raleigh (first incumbent of the Chair of English Literature at Oxford) she released some small but measured barbs into the flanks of a man and a type whom she regarded privately as a 'self-conscious poseur' (D3, 74). 'In the course of two large volumes filled with delightful and often brilliant letters', she wrote, 'it would be difficult to find a single remark of any interest whatsoever about English literature' (E4, 342). Her essay on George Moore, too, obeys none of the reticences required by the *Times Literary Supplement*:

⁶⁵(London: Faber, 1940)

George Moore is the best living novelist — and the worst; writes the most beautiful prose of his time — and the feeblest [...] how whimsical his judgements are, how ill-balanced, childish and egotistical into the bargain! (E4, 260-1.

Thus, Woolf's question as to whether one does 'write differently for different people' (L3, 159), prompted by Pearsall Smith's attack, must be answered in the affirmative. For the latterday critic, consideration of who the people were, and how and why they exerted their influence, are equally important if we are to pronounce with any certainty on the complexities of the relationship between literature and history, Virginia Woolf and her non-fiction.

Woolf's own version of this relationship testifies to its importance in her psyche and in her understanding of contemporary gender politics. This version can be read in the famous 'Professions for Women' speech, with its notorious central figure of the Angel in the House, the 'ideal of womanhood created by the imaginations of men and women' (P, xxx).⁶⁶ The story of her early journalism, delivered at the meeting of the London/National Society for Women's Service in 1931, was for Woolf a reminder both to herself and her audience that her vocabulary and modes of expression had been embedded in structures of power. These were structures that she experienced

⁶⁶Quotations are taken from the version given in *The Pargiters*, not *The Death of the Moth*. Jane Marcus, in *Art and Anger* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988) sees Leonard Woolf's edited version in *The Death of the Moth* as an example of his 'suppression of his wife's anger' (p. 136) aimed at presenting Woolf as 'silly and apolitical' (p. 120). Extreme though this verdict is, Leonard Woolf's choice of text is unusual, as is much of his editorial work with Woolf's essays.

as moulding her in terms of gender and restricting her potential forms of utterance accordingly. As Woolf recounts in her draft for the speech,

before I began my review, I always knew what I was expected to say. I felt some pressure on me to say what was agreeable. Dear old Henry James — he must be praised. One must not attack the crass stupidity of Carlyle. A set of values was ready-made. And these values were almost always half an inch to the right or left of my own (P, 163-4).

Individual editors did exert pressure, Woolf did internalise specific sets of editorial values and pressured herself accordingly, but her turn to the symbolic in characterising this oppression through the use of the figure of the Angel in the House, placed her actual experience in the wider context of general arguments on the relationship between gender, power and writing, experienced through the medium of journalism.

Gender, power and writing proved a volatile combination and provoked an explosive encounter, one which Woolf eventually resolved in favour of her freedom of expression. She 'turned upon that Angel and caught her by the throat' (P, xxxi); she 'took up the inkpot and flung it at her' (P, xxxii); and, as she says on more than one occasion, 'I did my best to kill her' (P, xxxi-ii). Finally, she 'flatter[ed] [her]self that [she] did kill her in the end', even though 'the struggle was severe' (P, xxxii). Woolf's battle with the Angel was both actual, in terms of the intervention of various editorial Angels in her work, and also symbolic, in that it represents a broader instance of the

difficulties of definition and self-representation women incur when faced with a language that is inseparable from gendered exertions of power. In its actual manifestation it is discernible through an investigation of her prose; its symbolic resonances facilitate a theoretical reading of Woolf's historical circumstances and textual manoeuvres.

As a curtailed figure whose story has to some extent been written in the language of others, or whose own values have been refused recognition, Woolf the journalist occupies a paradigmatically feminine position in the discourses that comprise literary history. In terms of representing an investigation of the politics within the world of journalism, and within the prose produced for that world, the story of Woolf and the Angel, like that of the 'Author' and the 'Editor', adumbrates much that Woolf's later career was to exemplify. In terms of her journalism (as opposed to her writing in general), the struggle to speak in a voice that was her own, symbolised by the killing of the Angel, was basically continuous. Even in 1936, five years after telling the tale of freeing herself from the Angel in the House, Woolf was still aware that 'I at once adapt what I'm going to say, if I think of a newspaper' (D5, 3) and therefore 'I'm always feathering round for some way of liberating my critical apprehensions which dont fit the *straitjacket* of the regular Times leader' (D5, 5).

Not surprisingly, as it was the paper to which she was connected for the majority of her writing life, the *Times Literary*

Supplement came to symbolise much that was limiting and limited about journalism for Woolf. The restrictive ethos which produced these stiff and formal articles was, Woolf felt, the result of a generational hangover, a persistence of what she called 'the Victorian manner' which was 'perhaps — I am not sure — a disadvantage in writing' (MoB, 164). The manner conditioned much that she wrote for that journal and even, she feared, managed to persist in those works she rewrote for the two *Common Readers*. Towards the end of her life she noted:

When I read my old Literary Supplement articles, I lay the blame for their suavity, their politeness, their sidelong approach, to my tea-table training. I see myself, not reviewing a book, but handing plates of buns to shy young men and asking them: do they take cream & sugar? (MoB, 164).⁶⁷

Given that Virginia Woolf's initial introduction to Bruce Richmond of the *Times Literary Supplement* was conducted over the tea-table, in just that atmosphere of late Victorian society that she was later to hold in such disregard, her choice of analogy is apparently derived from experience. As usual with Virginia Stephen's early journalism, the experience of establishing a connection with the *Times Literary Supplement* was engineered by a woman friend, Kitty Maxse. After dining with Kitty, Virginia Stephen recorded in her diary that 'Mr Chirol of the Times is reading my things with a possible view to asking me to write for

⁶⁷In an earlier draft of this section Woolf wrote 'Common Reader' rather than 'Literary Supplement'. The change suggests a greater degree of blame is attributable to the editor and the journal, rather than Woolf herself. For the earlier version, see *Virginia Woolf, Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind (Sussex: The University Press, 1976), p. 129

the T.L. Supplement' (EJ, 223) and nine days later, after a dinner with Bruce Richmond, she received a letter from Kitty Maxse

to say that he [Bruce Richmond] & the great Mr Chirol approve, & I am to come & meet them to discuss — I dont quite know what, but I hope it means that I am to get more work, reviewing I suppose (EJ, 228).

Reviewing it was, the particulars of which she discussed with Richmond at yet another tea party. This was a procedure that was to continue over many years; even in 1927 Bruce Richmond was still 'coming to tea on Monday to discuss an article on Morgan [Forster]' (D3, 149). Thus the *Times*, one of the two papers deemed least likely to accept contributions from the young and untried beginner, established a connection that was to last for the next thirty-three years, and did so in a manner that quite unashamedly conflated writing with socially constructed gender roles. For Virginia Woolf the tea-party had begun.

While the society hostess, the tea-party and the *Times Literary Supplement* were therefore linked by physical association, understanding that connection in terms of its symbolic resonances took very little effort. The *Times* was the great paper of the nineteenth century and even though the *Literary Supplement* was born in the year the Victorian era died, its tone, as Virginia Woolf heard it, held the timbre of the past. Her response to, and judgement on, that past is contained in the image of the tea-table. As she wrote in one of her autobiographical essays: 'the tea-table [...] was the centre of Victorian family life' (MoB, 130), and Victorian family life, as any

reader of her novels (especially *The Years* and *Night and Day*) would be aware, was for Woolf a major symbol of both individual and especially gender oppression. The fact that she saw herself in writing for the *Supplement* as serving buns to young men is highly pertinent, reflecting her perception of the subservient and gendered role constructed for her by writing in a style appropriate to that journal. Her choice of metaphor in reference to the *Times Literary Supplement* thus positions this portion of her journalistic career within the larger domain of her concern with gender, power, and writing. While her own experience of writing for the *Times Literary Supplement* drew forth the tea-table metaphor, a brief review of contemporary appraisals of the paper support the judgement implied by the carefully chosen figure of speech, and suggest that Woolf's assessment was not necessarily limited to the personal in its application.

What Virginia Woolf considered cause for regret in the *Times Literary Supplement* was for many of her co-contributors and contemporaries a cause of 'national pride' and celebration. If she, as the daughter of an educated man, lamented having to 'serve buns' in writing, her siblings, the sons of educated men, the founder members of the society of insiders she castigates in *Three Guineas*, found the experience distinctly congenial. They appear as the main advocates of the *Times Literary Supplement* and all it stood for in style and content. The view of the tea-table from the perspective of the host or the guest was not so disastrous, it seems. According to the Chancellor of the

University of Leeds, for example, on the occasion of awarding Bruce Richmond an Honorary Doctorate:

At a time when all standards have been shaken it [the *TLS*] has preserved to the lasting benefit of literature the continuity of English criticism and has maintained and advanced the reputation of Englishmen for humanity, sound writing and honest thinking beyond any of its predecessors or contemporaries. It has recognised the claims and adjusted the enmities of experiment and tradition under the best of hosts. It has been hospitable both to age and youth, always hating a bad book but always hoping for a good one, conscious of the past, alive to the present and of the future unafraid. The attitudes of authority, good will and expectancy were never so happily combined.⁶⁸

In its 1952 50th Anniversary issue, in which this lavish praise was reprinted (on the same page, ironically, as an advertisement for Burke's *Landed Gentry*), the *Times Literary Supplement* characterised its critical practice, which had so enchanted the Chancellor, as 'the faithful and fairly lively representation of what the work really does look like to a tolerably healthy, intelligent and well-trained mind other than the author's'.⁶⁹ The vocabulary at work in speaking to the tolerably healthy, well-trained mind, which echoes the prescription for sanity given by Dr Bradshaw in *Mrs Dalloway*, recalls the rhetoric of patronising dominance which Woolf, in *Three Guineas*, identifies as meaningless to the educated man's sister or daughter. To her 'it seems plain that we think differently according as we are born differently' (TG, 162).

⁶⁸'The Times Literary Supplement: A Record of its Beginnings', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 January 1952, p. 39

⁶⁹*ibid*

This repressive positioning of Woolf as a journalist, and some of the resultant tones of her 'professional' voice, are reminders to her later twentieth century readers that the articles we read as 'by Virginia Woolf' are as much an indication of Edwardian and Georgian editorial conceptions of literary propriety or expediency and traditional gender roles, as they are of a modernist or feminist sensibility. On many occasions, and especially in the early writings, Woolf speaks in the voice required and often demanded by the editorial policy of the relevant journal. Only when she began to develop a voice that managed to keep the vocabulary and tone of the journal yet import her own meanings did the repression that she so often railed against begin to loosen its hold.⁷⁰ The Woolf of the essays and journalism is, therefore, as Bernard in *The Waves* suggests, 'made and remade continually. Different people draw different words from me' (W, 109).

By the time she was writing the article on Lady Murasaki for Todd, Virginia Woolf had been continually remade by years of

⁷⁰S.P. Rosenbaum, in *Edwardian Bloomsbury*, notes that Virginia Woolf, like other members of the *Bloomsbury Group*, was influenced by 'the conditions of authorship in early twentieth-century London', and that 'how and what the Group wanted to write was affected, of course, by the editors and publishers who paid for and printed them' (p. 6), but he rejects the notion that the circumstances of her early reviewing condition the form of her non-fiction prose. 'Six months of journalism', says Rosenbaum, 'had taught her something about editors, and their periodicals, but little about the art of the essay or the review. That she had to learn from the work of Leslie Stephen, Aristotle and Pater, from her friends like Violet Dickinson, and from her sister and brothers and their Bloomsbury friends' (p. 164). While I would not deny external literary and familial influences I would argue equally strongly for the influence of editorial expectations and publishing conditions on the nature and form of Woolf's non-fiction.

writing for journals with whom she had varying degrees of sympathy. After many years of learning to construct a certain language through writing for the *Guardian*, the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Cornhill*, and despite the reservations later expressed in 'Professions for Women', Virginia Woolf was almost convinced that she was sufficiently sure of her voicing tactics to risk their exposure on the openly and shamelessly vulgar stage of *Vogue*. The risk was balanced by the knowledge Woolf had gained from her earlier rejections. When two of her articles were rejected ('Magic Greek' by the *Academy & Literature* and a review of Edith Sichel's *Catherine de'Medici and the French Revolution* by the *Times Literary Supplement*) she ensured that her next contributions were not 'too uncompromisingly opposed to their point of view' (EJ, 256) in the case of the *Academy* and that she treated books in a suitably 'academic spirit' (L1, 188) in the case of the *Times*. When Richmond asked for a 'general article' (EJ, 268) on Spain and sent '3 fat books about Spain to read for the Times' (L1, 189), after the 'unfortunate Sichel review' (EJ, 267), Virginia Stephen responded by writing a review which was 'dull reading, I think, though virtuous' (EJ, 272). She acted with even more circumspection when the *Times* sent her the proofs, which she 'changed a little, to make my criticism less abrupt' (L1, 190). The *Times Literary Supplement* published the article and continued to send her novels, although no more histories, to review. In private Woolf responded to the slur on her historiography by determining to 'produce a real historical work [...] for which I have solidly read and annotated 4 volumes of medieval English' (L1, 202).

Being dull though virtuous and tailoring one's tone were lessons learnt through rejection from the *Times* but they were ones which writing for the *Guardian* emphasized even more forcefully. Andrew McNeillie dubs it a 'pretty dull clerical newspaper' (E1, xii) and judges that many of the novels Virginia Stephen was given to review were 'also very dull' (E1, xiii). She complained continually about having to write in a style that satisfied 'the High Church parsonesses' (L1, 191). Not being able to 'say all, or indeed half' of what she wanted on subjects like Mrs Carlyle (L1, 200), or 'say nasty things' which was her 'real delight in reviewing' (L1, 166-7) lest Mrs Lyttleton do as she did with some of Woolf's work, and '[stick] her broad thumb into the middle of my delicate sentences and [improve] the moral tone' (L1, 214), was part of the process of learning the 'knack of writing for newspapers which ^{is} quite independent of literary merit' (L1, 155). She feared that it led her to 'sometimes doubt the value of words' (L1, 197) but in fact it enabled her to develop an extremely precise awareness of the value of words, and the relative value of literary merit.

Thus, if Mrs Lyttleton deemed 7-800 words equally sufficient to deal with the likes of *The Son of Royal Langbrith* (which she told Virginia Stephen was 'good' (L1, 158)) and Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* (which Stephen thought deserved a 'good, and careful review' (L1, 178)), Virginia Woolf would have to learn to develop a method which would please the parsonesses, 'represent all the toil' (L1, 178) some books

demanded, *and* enable her to 'assail the sanctity of Love and Religion without care for the Parson's morals' (L1, 206) if she so desired. Knowing that Mrs Lyttleton was unlikely to let her 'attack the Church of England' (L1, 201) or give her an extra column when the demands of articles like 'Where Can the Intermediate Patient Be Nursed?' were equally pressing,⁷¹ or Smith of the *Cornhill* to let her 'call a prostitute a prostitute, or a mistress a mistress' (L1, 343), Woolf of necessity taught herself a language of duplicity, a double-voiced ability to 'finish and compress', so that her complex and often condemnatory meanings could be slipped in under the cover of a superficial respectability, or fitted in to a brief 'notice' when space was restricted.

Early indications of this technique are evident in Virginia Stephen's 1908 review of *The Life and Letters of John Thadeus Delane* commissioned by the *Cornhill* (E1, 188-94). In describing her strategies in this review, Woolf boasted that, 'the subtlety [sic] of ^{the} insinuations is so serpentine that no Smith in Europe will see how I jeer the President to derision, seeming to approve the while' (L1, 337). Her serpentine manoeuvrings are achieved by placing Delane in associational relationships which appear to be complimentary but are, in fact, highly critical, and ensuring that the critical comments are made by others and not by the reviewer. Thus, in describing how John Delane went to Oxford and distinguished himself as a horseman and rider, Woolf quotes his tutor on this praiseworthy achievement: 'Mr Delane is part and parcel of his horse' (E1, 188). Delane's letters, which prove

⁷¹*Guardian*, 8 February 1905, p. 247

him literate as well as sporting, demonstrate his 'command of vigorous and wholesome English', but also 'show him something of a philistine' (E1, 189). In his business dealings Delane was 'anonymous', 'inscrutable' (E1, 191) and such was his close association with the *Times*, an admirable quality showing his dedication to duty, that he was 'divested of personality' (E1, 193). The patterning of these sentences, none of which is completely critical in its context, results in an overall impression, when they are read in combination, of a drab, unintelligent, one-dimensional individual. The last sentence of the review, which reads

From the clods of earth and the watery English sky he received a passive satisfaction, and came perhaps to enjoy an easier intercourse with these dumb things than with human beings (E1, 193),

draws together the sinuous attack and leaves the perceptive reader in no doubt that every adjective describes Delane and not the landscape.

Reginald Smith of the *Cornhill* found this depiction of the 'solid virtues' of a hearty, rural and simple Englishman worthy of approval, obviously missing the irony of continual references to Delane's lack of personality and too-close association with the animal world. We see here the beginnings of Woolf's method of arguing by analogy and association, a method she was later to perfect in her reliance on metaphor, quotation and patterning within the article, all the while keeping a tone and utilising a vocabulary which pleased the appropriate editor. The review of Delane may be cited as support for an argument in favour of

Woolf's early development of a highly subtle and effective rhetoric in response to a restrictive editorial policy. But it is also, as she points out in her letters, not an unadulterated example of pure Woolfian prose. Her control of this technique was not yet perfected, and we see here the evidence of the external censorship that Woolf found so oppressive throughout her life. 'Smith has added words to my sentences', she wrote in disgust to Lady Robert Cecil her co-contributor to the 'Book on the Table' series in the *Cornhill*, and 'cut out others, till I threaten to resign. I am furious' (L1, 332).

The techniques demonstrated in the review of Delane found greater opportunity for refinement in writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*. In learning to conform to the *Supplement's* standards of prose, Woolf learnt to structure her writing so that there were two levels operating simultaneously. As she said in 'A Sketch of the Past', 'the surface manner allows one [...] to slip in things that would be inaudible if one marched straight up and spoke aloud' (MoB, 164). The prose of protest, therefore, was a language of disguise; editorial restrictions did lead to a certain type of silence, but silence, as Woolf manipulated it, was also a form of subversion. Woolf's writing prefigures Adrienne Rich's poetic suggestion that silence

can be a plan
rigorously executed [...]
Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence.⁷²

⁷²'Cartographies of Silence', in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 17

Woolf's assertion that she became 'steadily more feminist, owing to the Times' (L2, 76) applies equally well to its *Literary Supplement*, with her feminism evinced in linguistic subtleties rather than overtly political statements.

The *Times* required formality and a certain degree of refinement, Woolf felt, which led her to be 'stiff and formal' in her prose, and even, on occasion, to 'dressing it up a trifle rosily' (D1, 248); but it also resulted in the development of two initially contrasting but essentially connected techniques. The formality in tone required by the *Supplement* led to an emphasis on compression and finish in her articles, a surface brightness and hardness. Formality, however, could also be a matter of style as well as tone, and there the potential for innovation and reaction worked against the surface sobriety. Writing for Bruce Richmond led Woolf to 'contrive an article rather like an elaborate design; which encourages ornament' (D2, 29). In the case of ornamental eloquence and a concentration on formal structure, obvious meaning is elided — style comes to do instead of accuracy — but through rhetoric and article construction meaning can be both hidden and released.⁷³ The devices which enabled Woolf to work this dual manoeuvre are metaphor and simile, quotation, and patterning through the repetition of key words and phrases. She notes in a letter that 'images^[...] oust the sober truth' (L4, 170), so that a metaphor will, as Rhoda says in *The Waves*, give "'like" and "like" and "like" — but what is the thing that lies beneath the

⁷³See (D5, 275): 'When I wrote TLS articles & knew nothing I slaved to make every sentence do instead of accuracy'.

semblance of the thing' (W, 134) However, 'the truth of one's sensations is', as Woolf suggests, 'not in the fact, but in the reverberation' (L4, 5) — on the reading outwards of the associational implications of the metaphor.⁷⁴ Thus Woolf does practice compression in the articles for the *Times Literary Supplement*, excluding the explicitly controversial statements which would offend Bruce Richmond and force him to perform his duties as an editor; but she also 'stretch[es] [her] style to take in crumbs of meaning' (D3, 235) by allowing the expanding associational implications of a metaphor or simile, or reading associationally, to replace direct statements.

This technique is demonstrated to perfection in Woolf's review of a novel by W.E. Norris. A prolific minor novelist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, whose reputation is now so diminished that he is not listed in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Norris was the subject of a number of Woolf's reviews in the years before 1925.⁷⁵ Her article on *Tony the Exceptional* appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 10 February 1921.

The design of the article is established in the opening titles. The book under review is *Tony the Exceptional*; the heading of the review is 'Mr Norris's Standard'. When the two are read against each other, the inverted comma in the latter could well indicate a contraction rather than a possessive. In addition, the

⁷⁴See Chapter Six

⁷⁵See 'The Obstinate Lady' and 'Mr Norris's Method', in (E3, 42-3 & 178-80) and 'Barham of Beltana' and 'Lone Marie' in (E1, 36-7 & 66)

continual playing with 'standard' throughout the review, a word taken from the publisher's puff as Woolf is at pains to indicate (thus absolving herself of responsibility for any judgement implied), comes to establish the book as just like all the rest of Mr Norris's fifty or sixty novels. It is very much 'standard' rather than anything 'exceptional'. In this context, too, the repetition of 'form' — Norris's 'sense of form' (E3, 282); his obedience to 'the law of form' (E3, 283) — comes less to imply shape and design, but formula. Piecing together the pattern of standard versus exception and form as formula, a codified judgement on Mr Norris starts to coalesce.

Woolf's form of critique is associational rather than linear, but incisive nevertheless. The mention of Mr Norris in relation to 'an old established firm of grocers' (E3, 281), for example, takes on a sharper meaning when read against the comment two paragraphs later, that in his novel 'everyone concerned in it is either a lady or a gentleman, and therefore of good manners, or an ex-shop assistant and therefore of bad' (E3, 282). The associational implications of the image of 'one scene suggesting and confirming another spontaneously, as bubbles froth at the end of a pipe' (E3, 283), when the author comes from the ranks of an ill-mannered shop keeper, then, are more likely to be an indication of a purveyor of the soapy and insubstantial than a 'true novelist'.

After this critique by patterning, the final judgement on Mr Norris is insidiously inserted in the concluding paragraph: 'In

short, we would as soon read Mr Norris on a railway journey as a good French novelist, and for much the same reasons' (E3, 284). The only French novelist mentioned in the review is Flaubert, whom Woolf overtly declares a greater artist than Norris, thus leaving him alone in his carriage. The analogy, therefore, is initially somewhat obscure. But after further reflection we are left with, not Mr Norris changing trains, but being firmly ensconced in one. He is established as a 'time-serving, mechanical' writer by his enclosure in the vehicle which carries him, even though Woolf had said previously that there was potential for his work to be analysed to 'explain our belief that Mr Norris is *not* a time-serving, mechanical writer, but a writer of art and intuition' (E3, 283, my italics). Her demonstration of art and intuition, though, with its pattern of imagery, with phrases echoing each other and constructing a network of highly judgemental criticism, portrays Mr Norris as a mechanical tradesman of letters, a writer of insubstantial, unexceptional prose. His own statement, which Woolf quotes to close the review, therefore emerges as a damning self-condemnation: 'when you have a standard, you have a standard, and there is no use arguing about it' (E3, 284). Virginia Woolf has, indeed, not bothered to argue, letting the compression and design of her prose do her arguing for her whilst maintaining a surface manner that satisfied the 'dear old Lit Sup' which 'twinkles & beams & patronises' (D4, 47). Essay-writing, she declared, was like 'cabinet making — putting little bits of wood side by side in their right places' (L5, 98), assured all the while that her skill was such that the demure Bruce Richmond would not notice that, in fact,

she was working 'like a cabinet maker composing a neat commode' (L6, 102).

The ornate and apparently superficial rhetoric, which in a way is part of the tradition of belles lettres, is moulded to fit Woolf's desire to establish a prose amenable to expressing all her potential meanings *and* include a judgement. Thus the commonly held belief that in her reviews and essays, Virginia Woolf 'does not dissect and analyse, or collect facts, compare them, and pass judgement', is superficially correct but essentially blind to the levels of meaning at work in her prose.⁷⁶ It is the 'margin of suggestion' created from the 'populous and teeming silence' of her prose (CDB, 15), a silence which does not disturb the decorous and ladylike atmosphere of the tea-table, which characterises Virginia Woolf's essays and journalism, and makes them such relevant models for the development of a language potentially expressive of a gendered subjectivity.⁷⁷

The subject of 'Virginia Woolf as journalist', revealed by an investigation of that journalism, is a shifting one. A protean Woolf in the process of continual revision, constructed through the intersection of conflicting editorially inspired discourses, recalls Michel Foucault's writings on the construction and understanding of the subject.⁷⁸ For him,

⁷⁶See, for instance, E.J. Scovell's 'Virginia Woolf, Critic', *New Statesman and Nation*, 15 October 1932, pp. 454-5

⁷⁷See Chapters Five and Six

⁷⁸See also Rachel Bowlby's appraisal of Woolf as 'a kind of literary Clapham junction for the crossing and potential collision of questions of

the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces.⁷⁹

Thus the Woolf we read in the essays and journalism, taking into account Foucault's unfortunate gender bias in assuming a masculine universal subject, emerges as the product of the relations of power that comprised the discourses at work in the historical event that was early twentieth century journalism. And, as Foucault goes on to explain, power is more than mere repression. In fact, 'far from preventing knowledge, power produces it', and 'if power is strong, this is because [...] it produces effects at the level of desire — and also at the level of knowledge'.⁸⁰ Through her journalism, Woolf experienced just this mixture of repression, desire and knowledge. Her reaction, a desire to breach those limitations, led to Woolf continually striving to 'devise a new critical method' (D4, 53) in response to the strictures of those like the ever respectable Bruce Richmond. This was to be 'something far less stiff & formal than these Times articles' (D4, 53) which, in turn, would allow her critical freedom. The matrices of power in respectable early twentieth century editorial discourse made it extremely difficult for Woolf to say what she thought, as she revealed in the 'Professions for

representation, history and sexual difference' in *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*, p. 2

⁷⁹'Questions of Geography' in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p. 74

⁸⁰'Body/Power' in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 59

Women' speech, but they did not silence her altogether, nor force her to speak constantly in a voice that was totally false to her sensibilities, desires and opinions. In fact, recognising and responding to the power of conventions in journalism led to Woolf examining her status as a professional woman, concentrating explicitly on the implications for gender and identity as they featured in her writing, and developing textual tactics of resistance.⁸¹

But for all her achievements in moulding the prose of journalism to accommodate her own requirements, Woolf, on occasion, still felt that she had not gone far enough. 'Oh let us remodel society', she cried in private, 'remodel society; break the cage of the thousand word article; and leave the bill unpaid — the bill of the blood stained butcher'.⁸² Although she did eventually break from the cage of the *Times*, and resisted D.L. Murray's attempts to recapture her,⁸³ she felt that she had never quite escaped the 'ingeminating [...] suavities and gravities' of reviewing that 'befit the depravity of the tea table'.

⁸¹I use 'tactics' rather than 'strategy', following de Certeau's outline of two paradigms of power outlined in Julie Robin Solomon, 'Staking ground: the politics of space in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*', *Women's Studies*, 16 (1989), 331-347. Strategy 'presupposes the existence of a seat of power, a space which is "proper" to the strategist, a space which the strategist defends and perhaps extend'. Tactics 'presuppose the absence of a seat of power, a "proper" place. The tactician always works on enemy territory' (p. 339). Tactics can be subversive or accommodating. Solomon argues that *A Room of One's Own* adopts a compliant tactical economy and *Three Guineas* a subversive one.

⁸²MHP, B. 11. c). Virginia Woolf has no sequential system of numbering in the typescript draft, so no attempt has been made to allocated page numbers.

⁸³MHP, letter to Virginia Woolf 13 September 1939, in which he sounded Woolf out as to whether 'you might some day resume your highly appreciated contribution to the Literary Supplement', .

These references to a bestial and bloodstained tea-party are contained in the draft of the pamphlet 'Reviewing', which was issued by the Hogarth Press in 1939 as part of its Sixpenny Pamphlet series. The essay was an attempt by Woolf to counter the depravity of the tea-table, show that 'reviewing as practised at present has failed in all its objects' (CDB, 122) and suggest an alternative that would free the author and the critic from the 'shop window' environment of reviewing (CDB, 118). Under her proposed schema the reviewer would be abolished, a 'Gutter' would summarise the prose work and quote from the poetic, and a 'Taster' would affix an asterisk or a dagger to indicate approval or disapproval. The author, quite separately, would have a private conversation with an impartial reader, selected by him or her, for critical advice (CDB, 127). Editorial influence, under these new circumstances, would be of no consequence. In the press, the space saved by the brevity of the Gutter and Stamp system would be given to the essayist in the tradition of Montaigne, or the critic in the tradition of Matthew Arnold. These drastic changes were outlined in the essay, a publication that Woolf knew was 'only able to raise questions [...] not to answer them satisfactorily' (L6, 370).

Even raising questions caused a minor furore amongst the reading public and the reviewing fraternity when the pamphlet was published. Various commentators called it an 'assault',⁸⁴

⁸⁴Anon, 'Advice to Reviewers', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 December 1939, p. 731

'thoughtless',⁸⁵ with its undue 'pessimism' the result of a 'misunderstanding'.⁸⁶ Leonard Woolf felt compelled to add a 'Note' to the essay because 'some of its conclusions seem to me doubtful because the meaning of certain facts has been ignored or their weight underestimated' (CDB, 131). Like the conservative editors before him he modified the prose that Virginia Woolf had prepared to put before the public, defusing its potential to overturn the tea-table by his mollifying note.

In fact, all her disgust at the enforced duplicity in expression and the uneven power relationships between editors and reviewers was left for Woolf's unprinted manuscript notes, indicating, as Jane Marcus points out, the power of the unpublished text to contain a feminist agenda.⁸⁷ In the drafts of 'Reviewing', Virginia Woolf's characterisation of the reviewer, the editor and the potential and limitations of journalism and criticism recapture the crucial issues raised by, and explored in, her journalism. This characterisation proceeds through a vocabulary that suggests a relationship between gender and power expressed in terms of the female body, which relocates discussion of the material at the level of the psyche, and highlights the potential of Woolf's journalism as a vehicle for an investigation of gendered subjectivity.

⁸⁵Malcolm Elwin, Letter to the Editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 November 1939, p. 655

⁸⁶Y.Y., 'Last of the Reviewers?' *New Statesman and Nation*, 4 November 1939, p. 640

⁸⁷'Preface' to *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. ix

In the draft, for example, Woolf describes a scene in which,

Yet again, yet again, over the roofs and through the wires comes the voice of the kindly man, the bearded who in his office among the proofs and the paste pots sits and wants he says by the 18th at latest an article.

Ring her up, write to her — say (he says to his smart little secretary) with the leather belt and the red wet lips) I want an article.⁸⁸

The reviewer is absent, powerless, at the command of the bearded, 'kindly' man, and she is a woman. Woman, as this draft implies, is a sexual object, a subservient stereotype with 'red wet lips'. Reviewers are women in this fictional environment, women or animals, 'pacing the cage with hackles erect'. By the time the feminine pronoun is lost, when the reviewer is 'rattl[ing] his tin can like a gorilla', it is of little importance since the gendering of the reviewer has served its purpose: the reviewer is positioned at the subordinate pole of a binary opposition. Now the unnamed writer can state that 'all are useless, quite useless, all reviewers'; useless, bestial and imprisoned. They are abject figures, living caged on the margins of civilisation.

They are not entirely useless, however, for they suggest a multiplicity of associations. Woolf herself provides one, cultural criticism one and feminist criticism another. But before going on to investigate the implications of figuring the reviewer as a beast weltering in blood and inseparable from a squalid feast, it is perhaps more fitting to leave Woolf's experience of the tea-table of journalism with her vision of an alternative to the gore. The

⁸⁸MHP, B. 11. c) All further quotations are taken from B. 11. c).

image of the bestial reviewer causes her to call for a new subjectivity and a new lyricism:

Oh for silence; or only a voice; not a body; not a tie; not a seal ring; but a voice speaking; two voices colliding; and the truth emitting its burst of fire; in that summer blue, June hot room, where the one large pane is all blue; silence reigns.

CHAPTER THREE: 'MONARCH OF THE DRAB WORLD': FIGURING THE
OBJECT IN JOURNALISM

Silence, however, did not reign in the world of journalism as Virginia Woolf experienced it, historically or psychologically. Her reviewer's room was not a sanctuary lit by the sharp brightness of the June sun, nor was the gendered body denied in favour of pure voice. In fact, journalism and the figure of the journalist in Woolf's writing, tended to reveal a sordidness and corruption that rendered monarchy despotic, the body bestial and the fiery burst of truth a temporary flicker. In this new realm the reviewer was ruled by the

Monarch of the drab world; of the shifting
shuffling
uneasy, queasy, egotist's journalists pobbing
and
boobling, like a stew a-simmer, asking for
sympathy
dousing the clean the clear the bright the
sharp in
the stew of his greasy complacency.¹

Stewing in the juices of his own second-rateness, the journalist emerges from one of Virginia Woolf's few pieces of deliberate verse as one of the least savoury characters imaginable. The individual journalist, who appears initially as

¹These lines are taken from the 'poem' 'FANTASY UPON A GENTLEMAN WHO CONVERTED HIS IMPRESSIONS OF A PRIVATE HOUSE INTO CASH', as reproduced by Quentin Bell in Appendix B of the second volume of his biography of Virginia Woolf (QB2, 253-4). The original typescript version can be found in MHP, A. 19. Further quotations from the poem, the title of which I have shortened to 'Fantasy', will be indicated by line numbers given in parentheses in the text. This excerpt, ll. 12-16.

J.B., eventually metamorphoses into 'John Bug; James Bug Bug bug bug' (30) and surfaces from his infectious stew to sip blood, 'my blood' (33), the blood of the poet who is, presumably, a representative of 'the clean the clear the bright the sharp' (15). Unlike the 'lady of the house' (1) who writes the 'FANTASY UPON A GENTLEMAN WHO CONVERTED HIS IMPRESSIONS OF A PRIVATE HOUSE INTO CASH', J.B. is a degraded figure, a bestial parasite, sucking the poet's blood to give himself substance and life, and by his very existence impeding her creativity. Like the Muse in Pope's *Dunciad*, whose presence ensures that '*Art* after *Art* goes out, and all is Night',

Light dies before thy uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall
And Universal Darkness buries All,²

J.B. puts out the light of Virginia Woolf's world by

sitting there, in the chair in the spring of the
year;
taking time, air, light, space; stopping the
race of every thought; blocking out with his
tweeds
the branches; the pigeons; and half the sky (8-11).

The vampiric journalist is, apparently, the epitome of all evil, the 'great Anarch' of the world of early twentieth century letters.

But before he departs fully sated on the blue blood of the true writer, J.B., the 'Gentleman who converted his impressions of a private house into cash' and darkened Virginia Woolf's day, fulfils a function that elevates his status above that of an

²Quotations taken from Book Four of 'The *Dunciad*' in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 799-800; ll. 640 & 654-6.

irritating and infectious insect and the subject of a minor poetic exercise in venting spleen. Woolf's almost frantic attack on the bug J.B. may have been provoked by an actual incident — a reporter from the *New York Times* visiting Monk's House uninvited and taking notes in a green book before being escorted from the premises by Leonard Woolf (D5, 72-3) — and the tone and content of the piece therefore conditioned by immediate circumstances, but this does not limit the poem's referential and analytic potential. By the time the poem is concluded, J.B. has imaged many of the contradictions inherent in Virginia Woolf's approach to journalists and the world of journalism; contradictions which, in turn, lead to the surfacing of new readings of Woolf's non-fiction and to a reevaluation of Woolf's representation of, and status as represented object in, debates about culture. As a cultural icon of sorts she both occupies and describes the 'sites of cultural contestation',³ a dual perspective for which the doubled yet conjoined figures of host and parasite are the perfect symbol. In this sense she occupies an analogous position, as emblem and practitioner, to the figure of Sylvia Plath, as revealed in Jacqueline Rose's assessment of her life and works. Both can stand as a 'ghosts' who '[haunt] our culture', instances of 'the inseparability of history and subjectivity' and victims of the opposition critics have enforced between 'high' and 'low' literature and 'the process whereby culture divides itself up'.⁴ In the light of the continued ambivalence of Virginia Woolf's lifelong relationship to journalism, and the difficulties in deriving a

³See Brenda R. Silver, 'What's Woolf Got to Do with It? or, The Perils of Popularity', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 38 (1992), p. 22.

⁴*The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), pp. 1, 7 & 9

unified and unproblematic view of culture, the depiction of the host and parasite association, and the particular imagery and vocabulary manipulated in the prose poem, provide a useful model through which to investigate the questions of language, culture and subjectivity which are involved in both the practice and the perception of early twentieth century journalism.

As a prose poem of sorts (Quentin Bell calls it 'an almost hysterical outburst of half-rhymed prose, rather like a parody of Joyce' (QB2, 200)), 'Fantasy' is almost without parallel in Woolf's literary oeuvre; very rarely did she ever venture into poetry of any sort, although she valued it most highly as a literary genre. Such was her regard for poetry that, when considering the future of women's writing in *A Room of One's Own* for example, the ultimate goal is the unimpeded, incandescent mind of a female *poet*. The Shakespeare's sister of the future, it should be remembered, is to be a poet, not a novelist: the first impulse of the writing imagination is to poetry. Despite her profound respect for the genre — 'had I been able to write poetry no doubt I should have been content to leave the other [that is, 'adventurous prose'] alone' (L5, 317) — Woolf refused to be labelled a poet and denied any attempts at verse composition: 'I have never written a line of verse' (L5, 36).⁵ Her use of poetry in

⁵Critics have noted the presence of snatches of verse in Woolf's novels (eg. *Orlando*; See Françoise Pellan, 'Virginia Woolf's Posthumous Poem', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 29 (1983), 695-700, in which Pellan notes that, in 1945, Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson published a 'poem' by Virginia Woolf in their anthology *Another World Than This* which is almost identical to the opening paragraph of *Orlando*) and Woolf herself consciously incorporated poetry into *Between the Acts*. Her manuscripts contain drafts of poems (see MHP, B. 4, pp. 4, 5, 6, 7) and the published work has sections in which Isa thinks or speaks her poetry. At one point

response to the intrusive journalist was, therefore, relatively unusual and ultimately destined only for the discharging of private anger that was kept private. This muting of Woolf's attempts at verse is consonant with the fate of the only other piece of free-standing poetry in her canon, 'Ode Written Partly in Prose on Seeing the Name of Cutbush Above a Butcher's Shop in Pentonville'.

This piece, which bears comparison with 'Fantasy' by virtue of their common form alone, was also a product of the latter half of Woolf's career, being typed in the mid 1930s, but not published until well after her death.⁶ It deals with, in terms of narrative, the life of John Cutbush who, as his name suggests, is a divided man, divided initially between two potential vocations, whether he 'shall [...] be butcher or florist?' (SF, 237). As the poem progresses, however, we see that the division is, in fact, more fundamental, with butchery and floristry taking on symbolic connotations. John Cutbush is faced with a choice between the external world of work and limited possibilities — 'Shall I serve for ever Massey and Hodge meat/merchants of

in her diary, too, Woolf considered writing an 'Ode to Whitaker' and a 'specimen lecture in USA: both in rhymed prose' (D5, 125), so it is clear that the concept of expressing herself in a poetic format was not alien to her, and, in fact, became more attractive as the 1930s progressed. See Gillian Beer's 'Introduction' to *Between the Acts* in Briggs. One could also argue that the untitled and unpublished piece in Berg, M.13 which begins 'Come now day, summer day, country day' is a prose poem in the same vein as 'Fantasy'. Critics have also noted and praised Woolf's deployment of poetic prose; see, for instance, Stella McNichol, *Virginia Woolf and the Poetry of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990)

⁶According to Susan Dick in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, it was typed on 28 October 1934 (p. 37). Quotations from the piece, the title of which I have shortened to 'Ode', will be cited in parentheses in the text, with page numbers following the letters SF.

Smithfield?'(SF, 239) — and the freedom of an imaginative life of flowers and poetry, in which he 'sees the violets and the asphodel' and 'dreams', having 'read/Byron in the Charing Cross Road' (SF, 239). Surrounding and supporting the story of his journey from 'little John' (SF, 237), through courting, establishing his business, marrying and having a family, and finally being threatened by 'the new butcher opposite' (SF, 240), Woolf weaves a lyrical and whimsical questioning of

how little we can grasp;
 how little we can interpret and read aright
 the name John Cutbush (SF, 241),

and what it means for 'time [to] run its wheels over him' (SF, 240).

An imaginative foray into the world where 'butchers/promise eternal faith to kitchenmaids' (SF, 240) and those who write odes partly in prose are destined only to pass by, 'Ode' has, it seems, very little in common with 'Fantasy', which depicts relationships that are destructive rather than productive. The tone, the grammar, even the vocabulary of both, reflects the opposition of their subject matter. The gentle paternalism of

[...] how little we can grasp;
 how little we can interpret and read aright
 the name John Cutbush but only as we pass his
 shop on Saturday night, cry out Hail Cutbush,
 of Pentonville, I salute thee; passing (SF, 241),

is easily overshadowed by the vituperative disgust expressed at the prospect of J.B. who 'wished to see [...] the lady of the house, did he?' (1) and

[...] sat on a chair,
 with his hair unbrushed; his mouth dribbling; his
 eyes
 streaming with the steam of some lodging house
 stew (34-6).

In terms of literary presentation, the poisonous J.B. is infinitely more interesting than the benign John Cutbush, and the vigour of presentation is matched by the vitality of response in the poems. The poet who steps into Pentonville to salute the butcher has a markedly different approach to the lady who is beset by the journalist who shuffles into her world not to be saluted, but to consume. The active walker in Pentonville does not enjoy the same active relationship with language as does her housebound friend. To the strolling poet, John Cutbush, though he butchers for a living, is part of 'the flower of life', a linguistically lame description; J.B., who invades the sedentary writer's privacy, provokes mobile linguistic innovation — 'pobbing' and 'boobling' — and his presence attracts more distinct terms of description, even though he butchers her peace of mind. He is 'uneasy', 'queasy' and an 'egotist'. John Cutbush is no more than 'red' faced, with 'eyes bleared' (SF, 240).

Differences apart, in both instances Woolf uses poetry rather than prose to muse on the question of subject/object relations, as refracted through the lenses of class, gender and writing. Part of the variance in tone between the two pieces is dictated by the fact that in 'Ode' the writer's subject position is not threatened, not even impinged upon by the object of her perusal. John Cutbush stays in Pentonville, he reads rather than

writes poetry, and he remains impenetrable to the observer who passes; indeed, if the title of the poem is to be taken literally, the poet may have never even seen the individual — only his name 'Above a Butcher's Shop in Pentonville'. Because of this distance between them, the poem is as much about the thought processes of the poet as the 'life' of John Cutbush. In such circumstances no boundaries are crossed, no hierarchies are disturbed, and nobody's integrity is undermined.

'Fantasy', on the other hand, presents no such security. The subject who writes the poem about J.B. is also the object of J.B.'s literary interest. She is forced to look at him looking at her, so that in both cases she is the object of the gaze, thus reducing her powers of individual agency, here specifically literary agency, in the process.⁷ The stability of individual subjectivity is shaken. Added to this personal destabilization, journalism and the journalist threaten the hitherto bounded and secure world of the 'private house' of the writer — a metaphor of literature as dwelling place that is particularly favoured by Woolf.⁸ In the latter scenario we see the fictional playing out of many of the private anxieties of Virginia Woolf as 'artist' competing with Virginia Woolf as 'professional writer', and also the public anxieties of the status of 'private' high culture in a world where its position is no longer inviolate. Woolf's personal circumstances

⁷See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). 'The gaze is at stake from the outset', says Irigaray (p. 47), and woman is 'always specularized and specula(riza)ble' (p. 72).

⁸See Ann Henley, "'The whole building of a book": Architectural analogy in Virginia Woolf's essays and novels' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama, 1990)

as individual subject and as a writer are therefore encapsulated in a larger debate about culture, which is manifested, in both the private and public instances, through the figure of the journalist, the journalist symbolised as parasite. Her oscillating pro- and anti-journalism views, as revealed in the poem 'Fantasy' and in her private and non-fictional writings, reflect the paradox of literature and culture in the Modernist period. If, as Raymond Williams suggests, post World War I preoccupations and definitions of the notion of culture arose from the 'development of mass media of communication and the general growth of large-scale organisations',⁹ of which the journalist was the symbolic figure par excellence, Virginia Woolf's private dilemmas can be read as a portrait in miniature of a national cultural scenario.

Many of the connotations of the world of journalism for Woolf and for her contemporaries can be deduced from the figure she chose to symbolise that domain — the bug. A lower species than the human, James Bug recalls that well-known epithet for all things journalistic: Grub Street.¹⁰ 'Grub Street' and the 'Underworld' were terms used freely by Woolf in reference to journalism and its practitioners, as was the figure of the insect.¹¹ John Middleton Murry, for instance, whom she considered 'an

⁹*Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with Chatto and Windus, 1963), p. 286

¹⁰Woolf's 'bug' is probably derived from her acquaintance with Dickens's view of reviewers as the 'lice of literature'. See 'Reviewing' (CDB, 120). See also George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1891]) for vivid descriptions of the squalor of late nineteenth century hack journalism.

¹¹See (D1, 156, n 8): "'The Underworld' is a barely definable term used by both LW and VW, roughly equivalent to 'Grub Street' (the abode of literary hacks), but with a suggestion of social inferiority'.

oracle in the underworld' (D1, 156), worked in her 'flesh' like a 'jigger insect' (D2, 249). As suggested by the subterranean metaphor, Virginia Woolf's perception of the landscape of literary culture was based on the premise of hierarchy and that vertical division was developed in her writing through a rhetoric of social distinction.

In both 'Ode' and 'Fantasy' this is developed through choice of genre and content. In both pieces, the idiosyncrasy (for Woolf) of the literary method draws attention to the nature of the subject matter; a form associated with 'high' art emphasises the 'low' subject matter and the combination of the two reveals certain complexities of class and literature. Academic literary criticism is now becoming more aware of the analyses of class in Woolf's novels,¹² no longer content to see them as the unmediated responses of an unenlightened representative of the upper middle classes fascinated with 'art' and ignorant of 'life', a trend which an examination of her journalism will further promote.¹³ While the publication of her private writings does reveal a questionable attitude to the 'lower classes' — 'The fact is the lower classes are detestable' (D2, 64) — it also demonstrates that Woolf was conscious of her own shortcomings and capable of self-scrutiny: 'I'm one of those who are hampered

¹²See, in particular, the many writings of Jane Marcus, who views Woolf as a champion of the oppressed, in terms of class and gender, and a marxist. For a less contentious analysis of class see the unpublished paper given by Hermione Lee at the 1992 Oxford Conference on Virginia Woolf: 'Virginia Woolf and Offence'.

¹³This attitude, promulgated largely by the *Scrutiny* team in the 1930s has generally lost its popularity, but works like John Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, and television programs like *J'Accuse* may point to a late swing back to the *Scrutiny* view.

by the psychological hindrance of owning capital' (D1, 101). Her fiction is now recognised as portraying a similar opposition, and these two pieces of verse are more evidence to support the view that Woolf, though a self-confessed snob, was not an unthinking one.¹⁴ Woolf's concern with class therefore extended itself to expression in all literary genres, but found, perhaps, its most concentrated expression in works dealing with journalism or produced for that medium, for there writing itself is involved as both the subject matter (for most of Virginia Woolf's more explicit writing on class issues took the form of essays written on other writers or the future of writing)¹⁵ and means of representation. Indeed, when class and literature meet at both meta- and textual levels, the result is bound to be somewhat intricate and unusual in its manifestations. It leads, as a comparison of the 'Ode' and 'Fantasy' illustrates, to a more forceful, startling and ultimately ambivalent investigation of the relationship between writing, gender, money and status.

In 'Fantasy' the particular vigour of the language — minimal punctuation, vivid imagery and frequent, though somewhat uncontrolled, repetition — highlights the power of the threat that Virginia Woolf felt to come from journalism and all it represented. The terms she used to describe the loathsome bug, 'uneasy', 'queasy' and 'egotist', apart from their capacity to startle the reader by echoing each other in rhyme and assonance, are

¹⁴See Virginia Woolf, 'Am I A Snob?' in *Moments of Being*, for a lively analysis of Woolf's approach to her own snobbery.

¹⁵For example, 'The Leaning Tower' and 'The Artist and Politics' (M, 105-25 & 180-2)

terms of particularly potent abuse in Virginia Woolf's vocabulary, egotist being one of her most damning condemnations. Woolf found that 'the mention of "I" is so potent — such a drug, such a deep violet stain' (L5, 193) and declared 'I hate any writer to talk about himself; anonymity I adore' (L5, 191). 'I' is 'large' and 'ugly' (L5, 195), and, in *A Room of One's Own*, the shadow it casts leads to 'aridity' and sterility; 'nothing will grow' within its shade (Room, 131). The particular triumvirate of disdain — queasy, greasy and egotist — harks back to Woolf's responses to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, another incident in which her literary judgement found expression through a vocabulary of class-inflected phrases and vivid terms of physical repulsion.¹⁶ Joyce's innovative prose was a threat to Woolf's newly developed literary subjectivity and the ease with which she turned to abuse based on class distinctions suggests that when one aspect of her modernist sensibility was threatened, she bolstered it with a return to established parameters, of which the security of class was the most easily available. In her most famous response, in the diary entry of 16 August 1922, she described her reaction to reading *Ulysses* as 'puzzled, bored, irritated, & disillusioned as by a greasy undergraduate scratching his pimples' (D2, 188-9); it was an

illiterate, underbred book [...] the book of a self taught working man, & we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw,

¹⁶Woolf noted, when reading *Ulysses*, that 'Bloom is/ Editor of a paper (MHP, B. 3. f), p. 3), and although Bloom is not an editor but an advertising canvasser the connection between *Ulysses* and journalism may have contributed to Woolf's use of a similar vocabulary in condemning both. See the 'Aeolus' section of *Ulysses* for Joyce's most direct engagement with the world of journalism, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968 [1922]), pp. 118-50.

striking, & ultimately nauseating. When one can have the cooked flesh, why have the raw? (D2, 189).

Reading Joyce led her, in her writing, to 'dwindle, niggle, hesitate' (D2, 64). He literally made her uneasy, taking the ease out of her own methods of composition. In all these passages references to social status jostle with symptoms of poisonous consumption, and the hated term 'egotist' presides over all. In both, a sense of revulsion couples with a sense of threat — Joyce threatened her sense of originality and journalism her sense of pure purpose. Reading *Ulysses* made Woolf reflect that 'what I'm doing is probably being better done by Mr Joyce' (D2, 69) and journalism interrupted the process of writing fiction:

the horror of writing 1, 2, 3, 4, reviews on end, 3 concerning Mitford too, I've been groaning & grumbling, & seeing myself caged, & all my desired ends — Jacob's Room that is — vanishing down avenues (D2, 35).

Although the threat is almost purely existential, Woolf's responses are expressed in terms of a corporeal reaction: her body is attacked by a parasite, nauseated by raw flesh and caged like an animal. Joyce and the journalist join as examples of an almost bestial opponent to 'the clean the clear the bright the sharp' of Woolf's vocation as a writer.

Much of her private writing on journalism — her own and others' — echoes this preoccupation with class and the threat such a 'low' occupation poses to the higher pursuit of writing fiction. Even though she produced the majority of her essays and reviews for journals and papers which could in no way be

considered 'popular' by the general public (John Carey, for instance, cites the *Criterion*, for which Woolf wrote, as an organ of elite high culture, 'the circulation of which was limited, even in its best days, to some 800 subscribers'¹⁷) she herself placed that aspect of her work well below her fiction, so that it enjoyed a relatively low status, regardless of the intellectual and class pretensions of the journal in which it appeared. In thus reducing journalism to a menial position in the gradation of culture, Woolf was not an unusual figure in her time. Even her otherwise arch enemy F.R. Leavis characterised journalism by its associations with a world of vice and squalor; journalism, according to Leavis, 'solicits us everywhere' and even 'the academic conception of tradition' can not 'save its champions from wallowing'.¹⁸

Like many of her adult attitudes Woolf's distrust of the pale world of journalism, where the bug is 'malodorous glistening/ but only semi transparent' (31-2), has its roots in the atmosphere of her childhood, as much as the contemporary scene of the early twentieth century. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, although one of the greatest of Victorian journalists, celebrated by the Leavises as being in 'the direct line of the best tradition of our literary criticism', the tradition of the 'higher journalism that was then available to offer a career to talent without degradation', one who filled the more prestigious title of Man of Letters, always felt his

¹⁷John Carey, p. 9; the *Times Literary Supplement*, however, is a different matter. In 1924, for instance, the average net sale for September was 26,675 copies weekly. See the *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 August 1924 for details.

¹⁸F.R. Leavis, 'What's Wrong With Criticism?', *Scrutiny*, 1 (Sept. 1932), p. 140

profession to be less than noble.¹⁹ As Noel Annan recounts, Sir Leslie once told his wife to 'tell some young man that it "would be more virtuous to starve or to take a public house than to earn a living by journalism"'.²⁰ Woolf recounts that by the end of his life he considered himself 'a failure as a writer; he had been "jack of all trades, and master of none"' (CDB, 72). He considered his literary performances 'a rather uninteresting topic' and declared journalism 'not a very exalted profession'.²¹ When he began as a journalist in 1864/5 he felt 'naturally, more respect for a literary life — perhaps I should only say for the career of a journalist — that I can feel now', now being 1895.²² Naturally, this verdict must have affected his daughter, who read the *Mausoleum Book* in which these memories were recorded (she was Sir Leslie's amanuensis in his declining years) and felt herself to be his literary inheritor. Indeed, her reaction to a friend's offer, on hearing that she wanted to be a writer, to meet Andrew Lang, the prolific and incessant late nineteenth century journalist — 'I boggled' — suggests that the attitudes of Sir Leslie had definitely been assimilated. Lang was not the type of author a 'real' writer considered worthy of acquaintance.²³

¹⁹Q.D. Leavis, 'Leslie Stephen: Cambridge Critic', *Scrutiny*, 7 (March 1939), pp. 404 & 410; for Stephen as man of letters see John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, pp. 97-107

²⁰Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian*, p. 112

²¹Sir Leslie Stephen, *Mausoleum Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 85 & 87

²²*ibid*, p. 7

²³(MoB, 171). Lang was a translator, a reviewer, an essayist, poet, historical writer, anthropologist and sometime Don at Oxford.

When Virginia Woolf began writing in the early years of the twentieth century, then, it is no surprise to discover that her Aunt, Caroline Emelia Stephen, Sir Leslie's sister, expressed rather dour disapproval of her niece's means of entrée to the literary world. Writing to her friend Madge Vaughan, who encouraged the young Virginia in all her enterprises, Virginia Stephen grumbled that

I got sat upon as usual by the Quaker [Caroline Stephen] — (who thinks it right to criticise her relations, and *never* to praise them) for 'journalism' — She thinks I am going to sell my soul for gold, which I should willingly do for gold enough, and wants me to write a solid historical work !! People do take themselves so seriously: she sits and twiddles her fingers all day long, but she exhorts me to realise the 'beauty of hard work' as she says profoundly (L1, 166).

A year later, by which time Virginia Stephen had been published in the *Guardian*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Academy & Literature* and the prestigious *National Review*, Aunt Stephen was still questioning her niece's status as a writer:

The Quaker writes 'When I asked what you were doing I meant writing'. Do you see the excessively subtle point of that sentence? Somehow she drew a distinction between reviewing and other kinds of literature (L1, 212).

The intellectual status of many of the journals for which Woolf was reviewing was high, but it appears that Aunt Stephen's faculties of judgement were influenced by the rhetoric surrounding the changes in the perception of journalism taking

place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.²⁴ Her opinion that reviewing did not awaken Virginia Stephen to the beauties of hard work when, for example, in the space of one week (Saturday 11 to Saturday 18 March 1905)²⁵ Virginia Stephen did not let one day pass in which she was not involved with reviewing, is similar in attitude to Matthew Arnold's view that the 'new journalism', though it is 'full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts', in short, energy and industry, is still 'feather-brained'.²⁶ Writing three reviews and one essay, plus notes, reading three set books and others for background information will always be considered less than adequate employment if journalism itself is seen as occupying an immovable place at 'the bottom of hierarchy of cultural forms'.²⁷ The newspaper is the epitome of the 'provincial spirit' while the 'exercise of the creative power' (in 'the production of great works of literature or art') is 'the highest function of man'.²⁸

The implication that journalism was not 'hard work', not legitimate literary or artistic activity was one with which Virginia Woolf struggled throughout her career, often derogating the

²⁴For essays on the changing conditions and status of journalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see Joel H. Wiener, ed., *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914* (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1988)

²⁵See EJ for daily details of Virginia Stephen's reviewing (pp. 250-5 for the week cited) and also the notebooks in which she copied out quotes and jotted down ideas from her reading: MHP, B. 1. a).

²⁶Matthew Arnold, 'Up to Easter' in *Essays, Letters, and Reviews*, ed. by Fraser Neiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 347

²⁷Laurel Brake, 'The Old Journalism and the New: Forms of Cultural Production in London in the 1880s', in Wiener, p. 2

²⁸Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', in *Selected Poems and Prose* ed. by Miriam Allott (London: Dent, 1978), p. 191

quality of her work and dismissing the quantity as having no relevance to worth — either to her worth as a literary reviewer and essayist, or the objective worth of the pieces she published. While she recorded faithfully one aunt's criticism she omitted to even mention another's praise. Aunt Annie Thackeray Ritchie, herself a late nineteenth century journalist of distinction, 'highly praised' part of Virginia Stephen's review 'Literary Geography'; Virginia Stephen did not mention it.²⁹ Any praise that was acknowledged provoked a kind of shame rather than pride. As if expiating a sin, praise for her journalism led Virginia Woolf to '[promise] to translate a bit of tough Greek, as a penance' (EJ, 229). To 'struggle with my novel' was worthwhile; 'my reviews dont count at all' (L1, 375). They, like the blood/prose emitted by J.B., 'pale' by comparison with the brilliance of fiction or legitimate history.

Pitted against this idea that journalism was not 'real' work was the actuality of the time and effort Virginia Woolf put into each piece. Leonard Woolf, in his introduction to *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* noted that 'I do not think that Virginia Woolf ever contributed any article to any paper which she did not write and rewrite several times' and cites the example of an unspecified review with an original draft and 'no fewer than eight or nine complete revisions of it which she herself had typed out' (DoM, 7).³⁰ Evidently the industry that characterised Woolf's

²⁹Rosenbaum, *Edwardian Bloomsbury*, p. 157

³⁰This is reiterated in Leonard Woolf's autobiography *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911 - 1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 81: 'Even with a review, she would write and rewrite it and rewrite it again from end to end five or six times', and supported by an extensive

work in 1905 was consistent throughout her career. An essay on Conrad, commissioned by the *Times Literary Supplement* after his death in August 1924, a leader slightly in excess of three columns, went through twenty three pages of drafts in manuscript.³¹ For her late essay on Ellen Terry, offered to *Harper's Bazaar* in 1940, Virginia Woolf read Terry's *Memoirs*, Edward Gordon Craig's *Ellen Terry and her Secret Self* and *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw A Correspondence* and wrote in excess of fifty pages of draft.³² This industry, however, while it contradicted the criticism of journalism as an inconsequential pastime, indulged in it in order to make a little cash, converted it into a burden of drudgery. Journalism became something that ate up time, time that could be spent on more respectable ventures. Hence, in reading through Virginia Woolf's voluminous correspondence and diaries one comes across incessant references to the desire to escape from the crushing weight of journalistic demands. In 1917 Woolf wrote to Clive Bell that 'you don't waste your time on reviews' (L2, 167), a freedom from toil which enabled him to try 'a few experiments' in prose; her own time spent in a 'horrid burst of journalism' (L4, 187) was 'such hard labour in the doing that one can't read them [the articles] without remembering the drudgery' (L4, 195). In 1910, therefore, she vowed 'never shall I write a review again' (L1, 440), a desire she reinvoked in 1920, when she reasserted that

range of manuscript evidence. Revision would include the writing and rewriting of individual sentences and paragraphs to remove problematic phrases and ensure that the final result had the words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs in exactly the right order.

³¹See the drafts on the verso pages of the manuscript of *Mrs Dalloway*: British Library, Add. Mss. 51046

³²See MHP, B. 5. a) & c)

'my private aim is to drop my reviewing' (D2, 34), and again finally, in 1937, when she decided she would not write articles 'at all except for the Lit Sup' (D5, 91). At no point did she secede from reviewing; nor did she limit herself to a particular journal like the *Times Literary Supplement*. After the 1937 declaration, articles appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation*, the *Yale Review*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Listener* and the *New Republic* and by early 1938 she had decided to sever her connection with the *Times Literary Supplement*, rather than restrict herself to writing for it.³³ The anomaly, continuing long past the time when financial considerations governed her actions, of spending apparently inordinate amounts of time perfecting a product to which she apparently attributed no value, was a permanent feature of Woolf's professional writing life. Like the hideous bug J.B., sucking the life blood from his host, the onerous activity of writing articles and reviewing consumed Virginia Woolf's time, drained her of energy and imagination and left her railing against its invasion of her life and its detrimental effect on her fiction. 'I have had to scribble all day to finish an article and this leaves *one* very much out of language', she lamented (L2, 583), especially as 'after a dose of criticism I feel that I'm writing sideways, using only an angle of my mind' (D2, 248-9).

Not only did Woolf blame journalism for its effects on her creative abilities, she even went so far as to attribute her emotional, and what one might call her clinical, difficulties, to its

³³See B.J. Kirkpatrick, *A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980 [1957]) for details of these later publications.

evil effects, suggesting that threats to the writing self are experienced as threats to the physical body. She recognised that

I'd been depressed since Jan 3rd. We ran it to earth, I think, by discovering that I began journalism on that day. Last Thursday, I think, I returned to fiction, to the instant nourishment & well being of my entire day (D2, 234).

Journalism is the ultimate scapegoat, starving her of the nourishment necessary for every type of health — a sustenance only the writing of fiction can provide. Just as the journalist J.B. is a parasite on the body of the lady, so journalism is a parasite on the body of fiction, eating away the mental and physical energy the writer needs to create 'art'. Extending the analogy a step further, one is able to assert that mass culture is a parasite on the body of a more pristine capitalised Culture, a proposition that Woolf never makes overtly, but which her rhetoric implies. Had Woolf made the leap explicitly she would not have been alone in her fears. According to the critic Andreas Huyssen,

ever since the mid-19th century, the culture of modernity has been characterized by a volatile relationship between high art and mass culture.³⁴

This is the argument which John Carey develops, highlighting the almost pathological antagonism between Modernist high culture and 'the masses', and which Huyssen sees as fundamental to the definition and self-constitution of Modernism. Modernism

constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its

³⁴*After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. vii

other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture.³⁵

Following the paradigm of self-constitution or subject formation, established by psychoanalytic theory, the culture of Modernism comes into being by defining itself against the 'other' of mass culture.

Mass culture may well be Modernism's other, which fits perfectly with high/low oppositions worked out through the language of class distinction in Woolf's writing, but the gendering of that binary opposition presents a multitude of problems. As Hélène Cixous argues, wherever there is a binary opposition, and 'thought has always worked by opposition', there is a hierarchy and that hierarchy is gendered: the 'two-term system' is 'related to the couple man/woman' and the 'hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual organization to man'.³⁶ According to Huysen, the Modernism/mass culture dichotomy is no exception. As Modernism's other, mass culture may well carry lower class connotations, but it is also inescapably 'female' — that being the side, as Cixous outlines it, of 'Low', 'slave', of 'Subordination'.³⁷ Huysen concurs with this process of gendering, declaring that mass culture, since the mid to late nineteenth century, has consistently been gendered female:

the political, psychological, and aesthetic
discourse around the turn of the century

³⁵ibid

³⁶Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties' in *New French Feminisms*, pp. 90 & 91

³⁷ibid, pp. 90 & 92

consistently and obsessively genders mass culture as feminine.³⁸

However J.B., Woolf's emblem of mass culture, is male; he is the '*Gentleman* who converted his impressions of a private house into cash'. In the interests of historical accuracy — both in terms of the actual intruder who arrived in the Daimler, and in terms of the likelihood of any journalist in 1937 being male — J.B. had to be a 'he', and in terms of his opposition to Woolf as woman writer the inversion of gender is understandable. But despite J.B.'s obvious masculinity, certain of his habits mark him as female; when read through his habits rather than his appearance, J.B.'s gender becomes less well defined. He sips blood, for instance, and his body bleeds into print, both images that have particularly strong resonances for feminist literary critics. Notwithstanding the assertion by one scholar that 'from time immemorial the female has been identified with edible commodities',³⁹ the gendering of the consumer, especially when considered in terms of either voracious hunger or starvation, has consistently been female.⁴⁰ In Woolf's own fiction, consumers are almost always women and the association between food and femininity is always negative. In *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, the voracious

³⁸Huyssen, p. 46

³⁹E. Patnaik, 'The Succulent Gender: Eat Her Softly' in *Literary Gastronomy*, ed. by David Bevan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 59

⁴⁰See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), especially Chapter 11 'The Genesis of Hunger According to Shirley', pp. 372-398 and Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), who notes that hunger and starvation had been publicly linked with the feminine through the campaigns of the women's suffrage movement (pp. 95-6).

and, to Clarissa, detestable Miss Kilman greedily consumes her éclair in a pang of barely suppressed desire. This scene finds an echo in the unnamed woman in the sketch 'Portrait 5' who luxuriates over sugared pastry while affirming her own self satisfaction, with the 'sin' of gluttony sliding into the 'sin' of pride.⁴¹ Another sketch, 'The Frenchwoman in the train', contains a more sinister evocation of malevolent consumption, as the eponymous Frenchwoman utters 'a hiss with a little saliva [...] from the front teeth which have been yellowed and blunted, biting at cabbage stalks' (SF, 242-3). Even the central and celebratory dinner in *To the Lighthouse* has its ominous side, as Mrs Ramsay serves up Paul and Minta to a future of restrictive married life just as she serves up the boeuf en daube. The sacrificial element of the meal is noted at the same moment as the benevolently social, when Mrs Ramsay

peered into the dish, with its shiny walls and its confusion of savoury brown and yellow meats, and its bay leaves and its wine, and thought, This will celebrate the occasion — a curious sense rising in her, at once freakish and tender, of celebrating a festival, as if two emotions were called up in her, one profound — for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands (TtL, 135-6).

Lily Briscoe is right to feel that this is 'frightening', this is 'terrifying' (TtL, 136 & 7). And such imagery is not only limited

⁴¹For this story and the following one, see 'Portraits' in (SF, 242-6)

to Woolf's fiction. One of the last observations she made in her diary, was of women eating in a Brighton tea shop, ironically named 'Fullers'. There sat

a fat, smart woman, in red hunting cap, pearls, check skirt, consuming rich cakes. Her shabby dependant also stuffing [...] They ate & ate [...] Something scented, shoddy, parasitic about them [...] Where does the money come to feed these fat white slugs (D5, 357).

Scenes of physical consumption lead naturally, though somewhat unkindly in this instance, to questions of material and economic consumption. Both are equally base.

The image of the bug bleeding into print also brings with it obvious associations with the female. According to Susan Gubar,

one of the most resonant metaphors provided by the female body is blood, and cultural forms of creativity are often experienced as a painful wounding [...] for the woman artist who experiences herself as killed into art may also experience herself as bleeding into print.⁴²

In terms of his literary companions in Woolf's works, and his bodily functions, then, the sucking, bleeding J.B., despite his external masculine garb of 'rubbed grease stained tweeds' (21), attracts all the negative connotations of debased femininity.

The feminine aspects of J.B. are therefore entirely in keeping with characterisations of the culture he represents and which Virginia Woolf, in her less generous moments, derided.

⁴²Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and Issues of Female Creativity', in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. by Elizabeth Abel (Sussex: Harvester, 1982), p. 78

The complexity, in her case, arises when one has to gender high culture. Traditional male Modernists masculinise it, as Huyssen points out, and any close investigation of Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis or T.E. Hulme, for example, will reveal.⁴³ The contradiction of Modernism gendering itself masculine in opposition to a feminised mass culture, and later twentieth century French feminist literary critics gendering it feminine is embodied, if such a term can be used, in Virginia Woolf's writing.⁴⁴ J.B., the hated journalist, is a feminised male, and yet Woolf's images of fiction, for her the emblem of her own brand of modernism, is consistently female, although a brutalised female.⁴⁵

As this ambiguity of gender suggests, for Virginia Woolf the notion of exactly what constituted high and low culture was not fixed immutably, either in her imagination or in practice. Strict analogies of high and low, art and journalism break down, as the question of gender indicates. In the poem on J.B., inflexible hierarchies of host and parasite also crumble, as Woolf refuses to kill the beast who afflicts her. By letting the bug live she suffers the intermingling of her blood and his to continue; she permits, and even, at times, advocates, the transgression of boundaries.

⁴³Huyssen, p. 55, and the section on Ezra Pound in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 353-71, *The Essential Wyndham Lewis: An Introduction to His Work*, ed. by Julian Symons (London: Vintage, 1991) and T.E. Hulme's essay 'Romanticism and Classicism' in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 93 -105

⁴⁴By this I mean Kristeva's practice of affirming male Modernists like Joyce and Artaud as feminine writers. See her 'Oscillation between Power and Denial', in *New French Feminisms*, pp. 165-7

⁴⁵See, for example, the image of the art of fiction as battered woman at the end of 'Modern Fiction' (E4, 164)

Her class bias is well-recognised, and her loathing of journalism well-documented, yet she advocated, in 'The Leaning Tower', the bridging of the gulf between the two worlds, the worlds of class and educational privilege and classless democracy (M, 124),⁴⁶ and her continued practice, over four decades, of journalism, demonstrates that, for all her protestations against its debilitating effects, she benefited from its presence in her writing and personal life. Just as J.B.'s

bug's body bleeds in pale
ink recording his impressions of a private house
in the newspapers for cash (39-41),

so Virginia Woolf spent nearly forty years doing almost exactly the same thing — recording impressions of books, people, pictures, houses for cash, even to the point of participating in such an obviously mercenary and populist exercise as the *Cosmopolitan* feature 'What interests me most in this Cosmopolitan world of today'.⁴⁷

She did not stop it; she did not kill the bug. Between 1904 and 1941 only two years passed during which Virginia Woolf published no journalism: 1914 and 1915, years during which she was incapacitated by mental illness. As she notes in 'Fantasy', the bug is 'always on the wall' (37); one does not kill him because 'if you kill bugs they leave marks/on the wall' (38-9). It was better to have the bug than the stain; just as in her own practice

⁴⁶According to Woolf in this essay, bridging the gap 'we can look forward hopefully to a stronger, a more varied literature in the classless and towerless society of the future' (M, 123), so 'let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves' (M, 125).

⁴⁷*Hearst's International Combined with Cosmopolitan*, April 1938, pp. 144-5

Virginia Woolf felt it was better to endure the burden and ignominy of writing for the papers and periodicals, whatever their lower class and mercenary connotations, than eliminate what was, in actual fact, an integral, though troubling, facet of her life.

Part of the attraction of journalism was its potential to expose one to a whole new world, and to guarantee a degree of fame in the new environment. Being monarch of a drab world by definition lacks glamour, but it does not necessarily deprive one of the excitement of the new. The position of eminence has its own advantages, not the least of which is the satisfaction of personal vanity. The antics of the fictional J.B. provoked Virginia Woolf to ask

Why did he want to be 'seen.' What corkscrew urge from the surge of his stew, his gobbets and gibbets forced him out of the here, to this chair, to be seen? (22-5).

In seven lines of poetry (22-8), Woolf repeats the phrase 'to be seen' four times, reinforcing the element of public prominence and exposure to an audience involved in journalism. In her more private personal writing, her letters and her diaries, she records with some pride the popularity she achieved through journalism, acknowledging that 'this social side is very genuine in me' (D2, 250) and that the sense of 'writing for an audience always stirs me' (D3, 135). In 1919 she wrote that 'I've got to write articles without end. I'm very highly thought of—as a reviewer' (L2, 391); in 1923 she recorded privately that 'I can't help thinking myself about as successful journalistically as any woman of my day' (D2,

251), then added the proviso 'but that is not saying much'. Yet she recorded with evident delight that Lytton Strachey 'thinks me the best reviewer alive, & the inventor of a new prose style, & the creator of a new version of the sentence' (D1, 277). Journalism gave Woolf popularity amongst the public and amongst her friends, and also a sense of her own worth within the industry. In 1918 she noted that 'when I have to review at command of a telegram [...] I feel pressed & important & even excited a little' (D1, 197); in 1932 she recalled 'how proud I was to be asked to do the T.L.S. article! [on Thomas Hardy]' (D4, 119); and in 1938 she remembered 'how pleased I used to be when L[eonard Woolf] called me "You're wanted by the Major Journal!" (D5, 144-5). The praise from Bruce Richmond which occasioned her pride to 'swell' (D5, 145) noted that he had 'long been very proud of your writing for the Supplement, and that it began so early'⁴⁸ a sentiment borne out by his earlier letters in which he declared various of her articles 'splendid' and 'admirable' and asserted that 'the front page is always open to you'.⁴⁹ Journalism therefore gave Woolf fame and prestige at three levels: among the public, like the readers of *Vogue* who read puffs which declared that Woolf 'whether as novelist or critic, always commands the eager attention of those who appreciate the more subtle uses of the English language';⁵⁰ among her immediate circle of friends, to whom she always made a point of outlining

⁴⁸MHP, letter, 26 May [probably 1938]

⁴⁹MHP, letters, 8 May 1937, n.d. 1923, and December 1923

⁵⁰Late May 1926

her journalistic contribution; and among those within the world of journalism itself — her editors.

The ultimate mark of her power and prestige as a journalist came when Woolf knew that she could negotiate a price, choose her topic and refuse offers without fear that that would lead to severance of all ties to the paper in question. It gave her the enviable liminal position of skimming over the surface of the Underworld, of stepping into and out of 'Grub Street', renewing an experience that was exciting and stimulating but not strictly essential.

Journalism was not abandoned because its figurative relationship to Virginia Woolf's fiction was less parasitic than symbiotic. Both Virginia and Leonard Woolf remark on the fact that Virginia needed a less demanding activity to afford her relief from the mental strain of writing fiction. For many years writing reviews was that relief. In another sense it allowed Woolf to express a part of her intelligence and imagination that could not necessarily find an outlet in her fiction.⁵¹ Accustomed as she was to express herself in binary oppositions, Woolf opposed fiction to fact and novels to criticism and felt that although one pole of the pair was privileged — a privilege later critics have been eager to maintain — to express herself

⁵¹This is Leonard Woolf's view in *Downhill All the Way*: 'She found that she could not go on for long periods uninterruptedly writing fiction and she relieved the strain by doing something which used another part of her brain or literary imagination. As the years went on she found that reviewing performed this function admirably; it gave her the relief which some thinkers or writers find in chess or crossword puzzles' (pp. 62-3).

adequately she needed to write in both modes. So even when the excuse of financial necessity had passed, she continued to write reviews. The benefit was measured by luxuries, which troubled Woolf's puritan conscience: 'the legacy of puritan grandfathers. I suspect pleasure slightly' (D2, 94). The profits of journalism were manifested in material objects, reinforcing the solid grounding of professional writing in the 'real world'. Once again journalism led Virginia Woolf to see herself as both producer and consumer. Where fiction gave Woolf the opportunity to pursue 'the sentence in itself beautiful' (D4, 126), journalism proved to her the advantages as well as the disadvantages of the sentence in itself profitable.

The oscillation between advantage and disadvantage, between attraction and repulsion is well-served by Woolf's decision to portray the journalist as parasitic insect. Originally his presence is an invasion of privacy, but once language intervenes in the encounter, he invades more than just the lady's privacy. As he speaks he becomes elusive, 'as he/talked he slipped like a bug malodorous glistening' (30-1); as he speaks he disturbs boundaries of subjectivity,

as if while he talked he
sipped blood. my blood; anybodies blood to
make a
bugs body blue black (32-4).

Once on the skin of his host their separate identities merge, her blood mingles with his, and his body, his writing body, like Donne's flea 'swells with one blood made of two'; J.B. is now 'you *and* I'. To kill him, to sever the links with the world of

journalism would, in a double sense, be 'selfe murder'.⁵² Woolf would be killing off that portion of her writing self that found expression through journalism and also injuring, perhaps fatally, the more privileged self who wrote fiction, but who wrote it bolstered by the knowledge that relief was at hand in the form of journalism. To purple her nail with the blood of the crushed J.B. would indeed, as Woolf feared, 'leave marks on the wall' of the house of literature. Connecting through the medium of blood, of language, the bug becomes a part of the poet and vice versa; borders are no longer rigidly maintained and hierarchies are dismantled. The union, though distasteful to the poet and short-lived for the journalist, is productive — she writes the poem and he

bleeds in pale
ink recording his impressions of a private house
in the newspapers for cash (39-41).

The poet and the pest connect at the level of language, language figured as blood, and they both produce language from a sense of bodily instability — an instability which, for the poet, involves a perception of cultural as well as personal threat. Figuring this disruption through the manipulation of imagery which relies on representations of the animal, food and the body, and displaying the results in fractured poetic prose, we see a dextrous demonstration of the practice Julia Kristeva calls the phenomenon of abjection, the language of which Kristeva considers fundamental to contemporary literature: it 'represents

⁵²Quotes taken from 'The Flea' in John Donne's *Poetical Works*, ed. by Herbert J.C. Grierson (Oxford: University Press, 1929; repr. 1971), pp. 36-7, ll. 8, 12 & 17 (my italics).

the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses'.⁵³ Writing itself was the one of the most 'intimate' and 'serious' activities for Woolf, integral to her sense of self. Sue Roe, following on from Toril Moi's location of 'the politics of Woolf's writing *precisely in her textual practice*',⁵⁴ has argued that the act of writing in itself enabled Woolf to construct a gendered subjectivity, thus locating a politics of 'constructing and reconstructing gender identity within her writing practice'.⁵⁵ Hence the questions of subjectivity and writing, not to mention the larger questions of culture, gender and class, are brought to the fore by the issue of journalism — what it means to write for a paying public and what it means for a woman to do so. Journalism, therefore, can be seen not only as a symbol of the crisis of culture that some commentators, such as F.R. Leavis, saw taking place in the early twentieth century, but also of Woolf's own crisis of subjectivity in relation to writing and gender.⁵⁶ Reading the 'Fantasy' through the matrix of Kristeva's exposition of abjection and extending the findings to the practices and procedures of Woolf's journalism and essay writing is therefore one way of investigating her non-fiction in an historical and

⁵³Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Abjection is defined on p. 2; for further writing on the abject see 'Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents' and 'Psychoanalysis and the Polis', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 238-71 & 301-20. Quotation taken from *Powers of Horror*, p. 208

⁵⁴Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, p. 16

⁵⁵Sue Roe, *Writing and Gender: Virginia Woolf's Writing Practice* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 6

⁵⁶For Leavis on the crisis of culture see, amongst others, 'Scrutiny: A Manifesto', *Scrutiny*, 1 (May 1932), 2-7: 'The general dissolution of standards is a commonplace' (p. 2) and 'Literature and Society', *Scrutiny*, 12 (Winter 1943), 2-11: 'No one, then, seriously interested in modern literature can feel that it represents a satisfactory cultural order' (p. 10).

personal context. Woolf can join Proust, Joyce, Artaud and Celine, and Jacqueline Rose's late addition of Sylvia Plath, as writers of the abject. Woolf's language of abjection, which emerges so clearly in relation to journalism, is therefore both particular to her own crisis of subjectivity and representative of that general crisis which is the fate of the subject (and especially the female subject) in modernity.

Two key aspects of the language of abjection are food and animal imagery. The implications of images of food and consumption and the issues of femininity and writing have been explored in detail by psychoanalysts and literary critics, and their specific implications for Woolf have not been overlooked. Using metaphors of food and digestion was particular not only to Woolf's own language of disgust and horror but, as Kristeva points out, the actual loathing of food is basic to the phenomenon she terms abjection: 'food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection'.⁵⁷ The biographical history of Woolf's troubling responses to food is well known and subject to the close critical scrutiny that surrounds elements of the more unconventional aspects of her life. According to Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf's irrational reactions to food were part of the pathology of her madness, a point on which he concurs with Leonard Woolf.⁵⁸ Both attest that Woolf fiercely

⁵⁷Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2

⁵⁸See QB2, Chapter One and for Leonard Woolf's assessment of the relationship between food and madness *Beginning Again*, p. 79: 'one of the most troublesome symptoms of her breakdowns was a refusal to eat', and p. 163: 'there was always something strange, something slightly irrational in her attitudes towards food'. For readings which question Leonard's assessment of Virginia Woolf's 'conditions' see Roger Poole, *The Unknown*

rejected any type of sustenance when she was most disturbed and exhibited signs of mental decline through her increasingly unusual reactions to food.

Certainly the cure for Woolf's madness was constructed in terms of food and rest, to the alleviation or exacerbation of the malady, depending on which critical camp one inhabits, and the pervasiveness of food in her private life is revealed by the prevalence of food references in her letters to Leonard. More than ten years after her major illness of 1913-15, Virginia Woolf wrote to Leonard about her eating habits when she was separated from him and therefore absent from his supervision. She wrote that

we had the ^{vastest} most delicious meal I have ever eaten [...] we began with paté of duck, went on to trout, gnocchi, stuffed chicken and spinach made with cream and then sour cream and a delicious cake and then pears ad lib (L3, 534).

Her dedication to describing in detail every stage of the meal is not surprising when one considers that when Leonard Woolf wrote to John Lehmann about Virginia Woolf's illness, surmising that 'she is on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown', the causes, he considered, were 'the war, food etc'.⁵⁹ In a letter to Margaret Llewelyn Davies he called it 'the food difficulty'.⁶⁰

Virginia Woolf and Stephen Trombly, *All that Summer She was Mad: Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors*

⁵⁹Spotts, p. 250

⁶⁰ibid, p. 254

This private obsession with food and its association with unacceptable forms of social and moral behaviour was one that found an echo in Woolf's writing, recurring with varying degrees of intensity in her fiction and short stories. Indeed, according to Stephen Trombley, 'Virginia's interest in food as an essential part of her writing marked her career from beginning to end'.⁶¹ A brief survey of 'scenes of eating'⁶² in Woolf's fiction suggests that this is indeed the case. *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and the short stories have already been mentioned for their depiction of scenes of consumption; one can add to this list the two set scenes of feasting in *A Room of One's Own*.

Patricia Moran, in particular, has charted the relationship between images of food, gender and what she calls 'the scene of writing' in Woolf's works.⁶³ As is usual in Woolf studies, however, the scene of writing is not extended sufficiently to include the public sphere of journalism, although individual essays which were once reviews are mentioned. Nor are the implications of journalism as a problematic 'other' to Woolf's fiction considered. Moran notes that depictions of men eating in

⁶¹Trombley, p. 64.

⁶²The phrase is Mervyn Nicholson's from 'Eat — or Be Eaten: An Interdisciplinary Metaphor', *Mosaic*, 24 (1991), 191-210. He argues that 'eating as an image schema is not simply a literary motif, but a cultural paradigm that informs and shapes a range of social phenomena, including disciplines outside of literature' (pp. 193-4). Woolf's use of food as a motif is not unique (see Dickens, Proust, Joyce) but her frequent connection of scenes of eating with commentary on gender issues makes this feature of her writing particularly pertinent to an investigation of gender, subjectivity and writing.

⁶³Patricia Moran, 'Virginia Woolf and the Scene of Writing', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 38 (1992), 81-100

Woolf's fictional works involve connotations of creativity, whereas for women the implications are much more problematic.

Unfortunately, 'the woman writer is caught in a double bind: she cannot eat and live; she cannot starve and write'; the 'creative activity itself generates guilt and fear'.⁶⁴ On first sight it appears that these insights transfer directly to the poem on J.B. and the lady. J.B., it will be remembered, consumes and creates — the blood that he sucks from the lady leaks from him into print. The woman writer does eventually write the poem, but the pestilent journalist drains her of her more familiar forms of creativity; eating still results in a loss of the ability to write. The only difference between the poem and the presentation of eating in Woolf's fiction is that the disgust and fear normally projected by Woolf onto the women who eat in her fiction is here loaded unmercifully onto J.B. The creative act of writing reviews and essays generates guilt and fear which are embodied in the language of the secondary creative act — that is, that writing of 'Fantasy'. J.B. becomes the embodiment of all Woolf's prejudices and phobias about her status as a writer once she has entered the world of journalism, literary or popular, and is depicted in the images and metaphors of Woolf's own private psychosis and those of the abject. He becomes, in fact, the phobic object at the site of abjection.

If, as Kristeva suggests, the body at this point is without gender, we can relate the incongruities of the masculine looking

⁶⁴ibid, pp. 95 & 98

but feminine acting bug to the inability of the abject to be strictly gendered. The blurring and disintegration of gender is also achieved through the connection between parasite and host. In the poem J.B. and 'she' are ostensibly separate but their physically close relationship is highly significant. They connect through the medium of blood — through prose. The poem therefore encodes not only the antipathy but also the ambivalence Virginia Woolf felt towards journalism as a profession and herself as a practitioner. It also explores the position of language at the boundary at which subjectivity is constructed and the ambivalence of that position. In the extremity of Woolf's reaction to J.B. we see the horror of the bestial and the power he exerts over her imagination, a power which prevents her from killing him and which leads her to write the poem. We see the 'fascination of the abomination' that Conrad notes in *Heart of Darkness* and Kristeva sees as typical of abjection in which 'so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims'.⁶⁵ Such is the abject's ambiguous power that one is drawn into a 'vortex of summons and repulsion' in relation to it.⁶⁶

To figure this repulsion, J.B. turns from man to bug, human to animal. In the presentation of scenes of eating analysed thus far, animal imagery is used without restraint. Like 'loathsome Gluttony' in *The Faerie Queene*, who rides in on 'a filthie swyne', himself like a 'brutish beast' and 'more like a monster, than a

⁶⁵Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985 [1902]), p.31; Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9

⁶⁶Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 1

man', the figures who eat bear their bestiality with them.⁶⁷ The figures in Woolf's fiction uphold the connection between eating and the animal raised by Kristeva. The Brighton women in the tea shop are likened to slugs, the Frenchwoman to a tapir, Doris Kilman (in Clarissa's eyes) to a monster, and the lady in Portrait 5 carries a 'gland in her cheek' from which scent drops, like a cat intent on marking its territory. The fate of J.B. is therefore not unusual.

Describing humans in animal terms is, in fact, like the vocabulary of food, a particular characteristic of Virginia Woolf. In all her close relationships where the solitariness of the individual subject is impinged upon by its closeness to others, where the bounds of subjectivity are threatened, both self and other take on animal personae. With her husband Leonard, Virginia was Mandrill and he Marmoset; with her sister Vanessa Bell, she was Billy Goat and Vanessa was Dolphin; with her intimate friend Violet Dickinson, Virginia Stephen was a 'Sparrow' and Violet a mother kangaroo; and with her lover Vita Sackville-West, the creature Potto was created to symbolise the physical aspect of their relationship. This prevalence of food and animal imagery may appear to be entirely idiosyncratic, but, according to Kristeva, the 'first dietary trespass', the taboo at the base of abjection involves both a 'feminine' and an 'animal temptation' so that the antecedents of modern abjection, as revealed, for instance, in Biblical texts, link the animal, the feminine and food,

⁶⁷Quotes taken from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by Thomas P. Roche (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 84, Book One, Canto IV, 21, 22 & 23

all at the point of abjection.⁶⁸ The abject, says Kristeva, 'confronts us [...] with those fragile states where man strays on the territory of *animal*'.⁶⁹ Food, like the human bordering on the animal, is a substance that highlights the limits of the human.

Food and the abject not only remind us of our corporeality and mortality but signify the wider theoretical and political potential of recognising different states of being:

it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.⁷⁰

In this passage Kristeva echoes Bakhtin, who declares that, in eating, 'the body transgresses its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart'; 'in the act of eating [...] the confines between the body and the world are overstepped by the body'.⁷¹ In transgressing one's own limits, the bounds of subjectivity are breached. The ambiguity of existing without strict impermeable borders, the ambiguity of being a subject in process, 'the feeling of being a subject in the process of constituting itself as such',⁷² is both liberating and threatening. The ambiguity which is such a key element in Woolf's writing in general and her writing on journalism in particular, is echoed in the terminology of both Bakhtin and Kristeva. Both theorists note that this transgression

⁶⁸Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 96

⁶⁹ibid, p. 12

⁷⁰ibid, p. 4

⁷¹Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 281 & 282

⁷²Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 47

is both liberating and frightening. 'The time of abjection', says Kristeva, 'is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth [...] Jouissance, in short'.⁷³

Woolf investigates both the 'time of thunder and oblivion' and demonstrates the potential of 'veiled infinity' in her writing on journalism and her writing produced for that medium. The threat of oblivion is most explicitly outlined in her writing on the character she called 'Middlebrow', a generic individual who occupied her mind to the extent that she wrote a number of draft passages on his detrimental effects before composing a complete piece, in the form of a letter to the *New Statesman*, outlining his evil capabilities.⁷⁴ The presence of the numerous draft paragraphs suggests that the figure of the middlebrow was one who had troubled Woolf for some time, but the actual piece eventually published in *The Death of the Moth*, was provoked by a specific series of events. A review of her second *Common Reader* in the *New Statesman and Nation*,⁷⁵ and a series of talks conducted on the wireless, firstly 'To a Highbrow' delivered by J.B. Priestley and secondly 'To a Lowbrow' by Harold Nicolson made Woolf 'so excited, so incandescent, I must needs fire up about Priestley & his priestliness, & write an essay' (D4, 129).

⁷³ibid, p. 9. This notion of time relates the abject specifically to women and feminism. See 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 187-213

⁷⁴See MHP, B. 9. 1)

⁷⁵The review was printed in the issue of 15 October 1932. Woolf's reply was intended to be a letter to the editor, but, on the advice of Leonard Woolf, was not sent and was published posthumously (D4, 129).

Middlebrow, as he appears in this piece, bears many of the characteristics 'enjoyed' by J.B.⁷⁶ He has a 'strange [...] passion [...] for being seen' (DoM, 116); he has parasitical tendencies which relate him to the insect world: he is a 'pest which is the bane of all thinking and living', he is spotted 'on the cabbages' and 'infecting that poor old sheep' (DoM, 118); and he blocks out the light, this time of the moon: 'Middlebrow obscuring, dulling, tarnishing and coarsening even the silver edge of Heaven's own scythe' (DoM, 118). Although not specifically a journalist, the danger from Middlebrow comes because he is 'betwixt and between' (DoM, 115). He disrupts hierarchies, damages contemporary culture by ignoring 'living art' (DoM, 118) and pursues money without end:

The middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige. The middlebrow carries favour with both sides equally (DoM, 115).

The ultimate threat is complete sterility — 'what will become of us, men and women, if Middlebrow has his way with us, and there is only a middle sex but no husbands or wives?' (DoM, 118). So threatening does Woolf find this sauntering from one side of the hedge to the other, that 'if any human being, man, woman, dog, cat or half-crushed worm dares call me "middlebrow" I will take my pen and stab him, dead' (DM, 119). The fear of creative

⁷⁶The initials of Priestley may also have informed Woolf's decision to name her insect 'J.B'. Priestley was one of the figures Woolf created as a scapegoat journalist, see below.

sterility is therefore bypassed as Virginia Woolf promises to create in response to the middlebrow provocation.

Her own style of fiction (highbrow art) may have been the immediate agent of Woolf's purification and restoration in her own mind, but her recurrent campaign to return to sanguinity, after being beset by the middlebrow or tainted by the 'debauch' of journalism, most often resorted to the techniques practised in 'Fantasy'. Taking Kristeva's analogy of Oedipus the King, in which Oedipus becomes 'a scapegoat who, having been ejected, allows the city to be freed from defilement', the figure of the journalist in Woolf's writing becomes her scapegoat who bears all her disgust and horror, frees her from a sense of defilement and allows her to return to a type of fiction which could itself be seen as a threat to establishment definitions of literature — 'a coding of his repulsion in relation to the other in order to autonomize himself'.⁷⁷ Virginia Woolf's principal victims are limited to two figures: John Middleton Murry^a, editor of the *Athenaeum* and the *Adelphi*, and Jack Squire, literary editor of the *New Statesman* from 1913-19 and founder and editor of the *London Mercury*. These two are occasionally joined by J.B. Priestley and Robert Lynd, the latter a contributor to the *Daily News*, the *Nation* and the *New Statesman*. Ironically, she wrote articles and reviews for both Murry and Squire and reviewed works by all four.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 84 & 82

⁷⁸Woolf wrote reviews and fiction for Murry when he was editor of the *Athenaeum* (1919-21) and reviewed his *Critic in Judgement* in 'Is This Poetry?' (E3, 54-7). She submitted a story and essays to Squire's *London Mercury* (see E3) and reviewed his *Books in General*, *The Gold Tree* and *The Tricks of the Trade* (E2, 326-9; 248-9; & 89-91). She reviewed J.B. Priestley's

Squire she characterised as a 'cheap & thin blooded creature' (D1, 133) whose 'manner is always that of a curate, a grocer, a churchwarden, someone sticky with ^{jam and} buns at a School treat' (L3, 297); in short 'he's the spit and image of mediocrity' (L3, 394).⁷⁹ Murry's paper, in turn, symbolised all that was distasteful for Woolf in journalism — 'Thank God, I've stepped clear of that Athenaeum world, with its reviews, editions, lunches, & tittle tattle' (D2, 66), while he was 'a bloodless flea' (L3, 38), who 'has been rolling in dung, and smells impure' (L3, 95). Lynd was a 'second rate writer' (D3, 70), and Priestley, along with Arnold Bennett, one of the 'tradesmen of letters' (D3, 318).

Pursuing this analogy between Kristeva's explication of the abject and Woolf's reaction to journalism therefore provides a theoretical context for her condemnatory vocabulary and illuminates two important techniques which Woolf uses to great effect in her non-fiction. These techniques helped her to negotiate the impasse of expressing herself in forms and an environment which were gendered to exclude her. Abjection, according to Kristeva, can be negotiated through the strategies of projection and introjection, both of which have a curious similarity to the aims and techniques Virginia Woolf demonstrated in her essays. The vision of the abject is, 'by

Figures in Modern Literature (E4, 441-3) and Robert Lynd's *If the Germans Conquered England and Other Essays* (E2, 212-4).

⁷⁹See Alan Pryce-Jones, 'Little Reviews and Big Ideas', *The Listener*, 16 February 1950, pp. 285-6 for a more sympathetic discussion of the *London Mercury* in relation to contemporary periodicals and the contemporary literary scene.

definition, the sign of an impossible object, a boundary and a limit';⁸⁰ for Woolf, in her essays and journalism, the impossible object which taunts the vision is a writing subject who writes within genre expectations and language restrictions yet fulfils gender desires which subvert those very expectations and restrictions. The techniques which draw her closer to achieving the freedom of the 'veiled infinity' of a new writing subjectivity are projection, or ventriloquism when she creates characters who speak in lieu of the author, and introjection, the idiosyncratic method of allowing the voice of another to speak through her prose. This 'other' voice may belong to the subject of the essay, or to the traditional and respectable reviewer, or even to the reader. Woolf introduces their voices into her essay through quotation, an ironical mimicry of their style, or through the opening of a metaphorical space for dialogue in the text, which the reader is invited to fill.⁸¹

Techniques of ventriloquism, the projection of one's hitherto muted or unacceptable voice, or an aspect of one's silenced voice, onto another individual who is separate from oneself and yet connected through voice, allows one a freedom of expression denied by a bounded subjectivity. That subjectivity may be bounded by the restriction of being complete and therefore masculine, as it is in the essay,⁸² or bounded by the equally limiting constraint of being defined in opposition to the

⁸⁰Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 154

⁸¹See Chapters Five and Six

⁸²See Chapter Four

male, as it is in traditionally accepted theories of language and subject formation. The 'I' in the realm of the abject as Kristeva points out, becomes 'heterogeneous',⁸³ a term which itself contains muted echoes of Bakhtin's voice. This multiple 'I' suggests possibilities for the disruption of concepts of subjectivity dependent on wholeness and binary structures. A subject defined in relation to an object is mimetic and therefore limited; in relation to the abject it is various. Here we can see a possible origin for Woolf's creation of various personae, the introduction of dialogues, story-telling and highly metaphoric language in her essays, and the potential for rethinking notions of subjectivity and gender that these techniques involve. The powers of horror, of the abject, are now evident. Transgression can be an empowering act. Woolf's recognition of the power of breaking the surface of silence, of slipping from the water to the air, from one literary medium to another, from one speaker to another, are evident throughout her essays. A new language is born out of the abject, a process at work in Woolf's essays which is encapsulated in theory in the poem on journalism.

Woolf's language in 'Fantasy', repeats the patterns of the language of abjection. J.B., the insidious bug, the symbol of the abject, attracts all the repulsion projected onto the phobic object, and the language and structure of the poem which describes him bears all the advantageous characteristics of what Kristeva calls twentieth century abject literature. She writes that

⁸³Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 10

when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first.⁸⁴

J.B., as we have seen, is a parasite whose presence on the skin of Woolf the writer threatens her identity. His intrusion into her bloodstream disrupts the borders between internal and external, and this in turn certainly disrupts the narrative, the narrative of Woolf's preferred genres of composition (fiction to journalism), the actual narrative of the poem, and the method of writing, shifting it from prose to a modified form of verse. The changes that take place in the latter process conform remarkably closely to Kristeva's list of stylistic changes produced by abjection. The narrative's very 'make up changes',

its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompleteness, tangles, and cuts. At a later stage, the unbearable identity of the narrator and of the surroundings that are supposed to *sustain* him can no longer be narrated but cries out or is descried with maximal stylistic intensity (language of violence, of obscenity, or of a rhetoric that relates the text to poetry).⁸⁵

A cursory examination of 'Fantasy' reveals that every one of these features is reproduced in the piece. An investigation of the language of the essays will show that similar changes are occurring in their prose and construction.⁸⁶ Linearity is shattered, and the maximal stylistic intensity of a prose that relies on metaphor and personification for argument is born. In

⁸⁴ibid, p. 141

⁸⁵ibid, p. 141

⁸⁶See following chapters.

developing and investigating these features we should not overlook, nor even partially obscure, the original object of provocation and the potential of the descent into the abject. The original provocation was a physical manifestation of the world of journalism, a reminder to Woolf of her connection to the public and to the material circumstances of contemporary culture, and the importance of the abject, as Kristeva reveals it, is its relationship to art and culture, and the relation of art to subjectivity: 'the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages'.⁸⁷ This fluidity and multiplicity of languages, what Bakhtin calls 'heteroglossia', is what allows Woolf the chance to speak, to write. Woolf's writing on, and participation in, the field of journalism led to her involvement with questions of culture and the construction of language appropriate to both the accepted forms of expression within that culture and appropriate to the expression of her individual and gendered subjectivity. Looking inward, at the construction of the prose, rather than outwards, towards the influences of cultural politics; shifting the angle of vision from journalism to essays, is therefore the next task in breaking the surface of silence on Virginia Woolf's non-fiction.

⁸⁷Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 45

CHAPTER FOUR: FROM BUG TO BUTTERFLY: THE EMERGENCE OF THE
ESSAY

Virginia Woolf's reaction to the 'powers of horror' embodied by journalism and the journalist was extreme. She 'raged', according to her diary entry, at the 'bug walking over ones skin'; she raged, too, at the fact that she 'cdn't crush him' (D5, 73). Rage, horror and violence were required, she felt, to try to maintain a sense of self that accorded with her views of the writer as more than a paid note-taker.¹

Yet to judge by the reactions of her readers, such an aggressive and passionate project was entirely unnecessary. When viewed from the distant side of the gap occasioned by the writing subject/reading public divide, the ugly bug on the skin becomes too small to see, and the body of the woman dominates the vista. And the woman writer, as viewed by her appreciative readers, is just the type of figure that the victim in 'Fantasy' feared was lost for ever when contaminated by the bug. Where the writer sees only an 'inflated brown bug', who 'full of blood Sits there slides off makes notes',² the readers see a 'supremely civilised' writer, whose prose is like 'a crystal: shining, clear & a little remote', reminiscent of 'slim manicured fingers'.³ The transition is, apparently, absolute. No

¹Woolf described the journalist in her diary as 'the bug taking note' (D5, 73).

²MHP, B. 16. e), p. 1

³Quotations taken from MHP Letters. 'Supremely civilised' is from Stella Benson, 3 February 1933; the remainder from George Rylands, n.d. 1925

longer are we in a world where borders are hazy and distinctions blurred, where disgust is paramount and abasement endemic. The large, permeable, permanently visceral body has receded and diminished to the point where all that is left is the one traditional symbolic marker of the body as closed system, as higher life form, and as class indicator — the hands. Gone are the ink stained fingers of the journalist; holding the pen now are the slim manicured fingers of a lady.

Considering the sharpness of the distinction, and Woolf's own tendency to polarise the 'art' of fiction and the 'hack work' of journalism, one would expect the opposition of lady/bug to go beyond the difference of viewpoint created by the position of the reader, and to actually record an absolute distinction between journalist and novelist. But the readers who praise the 'civilised writer' are not commenting on the novelist; their admiration is reserved for Woolf the essayist, the author of the *Common Readers*, and the writer of 'essays', not journalism, for the periodical press. The opposition is no longer one between fiction and journalism but between essays and journalism, which signifies two different angles of approach to the one strand of Virginia Woolf's writing — her non-fiction. Changing the critical perspective on the non-fiction involves rethinking the connection between the prose and the circumstances of its production, perceiving the difference between registering an article as journalism, which implies the base financial transactions of

the contemporary world, and the essay, which suggests the respectability of tradition and the refined 'art' of belles lettres.

Woolf herself slipped between the two terms when describing the individual items she produced for the journals or newspapers and when reflecting on the bulk of her non-fiction as an entity separate from her other writings. When collecting the individual chapters of the first *Common Reader*, Woolf called them 'my essays' (D2, 261), yet one of the essays, on Addison, when originally planned for the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1919 was so enmeshed in its journalistic environment that it provoked Woolf to protest to Lytton Strachey, 'I'm not a hack' (D1, 277). This oscillation between deeming non-fiction commercial or artistic is reflected by the titles Woolf inscribed on the covers of her writing notebooks. She called the contents 'Reviews' in 1926, 'Articles &c' in 1930, yet 'Essays' in 1933, 1935 and 1940.⁴ It could be assumed that generic appellations were of little significance, yet in 1931 Woolf wrote, in ornate script on the cover of her notebook

'Some Elizabethans'
— An Essay —
by
Virginia Woolf⁵

demonstrating that in this instance, at least, an awareness of the importance of genre was part of the conception of the individual

⁴1926: Berg, M.1. 2; 1930: Berg, M.1. 4; 1933: Berg, M.1. 7; 1935: Berg, M.1. 6; 1940: Berg, M.1. 9

⁵Berg, M.11

writing project. The draft of 'Modern Letters', though, reveals that at times the terms 'essay' and 'journalism' were interchangeable for Woolf. In her notes Woolf wrote

Often ~~indeed~~, more often than not, the great letter writers were ~~people~~ frustrated novelists: essayists & ~~journalists~~ born before their time. In our day Dorothy [Osborne] would have been a novelist, & Walpole one of our most accomplished ~~essayists~~ journalists.⁶

The choice between marking a piece 'essay' or 'journalism', therefore, was quite often dictated by purely emotive, rather than formal, reasons. Thus a piece like 'To Spain', which conforms to most readers' expectations of an essay — a short piece written from an exclusively personal perspective, describing personal experiences and not initiated by books sent for review — is described by Woolf in phrases that we have come to associate with journalism — most notably self-deprecation and disgust.⁷ Virginia Woolf wrote to Roger Fry,

I'm very pleased that you liked the article. I had been feeling that it wasn't quite suitable for a first number. Journalism is altogether such a beastly business, but your praise has set me up (L3, 38).

⁶Berg, M.1. 4, p. 87

⁷For 'To Spain' see (E3, 361-5). Critical and readerly assumptions, including Woolf's, as to what constitutes an essay will be considered later in this chapter.

But while an apparently obvious 'essay' could easily be downgraded to journalism, the process also worked in reverse. When Woolf came to produce the first *Common Reader*, what had been 'articles' of loathsome journalism were transformed into 'essays' when they were about to be collected and published in book form. The pieces were no longer examples of the 'beastly business' of journalism, but part of a 'vigorous statue testifying [...] to the great fun & pleasure my habit of reading has given me' (D2, 259). Even though the pieces needed 'drastic & spirited' treatment in order to be reprinted, they were still 'old essays' (D2, 259) rather than old remnants of the degraded writings of the journalist.

It appears that once Virginia Woolf wanted to invest her non-fiction work with credibility she elevated it by giving it the status of 'essay', taking it out of the realm of occasional and ephemeral writing into the more hallowed grounds of 'literature'. Literature, like the essay, was protected by the sanctity of the past; reviewing, a term which 'covers all criticism of living writers by living writers' is 'merely a commercial enterprise', limited to contemporary works.⁸ By choosing to categorise her short non-fiction pieces as 'essays' when she considered them worthy of a second reading, by deciding to publish these pieces in volume form, by terming the collected pieces essays, and prefacing the volume with a quote from Samuel Johnson — literary critic and essayist — Virginia Woolf was making a move calculated to remove her non-fiction from the world of

⁸Berg, M.1. 8, pp. 23 & 18

journalism into the world of art, even when some of the pieces contradicted her own prescription and involved assessing contemporaries.⁹ Woolf, by publishing the two *Common Readers* and pieces under the imprint of the 'Hogarth Essays', announced herself to the reading public as an essayist.¹⁰ In order, therefore, to analyse adequately Woolf's non-fiction corpus, we need to ascertain its relationship to 'literature' as well as to the material circumstances of its production. We need to investigate Woolf as an essayist, and to consider her non-fiction as part of a generic tradition, with its own history, formal expectations and formal potential, as well as its own contemporary discourse of critical assessment, taking into account her role as woman writer in relation to all these factors.

Surprising though it may seem in the light of contemporary criticism's claim to have resurrected Woolf from the death of earlier critical assessment, the decision to focus on Woolf as a woman essayist actually revives certain views prevalent during the 1920s, '30s and '40s.¹¹ Lord David Cecil, future biographer of Max Beerbohm (acknowledged master of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century essay), was clear as to Woolf's merits as an

⁹See 'Modern Fiction', 'The Modern Essay', 'The Patron and the Crocus' and 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' in E4

¹⁰See J.H. Willis, Jr., *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917-41* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1992) for the history of the Hogarth Essays.

¹¹See the writings of Jane Marcus collected in *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) on the notion of rescuing and revivifying Woolf.

essayist. *The Common Reader*, he asserted, 'contained the most sensitive critical essays on English Literature ever written'; for him 'there was no one like her at interpreting the spirit of an author — & also at making the critical essay as vivid & exquisite a work of art as a poem or a novel'.¹² He praises Woolf for her genteel literary qualities, emphasising the 'sensitive' and the 'exquisite' nature of her prose and critical faculties. Mr Faussett, the *Manchester Guardian's* reviewer of *The Common Reader*, also lauds Woolf's essays, which he feels, 'by their sufficiency and freshness, insight and accomplishment so captivate and satisfy the mind', an opinion which made Woolf 'really pleased' (D3, 18).¹³ No doubt the letter from Olive Heseltine, in which she informed Virginia Woolf that

the Daily News authorises me to offer you an very humble apology both for their delay in noticing *The Common Reader*, & for giving it to an inferior reviewer,¹⁴

also added to the sum total of her pleasure; it certainly proved that her fears as to 'what people like you [i.e. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, the archetypal educated reader] might think'(L3, 182) were largely groundless. Indeed, educated readers praised the work with unrestrained enthusiasm. Stella Benson, whose own books Virginia Woolf read with pleasure and whose mind she considered 'fine' and 'steady' (D4, 192), enthused wildly about Woolf's power in the *Second Common Reader* to 'know so much, and know it so

¹²LWP, II. D. 4a) letter, n.d. 1942

¹³For Faussett's review see Majumdar and McLaurin, p. 151

¹⁴MHP, letter, n.d. 1925

serenely and dispassionately' and then to 'write in a supremely civilized way'. 'Indeed', she avowed, Virginia Woolf's essays demonstrated that 'that is what it is, to be educated and civilized'.¹⁵ George Rylands, too, reacted to the *Common Reader* in a most complex and complimentary manner, responding to Woolf as an essayist with almost rapturous, and certainly creative, abandon: 'there is no other writer living with such a critical style'.¹⁶

The responses of these readers, both public and private,¹⁷ to the volumes of collected essays indicate the level of appreciation and regard accorded to Woolf as an essayist during her lifetime. This recognition was also reflected by the prominence given to her non-fiction writing in the summaries of her career which appeared in the obituary columns. The current brief biographical surveys, such as Frank Kermode's *Biographical Preface* to the Oxford World Classics editions of her novels (1992), accord only minor importance to the non-fiction. At the time of her death, however, when she had not published a collection of essays for nearly ten years and when she had issued only twenty three essays in the previous six years, Woolf's non-fiction received almost the same degree of appreciation

¹⁵MHP, letter, 1933

¹⁶MHP, letters, 1925. All future quotations from Rylands will be taken from this letter.

¹⁷See the letters from John Nef, MHP, letter, 20 August 1933 and Victor Rothschild, MHP, letter, n.d. 1932, in which the former praises Woolf for her ability to deal 'again and again with what ought to be, but seldom has been, the central theme of historians: how the problems of life and the manner of living have changed through six centuries of English history,' and Rothschild informs her that *The Common Reader* is 'one of [his] favourites'.

as her fiction. Kermode includes the non-fiction, en masse and without any analysis of generic distinctions, under the heading 'other writings', casually mentioning Woolf's 'need or desire to write literary criticism and social comment', and noting the titles and, rather loosely, the form of some of these contributions: 'she had also written and published many shorter works, as well as both series of *The Common Reader*, and *A Room of One's Own*'.¹⁸ The earlier accounts, however, give equal prominence to the non-fiction and the novels. 'MRS VIRGINIA WOOLF' announced the *Times* obituary, 'NOVELIST, ESSAYIST, AND CRITIC'.¹⁹ Shena, Lady Simon, in her obituary for *The Woman Citizen* (June 1941) echoed this emphasis, demonstrating the breadth of appeal enjoyed by Woolf as an essayist.²⁰ For her, and the members of the Women Citizen's Association, just as much as for the readers of the *Times*, Virginia Woolf was the author of

a dozen or so novels, a biography, articles on literature, and literary criticism, many of them published under the title of 'The Common Reader', and two books described as essays — 'A Room of Ones Own' and 'Three Guineas'.

Indeed, for the editor of *The Woman Citizen* it is 'on account of those two essays that she is to be remembered'. In these circumstances Andrew McNeillie's assertion that 'Virginia Woolf was arguably the last of the great English essayists' (E1, ix) appears less contentious

¹⁸Quotations taken from the *Biographical Preface to The Voyage Out* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1915]), pp. vii-xi

¹⁹MHP, Add. Mss. 31, p. 1

²⁰MHP, Add. Mss. 6. All quotations taken from the June 1941 issue, pp. 2-3.

than it otherwise might, and the lavish praise of her contemporary readers less hyperbolic.

For the modern reader and critic, Woolf's standing as an avatar of twentieth century literature depends upon the combination of her fiction and the comments on fiction expressed *in* the essay format, rather than the actual use *of* that format. Similarly, her popularity as the 'symbol' of a 'whole pattern of culture', to use T.S. Eliot's phrase,²¹ depends in part upon the autobiographical material she revealed in essays like 'A Sketch of the Past' rather than the manner of its revelation. However, while recognising the importance of essays like 'Modern Fiction' to understandings of Modernism, and valuing the testimony in women's autobiographical writing, the place of the essay in shaping those writings should not be overlooked.

Much has been made of the importance of Woolf's formal choices in composing her fiction; her equally carefully composed non-fiction should be accorded the same privilege.²² The essays, therefore, require analysis which relates content to form, and which understands form in relation to the influence of genre. Woolf herself considered her non-fiction (excluding biography) as essays, and understood the essay as a genre in relation to the history of its

²¹Majumdar and McLaurin, p. 431

²²See James Naremore, *The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1973) and Michael Rosenthal, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979)

practitioners, Montaigne, Lamb and Pater, for instance.²³ To approach her essays, then, as part of the tradition of the 'Great English Essayists', in terms of canonical structures, actual style as practised, and the political and personal implications for both Woolf as woman writer and the essay as genre, is an enterprise suggested by both the dearth of criticism of Woolf's non-fiction and her own situation of that non-fiction in a generic tradition.

In an environment of critical practice which, seen at its worst, is engaged in dis-membering Woolf, fragmenting her into a feminist Woolf, a modernist Woolf, an historicised Woolf, even a nationally determined Woolf, approaching her through the essays can be a rehabilitative act of re-membering.²⁴ While avoiding the impossible and dangerous project of creating a monolithic and totemised Woolf, in which Virginia Woolf as essayist subsumes all other Woolfs and entrenches a new kind of critical sovereignty, assessing Woolf as an essayist enables us to audit the dialogue going on between the different versions of Woolf, without giving any one voice overall priority or enforcing any policies of exclusion. Under the general

²³When preparing to write non-fiction for publication Virginia Stephen made a point of studying past masters. In March 1905 she wrote in her diary 'out to buy Stevenson & Pater — I want to study them — not to copy, I hope, but to see how the trick's done. Stevenson is a trick — but Pater something different & beyond' (EJ, 251). No investigation of possible connections between Woolf's writing and Stevenson's has yet been made, but for a detailed study of the influence of Walter Pater, see Meisel, *The Absent Father*. In her writing on the essay Woolf consistently refers to the history of the genre's practitioners, see 'A Book of Essays' which mentions Hazlitt, Lamb and Montaigne (E2, 213-4) and 'A Flying Lesson': 'must we then look up Addison, Hazlitt and Lamb' (E3, 275).

²⁴See the Introduction for a summary of these critical positions.

rubric of the essay we see Woolf as feminist, choosing to couch her major works of overt theorising (*A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas*, 'Professions for Women', 'Women and Fiction' etc.) in the essay form; Woolf as modernist, both as theoretician, again expounding her ideas in the form of the essay; and as practitioner, experimenting with the boundaries of genre in *The Years* and her semi-fictional essays,²⁵ and trying to redefine the critical potential of the review, biographical essay or essay collection. Finally, we see Woolf as autobiographer, reconstructing her self and the essay in the process of writing.²⁶ In her use of traditional aspects of the genre and her literary relationship with the famous essayists, and in her modification of those features to suit her own ends, we see Woolf as traditionalist and innovator, a writer for whom the literary past is 'internalized, inseparable, as well as held at arms length', as Gillian Beer points out, a writer for whom the past is therefore amenable to rewriting.²⁷ And, inasmuch as the notion of subjectivity is implicated in the discourses of the past, the rewriting of that past is an enterprise of significant liberatory potential for feminist theory in terms of personal and critical practice.

²⁵*The Years* is the first of Woolf's fictional works to use the essay as the genre to modify the 'novel'. *To the Lighthouse* provoked Woolf to consider the possibilities of experimenting with genre: '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?' (D3, 34). *The Waves*, a 'playpoem' (D3, 203), was also to be 'an entirely new kind of book' (L4, 35) further suggesting the merging of genres. The first version of *The Years*, *The Pargiters*, was initially 'A Novel-Essay', see the holograph title page reproduced in (P, facing p. 5). See Chapter Five for more on *The Years*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas* and *The Pargiters*.

²⁶See Chapters Five and Six

²⁷*Arguing with the Past: Essays in Narrative from Woolf to Sidney* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 139-40

A focus on the essay also liberates dialogues between periods and schools of literary criticism, enabling us not only to engage with the '*difference* of the past in our present',²⁸ but to question the means by which we convey and analyse that past. In terms of literary history, Woolf's essays occupy a transitional point for both the essay as literary genre and the essay as critical vehicle. Virginia Woolf was publishing her essays from 1904 until 1941, and writing in the essay genre, if one includes the practice pieces in the early journals, from the mid 1890s on; her career, therefore, coincides with a period which suffered, to use John Gross's phrase, from 'a continuing cult of the familiar essay'.²⁹ The members of this cult were 'humane', and 'good humoured', and given to 'whimsical musings'.³⁰ It was the milieu in which Robert Lynd's 'The New Cat' and E.V. Lucas's 'The Lost Stick' were considered such wonders of essayistic prose as to designate their authors 'Modern Masters', and writers like Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton enjoyed a devoted following.³¹ The popularity of the personal essay was 'so immense and so peculiar', wrote Virginia Woolf in her own essay on the phenomenon in 1905, that 'we are justified in looking upon it as something of our own, typical, characteristic, a sign of the times which will strike the eye of our great-great-grandchildren' (E1, 25).

²⁸ibid, p. 1

²⁹John Gross, ed., *The Oxford Book of Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. xxi

³⁰ibid, pp. xxi-xxii

³¹See appropriate sections in *Essays by Modern Masters* (London: Methuen, 1926)

She considered such prevalence a 'plague' in 1905 and titled her piece accordingly 'A Plague of Essays'. Her editor, however, approached the problem from a different angle, deciding that the current situation was more of an indication of 'decay' than disease, and changed the title of the piece to its published version — 'The Decay of Essay-writing'.³²

His choice of adjective is appropriate from the perspective of the modern and postmodern reader, because the sign of the critical times which strikes the eye of the great-great-grandchildren Virginia Woolf imagined is the change in form and aim of the essay, from 'personal' to 'critical', from Belloc to Eliot, from appreciative to analytic criticism. In terms of this continuum from personal to critical, Woolf stands with Wilde and Pater, yet occasionally steps across to join T.S. Eliot.³³ In her own essays we see Woolf negotiating the transition, making theoretical pronouncements yet maintaining a degree of informality.

But the great-great-grandchildren can also see the subsequent development in literary criticism away from the essay as the tool of complete and precise critical judgement, to its use as personalised fragment, giving rise to so-called 'personal criticism' — whether

³²See (EJ, 243) and (L1, 181) for Virginia Stephen's response to this change.

³³See R. Lane Kauffmann, 'The Skewed Path: Essaying as Unmethodical Method', in Butryn, *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre*, 221-249 and Meisel, *The Absent Father*.

deconstructionist or feminist.³⁴ The importance of the historical moment of writing the essay speaks to the historical moment of our reading of it, initiating a dialogue which both historicises and relativises the past and the present. The ease with which we can engage in this dialogue is due largely to the form of the essay in general and especially as envisaged and practised by Woolf. Truly an open one, as Kazin declares,³⁵ the form of the essay is dialogized internally between the writing subject and the written object, and dialogized externally, between the writing subject and reading subject. Placing Virginia Woolf as essayist at the dialogized centre of a critical discussion enables us to re-member a new Woolf, historicised, politicised and gendered, while not ignoring the texture of the prose.

This is a move few commentators have found worth making — a reflection, perhaps, of both the standing of the essay in literary studies and the importance of non-fiction genre implications in Woolf studies.³⁶ It may be, as Woolf says in support of Ernest Rhys,

³⁴See *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and Nancy Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), Rachel Blau Du Plessis, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks With Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) and Mary Ann Caws, *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

³⁵Alfred Kazin, ed., *The Open Form: Essays for Our Time* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1961)

³⁶See Alexander Butryn, 'Introduction', pp. 1-8 and J.P. Riquelme, who declares that the essay is 'a literary form that would become the sibling of

that 'it is unnecessary to go profoundly into the history and origin of the essay [...] since, like all living things, its present is more important than its past' (E4, 216), but in order to understand their comparative difference, the present in relation to the past, the past itself must be delineated or at least explored. It is therefore pertinent to turn to the history of the essay as genre, read through a contemporary reader's response to Woolf's essays, before going on to investigate Virginia Woolf's understanding of, and reaction to the genre as well as her relationship to it in practice.

Virginia Woolf announced her presence as an essayist when she published her first collection of short non-fiction prose pieces, mainly revised versions of earlier reviews, as *The Common Reader* in 1925. The Hogarth Press marketed the book as a collection of essays and Virginia Woolf referred to it as such in her diaries and advertised it as such by her reference to Dr Johnson in the title. She also included references to past conventions in the titles of at least some of its contents, for example 'On Not Knowing Greek', and pointed readers' attention to the genre by including essays on essayists in the volume.³⁷ *The Common Reader* reached a reading

Modernist poetry and fiction in the first half of the twentieth century, but one that academic literary criticism continues largely to neglect'. J.P. Riquelme, 'The Modernist Essay: The Case of T.S. Eliot — Poet as Critic', in Butryn, p. 160

³⁷See Virginia Woolf's letter to Harcourt Brace, her American publishers: 'I am hoping to send you my book of collected essays, which I am calling "The Common Reader"' (L3, 142), and her private statement that 'the question I want to debate here is the question of my essays; & how to make them into a book' (D2, 261). See 'Montaigne', 'Addison' and 'The Modern Essay' in E4. The 'On ...' is a common formula for titling essays.

public well endowed with essays and essay collections and its sales proved that their appetite was not yet sated.³⁸ One particular reader, George 'Dadie' Rylands, was so enamoured of the volume and one essay in particular, that he was moved to write a long and detailed letter of appreciation. His response to Woolf as an essayist, which includes mention of himself as a reader as well as assessments of the prose contained in *The Common Reader*, opens up pathways into Woolf's relationship to the history and tradition of the essay as genre. His epistolary 'dialogue' with the silent Woolf (for no direct reply to the letter is apparently extant, although it is part of an ongoing correspondence)³⁹ establishes a dialogue between Woolf's essays and their readers which is continued in the present day between Woolf's essays and their critics. Reading Rylands reading Woolf allows subsequent reader/critics to co-respond to the original essays and to uncover correspondences between Woolf's essayistic practice and contemporary theory and literary history. The letter invites a reply, and in the absence of Woolf's the onus falls on the modern day critical reader.

Rylands begins his letter by emphasising the transformative effect of the work he has just read. Brief introductory thanks aside, Rylands launches into a poetic explanation of his response: 'each

³⁸According to Willis, *The Common Reader* was 'slow to catch on with the critics' (p.113), but 'when the *Observer* praised the book, sales began to pick up [...] Sales took up and never slowed' and there was a second edition in November 1925 (pp. 113-4). For the general popularity of essays see the history of the Hogarth Essays series (Willis, *passim*) and the fact of the recently published five volume Dent collection

³⁹See VW Letters, volumes 3-6

time I put the book down to question and to meditate on what you say', he declares, 'I feel boorish, dusty: like turning from slim manicured fingers to one's own bitten nails'. By implication like the hands that fashioned them, the essays are shapely, refined and feminine — seemingly a natural emanation from the female body and the female pen. The connotative echoes of slim and manicured, slight and over-refined and just plain effete conjure up the popular image of the essay — the belletristic polished ramblings of the dilettante writer, a 'highly wrought' occasional piece,⁴⁰ suited more to the drawing-room than to the study, and with no place at all in the academy. In these circumstances the assignation of gender is less a reflection of historical conditions than a veiled value judgement: the essay is a feminised and therefore inferior genre. Its manicured fingers do no work.

But these refined and elegant hands impress the reader by their difference. The scholarly figure in an establishment setting, for Rylands was very much a Cambridge man of the younger generation⁴¹ — feels degraded by comparison, his nails are 'bitten', mutilated and unseemly and he feels 'boorish and dusty'. This discomfort is pleasant, however, for he assures Woolf that his 'happiness' in the book is 'intense', and pleasure — a key concept in

⁴⁰John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*, p. 266

⁴¹Woolf described him as 'being honest Cambridge' (D2, 266)

Woolf's own understanding of the function of the essay⁴² — is all a result of the style:

The style makes me hold my breath — everything is imagined, conjured up in a crystal: shining, clear & a little remote. Do you sit waiting for the images, the comparisons, metaphors to flutter like bright butterflies into the room and then with a quick gesture catch them, drug them & pin them down.

There is no other writer living with such a critical style.

Jane Austen, Miss Mitford, the Victorian women novelists these have enchanted me most

Virginia Woolf is, according to this assessment, alternately magician and lepidopterist, a medium for the revelation of hidden magical truths and a destroyer, a barely mobile predatory force who captures and subdues the living elements of her prose. As an actual writer she tends to recede from the scene, and even though she and her writings are the supposed topic of Rylands' letter, she all but vanishes from that, too. Seduced by his own imagery and metaphoric extravagance, the remainder of the letter sees Rylands developing his praise through a prose that, while it tends to define Woolf quite precisely as an essayist, allows her little room to manoeuvre outside that definition, while simultaneously emphasising his controlling role as reader. This process implies many of the key issues needed in any assessment of Virginia Woolf

⁴²See 'The Modern Essay' (E4, 216-27)

as an individual essayist and as a member of a generic tradition, whilst unknowingly foreshadowing Woolf's aesthetic refiguring of the essay as a response to its theoretical potential as a vehicle for exploring and determining a gendered writing subjectivity.

In Rylands' response to *The Common Reader*, the insect world intervenes yet again in the scene of writing, but this time Woolf's connection with the animal occurs in relation to the butterfly rather than the bug — the butterflies of metaphor that she catches, drugs and pins down. In focusing on metaphor Rylands identifies one of the primary characteristics of Woolf's prose style and argumentative procedure as essayist; in choosing his own metaphor he is unwittingly associating the woman essayist with a creature whose other characteristics are far more revealing, in relation to issues of gender and culture, than would appear at first sight.

Firstly, the butterfly is a later manifestation of the grub — metamorphosis takes place and the airborne and splendid butterfly emerges from the chrysalis that encases the once terrestrial and mundane caterpillar. The transition from bug to butterfly is a suggestive analogy for the process by which Virginia Woolf's essays emerged from their base beginnings as the products of the periodical press. Pieces which had been reviews, leaders, commissioned essays and unsolicited contributions to journals metamorphosed into pieces which bore the literary title 'essay'. Just as the bug and the butterfly are different stages of the one life form,

so the choice of essay or journalism reflects a different approach to the one body of writing — Woolf's non-fiction.

Figuring non-fiction writing as butterfly or bug also provides an interesting base from which to comment on the interdependence of 'low' and 'high' forms of writing and culture. Almost all the pieces published as essays in Woolf's lifetime, either as part of a collection or as individuals, enjoyed first publication in periodicals or newspapers. They were paid for and thus constituted a part of the economy of work, not the leisured existence untrammelled by the thought of money which characterised the world of high art. Yet the popular perception of the essay at the turn of this century placed it initially in the world of leisured wealth, where the armchair critic reigned supreme and the essayist's persona was a man-about-town, free of the cares of making a living, like the Max Beerbohm of the 1890s.⁴³ These men of the world were both of the world and separated from it; like the butterfly which, once it sheds the carapace of its chrysalis leaves the sordid world of the caterpillar behind, the belletristic essayists developed an appearance that denied their base origins.

While Rylands imagined Woolf capturing metaphors and pinning them down, it is his metaphors that help to confine her and pin her down to an acceptable position, enacting their own politics of

⁴³See *The Works of Max Beerbohm* (1890) and Lawrence Danson, *Max Beerbohm and the Act of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

gender domination. Comparison, for the reader as for the writer, is the key. In Woolf's essayistic prose, according to Rylands, everything is 'conjured up in a crystal', and for him the essays on 'Jane Austen, Miss Mitford, the Victorian women novelists [...] enchanted me most'. Rylands, it seems, is extremely susceptible to female charms. Or perhaps it is that he can only see successful female writers in terms of a supernatural or unnatural power, that his praise, in fact, masks a gender bias that is more insidious than laudatory. Certainly it echoes the quite concentrated focus on femininity implied in his image of the hands of the essayist and comes dangerously close to the patronising condescension that rejoices in women being 'charming', a term for which Woolf reserved a particular loathing.⁴⁴

Through their mutual ability to enchant, Rylands groups Woolf with Mitford and Austen, the Brontës and George Eliot (the only Victorian women novelists covered in *The Common Reader*),⁴⁵ four of the most famous women writers and one of the few reasonably well-known female essayists. He aligns Woolf with women writers in general rather than with essayists in particular, allowing the qualities of her style to place her with Eliot, Austen and Mitford, rather than Montaigne, Addison and Beerbohm, writers renowned for their style practised within a specific genre, and who also receive

⁴⁴'But oh Lord how sick I get of all this talk about "lovely prose" and charm when all I wanted was to state a very intricate case as plainly and as readable as I could' (L6, 243) wrote Woolf in reference to *Three Guineas*

⁴⁵See 'Outlines: I. Miss Mitford', 'Jane Austen', "'Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights"' and 'George Eliot' in E4

considerable attention in *The Common Reader*.⁴⁶ In so doing he reflects the perception of a canon constructed entirely of male essayists, with no room for, or comprehension of, a female co-contributor, and presages the contradiction that Woolf, as woman writer and essayist, encountered when she came to write in the genre and, ineluctably, to engage with the canon.

Considering her well known assertion that

masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice (Room, 85),

and that, specifically, 'we think back through our mothers if we are women' (Room, 99), Woolf's own conception of literary history prevents her linkage with Beerbohm, Addison and Montaigne. A quick glance through the representatives of the 'mass' history of the essay looking for literary mothers, up to and including the period when Woolf was writing, is called for if we wish to hear the full resonance of the 'single voice' of Woolf's essays.

The 'thinking by the body of the people' responsible for the representation of the history of the essay leads the casual and possibly even the critical reader to assume, with Rylands, that the essay was, in Woolf's lifetime, almost exclusively a masculine genre. Bonamy Dobrée, reviewing the history of the genre in 1946, cannot

⁴⁶See 'Montaigne', 'Addison', and 'The Modern Essay' in E4

think of any women essayists besides Woolf herself; Orlo Williams, in his 1914 pamphlet *The Essay*, mentions only one, Vernon Lee; and Hugh Walker in his comprehensive history of *The English Essay and Essayists* (1915) outdoes all others and manages to cite three: Eliza Haywood, Mary Russell Mitford and Mary Coleridge.⁴⁷ The anthologists do not fare any better. There are no female 'Modern Masters' in 1926; by 1932, according to the University of London Press, there are no women writers of *Modern Literary Essays* worthy to join the likes of Robert Louis Stevenson, Lord Dunsany, John Freeman and Arnold Bennett. Only the five volume *Modern English Essays* can muster up four women worthy of inclusion: Alice Meynell, Vernon Lee, Grace Rhys and Vida P. Scudder. Even the current *Oxford Book of Essays*, chosen and edited by John Gross in an age that has enjoyed the benefit of feminist scholarship of rediscovery, lists only three before Virginia Woolf: George Eliot, Rose Macaulay and Alice Meynell.

The genre is defined by its male practitioners — a patrilineal line of descent from Montaigne, through Bacon, Addison, Johnson, Lamb, Hazlitt, Macaulay and Pater to Beerbohm, Chesterton, T.S. Eliot and Orwell in the twentieth century. Given the minor status of the genre (as opposed to poetry and fiction) and the tendency of early twentieth century essays to lapse into genial platitudes, womens' apparent exclusion from the canon could be seen as a lucky escape.

⁴⁷Bonamy Dobrée, *English Essayists* (London: Collins, 1946), Orlo Williams, *The Essay* (London: Martin Secker, 1915) and Hugh Walker, *The English Essay and Essayists* (London and Toronto: Dent, 1915)

But, as Woolf says in *A Room of One's Own*, 'I would ask you to write all kinds of books' (Room, 142). The unfortunate orientation of the essay towards armchair chat is no reason to overlook or exclude women writers from a canon which could be reoriented either by their inclusion or by investigating the reasons for their exclusion.

Even when women essayists are recognised, the terms of their recognition highlight the role of gender in canon construction. Those women who do participate in the genre are portrayed as forming a minor strand, subsidiary to the great tradition. Consequently, their contributions tend to be appreciated by commentators on a sliding scale which starts in the manner perfected by Rylands, continues with such phrases as 'a pen sensitive and sure' which Ernest Rhys uses to describe Mrs Meynell, is compounded by Rhys' additional epithet that Meynell, alongside Vernon Lee, is a lady capable of writing 'delightfully',⁴⁸ and concludes by describing the woman essayist as 'pantingly appreciative'.⁴⁹ Despite Woolf's radical view of canon formation, those literary foremothers she was able to identify appear at the condemnatory end of the spectrum and are disposed to reinforce the gender bias established by her male contemporaries. Contrary to Rachel Bowlby's assertion that Woolf did not mention one female essayist in her writings, Woolf made a number of references, none of them flattering, to women essayists

⁴⁸Ernest Rhys, *Modern English Essays*, volume 3, p. v

⁴⁹Orlo Williams, p. 55

both relatively famous and obscure.⁵⁰ Trying to think back through the limited array of mothers of the essay led Woolf to a realisation that, on the whole, they were a posse of wicked stepmothers at best and that perhaps the Modernist essay as practised by Woolf was going to be a single, solitary, and self-generating birth.

There could be no hope of productive connection between women when, in private, Woolf responded to Vernon Lee's prose not with delight but with despair. The essays of this writer left Woolf 'sobbing with misery' as Lee 'really turns all good writing to vapour with her fluency and insipidity'. She was a 'plausible woman' and joined that ultimate literary villain Mrs Humphry Ward on Woolf's 'black list' (L1, 320). In her public writing Woolf was only slightly more circumspect. 'If Vernon Lee lacks the temper of the great aesthetic critic', wrote Woolf, 'she has many of the gifts of a first rate disciple' (E1, 279). In her review of the Dent collection in which Alice Meynell and Vernon Lee are included, Lee receives a glancing mention and Mrs Meynell none at all — a sure indication of Woolf's opinion of their merits (E4, 216-27). Once again, only in private does overt criticism appear and then Mrs Meynell suffers a similar fate to the unfortunate Vernon Lee. In Florence, in 1909, Virginia Stephen attended a social gathering in the drawing room of the Countess Rasponi, and there

among the guests was a lean, attenuated woman,
who had a face like that of a transfixed hare —

⁵⁰In Briggs, p. 268

the lower part was drawn out in anguish — while the eyes appealed piteously. This was Mrs Meynell, the writer; who somehow, made one dislike the notion of women who write (EJ, 398).

So disturbing was this vision of a woman writer that it led Woolf to consider whether her 'theory' that 'a writer should be the furnace from which his words come' was proved correct, and therefore 'tepid people, timid & decorous, never coin true words' (EJ, 399). Appearing at the early stage of Woolf's own career as a writer, the 'tight airless style' Mrs Meynell used to write 'about 5 paragraphs a day for society papers & so on — all the time looking like a crucified saint' (D3, 250), was unlikely to prove attractive as an inspiration. When Woolf came to review a collection of Meynell's essays, *Hearts of Controversy* in 1917, she did so, apparently, in genuinely favourable terms. 'Mrs Meynell', wrote Woolf, 'is a true critic, courageous, authoritative and individual' (E2, 176). But the overwhelming effect of the piece, despite this praise, is to mark Mrs Meynell as an opinionated pedant. Her 'precision and power of phrase' (E2, 177) force the reader to ask 'Is it right that a critic should make his audience so conscious of their stupidity?' (E2, 176). Even more irritatingly, the reader notes that 'she sometimes picks up the curious detail, puts it in the foreground, and lavishes upon it the attention which it does not deserve' (E2, 177). Meynell's criticism may have a strength of character which makes it 'worth considering, worth testing, and worth disagreeing with' (E2, 176), but one is left, by the conclusion of the review, with the impression that its overriding characteristic is that it is disagreeable.

Recent and contemporary practitioners thus dismissed, Mary Russell Mitford, the first of the two acknowledged women essayists from previous centuries is deemed so disagreeable that she is little more than 'readable' to Woolf (E3, 214). She was a hack writer, who 'was at her wits end for money' and 'scarcely knew what tragedy to spin, what annual to edit';⁵¹ the prose of her essays was 'well-preserved, as we say of trim, hale, old spinster who has never been ravaged by passion or lost her figure in bearing children' (E3, 214). Virginia Woolf's vocabulary of disdain extends the gendered conception of the tradition of the essay to its 'natural' limit, at which point the prose of the woman writer is explicable only in terms of her body and its reproductive functions, and those functions are not capable of regeneration within the canon.

This barrenness in terms of quality (for Miss Mitford was nothing if not productive in terms of quantity)⁵² precludes Woolf from acknowledging her as a possible precursor, thus leaving Virginia Woolf herself as the lone insurgent into an entirely masculine tradition. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Woolf is the single female figure worthy of a chapter in Graham Good's book on the rediscovery of the essay as a genre, *The Observing Self*, and the only woman writer represented by two essays in John Gross's

⁵¹Virginia Woolf, *Flush* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933), pp. 17-18

⁵²*Our Village* (1832), *Country Stories* (1837), *Recollections of a Literary Life* (1852) and numerous essays in magazines, plus fiction, poetry and drama.

anthology.⁵³ While Woolf recognised the female figures who had been accorded minor status in the tradition — Vernon Lee, Alice Meynell, Miss Mitford and Eliza Haywood (a 'writer of no importance', who proves that 'people who write books do not necessarily add anything to the history of literature' (E2, 23) and may play 'no perceptible part save that of swelling the chorus of sound' (E2, 25)) — they held no attraction for her as writers and no potential as models. Those women writers whom she did admire who did write essays — George Eliot, for example — she left unexamined as essayists, preferring, like her contemporaries and later critics, to view the essay as a predominantly masculine genre.

There was, in fact, only one woman writer whom Woolf was willing to laud as an essayist: her aunt, Annie Thackeray Ritchie, author of the collection *Blackstick Papers* and prominent figure in late nineteenth century periodical publications.⁵⁴ Jane Marcus, in her efforts to establish an exclusive female band of literary forebears, equivalent to if not more influential than the more well-known male 'fathers' of Bloomsbury, claims Annie Ritchie as a shaping force for Woolf's writing, a claim which bears some consideration in the face of her privileged position as a female

⁵³John Gross, *Oxford Book of Essays*: 'Harriette Wilson' and 'The Death of the Moth'.

⁵⁴See Gérin, who notes that Annie Thackeray Ritchie's turn from 'fiction to critical and biographical essays' led her to achieve her 'more lasting success'; after the publication of *Madame de Sevigne*, 'Anny became a much sought-after contributor to American as well as English literary periodicals, for monographs, biographical notices of famous contemporaries, critical commentaries' (pp. 171 & 220).

essayist worthy of unadulterated praise.⁵⁵ But the praise, though unadulterated, is couched in such terms that its implications are troubling as well as refreshing. 'Aunt Annie's' collection has 'charm', but 'it is impossible to define the charm, or refer it, as the critic should, to some recognised source'. Instead 'it is far simpler to ascribe it to magic' (E1, 228). The critic/reader, and essayist herself, must, to try to discover Ritchie's method, resort to imagination:

we must imagine that she looks out of a window, takes somehow the impression of a gay, amusing world, turns over the leaves of her book and seizes a sentence here and there, remembers something that happened forty years ago, and rounds it all into an essay which has the buoyancy and the shifting colours of a bubble in the sun (E1, 228).

Although the effect of the composition is highly suggestive in that it allows the reader to construct a meaning from the essay through an act of imagination, a possibility Woolf developed with manifold skill in her own writing, composition itself is the result of 'magic'. In 'The Modern Essay', Woolf proposes the the essay 'should lay us under a spell with its first word, and we should only wake, refreshed, with its last', and that its controlling principle should be to 'give pleasure' (E4, 216). Presumably, therefore, Lady Ritchie possesses the qualities necessary to be a good essayist. But however charming and magical the essayist is, 'he must know — that is the first

⁵⁵Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, p. 12. She refers appreciatively to work by Carol MacKay that sees certain aspects of Woolf's style as coming 'directly' from Annie Thackeray Ritchie, but does not pursue the assertion. See Chapter Six for information on MacKay

essential — how to write'; his 'learning [...] must be [...] fused by the magic of writing' (E4, 216). Lady Ritchie, however, is not a magician in control of the magic, but a fairy, inspired and controlled by it. The fairy 'does more than preside; we are convinced, as we read, that she inspires too', as 'Lady Ritchie [surprises] us again and again by her flitting mockery' (E1, 228). We are back in the enchanted and enchanting world inhabited by George Rylands: when a woman essayist writes effectively, it can only be ascribed to supernatural causes. Male and female readers alike can find no other explanation.

Feminine charm can work magical effects on male readers, but once the essayist as 'good Fairy Blackstick' (E1, 228) is abandoned and the woman writer exercises the masculine privilege of being an essayist within the confines of the genre as defined by male practitioners, charm loses its potency. Once Woolf is writing on the Elizabethan dramatists, for example, rather than on women writers, once Woolf has stepped out of her sphere into his, the transition in Rylands's letter is swift:

— in the notes on an Elizabethan play I felt faint stirrings of disagreement. But *On Not Knowing Greek*, that is far the most important, the most incredible of the essays — and I never knew! The quick vivid contrast & comparison of village life in Greece & England is worth ten of the tomes I once had to read. I am unsettled though — you read Greek differently. And Pindar? He is not mentioned. The gnats are biting — I must stop.

He feels 'faint stirrings of disagreement', when he reads the 'Notes on an Elizabethan Play', and although 'On Not Knowing Greek' he considers 'far the most important, the most incredible of the essays' he is left 'unsettled' by it; unsettled because Woolf's reading does not conform to his expectations. He is specific in his quibbles: Woolf 'reads Greek differently' and fails to mention Pindar. What disturbs him, therefore, is the whole premise of her essay: 'On Not Knowing Greek' is based on, and explores the notion of, difference.

Virginia Woolf, as a female reader excluded from the public school/Oxbridge tradition of reading Greek necessarily occupies a position of difference, but — and here her reading undermines Rylands' position of assurance as a member of that public school/Oxbridge elite — her argument suggests that we are all, as twentieth century readers, forced into uncertainty by our cultural and historical difference from the ancient Greeks. Not only is the reader unable to 'know' his essayist because of cultural and gender differences, but the writing subject, in this instance the literary critical essayist, is questioning any modern writer's presumption to absolute knowledge. Woolf is subverting the highly traditional veneer of the essay — the 'On Experience' of Montaigne and 'On Some of the Old Actors' of Lamb by disrupting it with the insertion of a 'Not'.⁵⁶ But Woolf is also, as an examination of the theoretical

⁵⁶Charles Lamb, *The Essays of Elia and the Last Essays of Elia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951)

history of the essay genre proves, acting in conformity with a number of its original aims and later theoretical precepts.

Precise definitions of those aims continues to be a problem for the taxonomist of the essay as genre; delineating the essay results in unsettling uncertainties for more than one reader. Many critics have commented on the 'indiscriminate use' of 'essay' as a term,⁵⁷ the tendency of the term to be used as 'the designation for any piece of prose of moderate length',⁵⁸ and pointed to the radical uncertainty at the etymological centre of the word itself. To essay is to attempt, to try — etymologically the word 'embodies tentativeness'.⁵⁹ As Samuel Johnson defined it, the essay enjoys a kind of culinary half-life: it is a 'loose sally of the mind; an irregular indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition'.⁶⁰ The genre is generally deemed to have first appeared on the generic menu with the publication of Montaigne's *Essais* in 1580 and its characteristics defined by reference to his 'originals'. While practised quite self-consciously as a genre ever since, in keeping with the instability at the root of the word, a concrete definition of the constitutive features of the essay is remarkably scarce in its four hundred year history. Ted-Larry Pebworth's outline of the

⁵⁷Richard M. Chadbourne, 'A Puzzling Literary Genre: Comparative Views of the Essay', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 20 (1983), p. 133

⁵⁸Charles Whitmore, 'The Field of the Essay', *PMLA*, 36 (1921), p. 551

⁵⁹Walker, p. 2

⁶⁰From the Dictionary, 1755, quoted in *The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson*, arranged by Joseph Brown (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), p. 103

'essentially superficial characteristics' of the early English essay, somewhat modified, provides an adequate introductory definition. According to Pebworth, the essay 'is brief, tentative in approach, free in the choice and organization of subject matter, personal in illustration and application'.⁶¹

The coincidence of these factors — brevity, freedom and personality — in determining the essay has much to do with the historical timing of its birth as a genre. According to H.V. Routh, 'certain social and literary conditions gave Montaigne the opportunity and the impulse to create the essay',⁶² notably the shifts in epistemology, subjectivity and printing technology that were occurring during the late Renaissance. This was a period which saw an 'epistemological revolution in [...] philosophy'⁶³ and a move from 'the chirographic and oral culture of the Medieval and early Renaissance' characterised by the 'rise of printing';⁶⁴ in short, it was a movement from the feudal to the bourgeois public sphere.⁶⁵

⁶¹Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Not Being, but Passing: Defining the Early English Essay', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 10 (1977), p. 17

⁶²H.V. Routh, 'The Origins of the Essay Compared in French and English Literatures', *Modern Languages Review*, 15 (1920), pp. 39-40

⁶³Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 91

⁶⁴John Mowitt, 'The Essay as Instance of the Social Character of Private Experience', *Prose Studies*, 12 (1989), p. 278

⁶⁵See Mowitt and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986) for further material on the Renaissance as a period of transformation from feudal to bourgeois culture.

Under the pressure of cultural change, the late Renaissance, as Graham Good points out in his overview of the period in relation to the essay, saw an intense scrutiny of the self as an object of interest and a marked shift in the perception of what could or should constitute knowledge.⁶⁶ Montaigne expressed the new philosophy clearly both in the methodology of his essays and in the direct statements contained within them. 'We are', he wrote, 'knowing only in present knowledge, and not at all in what is past, no more than in that which is to come', thus dismissing centuries of medieval commentary.⁶⁷ And, contrary to revealed truth, he declared that 'whatsoever is known is doubtless known by the faculty of the knower' and 'all knowledge is conveyed to us by the senses'.⁶⁸ He extended his deprecation of the pedantry of rote and uncritical learning, by asking 'to what use serves learning, if the understanding be away?'⁶⁹ In an environment which questions relationships between learning and understanding, the essay stands out as a different type of vehicle for the transfer of knowledge, one opposed to the traditional methods of pedagogy (as Rylands the university-educated individual discovered even in the twentieth

⁶⁶Good, *The Observing Self*, pp. 1-25

⁶⁷*The Essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne*, with notes and quotations, and account of the author's life, made English by Charles Cotton, esq. Third edition, London, 1700 (London: Ward, Lock, no date); 'Of Pedantry', p. 84. I have chosen the Cotton translation above Florio's as Cotton's version was the one Virginia Stephen received as a gift just before she first started to write essays: 'this one is better than a Florio I think' (L1, 66). Further references to Montaigne's essays will give the essay title and the page number from this edition of the book.

⁶⁸'Apology for Raimonde de Sebonde', p. 369

⁶⁹'Of Pedantry', p. 87

century). It is one which is based, by implication, on a standard of cognition which is not necessarily supported by scholarship but, at this stage, by a tradition of extremely subjective empiricism.

While the challenge to scholasticism — the 'tyranny of schools'⁷⁰ or the tyranny of the tome — was being made by a new subjective empiricism and a recognition of the importance of criticism in the establishment of truth, an awareness of the centrality of the delimited self in this process was also occurring. Bonamy Dobrée puts it most simply:

the essay [...] claimed to put aside all pedantry, all learning crammed out of books, and merely gave the reasonable man talking to you or me or anyone else of what he thought about life.⁷¹

At the centre of the genre now, is the reasonable man; tyranny is replaced by the democratic sovereignty of the individual. The individual consciousness becomes the locus of meaning. This, according to Montaigne, was the purpose of the essay as he understood it. When he wrote, he did so not to 'pretend to discover things, but to lay open my self'.⁷² To be precise 'tis enough that I have done what I design'd; all the world knows me in my book, and my book in me'.⁷³ The object of knowledge becomes the writing subject, and 'he', in turn, is created in the very process of composition. This means that the essay 'has taken a fresh character

⁷⁰Routh, p. 32

⁷¹Dobrée, p. 8

⁷²'Of Books', p. 254

⁷³'Upon some verses of Virgil', p. 520

in the hands of almost all its chief exponents' and achieves a generic unity 'so far as it exists', in the essayist's point of view and manner of approach'.⁷⁴ It is defined through the representation of the 'impression of a mind thinking on a subject with no predetermined goal or formulaic conclusion to which it need own'; it is 'the record of a mind apparently roaming freely'.⁷⁵ In the gap between the 'uncritically accumulated commentary'⁷⁶ of the past and the objective scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment, the essay, with its brief discussion of a selected topic and its emphasis on the importance of the individual constructing and conveying that knowledge — the inscription of his experience in the essay — inserted itself into the gap occasioned by the shift in philosophy and announced itself as one of the new 'kinds' or genres of the Renaissance.⁷⁷

Woolf's essays are situated, in turn, in the parallel period of epistemological crisis known as Modernism. With certainties of knowledge being undermined by Nietzsche, Darwin and Marx, and the individual psyche coming under examination in the work of Freud,⁷⁸ it is not surprising that the modern period should spawn a

⁷⁴Whitmore, pp. 551 & 560

⁷⁵Pebworth, p. 18

⁷⁶Good, *The Observng Self*, p. 3

⁷⁷Colie, p. 36

⁷⁸See Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-92), Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867) and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). For an overview of their impact see 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in *Modernism 1890-1930*, ed. by Bradbury and McFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991 (1976)), pp. 19-55

renewed interest in the essay.⁷⁹ Where Pater noted that the essay is the 'strictly appropriate form of our modern philosophic literature' and is 'that characteristic literary type of our own time',⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf, who had selected Pater along with Stevenson as her mentors in the art of the essay, followed Pater in asserting that the essay was a peculiarly modern form:

there are a certain number [...] of wares that we have either invented or very much developed. Perhaps the most significant of these literary inventions is the invention of the personal essay. It is true that it is at least as old as Montaigne, but we may count him as the first of the moderns (E1, 25).⁸¹

Georg Lukacs and Theodor Adorno, and their latter day synthesiser Graham Good, built on the renewed interest in the essay and its relation to modernity to develop theoretical explanations for

⁷⁹Perry Meisel's notion in *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) that 'we can even schematize English literary history as a sequence of three modernisms — the Renaissance, Romanticism, and High Modernism proper' (p. 4) could suggest a stronger link between modernity, crises of subjectivity and the essay. The Renaissance and the Romantic era saw the flourishing of the two essayists most admired by Woolf, Montaigne and Lamb, while Woolf herself wrote in the period of High Modernism. This schema, however, does not account for the flourishing of the essay in the eighteenth century.

⁸⁰*Plato and Platonism: A Series of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1912), p.174. Woolf is possibly echoing Pater when she dubs Montaigne the first of the moderns, as Pater notes that 'the essay came into use at what was really the invention of the relative, or "modern spirit", in the Renaissance of the sixteenth century' (pp. 174-5).

⁸¹Woolf's recognition of the centrality of Montaigne to conceptions of the essay as genre is the reason I have relied on an analysis of his works to form the basis of my discussion of the essay as genre.

its status as a genre.⁸² In this later theoretical approach to the essay, two of the features noted by Pebworth in his general and simplified approach recur: freedom and personality are upgraded in theoretical discourse to stylistic openness, subjectivity and the configuration of subject and object through rhetorical composition. The same rejection of established and institutionalised knowledge or truth remains: 'the essay has to create from within itself all the preconditions for the effectiveness and solidity of its vision', writes Lukacs.⁸³ More bluntly, according to Adorno, the essay refutes the conception of truth as 'something ready-made', and advocates the 'luck and play' of 'open intellectual experience'.⁸⁴ Following the pattern established in the Renaissance and revived in modernity, both turn from a rejection of external truth to an appraisal of subjective reality. Adorno and Lukacs, and more especially Graham Good, develop the interdependence of subject/object relations and writing. While Lukacs asserts that 'the essayist must now become conscious of his own self, must find himself and build something out of himself', Adorno develops a more complex approach.⁸⁵ 'The essay', he writes, 'is determined by the unity of its object, together with that of theory and experience which have migrated into the object', but

⁸²Georg Lukacs, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay', in *Soul and Form*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974); T.W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', trans. by Bob Hullot-Kentor & Frederic Will, *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 151-71.

⁸³Lukacs, p. 11

⁸⁴Adorno, pp. 166, 152 & 161

⁸⁵Lukacs, p. 15

the essay urges the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience. In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operation, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet.⁸⁶

The essay, the Jamesian figure in the carpet, is constructed, therefore, through the free conjunction of a writing subject and its object, with the resultant prose not limited by any type of philosophical or rhetorical system. The essay 'freely associates what can be found associated in the freely chosen object'.⁸⁷

The essay, then, emerges from this theory as the literary representation of the momentary realisation and transcription of the self, the writing subject, configured in relation to an object. It is the self's perception of the world or the precise object under scrutiny which creates its unity, a unity achieved in writing. Good summarises the essay genre thus:

The heart of the essay as a form is this moment of characterization, of recognition, of figuration, where the self finds a pattern in the world and the world finds a pattern in the self [...] The essay is an act of personal witness [...] at once the *inscription* of a self and the *description* of an object.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Adorno, pp. 165 & 160

⁸⁷ibid, p. 159

⁸⁸Good, *The Observing Self*, pp. 22-3

With its fixed date of birth, its focus on subjective means of apprehending reality, and its synchronicity with the mood of modernity, the essay should offer no problems to its latter-day readers and practitioners. Yet, if we return to Rylands's letter, we remember that his 'I' was unsettled, that he encountered difficulties reconciling the essay and knowledge ('I never knew'), and that he was seriously disturbed by Woolf's relation of difference to the essay. Such was his discomfort that the flow of his letter was halted, and his metaphorical insects turned from butterflies to gnats. In the face of uncertainty he stops, fleeing from the irritating gnats of difference into the underlined confidence of his own signature: 'Love Dadie'.

Rylands' fundamental uncertainty, yet obvious delight, in the face of an essay which involves and activates him as a reader while causing him to re-evaluate his standing as a knowing reading subject, and his seizure of difference as the cause of his disturbance, reflects an overall lack of stability that runs through the genre and belies the certainty that 'history' and 'theory' implies. His juxtaposition of 'the essays' and 'I never knew' directly confronts the impasse at the centre of writing and thinking about the essay, and about genre itself. 'If a genre exists', as Derrida says, 'then a code should provide an identifiable trait and one which is identical to itself, authorising us to determine, to adjudicate whether a given

text belongs to this genre'.⁸⁹ Considering the 'fact' that the essay is deemed to have originated at one identifiable point — with the publication of Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* in 1580 — and therefore defining components of the genre, Derrida's 'code', can presumably be identified by direct reference to the first essays. Rylands's uncertainty seems to be a misplaced emotion. Uncertainty is, however, justified, for the code that defines the essay is the very factor which undoes it as a genre.⁹⁰ Not only is the concept of an absolute origin, historically and philosophically synchronic with Montaigne undermined by both the reception and the ancestry of his texts, but the very centrality of the individual subject to the essay also poses fundamental problems.

So, although Montaigne's publication of 1580 may have been the first to use the title 'essay' to identify the pieces of short prose, written in the first person on any topic, his status as creator of the essay is questionable. Many of the features of those pieces derived from the techniques of earlier writers. Hugh Whitmore identifies, in particular, the indebtedness of the essay to the Ciceronian and Platonic dialogue, the Latin letter, the short treatise and the character-sketch (Theophrastan or otherwise). Historical circumstances, therefore, are not so certain as one might imagine. When one considers, however, that one of the features of the

⁸⁹Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. by Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry*, 7 (1980-1), p. 64.

⁹⁰See Reda Bensmaïa, *The Barthes Effect; The Essay as Reflexive Text*, trans. by Pat Fedkiew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) for a discussion of the essay as a genre which deconstructs genre.

Renaissance in general was a desire to look back to and revive Classical models, the derivative nature of the essay becomes less surprising.

Even more damaging to the notion of origin is the status of the author and the text at the point of genesis. Even before we engage in the debate on the relative importance of subjectivity as opposed to authorship, the position of the historical author is undermined by circumstances of reception and composition of his text. Most critics, commentators and historians all highlight the moment of origin — 1580 — and then proceed to elaborate on the subsequent tradition without questioning the right of Montaigne to stand as its 'father'. But for the majority of readers, Virginia Woolf among them, the tradition as they read it was English, and the Montaigne who featured in it was a writer as much created by his translators, Florio and Cotton, as by his original prose.⁹¹ In addition, the actual status of the 'original prose' as a direct emanation from the pen of the writer, leaving aside for the moment all the problems raised by translation, is also rendered highly questionable by the process of textual composition as revealed in the essays themselves. Although Montaigne asserted, in 'Of the resemblance of children to their fathers' that in this 'fagotting up of divers pieces' he 'never correct[s] my first by any second conceptions', he may 'peradventure [...] alter a word or so: but 'tis only to vary the phrase, and not to destroy my

⁹¹The first edition of Florio's translation appeared in 1603, Cotton's in 1685

former meaning'.⁹² As he declared in 'Of Vanity': 'I add, but I correct not', so that

My book is always the same, saving that upon every new edition [...] I take the liberty to add (as it were by an ill-jointed in-laying or faneering) some few insignificant things over and above.⁹³

The essay genre and its 'creator' defy the myth of origin by being displaced and dispersed by their status as translated and transitional texts.

One aspect of origin, however, is upheld by the history and theory of the essay, and proved most upsetting for Woolf as a woman writer. As originator of the genre, Montaigne stands as its metaphorical father; the history of male practitioners forms a lineage of sons; the focus on subjectivity ensures that a gender bias is built into the genre; and the very status of the essay as a genre means that it is based on a law of the same: the essay, therefore, is the very epitome of patriarchy.⁹⁴ 'To assume', as Joel Haefner says,

that an essay can be 'fathered', that an essay is the sincere and true expression of inner character, that the genre falls into a binary opposition of two types, the personal and the ratiocinative, is to claim the essay genre as the

⁹²'Of the resemblance of children to their fathers', p. 460

⁹³'Of Vanity', p. 566

⁹⁴See 'The Blind Spot of an Old Symmetry' in Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, pp. 13-129, for a discussion of the patriarchal construction of the law of the same. See also Derrida, 'The Law of Genre'.

product of patriarchal, aristocratic, individualistic culture.⁹⁵

Surviving as a woman writer in this culture, even if one possesses the special 'gesture' recommended by Hélène Cixous, the ability to 'dash' through and to 'fly [...] flying in language and making it fly', is a highly perilous process.⁹⁶ Woolf managed to fly from the patriarchal bind of the essay, while simultaneously stealing its potential for constructing a subjectivity in writing, through capturing the butterflies of metaphor, noted by Rylands, and the deployment of other tactics.⁹⁷

Rylands saw Virginia Woolf capturing the insects, but, as the case of the blood-sipping bug of journalism proves, Woolf was also capable of being captured by association with the analogies implicit in figuring oneself by reference to the animal world. While the beautiful butterflies of belles lettres may deny their base origins in Grub Street, many of the problems of the female journalist metamorphose into the butterfly world of the essay. As might be expected in any genre dominated by 'the languages of patriarchy', Woolf's primary concerns before negotiating the possibilities of a reconciliation between the essay and the woman writer are to explore the potential repercussions of such a connection. Appropriately, for this preliminary sortie, her short story 'The

⁹⁵'Unfathering the Essay: Resistance and Intergenreality in the Essay Genre', *Prose Studies*, 12 (1989), p. 259

⁹⁶See 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms*, p. 258

⁹⁷For Woolf's special use of metaphor see Chapter Six; for her other tactics, see Chapter Five.

'Introduction' exposes the dangers of the divide between the woman writer and the essay. As was the case with her response to journalism, Woolf expressed her reactions through animal imagery. This time she echoes Dadie Rylands and settles on the butterfly as the appropriate symbol for the exploration of the relationship between subjectivity, gender and writing.

Lily Everit, the butterfly-winged protagonist of 'The Introduction' enjoys a rare but dubious privilege — she is the lone representative of the female essayist in Woolf's fictional works. Her brief and isolated appearance in Woolf's catalogue of artist figures — poets like Orlando and Isa Oliver, dramatists like Miss LaTrobe and Orlando, novelists like Mary Carmichael and Miss Willatt and even minor literary critics/historians like Miss Allan and Miss Linsett⁹⁸ — highlights Lily's as a rare vocation. Her male companions in the fiction, Jacob Flanders in *Jacob's Room* who writes an essay on the Ethics of Indecency and fails to write one on Great Men, and Ralph Denham and William Rodney in *Night and Day*, have the safety of each others company in their profession. Although they endure certain traumas of composition, their negotiations of that tradition, through their ability to affiliate themselves with male predecessors and their ability to construct a recognisable and acceptable subjectivity in writing, enable them to survive the initiation into

⁹⁸Isa Oliver and Miss La Trobe from *Between the Acts*; Mary Carmichael from *A Room of One's Own*; Miss Allan from *The Voyage Out*; and Miss Willatt and Miss Linsett from the short story 'Memoirs of a Novelist'.

writing unharmed . For Lily, however, the introduction is somewhat different.

Although she shares a namesake, Lily Briscoe, and a cluster of co-protagonists, all guests at Mrs Dalloway's party who feature in their own individual but linked short stories, Lily Everit's is an isolation that is fundamental, life-shaping and of Biblical proportions — 'she felt like a naked wretch who having sought shelter in some shady garden is turned out' (SF, 188). She is alone in Woolf's fictional oeuvre, and alone within her own short story. As such, she embodies not only Woolf's recognition, in fiction, of the scarcity of female practitioners of the essay in the history of the genre since Montaigne (an awareness also reflected in Woolf's own essays), but also figures as a complex model of Woolf's understanding of what it means to be a female essayist in that tradition.

'The Introduction' is very much a story about tradition and the individual female talent, a parallel fiction to the tale of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room Of One's Own*. In both, gender determines one's fate as a writer, and the fate is mediated through the body — the body as personal physical and psychic experience, and the body experienced as social being, reminding us, once again, of the participation of the writing subject as a journalist and now as an essayist, in both the private and the public spheres. And, as in much of Virginia Woolf's writing, both private and public, the body is figured through animal imagery and analogy.

Negotiating the transition from one sphere to the other is Lily's task at Mrs Dalloway's party. The story opens with Lily Everit standing alone, in the corner of a crowded room, at her first party; Mrs Dalloway is 'bearing down on her from the other side of the room', smiling and summoning her to 'come out of [her] corner and talk' (SF, 184). The smile is 'at once benevolent and drastic, commanding', it brings out in Lily 'the strangest mixture of excitement and fear, of desire to be left alone and of longing to be taken out and thrown down, down into the boiling depths' (SF, 184). But the desire for social self immolation is temporarily thwarted by Mrs Dalloway's interception by another guest; Lily is left in temporary peace, time in which she can

hug to herself, like ^a spar in the sea, to sip, like a glass of wine, the thought of her essay upon the character of Dean Swift which Professor Miller had marked that morning with three red stars: First rate. First rate (SF, 184).

Lily, then, is a successful essayist, albeit within the confines of an establishment which indicates merit with three red stars. Unlike her counterpart Jacob, in *Jacob's Room*, whose essay is rejected by 'the *Fortnightly*, the *Contemporary*, the *Nineteenth Century*' (JR, 93) and whose undergraduate composition, 'an essay, no doubt — "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?"' lies unwritten, merely a piece of 'paper ruled with a red margin' (JR, 48), hers is an acceptable effort by academic standards. Her essay is 'like a lump of glowing metal', 'a rock', a 'hard lump', a solid inner core of identity

unequivocally linked to 'all her being ([...] sharp as a diamond cleaving the heart of life asunder)' (SF, 184). Individuality, identity, a sense of personal solidity and clarity, are intimately bound up with the successful essay on the character of Dean Swift. This is 'fact', as opposed to the 'fiction' of a social existence, of 'going out' into that 'famous place: the world' (SF, 184).

In linking the private core of being to the essay Lily is, in fact, identifying the element of the essay which most commentators have identified as one of its few characterising features. Where Montaigne affirmed that in writing an essay he was 'moulding this figure upon my self' and 'giving my self so continual and so exact an account of my self' that his book was 'consubstantial with the author',⁹⁹ Virginia Woolf agreed. 'The essay', she wrote, is 'primarily an expression of personal opinion'. 'Almost all essays begin with a capital "I"' (E1, 25), a sentiment echoed by Woolf's contemporary A.C. Benson. The 'point of the essay', he asserts, is 'the charm of personality'. The essay, he goes on to say 'is the reverie, the frame of mind in which a man says, in the words of the old song, "Says I to myself, says I"'.¹⁰⁰

Herein lies the problem: the essay is the prose rendition of 'the frame of mind in which a *man* says "I"'. Lily Everit, as she discovers at the party, exists as a 'shy charming girl, with pale skin, her bright

⁹⁹'Of Giving the Lye', p. 414

¹⁰⁰'The Art of the Essay', in Rhys, *Modern English Essays*, Volume 5, p. 51

eyes, the dark hair which clustered poetically round her head and the thin body in a dress which seemed slipping off' (SF, 185). In the social world she is

proclaimed what in the comfortable darkness of childhood she had never been — this frail and beautiful creature, before whom men bowed, this limited and circumscribed creature who could not do what she liked, this butterfly with a thousand facets to its eyes and delicate fine plumage and difficulties and sensibilities immeasurable: a woman (SF, 185).¹⁰¹

The essay, which had already 'wobbled' (SF, 184), which she had 'instinctively hid[den]' (SF, 186) is now 'dulled to obscurity' (SF, 186), and in the face of the man to whom she is introduced, Bob Brinsley, another writer of essays 'just down from Oxford' (SF, 185) and 'in direct descent from Shakespeare' (SF, 186), disintegrates. In the face of his 'massive masculine achievement', 'what could she do but lay her essay, oh and the whole of her being, on the floor as a cloak for him to trample on, as a rose for him to rifle' (SF, 186).

When Jacob's essay meets the world and is rejected, however, he throws it 'into the black wooden box [...] upon which his name was still legible' and 'the lid shut upon the truth' (JR, 93). Like the painted name on the outside of the box, Jacob's identity is still clear,

¹⁰¹ Woolf makes this explicit in the draft: 'all the little chivalries & respects of the drawing room; all made her feel that ~~her part was stamped upon her~~ she [came] out of her chrysalis', Berg, M.1. 2, p. 11. Having her part 'stamped' upon her links directly with Brinsley's subsequent 'trampl[ing]' on her essay and her character (p. 17). In the published version the butterfly/fly opposition.

like the box itself it is secure, compact and lockable; inviolate, it contains the truth. Lily, on the other hand, is traduced, desecrated, metaphorically violated. She has no misapprehension as to why; she is faced with an established, monolithic tradition, which excludes her by definition. She 'yield[s] to the pressure of unquestionable might', is convinced that

it was not hers to dominate or assert; rather to sit and embellish this orderly life where all was done already; high towers, solemn bells and flats built every brick of them by men's toil; churches built by men's toil, parliaments too; and even the criss-cross of telegraph wires she thought looking out the window as she walked. What had she to oppose to this massive masculine achievement? An essay on the character of Dean Swift! (SF, 186).

Tradition, figured architecturally, is built to exclude her; regardless of his temporary failure it is built to include Jacob. He lives in Lamb's Conduit Street, surely no coincidence for a young man who wishes to write essays; the furniture in his room comes from Cambridge; the flat itself is eighteenth century — a period well-known for its essayists. Lily is not even supported by the subject of her essay, the well-known misogynist Dean Swift who, as Woolf pointed out in her own essay on him, written around the time at which she wrote 'The Introduction',

loved power and the company of men; [who] though he had his moods of tenderness and his fierce spasms of disgust at society [...] Above all [...] hated interference [and] If anyone laid a finger upon his liberty or hinted the least threat to his independence, were they men or women

[...] Both were chastised, the woman brutally (E4, 296).¹⁰²

Like Woolf, then, Lily writes on the character of Dean Swift; like Lily, Woolf was aware of the relationship of the female essayist to tradition. Foreshadowing the sentiments she was to express in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf made clear her position in a debate conducted in the *New Statesman*, between herself and Desmond MacCarthy, who asserted, in support of Arnold Bennett, that women were intellectually inferior to men. 'It seems to me indisputable', Woolf replied to the Brinsley-like Bennett and MacCarthy,

that the conditions which make it possible for a Shakespeare to exist are that he shall have had predecessors in his art, shall make one^{of} a group where art is freely discussed and practised, and shall himself have the utmost of freedom of action and experience (D2, 341).

Bob Brinsley, we may recall, appears to Lily to enjoy 'direct descent from Shakespeare', as a man just down from Oxford he will have enjoyed an atmosphere in which art is freely discussed (Jacob, up at Cambridge, enjoys evenings symbolised by 'two, three, five young men [...] a sofa, chairs, a square table [...] somebody stood by the fender talking)' (JR, 56). Freedom, too, is Bob Brinsley's masculine privilege, with his 'self-assurance, and his delicacy, and honour and

¹⁰²See also the draft of this essay: 'The power, the But the powerful man So without tyrannical, uncompromising, harsh masterly He was the same man And, as always in spite of his insatiable appetite for power, he there was no one more If He did not dwelt upon his successes triumphs to her, nor covered over his ambition', Berg, M.1. 1, p. 129 (excisions ignored).

robust physical well-being, and sunburn, and airiness' (SF, 186) — the freedom to expand and assert and dominate; the freedom to indulge in his own egotism. As a typical, and therefore gendered, essayist, Bob Brinsley enjoys the pleasure of the privilege that is the mark of the essayist, the ability to say 'I'. Lily, by contrast, is 'Ever it' and never 'I', and her 'light being [charged] with cloud', is 'confused [...] for ever and ever' (SF, 188). She feels her wings 'shrivelled [...] on her back'; she is crushed by the 'yoke' of this 'civilisation', and looks to another guest 'as if she had the weight of the world upon her shoulders' (SF, 188).

Carrying the weight of the male-dominated history of the essay and the equally heavy knowledge of the importance of subjectivity to the essay, Woolf was in a position not unlike Lily's when she came to write essays. Rather than being a 'performative allegory of the birth of the feminist critic', with Bob Brinsley as male scholar performing a 'tribal ritual of intellectual clitoridectomy, of sexual lobotomy' as Jane Marcus argues,¹⁰³ 'The Introduction' enacts the inherent problems of being a woman writer in a male tradition, especially one founded on a gendered ideology of construction. The problem is not unique to the essayist, as post-Lacanian theory, which arrogates language and subjectivity to the masculine gender, makes clear but, because of the special relationship subjectivity and writing have to the essay as a genre, it brings the issue into much greater relief. Woolf's dilemma, explored in fictional terms in 'The

¹⁰³Jane Marcus, *The Languages of Patriarchy*, p. 1

Introduction', is outlined in its theoretical dimension by Patricia Waugh:

To ask 'Who am I?' is to articulate a question which usually assumes an a priori belief in an ultimate unity and fixity of being, a search for a rational, coherent, essential 'self' which can speak and know itself. For Woolf like many women writers positioned in a patriarchal society, a more appropriate question would be 'What represents me?' This question carries an implicit and necessary recognition of alienation: the phenomenological perception that 'I' am never at one with myself because always and ever already constituted by others according to whom, and yet outside of what, I take myself to be. For the woman writer, the further implication that, if the 'I' is spoken or positioned in a discourse where subjectivity, the norm of human-ness, is male, then 'I' is doubly displaced, 'I' can never in any material or metaphysical sense be at one with myself.¹⁰⁴

In pointing to the issue of representation, Waugh provides a useful introduction to Woolf's textual practice in the essay. Woolf's numerous techniques draw attention to the alienation of the subject in language but also indicate a means of escaping from this dilemma and negotiating new ways of constituting subjectivity in writing.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 10-11

¹⁰⁵See Chapter Five for discussions of the essay as letter, dialogue and mixture of fact and fiction; see Chapter Six for a discussion of Woolf's rhetoric of metaphor. Her use of heavy irony, in which she continues to write in the vocabulary and manner expected of her yet mocks her own conformity and the pretensions of the discourse as she does so, has been mentioned in Chapter One. This double-voicedness is present in many of Woolf's otherwise conventional essays and inflects the seeming impersonality of her use of the

construct subjectivity; part of Woolf's agenda was that her own writing should bear the mark of gender, that as a woman writer 'she has [...] to be herself <and write>' (P, xxxiii) confident in being 'a woman again — as I always am when I write' (D3, 231). Her mission, therefore, was to combine the two without suffering the same fate as Lily, while remaining aware of her essential alienation. Her success lay in developing the techniques she mastered as a child, parodying Victorian journalese, and honed in response to various editorial restrictions and demands. Looking at the non-fiction as 'essays' reveals Woolf working within the limits of a discourse whilst remaining ironically self-conscious of her position. This, in turn, allows her to exploit both the essay's ontological and historic heritage in order to develop a rhetoric that could construct new possibilities for writing the self. Thus she points to the possibility of the 'sanctuaries, or butterflies' (SF, 188) that Lily Everit felt had been destroyed in her presence.

Lily's pain, apart from being self-destructive, is inimical to one of the principles of the essay as outlined by Woolf: that it 'should give pleasure' (E4, 216) that, in so doing, it 'must draw its curtain round us' (E4, 224). 'Vague as all definitions are', she writes, 'a good essay must have this permanent quality about it; it must draw its curtain round us, but it must be a curtain that shuts us in, not out' (E4, 224). Lily Everit is shut out, which is painful in the extreme, but writing on the inside is just as limiting. As Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*, 'I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out;

and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in' (Room, 31). Devising tactics to avoid being relegated to one side of the curtain or the other, breaking the silencing surface yet again, was Woolf's practice as an essayist. Building on the oscillation between power and denial, Woolf developed and modified the basic tenets of the essay, the configuration of subject and object revealed and contained in the prose, yet adhered to its original philosophy of freedom from system. Her methods, explored in the following chapters, are also true to the philosophy of the essay as she expressed it in her essay on 'The Modern Essay'. She is speaking of Max Beerbohm, 'the prince of his profession' (E4, 220), but she could be describing the rhetorical revolution, the stylistic tactics she inscribed in her own works:

The triumph is the triumph of style. For it is only by knowing how to write that you can make use in literature of your self; that self which, while it is essential to literature, is also its most dangerous antagonist (E4, 221).

CHAPTER FIVE: 'A VOICE ANSWERING A VOICE': DIALOGUE AND THE

ESSAY

Did I my lines intend for public view,
 How many censures would their faults pursue! [...]
 Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
 Such an intruder on the rights of men,
 Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed,
 The fault can by no virtue be redeemed.¹

Let me then create you. (You have done as much
 for me.) (W, 68)

For where is truth to be found — about fiction? In
 darkness; in silence; when the face is hidden; and
 only the voice is heard only the words are seen;
 but no body; no tie or seal ring; but only a voice,
 speaking; another answering; two colliding; from
 which the truth bursts; like fire from a struck
 match; answer and question and answer.²

For Lily Everit, 'a woman that attempts the pen' in the field of the
 essay, the experience of writing is, like the speaker in Anne Finch's
 'Introduction', and unlike the princely Max Beerbohm's in 'The
 Modern Essay', essentially negative. It appears that Beerbohm
 experiences power in writing and Lily denial; even though she
 'knew how to write', she could not make use of her 'self'. For the
 woman writer writing within the established paradigms of the
 essay, Anne Finch's 'Introduction' is more prophetic than

¹'The Introduction', ll. 1-2 & 9-12, in *Anne Finch Countess of Winchilsea: Selected Poems*, ed. by Denys Thompson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1987), pp. 26-7. 'A voice answering a voice' is taken from (O, 310)

²MHP, B. 11. c) 4

Beerbohm's triumph. In the 'Introduction', 'so strong the opposing faction still appears,/The hopes to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears'. Winchilsea's persona, like Lily, is forced to realise that 'for groves of laurel thou wert never meant:/Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou there content'.³ The darkness Winchilsea invokes is a constrained and repressive domain, one where the visible, gendered and condemned body of the woman writer 'conscious of wants, still with contracted wing', retires to a dim grove, there to sing to her 'sorrows' and some 'few friends'.⁴ The obscurity to which she is relegated is reminiscent of Keats's forest dim in which the female writer will 'fade far away, dissolve' and if not 'quite forget' the 'weariness the fever and the fret', at least remain trapped in 'embalmed darkness'.⁵ It seems that it is not her privilege either to fly away nor to illumine the darkness by being 'like a fire from a struck match'.

Being able to strike a light in the darkness, and cause a minor explosion of truth is, Virginia Woolf suggests, an achievement that can only be realised when certain aspects of gender are hidden, when the biological and cultural markers of sexual difference — the face, the body, the masculine tie and seal ring — are invisible. Then darkness is experienced as an equalising disguise rather than as gender specific repression, and it becomes a positive and productive

³Winchilsea, 'The Introduction', ll. 57-8 & 63-4

⁴ibid, ll. 61-2

⁵'Ode to a Nightingale', in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. by H. Buxton Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1934)

environment. Darkness masks the visible signs of difference which can be read as limiting factors in the expression of identity; hiding one's face therefore allows the individual to speak. From the darkness, then, emerges the voice, the anonymous voice, and from the anonymous voice comes truth. But the spoken truth is not a singular utterance; truth is to be found through dialogue, through 'a voice, speaking' and 'another answering'; through 'two colliding [...] answer and question and answer'.

This collision of voices, according to Woolf, produces a truth, a truth that is illuminating, inflammatory, temporary, and ostensibly about fiction. Such is her conception of the complexity of fiction, evident in essays like 'Modern Fiction' and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', and such is the interest in this piece on the effect and methodology of appraising fiction, that more than the status of the novel as discerned by an impartial literary critic is at stake in this draft statement for the article that became 'Reviewing'. Writing about literature, for Woolf, involved questions of subjectivity because the 'stuff of fiction' involved the 'ordinary mind on an ordinary day' (E4, 161 & 160), and because the vehicle for analysing fiction was the essay, the essay that, like Mr Ramsay's philosophy, dealt with subject, object and the nature of reality (TtL, 33) — in this instance, the realities of literature. An investigation of written subjectivity therefore involved, almost of necessity, an investigation of writing subjectivity. As Woolf wrote when contemplating the form and purpose of the first *Common Reader*, 'I shall really

investigate literature with a view to answering certain questions about ourselves' (D2, 265). The truth about fiction, therefore, involves the truth about subjectivity as well.

But truth, as Virginia Woolf's prose in this passage and in other selections from her writings makes clear, is not 'the Truth'. Truth is not a solid, tangible and unchanging 'nugget', as any reader of *A Room of One's Own* knows; it is not an essence that can be seized, reified and elevated to an hierarchical position. In this instance it is something mobile — it bursts and burns — a kinetic process rather than a stable substance, and something relatively short lived — it lasts only so long as there is wood from the metaphorical match to sustain the flame. And while it is itself a process — fire, combustion — it is also the result of a kinetic process: the collision of two voices, the friction of a match striking against an unknown object. Process and truth are key terms in the genesis and practice of the essay as genre, and being fixed, as Lily Everit's story reveals, is tantamount to being pinned down like a butterfly to a board. The illuminating dialogue that Woolf adumbrates in the draft of 'Reviewing' — a dialogue that breaks the surface of silence, for the voice is heard — constitutes the theoretical basis of her gendered writing practice in the essay, both literary and autobiographical.⁶

Her response to the essay as a genre gendered masculine involves a dialogic process of writing, in which the subject is

⁶Chapter Six will deal with the autobiographical essay.

invoked, not in response to an object — a binary which is traditionally a sexed one with the masculine as the privileged term — but in relation to another subject.⁷ If Woolf were to assume the traditional voice of the essayist, this would involve an appropriation of the masculine and the destructive denial of her self that Lily encounters in 'The Introduction'. If, however, Woolf as an essayist rewrites the paradigm of the essay and structures herself in relation to another subject, firstly through the process of writing, thus not denying the formative premise of the essay, and, secondly, through the process of being read, then she breaks the bonds of the essay as a gendered genre. And if that subject is another speaking subject, as the example of a voice speaking and another answering implies, then she is also developing a gendered and politicised practice of writing that has multiple implications for the future of women and/in writing. The process, in addition, is not reflective, in the

⁷This is similar to the process outlined by Anne Herrmann in *The Dialogic and Difference: 'An/Other Woman'* in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). She argues that Virginia Woolf responds 'to a dominant literary culture [by] breaking with a literary tradition by totally immersing herself within it, at once appropriating and interrogating it' (p. 2). This is achieved through the creation of 'an/other woman' in the text, making 'it possible for the woman writer to rewrite 'the feminine' in the form of a female subjectivity, by inscribing herself in her own text as gendered and as fictional subject' (p. 3). I would argue that the process is not limited to the creation of female fictive subjects and that Herrmann's analysis does not pay sufficient attention to the notion of time in representing this new subjectivity. While a dialogic relation does involve the new subject in history, being dialogically constituted implies a temporary, relative and instantive being — implying a more immediate and transitory sense of history — and therefore avoiding the problem of introducing a new fixed and potentially equally repressive system of self-definition.

traditional terms expressed by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*,⁸ but creative and then consequentially reflective, allowing the writer to create a gendered subjectivity through writing the oppositional object as another subject and then letting that process recreate the original scriptive subject, by a self-reflexive reflection, as an individual not gendered masculine. As Bernard says in *The Waves* (68), 'Let me then create you. (You have done as much for me.)'. The subjectivity thus engendered is not feminine, for that requires the occupation of an object position, but it does enable the woman writer to write.

The process as outlined, appropriately for the tactical practice of a restrictive genre whose importance lies in the traversing of the space between two temporarily fixed positions, oscillates in a middle ground, this surface between the feminine darker depths and the patriarchal upper air. The critical methodology, too, oscillates in a central space, looking in one direction to Bakhtin for its theoretical basis, and in another to Virginia Woolf for its practice and its theoretical potential. Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogism, never a term he actually used but one coined, appropriately, as a response to his writings by his readers and translators,⁹ provides a number of elements helpful in initiating and decoding this reading of Woolf's response to, and reworking of, the essay. The work, the word and

⁸'Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size' (Room, 45).

⁹A point made by Michael Holquist in *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, p. 15

the subject are, he suggests, constituted in and by dialogue, which is a continuous process. Dialogisation is 'the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel'; the word is 'born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it';¹⁰ and "'I and the other", inasmuch as they are being thought, constitute a relationship that is relative and convertible, since the cognitive subiectum [sic] as such does not occupy any determinate, concrete place in being'.¹¹ They come into existence as an event, and that event is contextual, historical, situated and ongoing:

for any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world [...] Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions [...] Contextual overtones [...] are inevitable in the word.¹²

The event *is* process; dialogised subjectivity, like the dialogised word is 'an ongoing event'.¹³ Thus linguistic and subjective 'presence' does not take place in a social void. Unfortunately, as many critics have pointed out, they do take place in a gender void, or, more precisely, a linguistic and ontological space that, because it is untroubled by questions of gender, adopts the quiet self-confidence of a theoretical position for which gender is not a

¹⁰Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 263 & 279

¹¹M.M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov, trans. by Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 23

¹²Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 293

¹³Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, p. 235, footnote 30

contentious issue. It is, of course, thereby gendered unconsciously masculine.¹⁴

Virginia Woolf's voice, as it explores and modifies the form of the essay is, if one follows Bakhtin's theory, a response to, and a partial echo of, previous voices, and one conditioned by historical context. Woolf's essays, therefore, respond to the collective voice of the history of the essay as a genre, conditioned by the historical context of Modernism, with its catch cry of *Make it New*,¹⁵ and early twentieth century journalism, with its editorial restraints and demands. Both these factors are further conditioned by Woolf's consciousness of the role of women in writing and in the formation of literary history. Thus Woolf's practice is a questioning of the answer asserted by the essay tradition and an answer to the question of Modernism and women and writing. It is also a forward looking simultaneous question and answer to contemporary and feminist theory. As Woolf's essays echo and respond to the voices of the essay genre and Modernism, they reverberate and create the circumstances for another, future, voice to answer. Virginia Woolf's practice in the essays creates the space for future theoretical responses. This, in turn, implies future positions *ad infinitum*, as theory answers practice, which can then be answered or questioned by further theoretical or practical responses.

¹⁴See Nancy Glazener, in Hirschkop

¹⁵See Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber, 1934)

In keeping with a generative and gendered Modernist rhetoric of instance, Woolf's reforming practice in the essay is varied.¹⁶ She creates the 'you' both in the text by creating fictional or semi-biographical subjects against which to pit herself, and through the process of reading, by implicating a reader in the essay, making an assumed reader actually insert him- or herself in the essay, writing in such an opaque or metaphorical manner that an active reader is required to intervene in the essay to construct meaning from what would be an otherwise obscure passage of prose.¹⁷ Thus Woolf couches her essays as letters, as conversations, as mixtures of fact and fiction, peoples them with characters, and relies on metaphor — forcing the reader to relate tenor and vehicle, or create one from the other. By positing the other not as 'Other' but as another self, or as a vacant space to be filled or answered by another self, she essays to produce not only a new form for the essay appropriate to its time and her own gender, but demonstrates the potential of the essay for conveying and embodying theoretical and emancipatory discourse.

(i) The Letter

To a Friend *In Praise of the Invention of Writing Letters*

¹⁶I am using the phrase 'rhetoric of instance' to signify a process of subject constitution through writing which is influenced by Woolf's practice and Bakhtin's theory. 'Instance' takes into account both temporality and positionality — 'instants' and 'in stance' — in the formation of subjectivity in writing, which is realised through a temporary dialogic configuration with another subject. See Chapter Six for elaboration on this proposition.

¹⁷See Goldman and Ferebee. See also Chapter Six for a discussion of the reader's role in constructing meaning and subjectivity in the essay through responding to metaphoric language.

Blest be the man! his memory at least,
 Who found the art thus to unfold his breast,
 And taught succeeding times an easy way
 Their secret thoughts by letter to convey;
 To baffle absence and secure delight
 Which, till that time, was limited to sight.¹⁸

The letter, as historians of the essay have amply demonstrated, is a recognised progenitor of the new genre;¹⁹ the letter, as Virginia Woolf was aware, is a form particularly suited to women as writers;²⁰ finally, the letter is, as readers of Bakhtin's theory on the dialogic nature of the utterance which 'arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and a rejoinder to it' recognise, a perfect formal representation of one of the basic elements of Bakhtin's theory.²¹ It would appear to be 'blest' indeed, as the ultimate formal device for a woman wishing to write an essay.

Montaigne, writing his essays during the Renaissance when the renewal of interest in classical forms saw a resurfacing of the Ciceronian letter as a rhetorical model, was, however, equivocal in his response to its potential. Although Montaigne carefully established his difference from his classical ancestors — 'but baldly to confess the truth, his [Cicero's] way of writing, and that of all long-winded authors, appears to me very tedious [...] for the most part I find nothing but wind'²² — he did acknowledge his debt to

¹⁸Winchilsea, ll. 1-6

¹⁹See Whitmore, *passim*

²⁰'Women's art was the art of letter writing' (E4, 554)

²¹Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 276

²²'A Consideration Upon Cicero', pp. 258-9

some of their techniques. In his essay on Cicero ('A Consideration Upon Cicero') he did so tangentially, admitting the suitability of the letter to his aim in writing essays:

it is a kind of writing, wherein my friends think I can do something; and I am willing to confess, I should rather have chose to publish my whimsies that way, than any other, had I had ~~to~~ whom to write.²³

But, he then explains, he declined to utilise the form's potential, because he did not have the appropriate audience, the perfect friend as recipient for his writings, and invention was beyond his moral capacity:

I wanted such a settled correspondency, as I once had to attract me to it, to raise my fancy, and maintain the rest against me. For to traffic with the wind, as some others have done, and to forge vain names to direct my letters to, in a serious subject, I could never do it but in a dream, being a sworn enemy to all manner of falsification.²⁴

Forging the identity of a recipient, however, was the very ploy Virginia Woolf seized upon in her use of the letter format. It was indeed an 'interesting question' as Woolf wrote to Gerald Brenan in 1929, 'what one tries to do, in writing a letter' (L4, 98). Partly it was 'to give back a reflection of the other person', which meant that, in 'writing to Lytton or Leonard I am quite different from writing to you', a difference that could be exploited most profitably by the

²³ibid, pp. 160-1

²⁴ibid, p. 161

writer if the recipient were in fact a fiction rather than a real person. Thus, if 'a good letter writer so takes the colour of the reader at the other end, that from reading the one we can imagine the other' (CR2, 64), inventing the reader at the other end allows one to re-invent the self. Reinvention could even mean complete reconstruction, as Woolf indicates in a discarded portion of the typescript draft of *The Years*: 'I writing to Rose become Rose'.²⁵ Creating, shaping, or even implying a recipient, whose characteristics, although created by the writer, determined the tone and manner of the letter, thus enabled the writer to create herself in response to the reader. On one level it was an act of disguise and masking, for Woolf did hide behind the reflectively created personae of the letter writer, especially if being the 'real' Virginia Woolf, the real 'I' of the traditional essay were a circumscribed role. Writing essays as letters enabled Woolf to play a double game. She did write as a woman, for letters were a woman's genre — 'it was an art that a woman could practice without unsexing herself' (CR2, 61); she did write as an essayist, for was not 'the art of letter-writing [...] often the art of essay-writing in disguise' (CR2, 60); and she did write in a manner the public found relevant to contemporary taste — witness the series of Hogarth Letters. But, she also wrote in a manner which allowed her a great deal of room for subversive and liberatory tactics.

²⁵Susan Squier, 'A Track of Our Own: Typescript Drafts of *The Years*', in *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*, ed. by Jane Marcus (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 203

The letter permits such freedom because, as Woolf recognised, like the essay which embraced it, its generic boundaries were not fixed; although 'there should be laid down once and for all the principles of letter writing [...] Aristotle never got so far' (CDB, 136). The best way to approach the letter, therefore, is to 'turn [...] without a yard measure to examine the morning's post, and those posts of other mornings that have been thrust pell-mell into old drawers'. A perusal of those old drawers proves, not that the modern art of letter writing is dead, but that it is 'so much alive as to be quite unprintable. The best letters of our time are precisely those that can never be published' (CDB, 139). If the modern letter's concern is with the unprintable, and the woman essayist is attempting the as yet unsaid, and the supposedly unsayable,²⁶ then an affinity between form and aim is established, and it only remains for the writer to 'write with a flick of the pen, leaving things to be understood' (L4, 329).

When choosing to write ~~her~~ certain of her essays as letters Woolf tended to flick her pen at topics of some complexity, topics where she felt that an ease or simplicity of response would be inappropriate.²⁷ Thus the letter is circulated when gender

²⁶'In "woman" I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies', Julia Kristeva, 'Woman Can Never be Defined', in Marks and deCourtivron, p.137

²⁷Catharine Stimpson, 'The Female Sociograph: The Theater of Virginia Woolf's Letters' in *Where the Meanings Are: Feminism and Cultural Spaces* (New York and London: Methuen, 1988), argues that Woolf used the letter to '[explore] a rhetorical device that might enable her to be largely angry' (p. 133); and also that she further 'feminized' a woman's genre by using it as a

intersects with politics, in *Three Guineas* and the Introduction to *Life As We Have Known It*, and when contemporary writing — always a problematic area for Woolf²⁸ — comes under scrutiny, in 'A Letter to a Young Poet' and 'All About Books'. Only once did Woolf revert to the use of the letter for literary criticism and reviewing that was not influenced by more controversial issues of the politics of writing and contemporary history, in 'The Reverend William Cole: A Letter'. This piece was written in 1932, in the year during which most of Virginia Woolf's experimentation with the letter and the short essay took place, and may have been a result of her general interest in the device at that time. It was fitting, too, that Cole, as the addressee of the prolific correspondent Horace Walpole, should feature in Woolf's essay on him alone, as the recipient of a letter.

Whilst 'The Reverend William Cole: A Letter' concluded the first stage of Woolf's experimentation with the letter, she initiated the correspondence with her 'Introduction' to *Life As We Have Known It*, known more commonly by its title as published in the *Yale Review* and reprinted in Leonard Woolf's edition of *Collected Essays: 'Memories of a Working Woman's Guild'*.²⁹ The traditional

vehicle for conveying her writing on 'the feminine, the intimate and the realm of feeling' (p. 134).

²⁸'There are many reasons which should prevent one from criticising the work of contemporaries. Besides the obvious uneasiness — the fear of hurting feelings — there is too the difficulty of being just'"(E4, 491-2)

²⁹This discussion relies on the text in *The Captain's Death Bed*, which is the commonly known version owing to Leonard Woolf's decision not to republish the version originally published in *Life As We Have Known It*. The *Captain's Death Bed*/Yale version contains a number of textual variants, most notably the substitution of fictional names for the main characters, the merging of small paragraph units into long paragraph sections, and extensive rewriting

introductory essay has been rejected, Woolf writes, because she has a congenital dislike of writing prefaces — 'I would rather be drowned than write a preface to any book whatever' (CDB, 207) — and because such a response would be inappropriate to this 'book which is not a book'. The letter formula is not so much chosen, as automatically slipped into, because the generic indeterminacy of the book to be introduced raises all sorts of questions, and

as all this had nothing to do with an introduction or a preface, but brought you to mind and certain pictures from the past, I stretched my hand for a sheet of note paper and wrote you the following letter (CDB, 207).³⁰

The letter is, therefore, a response to a letter, requesting a preface, a response to a book which occupies no stable position in literary categories, and a reply to the 'packet of papers' written by women (CDB, 217) which Woolf recalls being handed when she met the Guild officials in 1913 — the incident which forms the basis of the narrative of the essay. By writing the essay as a letter Woolf equates herself with the members of the Guild at a formal level, overcoming her sense of being a 'middle class visitor' (CDB, 217) by making them all women who write letters. Yet she is still able to acknowledge her difference, for the 'merit of the letter' as she said

in the paragraph beginning 'This was the tiny magnet' (CDB, 221). Quotations will be taken from the *Captain's Death Bed* version, as it is the most commonly known, but if they involve significant variance from the earlier version this will be included in footnotes. These references will be made to *Life As We Have Known It*, by Cooperative Working Women, ed. by Margaret Llewellyn Davies, intro. letter by Virginia Woolf, new intro. by Anna Davin (London: Virago, 1977 [1931])

³⁰'I stretched my hand for a sheet of notepaper and wrote the following letter addressed not to the public but to you' (Life, xvii)

in a private one to Margaret Llewellyn Davies, is that 'it gives a particular persons impression' (L4, 212).

And, as she reveals in the essay, there is a difference between working class women and 'ladies'. It is true that Woolf does not write directly *to* the working women, but writes *about* them and quotes them, potentially making them ventriloquist's dummies to her controlling voice. Denying them their voice by rewriting their letters in her own was a fear she acknowledged, 'I somehow thought many of the women would dislike my butting in, *and* ask what business I had' (L4, 341), but, as critics have pointed out, and as Woolf has demonstrated in her essays, quotation and ventriloquism have more facets than the greedily possessive desire to engulf. Quotation gives the woman writer, as Patricia Yaeger argues, 'the power to cite someone else's words at length in order to interrupt the citation and change its intent', a powerful vehicle for satire as Woolf proved in her juvenilia and in many of her early reviews.³¹ Quotation, too, especially if unacknowledged, also permits the writer to 'seize words and use them for [her] own purposes',³² and, if those words belong to a writer whose gender is known then the effects of this seizure can be subversive.

³¹*Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 156

³²Yaeger, p. 6. Both Caughie, *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*, pp. 3 & 24, and Rosenbaum, *Edwardian Bloomsbury*, p. 358, note Woolf's alteration of quotations but neither questions why she engages in this activity.

In her essay on Montaigne, for instance, Woolf devotes an inordinate amount of the text to quotation, in English or in French, and paraphrase. The twentieth century woman essayist thereby becomes an essayist by recreating herself as the father of the essay, through writing and rewriting the words of Montaigne. She creates a dialogue within the text by having Montaigne's words speak to her own, juxtaposing direct quotations with her own prose, and she rewrites the power relationship by putting Montaigne's words in her own sentences without the benefit of quotation marks. Montaigne's 'all the world knows me in my book, and my book in me',³³ becomes 'we can never doubt for an instant that his book was himself' (E4, 72); she repeats, as she says in her diary, 'my own version of Montaigne "its life that matters"'.³⁴ He is enclosed, 'consumed', by Virginia Woolf and she emerges as an essayist by eating his words.³⁵

But by quoting women rather than literary men in *Life As We Have Known It*, Woolf is giving them a voice, recognising their right to speak, rather than usurping their power. Context determines the politics of quotation and consumption. By engulfing the words of a male writer whose right it is to speak, Woolf is empowering herself;

³³Upon some verses of Virgil', p. 520

³⁴(D3, 8) and (E4, 77): 'But enough of death; it is life that matters'

³⁵Yaeger, op.cit., p. 35: "in consuming honey [i.e., language] so avidly the honey-mad woman preempts this symbolization, for by consuming a substance like herself she usurps her society's right to consume her." Yaeger also makes this point in relation to Charlotte Bronte's heroines who "consume to an excess, the languages designed to consume them."

by enclosing the previously unheard words of working class women in her own, Woolf reverses the power relationship, and empowers obscure women writers. By making women of all classes write letters and quoting them, she involves them all in a discursive network which, while it is aware of class divisions, achieves a power of speech through gender and genre solidarity. As she did in other essays on the obscure, like 'Miss Ormerod', Woolf brings the unrecognised to the fore by allowing them to speak in the public arena of the essay. In particular, the essay as letter allows Virginia Woolf to construct herself in response to other letter writers, and gives those 'other' writers a sense of status by having their writing enclosed in a 'literary' letter. It is the appropriate form for a writer to write on a book which defies categorisation, and the appropriate form for a class of women whose lives have thus far been denied society's approving categorisation. The letter also, because it presumes a future recipient and a reply, holds out hope. 'But I will quote no more', concludes Woolf; 'these letters are only fragments. These voices are trying only now to emerge from silence into half articulate speech' (CDB, 224).³⁶

Woolf repeats this tactic of overcoming a potential disadvantage in being a class or genre-bound writer, adding to it the difficulties of restrictions imposed by generation, when she returns to the letter in 'A Letter to a Young Poet' and 'All About Books'. The latter required her to write about contemporaries, about 'Scrutinies,

³⁶*Life As We Have Known It* has 'these pages are only fragments' (p. xxxxi).

a collection of critical essays by various writers [...] articles by the tolerably young' (CDB, 114); the former to venture into poetry reviewing, which she admitted somewhat jokingly to her nephew Julian Bell, a young contemporary poet, even though 'I so much reverence poetry [...] I cant judge it' (L4, 169). To judge it, and to give her verdict on the prose works of the 'advancing and victorious hordes of youth' (CDB, 115), even though Woolf admits quite disingenuously that she has not read them, requires the same sort of defensive and offensive manoeuvre as practised in *Life As We Have Known It*.

In both 'A Letter to a Young Poet' and 'All About Books', Woolf writes a letter in response to a previous one. In 'Young Poet' the 'letter stuffed with little blue sheets written all over in a cramped but not illegible hand' (HL, 213) — a highly symbolic characteristic if one is to consider the poetry it writes — which arrived in that morning's post, asks the unsigned recipient, among many things, to 'do write and tell me where poetry's going, or if it's dead?' (HL, 215). Writing to 'My Dear John', Woolf does not let the letter as formal device itself construct her as an uneducated 'common reader', but makes the role apparent by including in her letter a paragraph of self-description, which is generated by the letter she has received. Dear John is, according to Woolf's reconstruction of his letter in her own, 'intimate, irreticent, indiscreet in the extreme' (HL, 214); Virginia Woolf, therefore, can respond to such a correspondent in exactly the same way without the risk of appearing ridiculous. If he

stands as the model of a letter writer, then Woolf can be equally 'intimate' and 'irreticent' with no fear of being condemned for her effusion. So she responds to John by fecklessly avowing that 'before I begin, I must own up to those defects, both natural and acquired, which, as you will find, distort and invalidate all that I have to say about poetry' (HL, 215). Her defects are twofold — she lacks a 'sound university training' which makes it 'impossible' for her to 'distinguish between an iambic and a dactyl', and she is a prose writer, which 'has bred in me, as in most prose writers, a foolish jealousy, a righteous indignation — anyhow, an emotion which the critic should be without' (HL, 215). The contents of the letter, therefore, establish the writer as someone who is completely unqualified for her task; the choice of the letter format reinforces it. Critical discourse on the important topic of poetry and its death is not likely to be found in a letter, especially when written by someone who admits to 'run[ning] on, nonsensically enough' (HL, 216).

The critic-essayist is now reborn as the common correspondent, and having established her tendency to nonsense, Woolf can proceed with her reply with no qualms. 'Now that I have made a clean breast of these deficiencies', she writes, 'let us proceed' (HL, 216). She can proceed in whatever manner she desires having, by dint of the framing device of the letter, which admits of anything, and her own 'deficiencies' as a correspondent, her absolute freedom to write. The advantage of the form, as Woolf wrote to

Ottoline Morrell, is that 'when one is writing a letter, the whole point is to rush ahead; and anything may come out of the spout of the tea pot' (L5, 98). Anything may come out, but what do emerge are usually the sentiments required to be contained by the tea-table decorum maintained by more traditional journalism and reviewing. When writing 'All About Books' Virginia Woolf, does not retreat into the measured evasions of 'Preferences', (an article similarly based on recent publications), where she makes very few direct statements as to what books 'have interested me during the past winter' (E4, 542). In 'Preferences', she concludes by failing to conclude, feeling that 'as I look through the crowded lists [...] how likely it is that in the press and scuffle the book I should most have enjoyed has been trampled under foot and will only be found reprinted when "I have lain for centuries dead"' (E4, 543). In 'All About Books', however, Woolf advances instead into the self created persona of the letter writer.

In 'All About Books', the essayist receives a request for a 'long, long letter about books' and in reply promises to 'scribble for an hour or two whatever comes into my head about books' (CDB, 112). She does so only on condition that the unnamed, ungendered and undescribed fictional reader of the letter realises that 'a long, long letter is apt to be exaggerated, inaccurate, and full of those irreticences and hyperboles which the voice of the speaker corrects in talk' (CDB, 112). In addition, the reader should recognise that 'a letter is not a review; it is not a considered judgement', and this one

will only be written 'on condition you do not believe a word I say' (CDB, 112). Under these circumstances the reviewer, who is now reconstructed by virtue of the letter as a mere correspondent, can say what she pleases about the horrors of learning English Literature at University and the detrimental effect that this has on modern prose. She does so from a position of relative security, because, through the ruse of having to tell her correspondent all about books, Woolf establishes her credibility and erudition as a member of the older generation, discussing the classics, superficially but amusingly, as one would expect in a private letter. This done, confirming her independence and her ability to comment, she has set up the best possible situation by which to undermine the credibility of the scrutineers. Where she is a free and private individual writing on literature, they are a 'troop' of followers, who 'all march in step' (CDB, 115) behind their professors, writing a loveless prose. Where is the 'voice speaking from the heart?' (CDB, 117) asks the essayist, doing just that in her own letter.

The letter gives her the grounding necessary to attack this 'fatal defect' in modern prose (CDB, 115), allowing her to create herself as elderly fireside reader with a tendency to literary outrage, something she could not indulge as a sober and even-handed reviewer, who would quite likely have been educated in the very manner she condemns. Being self-constructed as a correspondent also allows her to avoid the consequences of expressing her opinions, since 'that this is all nonsense I am well

aware. But what else can you expect in a letter?' (CDB, 117). The responsibility for writing is denied, for the prose has been generated, not by the reviewer's critical examination of the book, but the casual letter writer's perusal of the contents' page. Ultimately, even the imperative to read the book is abandoned, for in the last sentence of the essay the reader on the mountain top (CDB, 112) and her more down to earth companions discover that while 'the time has come to open Scrutinies and begin to read', the correspondent is free to choose another course of action not open to the reviewer and declare that 'no, the time has come to rake out the cinders and go to bed' (CDB, 117).

Constructing herself in opposition to the friend in high places and the foe grubbing about on the plains beneath, yet never actually situating herself in a fixed position, Woolf achieves the status of geographical outsider, without actually being outside language. The letter ends with sleep, and ends unsigned. The conclusion is not absolute and the identity of the writer remains unspecified. Similarly, in 'Young Poet', the letter ends with dots, and though the pamphlet itself was issued under Virginia Woolf's signature and the letter generated a reply, 'A Letter to Mrs Virginia Woolf' by Peter Quennell, the text remains unsigned. The only other two letters in the Hogarth Press series to remain unsigned were Rosamond Lehmann's 'Letter to a Sister', dealing with what life and identity mean to a woman, and Louis Golding's 'A Letter to Adolf Hitler', dealing with anti-Semitism. Both are, in a sense, outsiders, and

rather than be constructed by a named identity beyond their control, manage their own births by letting their identity be created by the letter.³⁷

This identity is purely relational and suited to the immediate task under review. The letter, as Woolf wrote, 'should be as a film of wax pressed close to the graving in the mind' (L1, 282), but when that mind is in flight then the letter too must become airborne. It may be, as Woolf wrote to John Lehmann, 'a bad form for criticism, because it seems to invite archness and playfulness, and when one has done being playful the times up and there's no room for more' (L5, 83), but it was also productive, as she wrote when contemplating the form *Three Guineas* was to take, because 'after all separate letters break continuity so ...' (D5, 18). It was therefore entirely appropriate when writing an essay dealing with the ideological continuity of patriarchy with Fascism, connecting the continuity of that ideology over time with the formality and critical rigidity of its intellectual approach as one specifically lacking room for play, and advocating the necessity of constructing not only the 'position' of an outsider, but an 'Outsider's Society' (TG, 309), to couch that essay in the form of three letters. *Three Guineas*, at one point entitled *Answers to Correspondents*,³⁸ takes the basic principles of the letter format, and dialogue and exchange, and manipulates them to a potentially incendiary extent. Virginia Woolf

³⁷Quennell (HL, 327-46); Lehmann (HL, 65-78); Golding (HL, 301-24)

³⁸It was also, at one point, called *On Being Despised*, which establishes it in the tradition of the 'On ...' of the essay

wrote that in collecting material for the essay she had gathered enough powder to blow up St Paul's (D4, 77), and in shaping and arranging that material she did as much to disrupt the architecture of the traditional essay and the Pauline view of women as was possible in a book that was 'meant to stir, not to charm; to suggest; not to conclude' (L6, 199).

It stirred, and suggested, and did not succumb to the authoritarianism latent in concluding, by avoiding the limitations of a single, unified perspective.³⁹ If, as Woolf said, she was different people when writing to different correspondents, in *Three Guineas* she is utterly various and multiform. She replies to three correspondents: the man who asks for a advice on 'how we are to help [him] prevent war' (TG, 157), the treasurer of a women's college asking for funds, and another honorary treasurer requesting a subscription to support a society helping professional women to gain employment. She is able to construct herself, temporarily, against the first correspondent, as she did in 'Young Poet' and 'All About Books', by describing him, 'draw[ing] what all letter-writers

³⁹Critics have commented on Woolf's search for an anti-authoritarian aesthetic in *Three Guineas* and *The Years*. Alex Zwerdling, in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986) investigates Woolf's search for a form that would allow her to express her feelings without becoming a polemicist (p. 268); Margaret Comstock, in 'The Loudspeaker and the Human Voice: Politics and the Form of *The Years*', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 80 (1977), 252-75, sees the lack of a central figure in *The Years* as indicative of an anti-Fascist form; and Judith L. Johnston, 'The Remediable Flaw: Revisioning Cultural History in *Between the Acts*', in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1987) suggests that Woolf advocates polyvocality to avoid authoritarianism.

instinctively draw, a sketch of the person to whom the letter is addressed' (TG, 153-4), and asserting her difference from that figure. The 'You [...] who ask[s] the question' (TG, 154) is the son of an educated man, and works at the Bar; 'we' who answer it, are the 'educated man's daughter'; his relative, but no relation at all to him in terms of power. But 'we' are more than this. Through quotation, through dialogue with other voices in the three guineas of the text, in the notes and references and through the photographs, both printed and described, the 'we' of the essayist achieves a subjectivity independent from her brothers'. She is no longer object to his subject, but dialogically a subject. By the time she writes the last words of *Three Guineas* — a quotation from Georges Sand — she is a woman rewriting, but not translating the words of a woman writing as a man. Subjectivity is redefined:

Toutes les existences sont solidaires les unes des autres, et tout être humain qui présenterait la sienne isolément, sans la rattacher à celle de ses semblables, n'offrirait qu'une énigme à débrouiller ... Cette individualité n'a pas elle seule ni signification ni importance aucune. Elle ne prend un sens quelconque qu'en devenant une parcelle de la vie générale, en se fondant avec l'individualité de chacun de mes semblables, et c'est par là qu'elle devient de l'histoire.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Everything which exists is connected one to the others, and every human being who presents her own existence in isolation, without attaching to it the existence of others like herself, offers nothing but an enigma to untangle This individuality in itself alone has neither signification nor importance. It takes on meaning only in becoming a part of the general life, in fusing with the individuality of every one of my kind, and it is thus that one becomes part of history'. Translation taken from Berenice A. Carroll, "'To Crush Him in Our

Three Guineas reveals a subjectivity created through language and through the essay, but in a manner which evades the gendered and restrictive biases of a subjectivity created by traditional discourse.

So, although the essayist in *Three Guineas* is historically located in a specific time period, the 1930s during the rise of Fascism and the Spanish Civil War, she is not restricted in her location within the text. Within *Three Guineas* the prose moves from letter to letter, from reader to writer, from text to text, from text to footnotes, from text to quotation, from text to picture, from picture to picture, from language to language, from past to present to future. Nor is the movement unidirectional. The repetition of Mary Kingsley's quote, a woman whom the essayist asks to 'speak for us' — 'I don't know if I ever revealed to you the fact that being allowed to learn German was *all* the paid-for education I ever had' (TG, 155) — and the continual return to the original correspondent after endless digressions, means that *Three Guineas* defies linear narrative and creates its own narrative space, rather than establish a narrative direction and boundaries.⁴¹

The essayist defines herself against the women whom she quotes, against Virginia Woolf the novelist and essayist, phrases

Own Country": The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf', *Feminist Studies*, 4 (1978), p. 122

⁴¹Brenda R. Silver, in 'The Authority of Anger: *Three Guineas* as Case Study', *Signs*, 16 (1990-1), 340-70, notes the presence of dialogues within dialogues, and the ongoing narrative, as correspondents responded to the text by writing to Woolf, and Woolf responded by writing 'Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid'.

from whose works appear, unmarked, within *Three Guineas*, and against other writers who have written feminist essays or tracts.⁴² Her technique is 'to sum up these random hints and reflections upon the professional life of women in the nineteenth century by quoting once more the highly significant words' of Mary Kingsley and then declare that because

that statement is so suggestive [...] it may save us the bother of groping and searching between the lines of professional men's lives for the lives of their sister. If we develop the suggestion we find in that statement and connect it with the other fragments that we have uncovered, we may arrive at some theory or point of view that may help us to answer the very difficult question, which now confronts us (TG, 266).

By being mobile and dialogic readers, something we are manipulated into being by the state of the text, we may arrive at a theoretical conclusion, but a conclusion that is not universally applicable, because it is only reached in response to a specific question, 'for this letter would never have been written had you not asked for an answer to your own' (TG, 367). And because the response to the question is achieved through biography, and 'biography is many-sided; biography never returns a single and simple answer to any question that is asked of it' (TG, 268), the truth we arrive at is multiple as well as relational. We are in the realm of the three dots, the space of 'some hesitation, some doubt' (TG, 210), the gap between one voice and the next, the limbo between

⁴²See the references to Crosby, from *The Years* in (TG, 344) and the paraphrasing of the white light of truth from *A Room of One's Own* (TG, 217)

a letter written and a letter received, when meaning is in transit, the 'gulf — of silence' (TG, 331).⁴³

(ii) The Conversation: 'Words, after speech, reach/Into the silence'.⁴⁴

The gulf of silence is to be crossed by voices, by 'a voice speaking; another answering'; the 'detail of the pattern is movement' as Eliot wrote in *Four Quartets*.⁴⁵ The 'co-existence' of those voices could be conveyed indirectly by the letter, indeed the unsympathetic Q.D. Leavis saw *Three Guineas* as a 'hypertrophied conversation piece', or more straightforwardly by directly represented conversation.⁴⁶ Quite possibly, in fact, as Woolf discovered when writing an essay on Hazlitt, writing a good essay automatically involved writing in a conversational manner. 'And yet the essay brings this compensation', wrote Woolf in the draft of this essay, 'write as Hazlitt wrote fearlessly & independently, take no thought of the impression you make, of the indiscretions you commit, & then you [...] by degrees writing takes on the quality of talk'.⁴⁷ The conversation was a form Woolf used in a number of essays ('A Talk About Memoirs', 'Mr Conrad: A Conversation' and

⁴³Jane Marcus identifies the dots as relating specifically to lesbian sexuality: 'Dot dot dot is a female code for lesbian love'. See *The Languages of Patriarchy*, p. 169

⁴⁴'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets* in T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1974), p. 194

⁴⁵ibid, p. 195

⁴⁶Q.D. Leavis, 'Caterpillars of the Commonwealth Unite!' *Scrutiny*, 7 (1938-9), p. 211

⁴⁷Berg, M.1. 3, p. 157

'Walter Sickert: A Conversation') and one to which she returned again and again in trying to establish a shape and a theory for her critical essays.

As with the letter, the choice of 'talk' as a form for the essay was in no way original to Woolf or to her particular era. Nonetheless, as Edward Hungerford asserts, she did promulgate a 'sub-genre of the essay', the conversation piece, in the essays she chose to write as dialogues.⁴⁸ Her experimentation with the format, moreover, was not limited by homage to the tradition of the essay as dialogue, one long and well recognised. Plato's *Dialogues* have been acknowledged as a source for the essay — Lukacs called Plato 'the greatest essayist who ever lived or wrote';⁴⁹ William Hazlitt published his collected essays as *Table Talk*; and in the 1890s Oscar Wilde wrote a number of critical dialogues, notably 'The Decay of Lying' and 'The Critic as Artist'.⁵⁰ And whilst the history of the essay reveals its strong links with conversation, various publications of Woolf's acquaintances ensured that the potential of the form — achieved or thwarted — was kept fresh in her mind. Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson wrote 'Platonic dialogues, about law society the soul, duty, love, work etc' (L4, 356) and Woolf was reading their mutual friend Bob Trevelyan's dialogues whilst completing 'Walter Sickert'. Dickinson's style, however, was 'mechanical [...] the mould

⁴⁸Edward A. Hungerford, 'Is "A Society" A Short Story?', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 21 (1983), p. 3

⁴⁹Lukacs, p. 13

⁵⁰Published in *Intentions*, 1891

made in Greece' (D4, 30), and as Woolf wrote to Trevelyan when reading his stories composed in the dialogue form,

I am always rather bothered by it. If you bring in people, then I want to know quantities of things about them, and here, of course, as you use them, they are kept severely to the rails. Hence, perhaps, what I used to feel with Goldies' dialogues — something too restricted, too formed (L5, 293).⁵¹

Dialogue, she realised, could be mismanaged, but it was integral to her view of good criticism. As she wrote in her 1917 review of Arnold Bennett's *Books and Persons*, 'there are two kinds of criticism — the written and the spoken' (E2, 128), a statement she later followed up by asserting the superiority of the latter, declaring that 'the things that are said are so much better than the things that are written' (E3, 115). In short, 'the only criticism worth having at present is that which is spoken not written' (E4, 260). Spoken criticism allows people to '[flash] out' opinions on 'the spur of the moment', without any necessity to 'finish their sentences, let alone consider the dues of editors or the feelings of friends' (E4, 260). It gives the opportunity to register 'violent disagreement', and from that conflict derives the 'worth of the criticism' which lies 'not so much in the accuracy of each blow as in the heat it engenders' (E4, 260-1). Spoken criticism allows meaning and judgement to be

⁵¹E. M. Forster, in his biography *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson and related writings*, Abinger Edition (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), acknowledges that Dickinson's conversing personages are 'never coloured vividly' (p. 90) but asserts that 'the dialogue form [...] exactly suited his genius', in that 'it allowed him to assemble opinions and [...] to tint them' (p. 90); 'his business was the argument' (p. 91).

specific to the occasion on which it is delivered, it allows meaning to resonate beyond the text, as the reader completes the half-finished sentences, and it directs the reader by its very form to engage in a critical dialogue with the text.⁵²

But criticism as talk does not leave Woolf, as literary critic, utterly absent from the picture. She maintains a degree of authorial control by directing the reader through the depiction of the speaking characters, and the manner of reporting their conversations. She wondered about the people in Dickinson's dialogues; how she characterises and how she genders her own people serves to direct our wandering. The 'trouble' with the form that she anticipated in 'Landor in Little' (1919), that dialogue writers 'are always holding dialogues with themselves' (E3, 111), she turns to advantage in her own essays, allowing the dialogue to create the self.

The dialogue form, according to Bill Handley, 'preserves the freedom of the soul', but although he links the 'multi-voiced structure [as] anti-authoritarian aesthetics' to Woolf's feminism, as 'an aesthetic which liberates the plural self', he abjures an explanation of the creative potential of the dialogue and ignores its relation to Woolf's essays, preferring as most critics do, to depend upon the fiction for expository examples.⁵³ 'Conversation and the

⁵²See Chapter Six for more on the role of the reader.

⁵³Bill Handley, 'Virginia Woolf and Fyodor Dostoevsky: Can Modernism Have Soul?' *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 31 (1988), pp. 3-4

Common Reader', however, as Beth C. Rosenberg has recently pointed out, are intimately linked.⁵⁴ The common reader, she argues, is 'a rhetorical function rather than a persona' and the key to this function is Woolf's concept of 'conversation and dialogue'. Dialogue is, 'as a method for constructing knowledge [...] not fixed or static, but fluid, decentered, and process oriented [...] anti-authoritarian and non-didactic, unsystematic and constantly changing with each interaction'.⁵⁵ The only difference between this outline and a description of the essay is the word 'decentered'. The essay is 'centred in a self' (E4, 162), but the essay rewritten as conversation enjoys all the benefits Rosenberg lists: an 'open-ended invitational quality', and the ability to construct and interpret.⁵⁶ Dialogue does reveal aspects of Woolf's 'theory of language', but Rosenberg does not reveal how this theory is linked to the issue of constructing a self — a new kind of gendered self — in language, nor how it is provoked by generic factors.⁵⁷

By having characters speak in the first person in the essay, Woolf maintains the genre's links with the writing of subjectivity, and highlights the presence of the speaking subject. By having characters presented dramatically through dialogue she also, as Jane

⁵⁴'Virginia Woolf: Conversation and the Common Reader', in *Virginia Woolf Miscellanies: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow-Turk (New York: Pace University Press, 1992), 1-8

⁵⁵Rosenberg, p. 2

⁵⁶ibid

⁵⁷Rosenberg, p. 7

Wheare points out in reference to the dramatically presented characters in the novels, makes her readers more willing to accept her opinions, for

one responds to the fictional characters as if they were real people, and in so doing becomes extremely receptive to the points of view which Woolf embodies in their narrative.⁵⁸

But by having multiple and created 'I's within the essay, Virginia Woolf breaks the tradition of a unified, and therefore gendered writing subjectivity. As with the letter, her own subject position is created reflectively and metaphorically through the relationship between the created characters, expressing their views within the essay, and between the whole reader/writer/speaker/s relationship; which glances backwards to the tradition of the essay by using the dialogue, and forward to a 'new critical method' and a new theory of subjectivity by writing it as conversation.

The first step Woolf took towards using the dialogue as a format for the essay came in 'A Talk About Memoirs' (1920), a signed review in the *New Statesman* of five books of memoirs. It differs from all of her later efforts at dialogue in that it has no introduction, no scene setting, and no attempt to describe the characters. It merely begins:

Judith: I wonder — shall I give my bird a real beak, or an orange one? Whatever they may say, silks have been ruined by the war. But

⁵⁸Virginia Woolf: *Dramatic Novelist* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 3

what are you looking behind the curtain for?

Ann: There is no gentleman present? (E3, 180)

It is a startling opening, even by the standards of Virginia Woolf's other articles in the *New Statesman* for that year.⁵⁹ The inclusion of three questions, birds, silks and war, women sewing and an absence of men in four sentences does not seem a natural combination, especially when considering the *Recollections* of Lady Georgiana Peel, or *John Porter of Kingsclere: An autobiography ...* written in collaboration with Edward Moorhouse, author of 'The History and Romance of the Derby,' or the traditional form of the dialogue with its cast of male speakers. The exclusively female domestic setting of 'A Talk', serves to repoliticise the dialogue, and the essay which encloses it. Woolf subverts the Socratic dialogue,⁶⁰ for here we have not the exclusively male-voiced dialogue which typifies the history of the form, but an exclusively female conversation — the usually sneered upon 'gossip' elevated into the essay. The ease and self-sufficiency of women speaking without men in 'A Talk' is echoed by the all female discussion group featured in 'A Society', written six months after 'A Talk About Memoirs', provoked by the views advocated in the paper which published that essay, and also, quite possibly, inspired by Vanessa Bell's painting 'The Conversation', which depicts three women talking in a closed and intimate circle.⁶¹ 'A Society' was published by Woolf as a short story but could quite

⁵⁹See E3

⁶⁰Ruddick, p. 157

⁶¹See Diane Filby Gillespie, *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), pp. 109-113

easily be deemed an essay, the crossover between fact and fiction being one of the techniques Woolf employed in reworking the essay genre.⁶²

Reworking the genre, however, also involved reworking the essay collection, a literary form that, as it stood in the early twentieth century, Woolf felt was in need of rejuvenation. The 'collection of articles' was, in her view, 'an inartistic method'; something was needed to 'shape the book' (D2, 261). The book in question when Woolf wrote these remarks was the first *Common Reader*, but during her lifetime Woolf published two collections of her critical essays, *The Common Reader*, First and Second Series, and one proposed book 'Phases of Fiction', which ended up, after certain traumas of composition, as a published essay collection of its own: one essay, comprised of an introductory section and six smaller essays. But the drafts of 'Phases' were also used as the basis for future critical ventures, and it is these brief and tentative attempts at critical innovations that will be discussed here. The question of shape applied equally to all three collections, and all three flirted with the notion of dialogue to enclose the whole. All three, however, eventually rejected the overt use of dramatised characters speaking, contemplated at draft stage and represented in manuscript, but

⁶²One can see this crossover at work in other essayists, George Orwell, for instance, in 'Shooting an Elephant', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, volume 1, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 235-42. The difference between Woolf and these writers is her overt demonstration of the shift from a language of fact to a language of fiction — her self-conscious foregrounding of 'story-telling'.

retained a new dialogue of sorts within the texts of certain essays and within the collection, as numerous essays 'spoke' to each other, the original notion of dialogue as a cohesive shaping factor reveals the potential of the device for contemplating and constructing the new, in writing criticism and the self.

After 'A Talk', Woolf began preparing her first collection of essays, and, while 'wondering how to shape my Reading book' (D2, 120), began contemplating the potential of the essay genre. When going to 'tackle those old essays of mine' for the *Common Reader*, Woolf declared,

Courage & decision are my need, I think — to speak out, without mincing. At the moment I feel myself fairly [sic] free of foreign influence: Eliot, or whoever it might be: & this I must prize, for unless I am myself, I am nobody (D2, 259).

Later in the same diary entry her confidence leads to the decision that 'for plans, I have immediately to write a dialogue upon Conrad'. In an earlier draft of the introduction for the *Common Reader*, 'Byron and Mr Briggs', Woolf had already experimented with the use of dialogue, using characters from her novels to comment on criticism, with the reviewer then analysing their commentary. Before this essay was abandoned, the essayist concludes that criticism as dialogue reveals that 'though we have found no method, the fact seems to emerge that the writers of England and the readers of England are necessary to each other. They cannot live apart. They must for ever be engaged in intercourse' (E3, 499).

Although this intercourse failed to produce any offspring in terms of the actual essay ('Byron and Mr Briggs' remained unpublished during Woolf's lifetime) the principle of dialogue was retained in later attempts to regenerate the essay collection. The writer/reader relationship remained central to Woolf's non-fiction throughout her career.

The essay on Conrad, for instance, was to prove most productive in terms of Woolf's experimentation with dialogue. It allowed her to get closer to herself, something that was under threat when she first contemplated announcing herself to the world as an essayist. Now,

the brilliant idea has just come to me of embedding them [her collected essays] in Otway conversation. The main advantage would be that I could then comment, & add what I had^{had} to leave out, or failed to get in [...] this might be too artistic: it might run away with me; it will take time. Nevertheless I should very much enjoy it. I should graze nearer my own individuality. I should mitigate the pomposity & sweep in all sorts of trifles. I think I should feel more at my ease (D2, 261).

The Otway conversation referred to as the inspiration and spark was the method devised and executed in 'Mr Conrad: A Conversation'.

In this essay, Woolf creates two characters, Penelope Otway and David Lowe. The Otways were characters in *Night and Day*, and Penelope, though not one of the Otway family described in that

novel is a character whose name resounds suggestively. David Lowe's surname may also bear a more literal descriptive significance, but more significant than the implications of nomenclature are the critical positions each adopt in the essay, and the critical angle each represents. Both, as opposed to the primarily one-dimensional characters in 'A Talk', are well-depicted. Penelope Otway is 'the oldest unmarried daughter', who has 'always, since the age of seven, been engaged in reading the classics' (E3, 376). As the unnamed narrator wryly observes 'that education it could be called, no-one nowadays would admit'. But it is Miss Otway who advances a theory in this essay, contrary to her defective education and in spite of her self-deprecating excuse that 'my theory is made of cobwebs' (E3, 377). Conrad, according to her theory, 'is not one and simple; no, he is many and complex' (E3, 377). If, indeed, he is complex, then debate between two characters with differing views is the perfect form of criticism. In addition, if the subject of the essay is mirrored by the form of the essay, that process of reflection may, in turn, be read outwards to create a subjectivity for the writer of the essay. If a writer (Conrad in this instance) does not have to be 'one and simple' then the writer as essayist does not either, and can enter the newly conceived 'essay as conversation' as just another speaking subject.

David Lowe objects to Conrad on the grounds that he is 'an elderly and disillusioned nightingale singing over and over, but hopelessly out of tune the one song he had learnt in youth' (E3,

376), objections which resemble Woolf's own, which she stated in her diary — he 'withdraws^{more & more} into what he once did well, only piles it on higher ~~&~~ higher' (D2, 49) — and struggled to express in her *Times Literary Supplement* essay on Conrad, 'A Disillusioned Romantic' (1920). It was a struggle, not only because of the sober propriety of the *Times Literary Supplement*, but because Woolf found it 'painful (a little) to find fault [...] where almost solely, one respects' (D2, 49). By separating her opposing views and attributing them to separate but equally fictional characters, Woolf aired her reservations and contradictions without hindrance and without the need to form a fixed conclusion. Meanwhile, the dialogue allows for personality and immediacy, but not a limited authorial 'I' restricted to a pre-determined role as reviewer, as essayist, or as woman, someone who is a victim of limited education and a circumscribed existence.

'Happily, the dialogue form gives one room for such diversions from the predetermined' (L5, 313), as Virginia Woolf wrote to the editor of the *Yale Review* when submitting 'Walter Sickert: A Conversation'. The diversions, in this case, were an extra paragraph to make the essay more accessible to the American audience. The diversions could include the divergence from the critical norm implied by having two young women pronounce on memoirs, or an ill-educated spinster on the genius of Conrad, or a novelist and essayist, 'who as a writer is an alien', on the art of a painter. When asked by Sickert to 'do [him] a serious service' and 'write on this

closing exhibition',⁶³ Virginia Woolf encountered a crisis of confidence generated by her sense of unfamiliarity with the merits of artists: even though she thought his works 'all that painting ought to be', recognised art critics like Roger Fry and Clive Bell were 'rather down on it' (L5, 254). This uncertainty about her ability to write on art coincides with difficulties she was encountering with the form of the essay: 'so why go on with these essays? Why not invent a new method?' (D4, 194), and with her sense of subjectivity in general:

I think I've got rid of vanity: of Virginia. Oh what a riddance. I've not read an article on me by a man called Peel in the Criterion. I feel this a great liberation. Then I need not be that self. Then I can be entirely private (D4, 191).

When she came to write on Sickert, then, she chose the conversation format, ensuring that matters of writing, subjectivity and genre could be intertwined.⁶⁴ Questioning the centres of art, the self and the essay, she made her speakers 'outsiders, condemned for ever to haunt the borders and margins of this great art' (CDB, 176), but from their vantage point able to enjoy all the freedom of Outsiders.⁶⁵ As dwellers on the margins looking in on the silent world of art, 'trained not to see but to talk' (CDB, 175), the nameless speakers can let talk, 'which runs hither and thither, seldom sticks

⁶³MHP, letter, no date.

⁶⁴Originally the essay was to have opened with direct speech: 'I am a literary painter, & so are all painters of any excellence', Berg, M.1. 7, p. 1

⁶⁵See *Three Guineas*

to the point, abounds in exaggeration and inaccuracy' (CDB, 172), attempt to 'dally on the verge' (CDB, 181) of conveying a truth about painting, and, by implication, on other matters. Sickert had wanted to be portrayed as a 'literary painter' (CDB, 184), and felt that Woolf's essay had given him 'the only criticism worth having in all his life' (L5, 282), an achievement which was enabled by the essay in the form of the conversation, with its references to literature in the sentences of the speakers and the ability to focus on words rather than images. A sense of the subjectivity of the essayist's vision is not lost, as the essay opens with a specific setting — a Platonic style dinner party set in modern London — an unnamed narrator who selects what talk we shall hear, and the talkers. But the subjectivity is multiple and we hear the speaking voices only after a process of splitting, from the narrator to the conversational groups, to the unnamed and gender neutral individuals within one group whose conversation is heard in relative isolation but with the knowledge that it takes place against the conversation of the other diners. None has any real priority and any verdict on art is achieved through the dialogue through a mosaic of speakers and eventually between the dialogue between words and the ultimate silence of art.

'Walter Sickert: A Conversation', though a success in terms of its potential to reveal a new means of expressing a new sense of subjectivity within the essay was, unfortunately, a critical failure amongst Woolf's acquaintances. It failed to provoke the ongoing

conversation, the continued dialogue, which would prove the practical success of the method. Woolf wrote, with some dismay, 'Sickert I rather gather a failure: silence descends on that little flurry' (D4, 257). Its fate was similar to 'Mr Conrad', whose reception had been 'purely negative — No one has mentioned it'; a situation which left Woolf 'slightly dashed by the reception' (D2, 265). The inability of these essayistic conversations to generate a response from her circle of approved readers — one of the aims of the technique — may have led Woolf to discard the dialogue as the shaping device for her essay collections, but it did not prevent her from continuing to experiment with the conversation. Even though the concept of conversation or dialogue was not entirely omitted from the *Common Readers* or the published version of 'Phases of Fiction', the original conception of the essay collection, as revealed by the manuscript drafts, was much more specifically dialogic, and was indeed a move toward that new criticism Woolf was forever trying to achieve, and which she revisited in the revisions of 'Phases of Fiction'.

The first *Common Reader* was, as Woolf mentioned in her diary when beginning Conrad, to be 'embedded in Otway conversation'; the second original essay for the *Second Common Reader*, 'Donne After Three Centuries', was to be 'put in the mouth of Mary Bickley, an obscure woman 1845. her diary',⁶⁶ but the revision

⁶⁶Brenda Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 222

of 'Phases of Fiction', conducted around 1934, involved the entire rewriting of one section as 'a dialogue, in a hotel on the Mediterranean: each chapter to correspond with the period. Thus to rob it of formality', and another as a 'story' of a day's walk — returning to that intermixture of fact and fiction that Woolf found such a productive combination when writing essays.⁶⁷ The new dialogue form for 'Phases of Fiction' was to be 'a discourse for 4 voices/ Realism/ Romance/ Psychology/ Poetry'. The drafts of Chapter Two which remain show two people speaking in the bedroom of an hotel room, talking about Maupassant in passages typographically reminiscent of Joyce's rendition of the elision of speech and thought in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Each speaker's statement is introduced by a double dash '--' and there are no inverted commas. After the opening pages, however, the dialogue turns into a virtual monologue with one voice dominating, but lest the effect be lost the other speaker returns.

Even in the extended passages of one voice, however, that voice does not revert to the usual critical personality of the traditional essayist. The speaker instead spells out the reading process produced by biography in general but in fact by the essay, and invents a character called Michael Broom to illustrate the argument of the essay and show how it should be read. So the single speaker, describing the biographer, states that

⁶⁷All further quotations from this draft are taken from MHP, B. 7 c) & e)

It would seem to show that a biography is never complete in itself. It has to be re-made, supplemented [sic]. It does no more than supply the reader with a box of bricks which he has to make into a building.

As a character him or herself, the speaker is one of the bricks given by the author of 'Phases of Fiction' to the reader, and as a speaking character he/she embodies one of the tenets that he explains:

part of the vitality of [Boswell's] Johnson is due to his use of spoken words; to his making people come in and out of the room and talk; so that our own imaginations are stimulated and we go on making up after the actual words are over.

Here, then, is the principle of the use of dialogue in the essay with the essay as dialogue enacting what it advises. It does so through commentary on Maupassant which leads to a discussion on biography, talk of literature leading to talk of biography, or 'figure making' in prose, which is essentially the domain and practice of the essay.

(iii) Fact and Fiction: 'I'm telling you stories. Trust me'.⁶⁸

Moving easily from one topic to another, related one, from one speaker to another, achieves what Woolf wanted the essay-novel to achieve: 'to take in everything [...] & come, with the most powerful & agile leaps, like a chamois across precipices' (D4, 129). This leaping chamois, whose power is evident when it traverses the gap between

⁶⁸Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 13 and passim

cliffs, was brought to mind by the original concept of *The Pargiters*, a book that was designed to renegotiate the exclusivities of genre and gender. It was to be a combination of fact and fiction, the two laid side by side in the one book, and it was to deal with 'everything' about women, including their hitherto repressed sexual lives. *The Pargiters*, as it was originally conceived, was not finished, and the drafts were only published well after Woolf's death.

The interrelationship of fact, fiction and subjectivity arose, too, in the new draft of 'Phases of Fiction', another victim of aborted interest and now only available in unpublished manuscript drafts. This revision of 'Phases' meanders into a discussion on biography by two fictional speakers, with the question of biography leading one of the speakers to muse on the enslavement of the biographer to fact.⁶⁹ The options available to free him from generic rigidity and self-expressive restraint — which Woolf was to take up when freeing herself from the rigidity of the traditional essay — are twofold. Firstly 'he might divide up the two elements; He might produce a book like the Loeb classics, with facts on one side of the page, fiction on the other" a manoeuvre Woolf undertook in the abandoned *Pargiters*. Or, secondly, he might write a life

only on condition that you give me all the facts known to you; and then allow me complete liberty in the use to tell the truth about them; that is imagine, invent, create to give effect to all those facts breed in me.

⁶⁹All further quotations from this draft are taken from MHP, B. 7 c) & e)

This Woolf was to do regularly in her so-called biographical essays, essays that centre on a character, either overtly fictional or primarily historio-biographical.

A dialogue between fact and fiction involves the collision of the two voices that illuminate the darkness; it involves the oscillation in, and traversal of, the gap between presumed bi-polar opposites, letting one pole temporarily merge with the other, and refusing to affirm the absolute boundaries of either. Imagining and inventing a 'real' life, or giving a fictional life the authority of speech of a 'realist' role, provides an overt demonstration of the writer as creator, with a plenitude of implications for the creation of subjectivity. The character/s may be a mirror for the essayist, creating her as author as she creates them in the text, a persona for the essayist as she creates a role for herself in genre that would otherwise exclude her, or an example of the permeable nature of generic boundaries and binary oppositions, a revelation that undermines the premise of the writing of subjectivity expressed in the essay genre. Telling stories and creating real and fictive individuals, then, characterises the formal conditions of a number of Woolf's essays, and the underlying principles of the creation of a gendered subjectivity that Woolf's practice of the essay revealed.

As with the chamois leaping from fact to fiction, the essayist proves her agility and power through movement, through process, but where the chamois leaps, the essayist walks, or, appropriate to

this modern age, travels on a metaphoric train or aeroplane.⁷⁰ The essayist as perambulator, a traditional pose in existence since Johnson's *Rambler* and adopted on many occasions by Woolf, expatiates upon the relationship of identity to movement in 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure'. 'Am I here, or am I there', she asks,

or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience sake a man must be a whole (DoM, 24).

Walking and reading, the two occupations of the essayist that Woolf often combines in her portraits of the essayist as reader, are reminiscent of the mobility of conversation, of dialogue where:

one is forced to glimpse and nod and move on after a moment of talk, a flash of understanding, as, in the street outside, one catches a word in passing and from a chance phrase fabricates a lifetime.⁷¹(DoM, 26)

From the varied wandering from fact to fiction, and in the fabrication of character, the essay, as refigured by Woolf, escapes its tendency to impose a 'sentence' on the woman writer that is 'like

⁷⁰See Rachel Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* and Gillian Beer, 'The island and the aeroplane: the case of Virginia Woolf', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 255-90

⁷¹See Rachel Bowlby, 'Walking, women and writing: Virginia Woolf as flaneuse', in *New Feminist Discourse: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong (London and New York: Routledge, 1992)

hard little stones unrealised, useless, barren' and instead gives birth to one that is itself 'fertile'.⁷²

The essays in which Woolf works out this combination of fact and fiction and character creation are, ironically enough, essays that began their lives as actual spoken pieces, as lectures given to audiences in a University environment — *The Pargiters*, *A Room of One's Own* and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'.⁷³ In the latter two she opens with the traditional speaking subject/ listening or reading audience orientation of the essay and the lecture: 'I' and 'you' are opposed within the first couple of sentences. Both are responses, part of a dialogue, as the mention of 'your invitation to speak to you' in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (E3, 420), and 'when you asked me to speak' in *A Room of One's Own* (3). Although foregrounding its status as response to a previous utterance and thereby opening up the possibility for there to be further responses to *this* utterance, *A Room of One's Own* self-consciously makes the dialogue part of the form of the essay. It opens with a conjunction that leads to a question, which leads to a need for an explanation: 'But, you may say, we asked you speak about women and fiction — what has that

⁷²MHP, B. 7 c)

⁷³Perhaps it would be more precise to say 'an educational environment' for in the draft of the lecture 'How Should One Read a Book?', delivered at Hays Court Girls School on 30 January 1926 and published in the *Yale Review*, October 1926, CR2 (revised) and E4, Virginia Woolf also relied on the creation of fictional characters and telling a story to achieve her aims in the essay. 'Shall we then try, very quickly, to write a story here & now?' she asks, and proceeds to write two stories, one about a character called Mary and Australia, another about a character called Eliza Pett. Both were dropped from the published versions. See Berg, M. 1. 1, pp. 179-249.

got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain'. (Room, 3). Because 'you' have asked a question, 'I' has to reply; 'I' is not presuming to speak. Here again, the 'you' against which the 'I' is to be constructed is very much itself constructed by the 'I' — 'you *may* say'. It is only the word of the 'I' that we may take as authoritative, for the you of the lecture audience, identified in a footnote, is silent in the text and is, for the reader of the prose version, only an imaginative construct. The 'I', though, like the 'you' that it writes, is a fiction: "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being'; 'I' is 'Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or [...] any name you please' (Room, 5). The subject position itself is internally dialogic with three named Maries speaking to and against each other and to the reader. The fourth Mary, not named but implied by the ballad from which all four derive, holds out the possibility for the unknown, the unnamed, or the unnameable to speak also. The fourth Mary, a silence within this multiple fictive subjectivity is a question that can be answered, in the same way that 'I' answers the silent 'you', by those who wish to become involved in creating their own 'I', or left undisturbed as a recognition of the unspokenness of gender.⁷⁴

'I' is a fiction, then, but a speaking fiction, internally dialogised and externally dialogised as 'she' (for though she can be called by any name, only women's are suggested) directly addresses an

⁷⁴Harvena Richter, 'Virginia Woolf and Mary Hamilton', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 24 (1985), p. 1, identifies Woolf herself as the fourth Mary

audience, and 'I' speaks fiction. Because the subject under discussion is complex and deals with gender and literary modernism its exposition is 'naturally' convoluted; as Woolf says in 'Women and Fiction', 'ambiguity is intentional for, in dealing with women as writers, as much elasticity as possible is desirable' (WF, 195); 'it is useless to pretend that one can tell the truth about a subject that is as complicated & controversial as this <one> is (WF, 178). What one does, however, in aiming to approach truth, is to observe the traditional tenets of the essay. In writing on women and the essay,

one can only show how one came to hold whatever opinions one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker (Room, 4-5),

but in such a way not contemplated by the traditional figuration of the essay — a non-fiction genre. For the fictional 'I' of the new essayist, 'fiction [...] is likely to contain more truth than fact', and 'therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, to tell you [a] story' (Room, 5). The essay, therefore, turns away from its generic heritage as a factual genre and crosses the boundaries into the more open spaces of fiction.

This merging of genres, the enclosing of fiction by non-fiction actually leads to the expansion of the essay and liberates the 'I' of the essayist. In 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', when the 'I' is the traditional 'I' of the essayist and yet obviously a woman as the

visible 'person in this room' (E3, 420), excuses are needed to justify her audacity in speaking: 'and if I speak in the first person with intolerable egotism, I will ask you to excuse me. I do not want to attribute to the world at large the opinions of one solitary ill-informed and misguided individual' (E3, 421). In order to do what the essayist should do, but without the restriction imposed on her by gender, she breaks from the accepted parameters of the essay and resorts to fiction. 'So, if you will allow me', Woolf requests of her audience,

instead of analysing and abstracting, I will tell you a simple story which, however pointless, has the merit of being true [...] in the hope that I may show you what I mean by character in itself (E3, 422).

And so, through the story of Mrs Brown (notably a female character), the essay exemplifies what it sets out to establish, the creation of character — both character in fiction and character as the creator of fiction, the essayist.

Woolf's rewriting of authors and historical figures in her essays, then, is less an indication of a flawed intelligence or scholarly limitations by someone incapable of adhering to the 'facts',⁷⁵ than a tactic for exploring and 'creating' a gendered writing subjectivity within the essay. Critics have remarked how, in writing of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Sara Coleridge, Woolf uses the

⁷⁵See Denys Thompson, 'The Common Reader: Second Series', *Scrutiny*, 1 (1932-3), p. 289, who considers that 'many of the essays are the result of a misplaced creative talent'.

essay as a means of writing about herself,⁷⁶ but the practice is less specifically autobiographical in terms of revealing personal traumas, than more generally autobiographical in terms of creating a written self. The fact that so many of the 'subjects' of her essays were women adds to the gender potential of the manoeuvre but does not imply that Woolf was capable of creating a subjectivity only through sisterhood.

After a 'fictional' subjectivity is created in 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', the writing 'I' can pit itself against it, and the tone of the essay changes. The essayist's initial hesitancy — 'my first assertion is one that I think you will grant' and 'now I will hazard a second assertion' (E3, 421) — turns into the more authoritative 'I believes' of argument (E3, 425), and the self-assurance of the attack on Arnold Bennett. The 'I' develops in confidence and no longer becomes a subjectivity under siege. By the last two paragraphs the tentativeness of the female speaker in front of the Heretic Society at Cambridge has vanished, and it is the 'you' who is under attack. Now the speaker exhorts them: 'your part is to insist that writers shall come down off their plinths and pedestals [...] You should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety' (E3, 436). 'I' is freed to 'make one final and surprisingly rash prediction — we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English

⁷⁶Bina Freiwald, "'the praise that men give women": Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and the Critics', *Dalhousie Review*, 66 (1986), 311-36, and Vara Neverow-Turk, 'The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Virginia Woolf's Reading of Sara Coleridge', *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 34 (1990), 2-3.

literature' (E3, 436). We are on the verge, too, of a new role for women in writing, if we follow the fantastic suggestions of the speaker of *A Room Of One's Own* which, because it is so fantastic is preferably couched 'in the form of fiction' (Room, 148). She asserts that

if we live another century or so [...] and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own [...] then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down (Room, 149).

And although Shakespeare's sister is primarily a figure for the female poet, the essay in which she appears as the most resonant 'character' is itself an essay about writing an essay, about filling in the space and breaking the silence of 'a blank sheet of paper on which was written in large letters WOMEN AND FICTION, but no more' (Room, 32), so her significance extends beyond poetry to the future of the female essayist as well. The silence on the specific implication of Woolf's findings on women for the essayist or critic is acknowledged, but erased, in the draft of the essay: 'for I am going to be a coward, I thought, & call it courtesy. I am not going to say aloud what I think of all this fiction & poetry & criticism' (WF, 149). But she also declared that the only way to talk of something new is 'to talk of something else, so in the most oblique way possible, gently & then <no other remark> conclude' with the conclusion that a truth that is 'only to be <had> by comparing a great many different opinions' (WF, 193).

This was the original plan for the work that eventually split into two pieces, *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. *Three Guineas* is a multiplicity of voices in dialogue with each other and the audience, but the dimension of acknowledged and developed fictionality — the saga of the Pargiter family that became *The Years* — does not feature as a recognised speaker in the text as we have it. Nor does the speech of 'factual' voices bolster *The Years*. The original dialogue of fact and fiction, the essay-novel, fragments into a dialogue between two works, *Three Guineas* and *The Years*, with the reader required to participate in a more active way, reading from text to text rather than from demarcated genre to genre within the one text. Various features of *The Years*, its 'reverberative structure' for instance,⁷⁷ and its reliance upon dialogue and what Woolf calls its 'random rapid letter writing style' (D4, 199), indicate its links with the essay, but the connection is not necessarily an obvious one, which the juxtaposition of essay with fictional chapter would have made unavoidable.

That structure would have made formally explicit the techniques Woolf had developed but kept relatively muted in *A Room Of One's Own* and 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'. In *The Pargiters* the pretence of the lecture is maintained, the 'I' is there as a response to an invitation, and the question of truth and how to

⁷⁷See Grace Radin, *Virginia Woolf's The Years: The Evolution of a Novel* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981)

convey it is once again at issue. In order to fulfil her aims in delivering her speech or writing her essay, Woolf resorts to creation. She creates her readers as auditors, by maintaining the fiction of the essay as speech, and she further creates her audience by moulding them as readers of fiction, and as fictional creatures themselves. Fiction is required; women must forget that they are women and become something else, exist in another time:

I must ask you to forget that we are in this room, this night. We must forget that we are, for the moment, ourselves. We must become the people that we were two or three generations ago. Let us be our greatgrandmothers [...] I am going to take the liberty of effecting this transformation for you. I am going to read you chapters from an unpublished novel which I am in the process of writing, called 'The Pargiters' (P, 8-9).

The reason for choosing fiction is the same as she has always given in the past: 'I prefer, when truth is important, to write fiction' (P, 9).

The 'chapter' from *The Pargiters* then ensues, and is followed up by a second essay. Here Woolf continues to create her audience, and establish her position in writing by responding to the dialogue she thus creates. 'Why, you may ask, did they not go to College?', she asks her audience, creating a question she then goes on to answer at some length. The activity persists for the five chapters and six essays which constitute *The Pargiters*. The process was abandoned, though, with Woolf 'leaving out the interchapters — compacting them in the text; & project[ing] an appendix of dates.

A good idea?' (D4, 146). However good an idea it may have seemed initially it was, eventually, given up. Even though she felt that

I must be bold & adventurous. I want to give the whole of the present society — nothing less: facts, as well as the vision. And to combine them both. I mean, *The Waves* going on simultaneously with *Night & Day*,

she questioned her ability to do so, asking herself, 'Is this possible?' (D4, 151-2). Virginia Woolf replied to this questioning with a tentative answer, one which returns the problem of writing to the problem of subjectivity:

the figure of Elvira is the difficulty. She may become too dominant. She is to be seen only in relation to other things. This should give I think a great edge to both of the realities — this contrast (D4, 152).

Her character is to be found, not through the adoption of a dominant subject position, in which 'I' is 'as large, and as ugly as could be' (L5, 195), but dialogically, in relation to other things, by being 'anonymous' as Woolf puts it, when anonymity means that 'I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind & my eyes, refusing to be stamped & stereotyped. The thing is to free ones self, to let it find its dimensions, not be impeded' (D4, 197).

In writing, the problem was 'How [...] to get the depth without becoming static?' One

should aim at immense breadth & immense intensity [...] include satire, comedy, poetry, narrative, & what form is to hold them all

together? Should I bring in a play, letters, poems?
I think I begin to grasp the whole (D4, 152).

The whole is to include a mixture of fact and fiction, 'millions of ideas but no preaching — history, politics, feminism, art, literature — in short a summing up of all I know, feel, laugh at, despise, like, admire hate & so on' (D4, 152). As the punctuation vanishes and the words merge, juxtaposition leads to combination, and this leads to the future possibility of '& so on'. Like the multiplicity of opinions, the unlimited capacity and infinite variety of Mrs Brown, both are realised by the opposition between fact and fiction; the temporary configuration of two different discourses allows both to speak simultaneously within the one literary unit. This suggests a particularly productive formula for the writing of gendered subjectivity. But because the 'formula' is not formulaic, it avoids the tendency to system, the 'preaching', that Woolf wished to avoid. The conjunction of 'millions of ideas', the short 'summing up' and the promise of '& so on' adumbrates a methodology for writing and conceiving subjectivity. It is appropriate therefore, that much of Woolf's experimentation with this methodology and the philosophy behind it occurred in her autobiographical essays, which will be explored in the following chapter.

By virtue of its status as a non-fiction genre with presumptions to revealing truth, the autobiographical essay is a discourse of fact; in containing a written version of a woman's life, which is both the unsaid and the hitherto unsayable, it is a discourse

of fiction. So, dialogically created in this configuration of fact and fiction, the woman writer as autobiographical essayist can free herself from the restrictive pronomial positions created by the form of the essay, and say, with Bernard from *The Waves*:

*I have escaped you; I have gone buzzing like a swarm of bees, endlessly vagrant, with none of your power of fixing remorselessly upon a single object. But I will return.*⁷⁸

⁷⁸(W, 69). My italics.

CHAPTER SIX: 'WHEN THE SELF SPEAKS TO THE SELF, WHO IS SPEAKING?': AUDITIONING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Bernard's vision of the swarm of bees did return, in two separate passages in Woolf's writing, passages separated by eight years in terms of composition and situated on either side of a public/private divide in terms of audience. Publicly, the image of a buzzing, vagrant, amorphous self emerged as one of the controlling metaphors of Woolf's 1940 essay on Coleridge, 'The Man at the Gate', written for the *New Statesman and Nation*, whose readership at that time was approximately thirty thousand.¹ Privately, Woolf described an individual's reaction to the sight of an actual swarm of bees, a description which remained submerged in the diary of 1932, written, presumably, for an audience of one. In this private entry Woolf is quite clear about the potency of the symbol, and gives her literary powers full vent:

the bees swarmed [...] Bees shoot whizz, like arrows of desire: fierce, sexual; weave cats cradles in the air; each whizzing from a string; the whole air full of vibration: of beauty, of this burning arrowy desire; & speed: I still think the quivering shifting bee bag the most sexual & sensual symbol (D4, 109).

Just as Sylvia Plath uses the image of the bees to comment on gender relations in her series of bee poems, so Virginia Woolf notes the efficacy of bees for imaging sexuality. Where Bernard's self-

¹Smith's *Trade News*, 6 May 1961. The figure of 30,000 is for 1939.

characterisation as a 'swarm of bees, endlessly vagrant' (W, 59), incapable of being fixed yet always returning, hints at a new version of subjectivity, different from the stable, fixed identity of traditional discourse, the private vision of sensuality and sexuality in the bee bag points to a gendered reading of self in the swarm. The bee, it seems, is buzzing with a number of possibilities. Observing its suggestive potential, we might well exclaim, along with the narrator of Plath's 'The Swarm', who perceives the encounter between the bees and the humans, 'How instructive this is!'.² Plath's bees survive the winter and 'taste the spring', they 'are flying';³ Woolf's bees escape from the diary and *The Waves* and re-emerge in the essay on Coleridge, giving the reader a taste of the strategy required to read the essay and the subject it reveals and constructs. Since the bees fly from *The Waves* to the diary to the essay, and their symbolic impact is so powerful, the analysis of their contribution to the project of imagining and reading subjectivity may be extended beyond the confines of the individual essay, to a more extensive theory of the construction of a gendered subjectivity in writing.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, however, is the subject of the individual essay in which the symbol of the bee conjoins notions of subjectivity, gender and writing. *He* is 'the innumerable, the mutable, the atmospheric'; *his* 'written words fill hundreds of pages and overflow innumerable margins'; *his*

²Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (London & Boston: Faber, 1981), p. 217, l. 46

³'Wintering', *ibid*, p. 219, l. 50

spoken words still reverberate, so that as we enter his radius he seems not a man, but a swarm, a cloud, a buzz of words, darting this way and that, clustering, quivering and hanging suspended (DoM, 69).

Because the self is complex and elusive and, importantly, not gendered masculine, the essayist creates it through imagery and symbol, through metaphors which do not reduce 'him' to the fixity of his name. Coleridge is so mobile that 'little of this can be caught in any reader's net' (DoM, 69). Since he is so various, in order to even approach him, the reader must mirror his movements, chasing him with a butterfly net ever at the ready. Once the subject of the essay is portrayed as multiple, shifting and diverse, the reader is reflectively characterised as active and pursuing multiple meanings as they dart and fly like a swarm of bees, not passively receiving the individual word. In this way, the essayist as reader, for the 'we' of the essayist is also 'reading the "gallop scrawl" of the letters' (DoM, 70), is therefore also various and manifold. By writing her subject as multiple, Woolf has created the potential for her own writing subjectivity in the essay to be equally varied, thus escaping the limitations of subject/object configuration which the essay as genre presumes.

But, the essayist declares, in a move which appears to deny the benefits of a complicated and liberating presentation of subjectivity, 'it is well before we become dazed in the labyrinth of what we call Coleridge to have a clear picture before us — the

picture of a man standing at a gate' (DoM, 69), and here a description of Coleridge by DeQuincey is quoted. DeQuincey, therefore, is the author of the title of the essay. While Coleridge is 'part of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley' (DoM, 69), structurally and nominally in this instance, he is also part of DeQuincey. Although DeQuincey characterises Coleridge by the single image of the man at the gate, quoting DeQuincey writing on Coleridge multiplies the angles from which he is described, adds another voice to the choir that combines to create a subject and upholds the initial assertion of the essayist that 'it is vain to put the single word Coleridge at the top of the page' (DoM, 69). The single word is opposed to the image, the isolated individual to the contextual configuration of a relational subjectivity. In this linguistic/subjective ratio, the image or, as it is manipulated in the prose of the essays, the metaphor, stands as the appropriate device for revealing and constructing a model of subjectivity that could allow for Virginia Woolf to practice the essay and, in the process, create, if not a feminist aesthetics, at least an aesthetics capable of liberating gendered subjectivities.

Once the 'rhetoric of metaphor' is introduced, the image of bees and the image of the man at the gate fit into a network of figurative representations of the individual. The 'clear picture' of the man at the gate expands and impinges on the radiating image of the man as 'swarm'; both, however, reveal similar patterns of delivering meaning. While Coleridge as man at the gate is immobilised in the portal, unable to go forward or back, his mind,

his literary, word-producing imagination, figured as swarm, is equally poised on a threshold: 'there shapes itself in the volumes of Coleridge's letters an immense mass of quivering matter, as if the swarm had attached itself to a bough and hung there pendent' (DoM, 69). In a muted echo of Shakespeare's 'Hang there like fruit, my soul,/Till the tree die' (an echo that possibly serves to link Coleridge with Shakespeare in terms of genius and status),⁴ Coleridge's words 'yield those phrases that hang like ripe fruit in the many-leaved tree of his immense volubility' (DoM, 71). Woolf's phrases, in combination with DeQuincey's, yield a Coleridge who is capable of ripening into other selves. Subjectivity, like meaning, pends.

In keeping with his hymenopterick characterisation, this ripening of Coleridge's words 'serve[s] as a smoke-screen between him and the menace of the real world' (DoM, 71). The bee-keeper's protective puff of smoke reintroduces the notion of envelopes and membranes so common in Woolf's representations of writing, 'reality', and the self. In 'The Man at the Gate', like the bee bag in the diary entry, the 'word screen trembles and shivers'; unlike the diary picture it encloses 'one hum and vibration of painful emotion' (DoM, 71).

Coleridge, however, is more than an instrument of painful emotion and a figure of arrested potential to Woolf. As might be expected when the image of the bee is linked to subjectivity and

⁴*Cymbeline*, V, v, ll. 263-4

sexuality, Coleridge breaks the shroud of the enveloping smoke, and features as 'the forerunner of all those who have tried to reveal the intricacies, to take the faintest creases of the human soul' (DoM, 70). Coleridge is, as Woolf wrote elsewhere, the originator and epitome of the concept of the androgynous mind, one of the greatest critics (E4, 235), and an inveterate talker.⁵ In his single yet multiple figure, then, pend the figures of the critic and the autobiographer, both of whom are central to Woolf's thinking about gender and writing.

With so many factors integral to the essay — criticism, gender, writing and literary history — coalescing in the one figure, it is almost appropriate that thoughts about Coleridge led Woolf to think about the essay as a genre. Reading Coleridge and Shelley and noting the purity and musicality of their poetry, moved Woolf to wish that she could mould the essay to suit her perception of the subject, and

invent a new critical method — something swifter & lighter & more colloquial & yet intense: more to the point & less composed; more fluid & following the flight, than my old CR essays. The old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact. All the difference between the sketch & the finished work (D5, 298).

The choice of the phrase 'the sketch' as the designation for the preferred critical form is one that, possibly inadvertently, points to a combination of the essay and autobiography even more directly

⁵See *A Room of One's Own*

than the Coleridge connection had already done. For at the time that she was writing her essay on Coleridge and another on his daughter, an exercise that foregrounded the link between literary life writing and filial relations,⁶ Woolf was also engaged in composing her memoirs ('A Sketch of the Past') which involved rethinking the nature and form of the essay, and therefore the relationship between subjectivity and writing.

In buzzing back and forth between the prodigiously creative and elusive mind of Coleridge, the symbol of sexuality and sensuality, and the future of a new critical method, Woolf traverses the space between the public realm of the essay and the private realm of the diary; between the sexualised body and the word-engendering mind; between the present, the past and the future of writing. In 'The Man at the Gate', Coleridge as bee figures as both the written subject of the essay and object to the subject of the essayist, and the writing subject chosen by the essayist to convey a fellow writer. And the bee, for all its metaphorical association with the body and identity, has an indirect link with the writing of essays, as Woolf was well aware, for it was the early essays of Goldsmith in *The Bee* that she found 'such good reading' (CDB, 12).⁷ The flight of the bee, therefore, rather than the 'flight of the mind', stands as the perfect 'instructive' introduction to Woolf's

⁶'Sara Coleridge' (DoM, 73-7)

⁷See the draft of this essay: 'We are beginning— cannot read *The Bee* without suspecting that these papers were written in the great age of the essayist'. Berg, M. 1. 6, p. 7

autobiographical essays, and the rhetoric of metaphor that is involved in the writing of Woolf's essays, autobiographical or otherwise.

The autobiographical essays fall into a number of different categories, distinctions which, on the whole, have not been made when publishing or analysing Woolf's writing. Of autobiographical essays proper there are, in fact, no examples.⁸ Woolf published no complete short prose piece with herself as its topic; she made no 'pact' with her readers, never publicly declaring an intention to tell the truth about herself in a manner which would direct the readers' expectations and shape their reading process and thus create 'autobiography'.⁹ She did, however, publish a number of obituary and memorial essays on members of her family and close acquaintances which function as a type of reflective autobiography,¹⁰ in that, as she describes the space around her she

⁸Although Avrom Fleishman, in his introduction to *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing in Victorian and Modern England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1983) declares that 'no one can tell what autobiography is' (p. 1) he does presume to recognise autobiography as a public literary form. A 'feature of every autobiography that is worth mentioning' is 'that it is a book' (p. 5).

⁹The theory of the 'autobiographical pact' is Philippe Lejeune's. He writes that 'we admit [to autobiography] only those authors who themselves ask to be admitted', an 'autobiographical declaration of intention' is 'obligatory'. From *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris, 1975), quoted in Fleishman, pp. 16-17

¹⁰See Carol MacKay, 'Biography as Reflected Autobiography: The Self-Creation of Anne Thackeray Ritchie', in *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender*, ed. by Susan Groag Bell & Marilyn Yalom (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 65-79, which describes this practice in the writings of Virginia Woolf's 'Aunt Anny'. This mirroring of techniques could argue for a closer influential link between the two than has been acknowledged by critics thus far. For the obituary essays see 'Miss Janet Case: Classical Scholar and Teacher, *The Times*, 22 July 1937, p. 16; 'Lady

thus shapes herself as the absent figure in the common environment. Ostensibly silent, she is the echo in the gap between essayist and subject of the essay.

In this way, behind the anonymity of a writing persona of 'One of his daughters' (E1, 130), Virginia Stephen, in her 'Impressions of Sir Leslie Stephen' (1906), recreates herself as the literary descendant of her father by describing his reading habits and his relationship with his children. Again, in 'Leslie Stephen' (1932), by creating him without his title and as a father, she creates herself as his child, and therefore the natural inheritor of the characteristics and attitudes portrayed in the portrait.¹¹ These are the tactics she developed and exploited in many of her critical essays,¹² and show the crossover between writing per se and the strictly 'autobiographical writings'¹³ that critics and editors have noticed. They also suggest a reason for Woolf's choice of 'memoirs' rather than self-declared autobiography as the title option for the life-writing enterprise she began in April 1939, but which was not published until 1976.

Ottoline Morrell', *The Times*, 28 April 1938, p. 16. Further memorial essays will be discussed in the text below.

¹¹'Leslie Stephen', in (CDB, 67-73). This essay was originally published as 'Leslie Stephen, the Philosopher at Home: a Daughter's Memories', *The Times*, 28 November 1932

¹²See, for example, Chapter Five, section (i)

¹³Editor's Note to (MoB, 9)

Apart from obituaries and reviews of the works of her relatives, all of her other personal writings remained unpublished during Virginia Woolf's lifetime, a circumstance that greatly affects any attempts to analyse both the 'autobiographical essay' as she practised it, and the nature of the self therein revealed. The critical instability generated by pieces that were either to be spoken rather than read, or written to be read only within a limited private and familial circle, is further complicated when the 'major' piece of autobiographical writing, carelessly or consciously accepted as an essay by many critics, is not only unpublished but incomplete, utterly private and a precursor to a later work.¹⁴ In 'A Sketch of the Past' and the other works published in *Moments of Being*, Virginia Woolf seems both to evade and defy genre, confounding and confusing her status as a biographical subject and a subject for biography, in the very pieces which have been seized upon with such alacrity and glee by the critics.

The completed autobiographical pieces, 'Reminiscences', '22 Hyde Park Gate', 'Old Bloomsbury' and 'Am I A Snob?', although unpublished, can be deemed essays. They fit into the pattern established by Woolf in her public literary, obituary and memorial essays when she wanted to create a subjectivity in writing — they are structured around the concept of dialogue, and writing the self

¹⁴Alex Zwerdling, in *Virginia Woolf and the Real World*, carelessly calls 'A Sketch of the Past' an 'autobiographical essay' (p. 56) without any attempt to define his terms; Graham Good, on the other hand, in *The Observing Self*, situates his discussion of 'A Sketch' as an autobiographical essay in a book which is dedicated to analysing the essay as genre (pp. 127-34).

through writing the life of another. But they also generate an added complexity because of the circumstances in which they were written or delivered. Where the published literary essays were enmeshed in a network of power relations and literary expectations conditioned by the demands of editors and the reading public, the unpublished essays were equally influenced by the environment of their reception. 'Reminiscences', written in 1907/8, is addressed to the infant child of Vanessa and Clive Bell, Julian, in order to tell him about 'Your mother' (MoB, 34).¹⁵ The motives surrounding Virginia Stephen's desire to write her sister's life have been explored — it was part of a project of hers to write the lives of those close to her in order to practice her writing skills; it was part of an attempt to reclaim Vanessa for herself after her marriage to Clive; in establishing herself as a writer Virginia Stephen was following a path already set out by illustrious members of her family¹⁶ — but the effects of her structuring and perception of audience have not.

Writing the life of Vanessa to her infant son enforces a familial connection in the construction and relation of subjectivity, one that can be manipulated to the advantage of the writer, especially if the recipient of the written work is unable to read it. All the possessive pronouns that pepper the text, 'your mother' (MoB, 66), 'your

¹⁵Quentin Bell sets the opening moment of composition in 1907 (QB1, 122); Virginia Woolf's and Vanessa Bell's references to the work locate it in 1908 (MoB, 31).

¹⁶For the biographical project see (MoB, 31-2), for the reclaiming of Vanessa, DeSalvo, p. 69, and for following her family see LuAnn McCracken, "'The synthesis of my being": Autobiography and the Reproduction of Identity in Virginia Woolf', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9 (1990), 59-78.

grandfather' (MoB, 67), are unable to be read by the designated audience of the essay — Julian — so a space for another subjectivity is opened. There is a gap into which Virginia Stephen may insert herself, and a course established for making herself the audience of a telling of her own past. For despite the ploy of describing the mother in relation to the son, theirs is not the most significant relationship in the memoir. As told in 'Reminiscences', the life of Vanessa can not be written unless it expands into the life of Virginia.¹⁷ The opening sentence sets out the boundaries of this life of Vanessa and proves it to be only tellable through its connection with the life of another — Virginia Stephen. 'Your mother was born in 1879, and as some six years at least must have passed before I knew that she was my sister, I can say nothing of that time' (MoB, 34), writes Virginia. 'Our life' begins with an indoor dialogue between Vanessa and Virginia under the table (MoB, 35). The 'life' of Vanessa exists as a text through the formal dialogue between the writer and the infant; the 'life' of Vanessa in the text exists only in its relationship to another, Virginia, who is also the writer. The subject (Vanessa) exists and can only be written when configured with other subjects. Viewed from another perspective, the life of the writer is written as part of a dialogue with another speaking subjects, between the now mute voice of the past which has spoken (Leslie Stephen) and now mute voice of the future which will speak

¹⁷See Rose Norman, 'A Sister of One's Own: Mothers, Sisters and Narrative Strategy in Autobiographies of Virginia Woolf and Caroline Dall', *Prose Studies*, 15 (1992), 84-98

(Julian).¹⁸ Dialogue creates the conditions for the written representation and creation of subjectivity.

The creative power of dialogue is a concept which finds approving echo in the essay by Georges Gusdorf on the 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', an article which is seen as influential in the formulation of a theoretical framework and poetics of autobiography.¹⁹ "'To create and in creating be created", the fine formula of Lequier, ought to be the motto of autobiography', he asserts; autobiography is 'this dialogue of a life with itself in search of its own absolute', a dialogue to which 'there is never an end'.²⁰ These statements are highly suggestive and fit easily into discussions of Woolf's discursive practices in her autobiographical essays. Gusdorf's pronouncements on the conditions and limits of

¹⁸In *The Mausoleum Book*, Leslie Stephen, who says that he wishes 'simply to talk' to 'my darling Julia's children' about their mother (p. 3), discovers, however, that though he wishes to 'write mainly about your mother', if he wishes to 'speak intelligently it will be best to begin by saying something about myself' (p. 4). This method of letting biography slide into autobiography is very similar to Virginia Stephen's in 'Reminiscences'. In both, the attempt to write the life of a relative in a private environment leads to, and legitimates, the writing of one's own biography. In Leslie Stephen's case the difference in outcome between the privately oblique and the publicly direct versions of the self, was extreme. In the published *Some Early Impressions*, Stephen assures his readers that he has 'no reason to think that the story of my "inner life" would be in the least interesting, and, were it interesting, I should still prefer to keep it to myself' (pp. 9-10). Even his 'remembrance of things past' will be 'full of gaps, often blurred and faded, and too probably distorted in detail' (p. 10) for it to be taken as genuine autobiography. His autobiography will only be, to quote Ethel Smyth, impressions that remained.

¹⁹Gusdorf, trans. by James Olney, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 28-48; for recognition of his influence see Fleishman, p. 8

²⁰Gusdorf, pp. 44 & 48

autobiography as genre, however, suggest more of a disjunction between Woolf and autobiography and raise questions about the assumptions of those who determine the autobiographical canon.

Autobiography, according to Gusdorf, 'is a solidly established literary genre, its history traceable in a series of masterpieces from the *Confessions* of Augustine to Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*'; it is 'a late phenomenon in Western culture' and specific to that culture, 'it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man'.²¹ Finally, 'autobiography properly speaking assumes the task of reconstructing the unity of a life across time'.²² This outline of the 'conditions and limits' of autobiography presumes a number of absolutes that Woolf's 'autobiographies' and current critical practice call into question.

For while autobiography as a separate genre has flourished as a subject for literary criticism in the recent past, that recent past has also seen the arrival of two methods of criticism that undermine much of what Gusdorf asserts, namely deconstruction and feminism. Ironically, it is also a period characterised by a great many feminist autobiographies, and by the autobiography of Roland Barthes.²³ Since the 1970s, according to James Olney, 'a new field of critical discourse [has] suddenly been opened up to investigators' and a

²¹ibid, pp. 28 & 29

²²ibid, p. 37

²³See Philip Dodd, 'Criticism and the Autobiographical Tradition', *Prose Studies*, 8 (1985), 1-13 and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*.

'(more or less) coherent body of critical writing now exists in a corner of literary studies that was previously all but empty'.²⁴ Autobiography and its accompanying criticism have become, in Woolf's words, 'the fashionable dodge' (D5, 229). But, where in this 'maze of proliferating definitions and theories', asks Sidonie Smith, is there 'any consideration of woman's *bios*, woman's *aute*, woman's *graphia*, or woman's hermeneutics?'²⁵ Her question highlights one of the presumptions of Gusdorf's outline that has remained unchallenged in much of the later, non-feminist inspired criticism — the unconscious gender bias. Western *man*, from Augustine to Gide, has stood at the centre of autobiography, and issues of gender have been largely overlooked when examining self-writing.

Olney, for instance, discusses autobiography with a strong gender bias; he is interested in 'why men write autobiographies', considers autobiography in terms of 'a man's lifework', and declares that

a man's autobiography is [...] like a magnifying lens, focusing and intensifying that same peculiar creative vitality that informs all the volumes of his collected works; it is the symptomatic key to all else that he did and, naturally, to all that he was.²⁶

²⁴'Autos. Bios. Graphein: The Study of Autobiographical Literature', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 77 (1978), pp. 113-4

²⁵*A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 7

²⁶*Metaphors of Self: the meaning of autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. vii, 3 & 3-4; in this book Olney discusses Montaigne, Jung, Fox, Darwin, Newman, Mill and T.S. Eliot. A.O.J. Cockshut, in

Not only is the autobiographer unequivocally 'he', but the student of autobiography, a 'vicarious autobiographer'²⁷ (a theoretical assertion of singular importance in discussions of the autobiographical essay and the essayist as reviewer of articles) is equally adamantly 'he'. According to Olney,

Not until he abandons *his* autobiography — giving up his *autos*, his *bios*, and the grapher (which is in the reading as well as the writing) that unites and brings the *autos* and the *bios* to being — can he ever assent to that eventuality,²⁸

that eventuality being the completion of the autobiographical project. Even if the parameters of autobiography are not set quite so gender-specifically, defining autobiography as 'self-portrait' where the self is something that 'thinks and acts; it knows that it exists alone and with others',²⁹ the self that writes the 'I' of the autobiography is still part of the Western culture, and gendered masculine. As Simone de Beauvoir said, 'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other'.³⁰

The Art of Autobiography in 19th and 20th Century England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), although he includes women in his survey, approaches the genre with the same gender bias: 'if [autobiography] is to convince it must deal with the real man' (p. 11).

²⁷James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, p. 27

²⁸*ibid*

²⁹William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, op.cit., p 85

³⁰Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. & ed. by, H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953 [1949]), p. 16

Virginia Woolf, as a woman autobiographer, is other to the 'norm' of Western culture that Gusdorf presents in his essay, yet unavoidably implicated in the historical constraints of her generation which worked to enforce that norm. She notes in a letter to Ethel Smyth that 'there's never been a womans autobiography' (L6, 453) and recognises the need for a language that can express a bodily experience of gender, yet she continues to refer to the subject of biography with the pronoun 'he'. Her practice in her essays, however, works against the generalising tendency of her writing on the 'universal' subject of biography.

Woolf, in not attempting to reconstruct her life as a unity across time, but anecdotally, through the recording of incidents, is antithetical to the formal conditions Gusdorf advocates. As a woman writing an autobiographical essay, Woolf is doubly other for, as women stand to the tradition of autobiography, so, apparently, does the autobiographical essay stand to the tradition of autobiography properly speaking. Good, the sole taxonomist of the autobiographical essay, writes that 'there is little or no acknowledgement of the autobiographical essay as a distinct form, with its own range of potentials and own canon',³¹ but argues for its right to be designated a 'sub-genre' of the essay, a genre that itself enjoys a marginal status. Even though 'all essays are to a certain extent autobiographical', a proposition that is supported by the

³¹See Graham Good, 'Identity and Form in the Modern Autobiographical Essay', *Prose Studies*, 15 (1992), p. 99

presence of Montaigne in many discussions of the origins of autobiography as a genre, the autobiographical essay is 'distinguished from other essay forms by its even greater subjectivity, and its even greater focus on personal experience'.³² It is distinct from autobiography by its length — it is obviously much briefer — and by its episodic and non teleological structure.³³ So, in the autobiographical essay 'a personal episode is described in terms of a personal issue rather than, as in the full-length autobiography, in terms of an overall design which connects all the episodes'.³⁴ Brief, fragmentary and episodic, rejecting a predetermined form and destiny, the autobiographical essay is, as Good suggests, characteristic of the modern experience of identity.³⁵ But, more interestingly, it is characteristic of the experience and representation of women's identity, especially as classified by those critics wishing to distinguish a tradition of, or the potential for, a woman's autobiography. In addition, the form, as Woolf's contribution to the genre demonstrates, is eminently capable of carrying the writing of a gendered subjectivity, which involves more than the writing of a biologically determined 'woman's life', realising the potential of taking advantage of a situation which queries the universality of a unified subjectivity.

³²ibid, pp. 99 & 100

³³ibid, p. 100

³⁴ibid, p. 101

³⁵ibid, p. 116

To write 'I' as a woman is, as Donna C. Stanton suggests, to deny the notion 'essential to the phallogentric order: the totalized, self-contained subject present-to-itself'. This is due, continues Stanton, to 'women's different status in the symbolic order'. Writing 'I' as a woman, or

autogynography [...] characterizes the fundamental alterity and non-presence of the subject, even as it asserts itself discursively and strives toward an always impossible self possession.³⁶

Autogynography, as Stanton proposes it, undoes the presumptions of traditionally practised and theorised autobiography, and does so from two different angles, one feminist in the Anglo-American tradition, the other a more postmodern, poststructuralist perspective. The former argues that there is a counter-tradition of women's autobiography, separate from the accepted canon of autobiography, which has been based on male texts and male criteria of what constitutes the important features of a life. Because men and women value different things and historically their lives have been different, autogynography as an autobiography that mirrors a woman's life lived as material existence, disrupts traditional autobiography in formal, yet realistically inspired, ways. According to Estelle Jelinek, 'the multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write autobiographies', so that

³⁶Donna C. Stanton, ed., *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 15

the narratives of their lives are often not chronological and progressive but disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters.³⁷

Suzanne Juhasz, too, asserts that women's autobiographies 'show less a pattern of linear development towards some clear goal than one of repetitive, accumulative, cyclical structure'; in their works 'significance, objectivity, distance are rejected'.³⁸ In short, women tend to 'write in discontinuous forms and to emphasize the personal over the professional' because this is the way they live in patriarchal society.³⁹ Their practice, however, coincides in significant ways with the definition of the autobiographical essay.

Taking a more postmodern view of subjectivity and gender, in an age when absolutes have lost their meaning, and looking at the writing of a life in symbolic rather than realistic terms, the unified self is seen as fictive and consequently, as Smith writes,

constitutive elements of the old essential self, such as sexual identity and its engendered manifestations, are also fictive. Discursively constructed rather than biologically given,

³⁷'Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition', in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 17

³⁸'Towards a Theory of Form in Feminist Autobiography: Kate Millett's *Flying and Sita*; Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*', in Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography*, pp. 223 & 222

³⁹Jelinek, *Women's Autobiography*, p. xii

gendered identity becomes fluctuant and variable rather than constant and unchanging,⁴⁰

and, presumably, under such circumstances, rejects even linguistic involvement in a process of linear development. The self exists 'in process, a site of dialogue with the world, others, memories, experience, and the unconscious, the subject is implicated in sinuous webs of intersubjectivity'.⁴¹ Of itself this mode of subject constitution disrupts the patriarchal binary and can therefore be seen as feminist in effect, but, as many feminist critics have pointed out, with some degree of alarm, the 'actual woman' tends to be left out this formulation, just as the stories of her life are excluded from the autobiographical canon. If, however, one substitutes the sinuous web with an image of intersubjectivity that implies less fixed lines of interconnection, and considers autogynography as less of an oppositional and more of a relative practice, then the limitations of an either/or approach to feminist and autobiographical theory are avoided.

In a situation where gendered subjectivity is temporary yet situated, and beholden to the concept of dialogism, in which the subject is constituted in and through a dialogic moment of mutual configuration with another, the self thus constituted is particular to that moment and those historical circumstances. This instance is

⁴⁰Sidonie Smith, 'Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9 (1990), p. 15

⁴¹ibid

capable of including the notion of 'woman' either as an historical idea influencing the event of dialogic interaction, or as a role adopted appropriate to that moment. Yet, because the process is continuous and the self, once constituted, open to infinite reconfigurations, it disrupts the rigid binary of subject/object, masculine/feminine. Subjectivity, gendered in both process and position, is achieved 'in stance' and in 'instants'. It is created through a dialogic 'rhetoric of instance'.⁴² The form most amenable to this philosophy, and therefore the most likely to embrace a gendered subjectivity in writing, is the essay, and the rhetorical device most suitable to enacting and conveying the moment of configuration and the idea of process is the metaphor.

The form of the autobiographical essay, as conceived by Graham Good, correlates with the theory of writing mirroring an essential female self, with discontinuity and the rejection of teleology in form the result of a woman's experience of life directly translated into prose. The more postmodern version of a gendered subjectivity, in which the fluctuating nature of subjectivity is represented in a process-oriented, non-linear form is also reflected by the essay. The essay as Woolf practised it, especially in the autobiographical examples, realises and develops the possibilities of a rhetoric of instance, where a gendered subjectivity is constructed in writing in a never-ending process of dialogue with other subjects.

⁴²See Chapter Five

Actual dialogues occur in Woolf's autobiographical essays as both a theoretical point of structuration and a circumstance of presentation. The four autobiographical essays that can be so designated with minimal qualms were all part of an ongoing dialogue between members of the Memoir Club, in their present and past existences.⁴³ The Memoir Club was an informal dining and reading group, comprised of those individuals popularly understood to comprise Bloomsbury,⁴⁴ which met irregularly to read, originally, chapters of 'what was to become a full-length autobiography' (D2, 23 n.9). The impetus behind this social event was to induce Desmond MacCarthy to 'write something other than journalism' (D2, 23 n.9), a further indication of the esteem in which journalism was held at the time amongst Woolf's circle of friends. In requiring the writing and reading of autobiography, and being formed with the intention of bringing 'Desmond MacCarthy the serious literary writer' into existence, the Memoir Club was, in a double sense, formed to create a writing subjectivity. The first meeting, as Woolf records, was 'a highly interesting occasion', as 'Lord knows what I didn't read into their reading'. Even though she doubted that 'anyone will say the interesting things [...] they can't prevent their coming out' (D2, 23). Autobiography, and the dialogic environment in which it exists, as Woolf understood and experienced it, is also a

⁴³'22 Hyde Park Gate', 'Old Bloomsbury', 'Am I A Snob?' and 'The Dreadnought Hoax'. The first three are published in *Moments of Being*, the remaining fragment of the last as an Appendix to (QB1).

⁴⁴See Bell, *Bloomsbury*, p. 14

conversation between the said and the not-said, with the role of the auditor/reader integral in deriving meaning from the essay/speech.

While it is important to realise that the contributions to the Memoir Club were spoken, and that 'according to Quentin Bell it is unlikely that Virginia Woolf kept very closely to the text' (MoB, 220), she did prepare written or typed texts and those extant texts do represent complete and self-contained literary works, and enjoy similar status to the other speeches Woolf made before groups or on the wireless which were later published as essays.⁴⁵ The papers that were read were kept and circulated in manuscript form, so that those who were unable to attend meetings could read what they had missed.⁴⁶ Many contributors kept their efforts, confirming their value as literary documents.⁴⁷ In one instance, Virginia Woolf recycled her memoir on the Dreadnought Hoax, speaking it, in the way that Bell implies, to her audience at the Rodmell Women's Institute, and reading it to the audience at the Memoir Club.⁴⁸

⁴⁵For the minimal variations between text and speech compare the recorded version of Woolf's speech 'Craftsmanship' given on 29 April 1937 (available at the National Sound Archive, London) with the published version, 'Craftsmanship', published in *The Death of the Moth*. See the Conclusion for an investigation of this essay.

⁴⁶See Virginia Woolf to Maynard Keynes: 'Would you let us have your manuscript in order that we may read what we missed last night? It will be kept private and returned instantly' (L2, 456).

⁴⁷Many of these documents form the basis of the book edited by S.P. Rosenbaum, *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism*.

⁴⁸Of the Women's Institute meeting, Woolf writes 'my talk — it was talked — about the Dreadnought. A simple, on the whole natural, friendly occasion' (D5, 303); on the Memoir Club meeting, 'I read my Dreadnought notes, not very well' (D5, 315).

As S.P. Rosenbaum points out, the shape and tone of most of the memoirs and therefore of the autobiographical essays produced by members of Bloomsbury, were determined by the Memoir Club.⁴⁹ 'In this society the members read their memoirs aloud', remembers Quentin Bell, so 'clearly it was necessary that a high degree of confident intimacy should obtain amongst them'.⁵⁰ One later historian of various members of the group sees the predominant tone as self-satisfaction posing as self-criticism,⁵¹ but there were other more complex effects to be gained from writing for a multiple but bounded audience, in a public yet essentially private forum.

The memoir, as opposed to other classes of autobiography,⁵² implies a slightly diffused focus of interest, with the writer the subject of her own essay, but also the viewing eye, existing in context and describing the milieu as much as the individual. This would ensure that the audience were more likely to regard the autobiography with interest. As Woolf said in her review of A.C.

⁴⁹Victorian Bloomsbury, p. 59

⁵⁰Bell, *Bloomsbury*, p. 14

⁵¹Nigel Nicolson, 'Bloomsbury: the Myth and the Reality', in *Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. by Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 13

⁵²For instance, the confession, eg., Valentine Ackland, *For Sylvia: An Honest Account* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985); the history of self as exceptional figure, eg., Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Arrow Books, 1969 [1933]); the history of self as feminist enterprise, eg., Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977).

Benson's *Memories and Friends*, an autobiography in which he retails a 'long, loitering journey among pleasant places and charming people' (E3, 407),

in order to appreciate Mr Benson's memories fully one should have been educated at Eton and Cambridge. One should have a settled income. One should have an armchair. One should have dined well (E3, 406).

A direct retelling of the individual private and personal life may well have alienated the audience of the Memoir Club, many of whom were, in fact, educated at Cambridge, and some at Eton. Virginia Woolf's memoir titles therefore, refer mostly to place and incident — '22 Hyde Park Gate', 'Old Bloomsbury', 'the Dreadnought notes' — and describe a past shared with other members, rather than the individual experiencing a situation separate from the other members, as in 'Am I A Snob?' Also, in writing for a club, a multiple audience, about a self that exists in an equally multiple past context, where that context is constituted by the past selves of the present audience, the potential for self-revelation and self-construction is both restricted and increased. The 'I' who writes is called into being by the club — 'at Molly's command I have had to write a memoir of Old Bloomsbury'; 'Molly has very unfairly, I think, laid upon me the burden of providing a memoir tonight' (MoB, 221). And although 'naturally I see Bloomsbury only from my own angle — not from yours' (MoB, 197), Woolf's 'own angle', her 'stance', is shaped by the knowledge of the past and present attitudes and experiences and relationships of the audience members. But, because the common

past is understood to be representable from a variety of different angles — many meetings, for instance, contained more than one reading and the same ground was traversed by many different routes — this results in a freedom which allows the writer an extension of liberty in self-construction. 'I' can emerge from relationships *in* the past and the present, and from relationships *between* the past and the present. And because certain elements of the past are shared, are part of a common experience, other less certain, or less acceptable, aspects of the self may be revealed and believed because they are located in a recognisable context and delivered in a friendly environment. In a cosy, informal atmosphere 'one thing follows another; out of the present flowers the past; it is as easy, inconsequent, melodious as the smoke of those fragrant cigar' (DoM, 103).

The self that emerges is primarily social, the Virginia Stephen of turn of the century balls, of the Dreadnought hoax and of 1930s literary gatherings. Unlike the Virginia of 'Reminiscences', and 'Julian Bell',⁵³ who emerges from essays structured on the incident of death where the self is formed in opposition to the absent other, the Virginia Woolf of the Memoir Club essays is formed in response to the multiple and socially situated other. Writing privately about her nephew Julian Bell after his death in the Spanish Civil War, Woolf inscribes herself in the document not as Aunt, but as writer. In the opening sentence, 'Julian' is surrounded by the 'I's of Woolf:

⁵³See Appendix C of (QB2).

I am going to set down very quickly what I remember about Julian, — partly because I am too dazed to write what I was writing: & then I am so composed that nothing is real unless I write it (QB2, 255).

By the end of the paragraph, he has joined a list of the remembered dead — Thoby Stephen, Roger Fry — who now exist in the thoughts, and eventually in the prose, of the memoir writer. The writer, however, 'composes' herself in the process of writing. The essay poses an opposition between the life of action and the life of intellectual struggle, of writing, in a time of political crisis, and when the choice of the former results in extinction, the role of the writer becomes more central.

Consequently, Virginia Woolf as writer becomes co-subject of the memoir, and drifts into autobiography, but autobiography that is much more 'personal' than the Memoir Club essays, and much more introspective than 'Reminiscences'. Whereas, in 'Reminiscences', the fact of Vanessa being both a mother and absent (a mother to Julian and therefore absent to Virginia Stephen) led Virginia Stephen to write about herself, especially in relation to her own mother who was absent through death, the death of Julian as man of action led her to write herself as writer. Woolf assures herself that 'my natural reaction is to fight intellectually: if I were any use, I should write against it: I should evolve some plan for fighting English tyranny' (QB2, 258-9). If nothing is real unless it is written, and Julian has both rejected writing and been killed he is, then, doubly

unreal, and utterly absent. It only remains for Woolf to write herself.

Constructing oneself against the absent other, and constructing oneself through a relational network, stand as the two poles of subject formation envisaged in contemporary theory. Both are gendered, the first masculine and consequently universal; the second, feminine and/or feminist. When woman is written, she is the absent other in phallogentric discourse, the 'not I' against which the 'I' measures itself; but writing woman, especially woman as autobiographer, is established and maintained as a fluid, relational self, a self which exists in a network of connective rather than oppositional relationships. These relationships, in their multiplicity and connectedness, break the patriarchally supportive limitations of binary oppositions. Virginia Woolf modifies both these positions in her autobiographical essays, firstly constructing a self against an absent other, but not restricting the muted partner to the female, and writing the self against it as feminine rather than masculine. Secondly, she writes the self through relational systems of co-subjects, an enterprise, however, which only exhibits a limited portion of the self to public view. In her last 'essay', 'A Sketch of the Past', Virginia Woolf combines both these approaches to self and life-writing, and develops a means of writing and reading the self which allows for absence, multiplicity and movement between the two, going beyond autogynography as envisaged by Stanton. She does so by modifying the basic characteristics of the essay as genre,

as identified by Good, with a rhetoric of instance which relies on metaphor. Writing the self through metaphor permits gendered subject construction and, equally importantly, the reading of a potential gendered subjectivity.

Netting a self in the play of metaphor in the essay is a strategy amenable to both poststructuralist and feminist theorising, but while it posits Woolf and the essay as ready subjects for a postmodern reading, this does not necessarily imply that they are being heralded as the genesis of the postmodern author and the postmodern genre.⁵⁴ Reading Woolf's rhetoric of metaphor in her essays and especially its deployment in the autobiographical essay 'A Sketch', which links it firmly to the issue of subject formation in writing, does, however, foreground the potential of the essay as a genre for 'feminist' ends, and the fertility of Virginia Woolf for the development of feminist theory.⁵⁵

Feminist theorists, the 'exponents of difference' for whom the works of Woolf have been so useful, 'have privileged metaphor, the trope upheld from classical to modernist times as the optimal tool for transporting meaning beyond the known'.⁵⁶ In concentrating on

⁵⁴See Pamela L. Caughie's similar disclaimer (regarding Woolf as postmodernist) in *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*: 'my purpose is not to claim Virginia Woolf as a postmodern writer' (p. xi).

⁵⁵See Rachel Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*, for a reading of Woolf in the context of the development of feminist theory.

⁵⁶Domna C. Stanton, 'Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva', in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. by Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 157-8

this one trope they are, if one follows Derrida's approach to metaphysics and language, investigating the essential characteristic of discourse and of signification. According to Derrida,

metaphor in general, the passage from one existent to another, or from one signified meaning to another, authorized by the initial *submission* of Being to the existent, the *analogical* displacement of Being, is the essential weight which anchors discourse in metaphysics.⁵⁷

Metaphor not only represents the possibility of language, but through a feminist reading of the 'founding metaphor' of 'darkness and light (of self-revelation and self-concealment)',⁵⁸ the position of women in language, and also the possibilities of language, are envisaged. For, as Derrida goes on to say 'metaphor, or the animality of the letter, is the primary and infinite equivocality of the signifier as Life';⁵⁹ and, if there is no transcendental signifier, or its presumption to existence and dominance is denied, the domain and play of signification can be extended infinitely to the infinite benefit of those who have previously been restricted by being entrenched in an hierarchical system of meaning.

With a pattern of boundless expansion and connection conjured up by metaphor, transferring the pattern to the realisation

⁵⁷Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 27

⁵⁸*ibid*

⁵⁹*ibid*, p 73

of subjectivity becomes a productive venture, for if 'A is (like) B',⁶⁰ why should not B be (like) C, and C be (like) A, and so on ad infinitum. Subjectivity becomes relational, contextual and open to an endless series of connective possibilities; metaphor releases the potential to 'imagine in the material of language what hasn't yet come — what might not be able to come — into social being'.⁶¹ This may be the critic as woman essayist, or the woman essayist as autobiographer, both of which involve the creation of a gendered subjectivity in writing.⁶²

The use of metaphor as a structural principle and as the foundation of an idiosyncratic rhetoric in her essays enables Woolf to exploit what has subsequently been seen as a poststructuralist reading of language and subjectivity. Introducing the principle of metaphor to the essay disrupts any pretension the essay as genre might have to reveal 'truth' to the reader, even when that truth is conditional on the experiential character of the essay. By inviting

⁶⁰Stanton, in *The Poetics of Gender*, op.cit., p 161

⁶¹Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p xii

⁶²Critics have noted the highly metaphorical style and language of Virginia Woolf's essays: V.S. Pritchett, in 'Invader', *New York Review of Books*, 15 September 1977, p.8, notes the 'flash of her arguing metaphors'; Edward Bishop in 'Metaphor and the Subversive Process of Virginia Woolf's Essays', *Style*, 21 (1987), 573-88, notes that metaphor 'was an instrument of inquiry as well as a means of crystallizing argument (p. 573), and that Woolf used it to 'subvert the conceptual strictures of language, to liberate the author and the reader from [...] "the prison-house of language"' (p. 585). His focus is on Woolf's extension of language in relation to 'reality' rather than subjectivity. Neither note how her use of metaphor extends to the structure of the essay, nor have they charted the potential this could have for the essayist and the essayist as autobiographer in particular.

the reader to participate in the construction of meaning through reading back from the vehicle to the tenor for instance, or leading them to read continually outwards, as one metaphor suggests another or the potential for another, Woolf introduces extra subjectivities into the essay. This, of course, disturbs the direct subject/object configuration and forces open the possibility of meanings that extend beyond the known and the already realised and therefore already implicated in patriarchal discourse.

At a basic, as well as a theoretical level, this strategy was useful to Woolf as a journalist, working within the limitations of a language that had to be found acceptable by publishers and public alike. The essay on Walter Raleigh, for instance, published in *Vogue* in 1926, works its criticism of the 'Professor of Life' and the Professor of English at Oxford through a series of metaphors and similes (treating similes as a '[version] of metaphor's prototype'⁶³), using the example of Raleigh as a negative metaphor for the practice of good criticism and thereby creating the essayist as good critic. The metaphors in this review of Raleigh's letters are both obvious and repressed, thus directing the reader in how to read, and allowing the reader the freedom to follow the directions on his or her own account, without the overt direction of the essayist.

Reviewing his letters, Woolf reviews Raleigh's prose. Walter Raleigh is guilty of 'dropping into slang' (E4, 343) and his books are

⁶³Terence Hawkes, *Metaphor* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 2

'as firm in style and hard in substance as a macadamised road' (E4, 344); in his academic writing he has 'never been outside the critical fence' (E4, 344); as a writer in general he 'remains trim and detached on the high road' (E4, 345). Following up, connecting and extending the implications of these metaphors, the reader participates, with Woolf, in constructing an impression of, and a verdict on, Walter Raleigh which belies the subtitle to the article supplied by *Vogue*: 'a Brilliant Commentary on the Life and Work of a Great Professor of English Literature' (E4, 346). Most of the metaphors reveal a relationship between language and hierarchical structures. Dropping into slang situates slang and Walter Raleigh beneath the level of ordinary speech; being behind the critical fence figures him as either incapable or unwilling to move beyond boundaries, and implies that he possesses similar capabilities to a penned farm animal. The road metaphor, however, could be read positively, as it implies forward movement, a movement that rejects hierarchical orientation in favour of transversal, and suggests that, on occasion, Walter Raleigh stepped out from behind the pen. Walking on a road may also imply that Raleigh follows an established critical path, not necessarily a retrograde step, but the nature of that path, or road, connects with the other metaphors in the essay to condemn Raleigh thoroughly.

The road is macadamised, which may imply firmness, but that in turn suggests rigidity. The road, nevertheless, is high and specifically macadamised, with macadamising being a process of

making a smooth surface by combining small broken pieces of material bound together by tar or asphalt. Portraying Raleigh walking on a metaphorical road constructed by this process is a damning comment on his critical practice and intellectual approach to literature. Like the metaphors which extend the meaning beyond the literal word, Raleigh's literary critical methodology has implications which extend beyond the merely literary, implications which are themselves developed through a series of individual metaphors and the metaphor on which the whole essay is premised. Woolf states of Raleigh that 'he never wrote a bad sentence; but he never wrote a sentence which broke down barriers. He never pressed on over the ruins of his own culture to the discovery of something better' (E4, 345). Raleigh, therefore, does not write in a way that breaks down barriers, that breaches the boundaries of the word, in a way that metaphorical writing, as practised by Woolf in this essay, does.

Her critical position is therefore the unspoken topic of the essay — the tenor to its vehicle. The essay is a metaphor of and for Virginia Woolf's own critical practice. She rejects the lecture and advocates the criticism of the creative critic, creative in terms of being a producer of literary works who also writes criticism, but also creative in producing an active reader by populating the essay with metaphors which induce creative reading in order to be fully appreciated. Thus the door is 'forced [...] open' (E4, 344) for women writers and readers and with it the possibility for endless future

openings. Criticism is wrested from the grasp of Professors of English at Oxford and placed in the hands of the essayist and her readers, in this case, the predominantly female readers of *Vogue*.

Critical practice, through the metaphor of the critic pressing on 'over the ruins of his own culture', is also figured in terms of cultural ideology. It involves questions of subjectivity, gender and power in its commentary on the issue of literary critical language. The culture in which Walter Raleigh is implicated is, as the associations of his name suggest, specifically imperialist. An inability or an unwillingness to breach the ruins of culture, as the essay goes on to demonstrate, shores up the ruins of a specific imperialist culture, notably the British Empire that Woolf associates with patriarchy and all its concomitant ills for women in *Three Guineas*. Rejecting the lecture in favour of the essay, rejecting the straight road of conventional critical prose in favour of the openness and circuitousness of metaphor, means writing against a methodology that makes imperial subjects of his readers, that puts readers at the same 'level' as Indian 'natives'. In the context of the ruins of empire the resonances of the second sentence of the essay — 'It was not his first lecture by any means, for he had already lectured the natives of India on the same subject for two years' (E4, 342) — become clear, as do the continual references to high and low, 'dropping' and 'pinnacles', and walking on roads formed by compressing and amalgamating various fragments. All become part of an overarching metaphor of the critic as imperialist, a point that

is made clear by the end of the essay, when Walter Raleigh leaves literature altogether and immerses himself in English militarism. His approach to language maintains the critical rigidity of hierarchised binary oppositions: imperialist/colonised, Oxford/India, and, by implication Professor-critic/essayist-critic. The essay points to the limitations entailed when that ideology is read across into the writing and constructing of subject positions.

For Raleigh, the critic is a lecturer; for Woolf, the critic is an essayist, a creator who is both writer as reader, and a writer who, while she creates herself in the stance of reader, also creates room in the texts for external readers to intervene in the process of creating meaning in the essay and the essayist as gendered writing subject. This is achieved not by positing either the writer or the reader as owner of a solid subject position, but in the relationship between the two — the dialogic connection between at least two speaking subjects, both of whom are capable of reconfiguring themselves at any moment in the future. Just as it is in the gap between connecting the vehicle and the tenor, the 'caesura' that is also the copula,⁶⁴ the surface between one 'reading' and the next in metaphor that is the generative realm for the production of meaning, so it is the relationship between the two or more subjects that is the most productive of a gendered subjectivity in writing.

⁶⁴See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of the caesura/copula of metaphor in 'Unmaking and Making in *To the Lighthouse*', in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, ed. by Gayatri Spivak (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 30-45.

Woolf metaphorically dramatises the fecundity of the method which she demonstrates in 'A Professor of Life' in her essay 'Reading'. This characterises the critic as reader and, returning to her fascination with the insect world, the critic as hunter of moths and butterflies. 'Reading' reveals that it is when inhabiting the gap between 'the hour of midnight and dawn', when the moth is caught and a tree falls, breaking the surface of the 'deep silence of the wood', that the ultimate experience of a 'creative character' (E3, 152) takes place. It is in the between time, that 'as with a rod of light order has been imposed upon tumult; form upon chaos' (E3, 153). It is 'the caesura [that] becomes the woman writer's [...] space of proliferation'.⁶⁵

It is a space of proliferation for the woman writer as critic, but the critic is also an essayist. The essayist is, by nature, concerned with the representation of subjectivity, so it is also a space of proliferation for the essayist as autobiographer, who consciously foregrounds subjectivity. The 'basic concept of the essay as a form', as Graham Good repeatedly asserts, is 'that selfhood cannot be grasped independently, it can only be configured with an object'⁶⁶ and in the autobiographical essay, 'the object is personal and private as well'.⁶⁷ The possibility of the self as critic is glimpsed in 'Reading' when the essayist questions the unknown and unspoken. 'What is it that happens between the hour of midnight and dawn', she writes,

⁶⁵Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing*, p. 84

⁶⁶Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 130

⁶⁷Good, 'Identity and Form in the Modern Autobiographical Essay', p. 100

the little shock, the queer uneasy moment, as of eyes half open to the light, after which sleep is never so sound again? Is it experience, perhaps — repeated shocks, each unfelt at the time, suddenly loosening the fabric? breaking something away? Only this image suggests collapse and disintegration, whereas the process I have in mind is just the opposite. It is not destructive whatever it may be, one might say that it was rather of a creative character (E3, 152)

The shock of the in between hour is of a creative character, but it is also, moving from the critical to the autobiographical essay, creative *of* character. In the essay 'A Sketch of the Past', a piece that Woolf calls 'these notes' (MoB, 83), and 'my memoirs' (D5, 222), in a vocabulary that repeats the imagery of 'Reading', Woolf describes the process of creating a self in writing. She supposes that it is

the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of something real behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs with what; making a scene come right; making a

character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we — I mean all human beings — are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock (MoB, 81).

The 'I' who sees, and the 'I' who writes reaches the temporary equilibrium of subjectivity without pain by a series of connective manoeuvres, a series of acts that realise metaphors yet keep the process of realisation continuous. Although a 'whole' is temporarily achieved, it is not a fixed essence since there is no transcendental truth — no Shakespeare, no Beethoven and, ultimately, no God. While the terms in which the possibility of subjectivity is rendered are strongly reminiscent of Platonic philosophy and rhetoric, subjectivity is achieved through a working of dialogue more Bakhtinian than Platonic. The self is realised through connection with a pattern, an image which itself suggests the notion of repeated and connective elements, a word that is both verb and noun, fixed and yet mobile. Both the connective motion and the idea of a revealed pattern imply a temporary configuration of identity, achieved in writing (indeed, the emphasis on the importance of art in relation to identity formation is paramount in this passage), which is capable of further and future reconfiguration. The self is

realised through 'moments of being', a phrase which, like the metaphor, combines the brief stasis of the instant in time and the continuous process of existence.

The self thus conceived is, by pre-Modernist standards, unstable, fragmentary and, possibly, under threat. The literary form capable of 'accommodat[ing] a more provisional and fragmentary sense of the writer's identity' is, as Good suggests, the autobiographical essay.⁶⁸ The twentieth century autobiographical essay is 'born out of the experience of displacement and the attempt to piece together some kind of coherence in a world that seems to threaten the dissolution of the self'.⁶⁹ In this ontological context the written text becomes 'an essay *in* or *at* identity, rather than simply an account *of* it'.⁷⁰ It 'seems to begin and end *in media res*' and

the forms of the autobiographical essay enact the processes of disintegration and reintegration, loss and reinvention, interpretation and reinterpretation, dislocation and relocation, which are characteristic of modern identity.⁷¹

By constructing her autobiography as an essay, a 'possible form' (MoB, 85), a 'sketch' rather than the complete picture of a traditional autobiography or a collection of memoirs, Woolf writes in a form that conveys the fragmentary nature of identity in the modern world. When the tenuous nature of identity is further complicated

⁶⁸ibid, 'Identity and Form in the Modern Autobiographical Essay', p. 101

⁶⁹ibid, p. 102

⁷⁰ibid

⁷¹ibid, p. 116

by the question of gender, the essay as genre, while it seems appropriate as a mimetic reminder of the instability of women in writing, also accentuates the incompatibility of the genre, as it stands, to the possibilities of realising a gendered subjectivity in writing.

Virginia Woolf, however, writes her memoirs not in the achieved form of the essay, with subjectivity understood in terms that either uphold or mask a binary bias, but in a 'possible form'. The play with subjectivity within the essay points toward the intersubjective, dialogically-formed and metaphorically-expressed subjectivity that encompasses the possibility of gender without binary oppositions. The possible form is a series of notes, a succession of prose instants, written at separate intervals, then re-written at later intervals, with the writing and rewriting occurring in the knowledge that 'perhaps one day, relieved from making works of art', the autobiographer will 'try to compose' them (MoB, 84).

Writing, and the self it inscribes, are both present and deferred. In the manuscript and typescript form, which are available to current readers and were available to Virginia Woolf as present essayist and future composer, the notes are to 'include the present — at least enough of the present to serve as a platform to stand upon' (MoB, 83-4). The reasons for doing so are twofold: firstly, it 'would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I

then, come out in contrast', and secondly, 'this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today [2 May 1939] I should not write in a year's time' (MoB, 84).

Thus the configuration of the 'I's written in, and the 'I's writing the essay are exceedingly complex. A self writes in the present, the present signified by dates, and the past self that is written about is a combination of past and present. But the self who writes is also the self who will read and rewrite in the future, a future which will become the present at the moment of editing, making the written present (dated) the past when performed as final revised text. Woolf reads and rewrites at a point beyond the moment of writing, but this moment is anticipated because the essay will not be restricted to an existence in manuscript; all the selves only exist in relation to the stance of a hypothetical future autobiographer, who will read and re-write and 'shape the whole' into memoirs or autobiography. 'I' occupies all the positions: reader, writer and written subject; subjectivity is multiple, absent and present.

Part of the reason for this manoeuvre may be historically conditioned, with Woolf's response to the problem of creating a subjectivity enmeshed in contemporary historical circumstances. During war time, the period in which much of 'A Sketch' was written and rewritten, Woolf lamented her loss of a sense of an audience. The war, 'our waiting while the knives sharpen for the operation —

has taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have ^{so little} sense of a public' (D5, 299). The 'familiar circumvolutions — those standards — which have for so many years given back an echo & so thickened [Woolf's] identity' (D5, 299) are lost in the war. Woolf's reaction to the threat to identity was to 'force a C.R. essay into being' (D5, 299), to retrieve her self in writing, but specifically in writing an essay. The essay on Coleridge was the result. Later, she could not 'concentrate upon E. Terry —' partly because she was 'not sure' of her 'audience in Harper's' (D5, 342). The essay on Ellen Terry, which exists in a multitude of draft and typescript forms in the Monks House Papers, interspersed with *Between the Acts*,⁷² understands and recreates Terry's life, which is bound up with Woolf's historicising of her own ancestry, as a series of 'sketches done in different moods, from different angles' with 'blank pages, too' (M, 166). Eventually the essayist is forced to ask 'which, then, of all these women is the real Ellen Terry? How are we to put the scattered sketches together?' (M, 170). The difficulty is great, especially when 'something of Ellen Terry it seemed overflowed every part and remained scattered'. Ellen Terry, as is fitting for an actress, is seen as an elusive figure inhabiting a succession of stances, and this creates her as a subject, as Ellen Terry. In conclusion Woolf can only say 'that was Ellen Terry's fate — to act a new part' and 'Ellen Terry is remembered because she was Ellen Terry' (M, 170). As Woolf wrote in her diary, 'the only justification for my writing & living' is to say 'I am I; & must follow that furrow,

⁷²MHP, B. 4, & 5. a)

not copy another' (D5, 347). So, although in the week before beginning her autobiographical essay, when Woolf noted 'how one rockets between private & public' (D5, 213) she still felt the power to 'engender in solitude' (D5, 215). When writing 'A Sketch' Woolf countered the loss of an audience by creating herself as audience, thus engendering herself in a solitude that was self-populated.

Virginia Woolf is constructed, recaptured and deferred in writing and the writing 'I' of the essay as we have it — the Virginia Woolf of 'A Sketch of the Past' — exists in an elusive present (for the present of the typescript is not the present of the manuscript) which includes both past and future. There is no 'you', no separate object to the subject; not even the reader of the essay can fill this position, because the reader is the future Virginia Woolf who will rewrite the sketch into the published version. 'I' comes into existence as a dialogic constellation of entirely private subjects, temporarily configured in a 'present' that is historically situated, yet never permanently realised in a way that confirms a traditional understanding of the subject.

In writing her autobiography thus, Woolf's construction of self in language metaphorically exposes the futility of the autobiographical project as traditionally envisaged, while indicating the possibility of a different type of self by writing it dialogically as metaphor. As Paul DeMan explains, if language is 'not the thing itself but the representation', then in using language to represent

the self 'autobiography veils a defacement of the mind of which it is itself the cause'.⁷³ Woolf, however, in the autobiographical essay, writes a self that is both present and absent to itself, is the thing itself and the representation, with the self formed through dialogic orientation towards others and always pointing to future orientations, touching the surface of the present, yet sinking beneath it and breaking through the surface to higher echelons.

In 'A Sketch', Virginia Woolf uses a number of depth/surface/upper air metaphors to describe this process of self-construction and memory that is, in effect, a writing and reading of instance and metaphor. The 'moments of being' which 'come to the surface unexpectedly' (MoB, 80), the shocks that make Woolf a writer, are structured metaphorically.⁷⁴ There are three moments: being pummelled by Thoby on the lawn and realising the futility of violence and, simultaneously, 'something terrible; and [...] my own powerlessness'; looking at a flower in the earth and realising that the flower is more than itself, is 'part earth; part flower'; and hearing of a death by suicide, and realising its impact by associative recognition: 'it seemed to me that the apple tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it' (MoB, 80). All

⁷³Paul DeMan, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern Language Notes*, 94 (1979), p. 930

⁷⁴Jane Goldman, 'Eclipse and Prismatic: The Feminist Post-Impressionism of Virginia Woolf' (unpublished thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1992), notes the metaphoric construction of the flower/earth moment and relates it to a subject configured in relation to other subjects rather than an object, envisaging a plural subjectivity in line with Habermas's notion of intersubjectivity. However, she relates this specifically to a socially-grounded, materialist feminism.

work connectively; each moment is more than itself. Meaning is relational, and the means of expressing it is metaphoric. Not only do the moments themselves reveal an even larger metaphor, the sense of life as pattern and the world as a 'work of art', but in 'com[ing] to the surface unexpectedly' they connect with the recurrent water and fish imagery that features in 'A Sketch' and figure the self in ichthyological terms.

Woolf figures the moment of recall and the events recalled as 'an incongruous miscellaneous catalogue, little corks that mark a sunken net' (MoB, 148). Like Lady Murasaki's fish, the corks are both on and below the surface, visible and accessible to the author as fisher, which is how Woolf has just characterised herself, describing her childhood 'passion' for fishing as one of the 'momentary glimpses' into herself (MoB, 148). They also indicate, in their relation to the net, a whole wealth of life beneath the surface. The glimpse into self that fishing reveals, 'like those rapid glances, for example, that I cast into basements when I walk in London streets' (MoB, 148) realises an awareness of submerged realities. The description of momentary glimpses or 'moments of being' describes 'the person to whom things happened' (MoB, 73) but also situates the moment historically, and recognises its ability to suggest the invisible presences which are so important to the telling of a life. It is, Woolf felt,

by such invisible presences that the 'subject of this memoir' is tugged this way and that way

every day of his life; it is they that keep him in position. Consider what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and also from class to class; well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream (MoB, 90).

Life writing may be futile from a traditional perspective, but engaged in through a rhetoric of metaphor, 'discovering what belongs to what', one can put 'the severed parts together' (MoB, 81) and realise the invisible presences, and, taught by the liberal use of metaphor in her essayistic prose, read out from the phrases to create and describe the indescribable — the stream.

Putting the parts together, however, does not mean cementing them into an immovable configuration. The moment of being, the instant which Woolf uses to describe the invisible presence, like the essay which encloses it, forgoes the distorting illusion of complete revelation or closure. It is a temporary and transitory incident related to an ongoing process. Thus the autobiographer, in realising the self by writing it as an instant, with the subject configured through its stance in relation to any number of other subjects (past, present and future Woolfs in 'A Sketch of the Past'), keeps the self in motion. Woolf exemplifies a new notion of subjectivity which is productive rather than restrictive, and which escapes traditionally gendered hierarchies. Fittingly, therefore, Woolf begins her next

paragraph, after the description of her autobiographical fishing expedition, thus: 'and to pull that net, leaving its contents unsorted, to shore, by way of making an end where there is no such thing, I add:' (MoB, 148). Writing the self as capable of future addition does not '[make] an end where there is no such thing' and mirrors the rationale of Woolf's writing practice in both the autobiography and the essay, which she constructed as fragment and as process towards something that can have no real closure without negating its own and its author's existence.

CONCLUSION: 'WORDS FAIL ME'

While Virginia Woolf may have felt that it was better to leave the contents of the net of her memories unsorted, analysing one of the more obscure instants of her career as essayist and journalist serves to 'make an end' to this thesis. In order to return to Lady Murasaki's pond, in which the metaphorical fish 'break the surface of silence', and reassess the voices speaking in this thesis, it is necessary, as Woolf wrote in 'A Sketch of the Past', to

write this partly in order to recover [a] sense of the present by getting the past to shadow this broken surface. Let me then, like a child advancing with bare feet into a cold river, descend again into that stream (MoB, 109).

Part of the past that shadows Virginia Woolf as essayist and journalist is Virginia Woolf as broadcaster, for on 29 April 1937 Virginia Woolf broadcast an essay the recording of which remains the only extant reproduction of her speaking voice.¹ 'Words Fail Me', 'Craftsmanship', 'A Ramble Round Words' are the simultaneous and alternative titles for the essay which was eventually published, under the title of 'Craftsmanship', in *The Listener* on 5 May 1937 and republished, posthumously, in *The Death of the Moth* in 1942. Its multiple titles and complex textual existence in five separate formats — the actual broadcast in 1937, the fragment of recording preserved in the National Sound Archive, its original publication in

¹See QB2, 200

The Listener, its republication as part of a collection of essays (both *The Death of the Moth* and Leonard Woolf's edition of *Collected Essays*)², and its future republication as part of Andrew McNeillie's complete scholarly edition of Woolf's *Collected Essays* — testify to the heterogeneous cultural and literary dimensions that characterise the products and production of Virginia Woolf as an essayist and journalist. Analysing the essay in its oral and written form, in its historical context and for its theoretical resonances, therefore serves to draw together the strands of argument and suggestion put forward in this thesis, whilst bearing in mind Woolf's own warning that when 'words are pinned down they fold their wings and die' (DoM, 132). 'In reading', she says, 'we have to allow the sunken meanings to remain sunken, suggested, not stated' (DoM, 129).

'Craftsmanship' unfolds many suggestive readings relevant to a new critical appraisal of Woolf's non-fiction, and a recognition of her importance for negotiating developments in literary theory. Recognising 'Craftsmanship' as a piece of broadcast journalism, for instance, prompts an awareness of Virginia Woolf as a participant in one of the key cultural events of the twentieth century — the growth of the electronic media and the concomitant growth of popular or mass culture. Like her involvement with the periodical press, Woolf's connection with the BBC demonstrates her contact with spheres of cultural life and cultural production that extend beyond

²The essay is misdated in both. Woolf, according to her diary, delivered the talk on 29 April 1937, *not* 20 April 1937.

the confines of the 'high art' of the Modernist novel. Far from being limited to the single role of self-publisher of esoteric prose, aloof from the common pursuits of the bulk of the population, Woolf delivered broadcasts on three separate occasions and was a frequent and keen wireless listener, especially during the later 1930s and war years.³ She was also, as a member of the Bloomsbury Group, part of

arguably the first aesthetic movement to be subject to the now familiar phenomenon of media hype. Its heyday coincides with the emergence of radio as the dominant popular medium in the inter-war years.⁴

Her connection with the wireless, therefore, shows Woolf to be aware of the opportunities that the medium offered for disseminating her non-fictional prose, aware of its power as a means of mass communication, and aware of how her own reputation could be conditioned by being the subject of broadcasts.⁵ The case of 'Virginia Woolf and the wireless', like that of 'Virginia Woolf and

³These were: 1) a discussion between Leonard and Virginia Woolf on 'Are Too Many Books Written and Published', on 15 July 1927; 2) a talk on 'Beau Brummell' in the Miniature Biographies series, on 20 November 1929; 3) 'Craftsmanship'. See Diary 5 for evidence of Woolf's listening habits.

⁴Kate Whitehead, 'Broadcasting Bloomsbury', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 20 (1990), p. 121

⁵The government's use of radio broadcasts in relation to war brought home to Woolf the issue of mass communication: 'The BBC in a measured trained voice: how the public was to go with warm clothing: no glasses: post cards: this interrupted by the Arch B's prayers: then cold menace: a spaced dictated message from the Admiralty to ships. Obviously we'd sunk mines. Then the afternoon (Wednesday) when all foreign stations were jammed. War broken out already L[eonard] thought' (D5, 178). She also noted when she was the topic of broadcasts: 'Allington [Dean of Durham] sneers at me on the BBC' (D5, 84).

journalism' demonstrates that the relationship between author and culture is neither static nor straightforward.

Through her occasional broadcasting of essays and debates, Woolf reveals the implication of 'literature' and literary figures in a medium that was increasingly being seen as the symbol of new popular and mass culture, but the circumstances surrounding her participation in the medium reveal, once again, complexities that undermine any notions of simple concepts of culture, class and literature. Thus, while the broadcasting of 'Craftsmanship' ensured that Woolf reached a potentially mass audience and therefore was part of a process of democratising the accessibility of art, her access to, and opinions on, the medium demonstrate similar conflicts and contradictions to those found in her involvement with print journalism. George Barnes, the member of the BBC Talks Department who asked Woolf to deliver the broadcast was Woolf's friend Mary Hutchinson's half-brother, and he initially made Woolf's acquaintance at a tea-party, echoing almost uncannily Woolf's earlier introduction to reviewing.⁶ Woolf's experience was similar to others' in her social class, with other talks producers, Joe Ackerley and Hilda Matheson, for example, who were also 'friends' of Bloomsbury, either soliciting or facilitating Bloomsbury's access to the wireless.⁷ The contradiction between 'low' cultural forms and

⁶See (D5, 31) for the description of the tea-party

⁷Hilda Matheson was Vita Sackville-West's lover and, according to Victoria Glendinning, in *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West* 'ready to give Harold [Nicolson, Vita's husband], as well as Vita, regular work at the BBC', p. 214. Kate Whitehead notes the networking of Joe Ackerley, p. 123

the elite social formation (often familial and frequently socially-based) that guaranteed ease of access to the medium which characterised Woolf's experience as a journalist in the print media, therefore carried over into her involvement with the BBC. Her broadcasting, like her print journalism, reveals the complexities of cultural and class dynamics, the Foucauldian network of power that politicises and historicises the mechanics of textual production, often overlooked in a purely textual approach to literature.

Broadcasting, similarly, highlights the situation of the text within various formative structures, rendering any glib association of *a* text with *an* Author and a regulated set of meanings fundamentally naive. 'Craftsmanship' was itself crafted as an essay in order to fit into its twenty minute time slot (according to Barnes it should therefore last for 'about seventeen and a half minutes which means, with most speakers, between 2000 and 2500 words')⁸, and although Barnes was adamant that he 'impose[d] no restrictions about subject', he did include his own ideas in the letter of invitation, along with an outline of the other talks in the series, both of which were potential influences on the writing of the essay.⁹ And, for all Barnes's liberality, Woolf may well have recalled a previous broadcasting experience in which the power of the broadcasting director — not dissimilar to the power of the print editor — was amply demonstrated. In 1929, when she was

⁸MHP, letter 26 January 1937

⁹MHP, 21 January 1937 for the letter of invitation

preparing to broadcast on Dorothy Wordsworth and Beau Brummell, 'at the last moment the BBC condemned Dorothy Wordsworth and made me castrate Brummell' (L4, 111). Woolf was 'in the devil of a temper' and vowed that 'never again' would she broadcast, just as she did again in 1937, demonstrating her ambivalence towards a facet of popular culture that both fascinated and repulsed her. Despite the 'never agains' and 'the bright bubble, the fly in the eye, & all the other effects — premonitory — shivers & disgusts of that BBC' Woolf was 'very cordial to Barnes, & would have agreed to do another had he asked me', a tendency she checked immediately with the warning 'remember, however, to refrain from that folly' (D5, 83).

Woolf's cordiality to Barnes is justified, for in 'Craftsmanship' there is no evidence of overt editorial intervention, or covert self-censorship from Woolf; but the very status of the talk as part of a series may have helped to shape the final essay. In the original schedule, Woolf was to have followed a talk on 'Words and Psychology' and preceded one on 'The Impact of America',¹⁰ both of which may possibly have been influential in her mention of surfaces and depths, consciousness and subconsciousness, and the repetition of similar ideas of language and nationality to those included in a previous essay on America and language.¹¹

¹⁰ibid

¹¹See 'American Fiction' (E4, 269-80)

The influence of America on the essay, however, can be seen as more profound than the mere possibility of intertextual echoes. When 'Craftsmanship' is analysed as journalism, with all its accompanying connotations of historical context, it reveals its ability to point out and comment upon the relationship between literature and history. As a piece of broadcast journalism, 'Craftsmanship' was delivered to the British listening public on 29 April 1937; this moment was therefore less than six months after the abdication crisis and less than a fortnight before the Coronation of George the VI, on 14 May 1937. Thus the 'Impact of America' was being felt in British society at a level far deeper than the linguistic, and placing the essay in its context highlights Woolf's position as an index of contemporary cultural debates in the 1930s. Woolf's private knowledge of the crisis illustrates her connection with elite culture, while her recording of the public's knowledge discloses the new power of the technology of mass communication.

Virginia Woolf heard the 'confidential story about the King & Mrs Simpson' from her husband, who in turn had had it 'told him in secret by K[ingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman & Nation*]'. Martin had been 'approached by one of the King's circle [and] was asked to write an article, revealing the facts from the King's side'. This took place on 27 November 1936 (D5, 37-8). The first public mention of the affair appeared in the newspapers on 3 December. On 11 December, Edward gave his 'side' in a national radio broadcast. Woolf paid careful attention to this novel use of the new

form of mass media, describing the event in her diary. 'Then we had the Broadcast', she wrote,

the thing had never been done on that scale. One man set up in the Augusta Tower at Windsor addressing the world on behalf of himself & Mrs Simpson. Out in the Square there was complete emptiness. All the life had ^{been} withdrawn to listen, to judge [...] Finally he wound up, God Save the King with a shout; after which I heard his sigh go up, a kind of whistle. Then silence. Complete silence. Then Mr Hibbert saying. And now we shut down. Good night everybody. Goodnight; & we were tucked up in our beds (D5, 43-4).

The abdication crisis was bound up with public realisation of the new power of the media, so Woolf's broadcast, which used the same medium, was delivered in the midst of the period of crisis that had called forth its use. A single diary entry of 27 April 1937 reveals the implication of the essay as a piece of journalism in its historical and commercial circumstances, sliding easily from the BBC to the Coronation, then back again to the BBC:

BBC rehearsal at 3: then Memoir Club. Sales slackening. Coronation impending. But on the 7th we're off. BBC have asked L[eonard Woolf] to do a whole series. Never again will I read even one talk (D5, 81).

'Craftsmanship' stands, therefore, as an indicator of cultural and media evolution in the 1930s, and as an example of the relevance of historical circumstance to analyses of the composition of Woolf's essays.

Examining the text of the essay in the light of its historical reference as 'one talk' given with the 'Coronation impending' also renders many of the phrases and allusions in the essay politically charged puns and satirical jibes. Without having the Coronation and abdication context foregrounded, much of the bite of Woolf's essay is lost. The references in the essay to 'Royal words' which 'mate with commoners', the comments on language being 'much less bound by ceremony and convention than we are', and mention of the dual societies for pure and impure English (DoM, 131), read in the context of contemporary events show Woolf to be a critical commentator on her society. In the broadcast of 'Craftsmanship', even the particular relish with which Woolf enunciates the sentence 'For she has gone a-roving, a-roving fair maid', with the great emphasis on the 'r' of roving clearly audible in the sound recording, is quite possibly an attempt to allude to the exploits of Mrs Simpson and the cultural references contained in the essay.¹²

The text, then, exists in a sort of limbo, broadcast on invisible sound waves which are lost to the present day, published yet separated from its moment of delivery, and partially recorded, repeating the moment of a lost origin, suspended in the incompleteness of its fragmentary recording and secreted in its

¹²Woolf's accent in the broadcast is itself a cultural reference, clearly indicating her class. However, Bell declares the recording 'a very poor one. Her voice is deprived of depth and resonance; it seems altogether too fast and too flat; it is barely recognisable' (QB2, 200).

archive. The speaker is disembodied and absent, pure voice to the auditor; the writer, the essayist, is deferred at the moment of speech, yet recreated, once the piece is published, as a speaker, absent and previous who voiced the text we now read; the audience is absent and deferred, multiple and single, present and future. The text flutters between broadcast journalism, essay and a free floating momentary utterance of voice, reminding us of the relevance of context to the process of plotting any locus of meaning within the text, whilst highlighting its radical instability and elusiveness.

The complexity of subject positions within this essay and its inability to be fixed, draws attention to its potential as a commentary on and model for the exploration and creation of a gendered subjectivity in writing, a potential which is perceptible in Woolf's essays and the genre in general. Woolf's focus on gender and language in 'Craftsmanship' — the essay is patterned around images and metaphors of birth and marriage — relates the two issues at a surface level of meaning, while her suggestion of alternative methods of approaching and achieving meaning and signification offers a more philosophical and theoretical reading of gender. By disrupting traditional binary oppositions, and a teleological approach to meaning, and the gender hierarchies inherent in both, Woolf thus anticipates a more radical concept of subjectivity not based on the established limited and limiting model.

In 'Craftsmanship' Woolf outlines a process of reading and writing that will liberate this new conception of a freer subjectivity. As with most of her essays, it works through a pattern of releasing multiple associative meanings, a methodology prompted by the restrictions of journalism and the essay as a genre, yet also amenable to a practice of subversion and critique. In this instance, the restrictions of journalism are the title of the talk and the series, 'Craftsmanship' and 'Words Fail Me', both of which were supplied and which Woolf asserts in the opening of the talk, lead her to suppose 'that the talker is meant to discuss the craft of words — the craftsmanship of the writer' (DoM, 129). The editorial expectations implied by the titles proffer, therefore, a means of approach to a predetermined topic, but Woolf as talker feels that there is 'something incongruous, unfitting, about the term 'craftsmanship' when applied to words' (DoM, 126). Words have multiple meanings, so they 'never make anything that is useful'; but words are 'the only things that tell the truth and nothing but the truth' (DoM, 126). So, in order to talk about words, which is her original task, in a manner in which she feels comfortable, the title should really be changed, to 'A Ramble round Words, perhaps' (DoM, 127). The suggestiveness of words leads to the speaker's own suggestion for a title, a title that gives her the liberty to ramble around without talking precisely about any particular issue. And since the essayist as reader of her own title has reached this position, so she indicates to her readers, while simultaneously creating herself as their partner and thus disrupting any possible hierarchical imbalance between writer and

reader, how they may approach her essay. We too may ramble around the words that she uses and divine possible meanings from our perambulations.

This new title also serves to situate the speaker in the traditional role of essayist, recalling Dr Johnson's persona, a manoeuvre picked up by the focus of the essay on the connection between words and truth. Truth, as the history of the essay genre suggests, is not to be found through established system, but through the experience of the essayist. Accordingly, in 'Craftsmanship', dictionary definitions of truth are discarded and an experiential model is substituted:

According once more to the dictionary there are at least three kinds of truth [...] But to consider each separately would take too long. Let us then simplify, and assert that the test of truth is the length of life (DoM, 128).

But contrary to the model favoured by the traditional essay and supported by accepted paradigms of language, and in keeping with her modifications of the genre, Woolf proposes a 'democratic' lateral or constellatory, rather than an 'aristocratic' or hierarchical, means of achieving 'truth'. Any 'truth' is 'many-sided' and words convey it 'by being themselves many-sided, flashing this way, then that' (DoM, 131); it is realised through temporary moments of combination, when words 'combine — they combine unconsciously together', rather than a fixed opposition, because 'the moment we single out and emphasize the suggestions [...] they become unreal'.

Rather than being permanently fused, the combination is generative, fluid and complex, with 'the sunken meanings [allowed] to remain sunken, suggested, not stated; lapsing and flowing into each other like reeds on the bed of the river' (DoM, 129).

This model of truth, like Montaigne's in his essays, presupposes and supports a model of subjectivity; 'words', as Woolf said, 'live, in the mind' (DoM, 130). They 'suggest the writer' (DoM, 129) and, insofar as the writer in the essay is also a reader and that she invokes the reader in the 'we' of the essay, they suggest the reader as well. Reader and writer, then, the 'subjects' of the essay and of language, are part of a constitutive economy of 'change', where 'anything that stamps them with one meaning or confines them to one attitude' is rejected and despised (DoM, 131).

While 'Craftsmanship' discusses the power of words and their complex relation to a new concept of truth, the structural and rhetorical subtext of the essay, like many of Woolf's essays which lack its specific explicatory bias, enacts its subject of discussion. The frequent use of the metaphors of marriage and mating, prompted no doubt by the recent abdication crisis, gives the essay its linguistic and thematic keynote. The metaphor of marriage, like metaphor as a trope, breeds meaning. The result may be troubling, as with the bringing together of 'two incongruous ideas, which if they mate can only give birth to some monster fit for a glass case in a museum' (DoM, 126); or the result may be triumphant, as with the famous

linguistic marriage which produced the beauty of the conjunction between 'incarnadine' and 'multitudinous' (DoM, 130). Words live, as the essay lives,

variously and strangely, much as human beings live, by ranging hither and thither, by falling in love, and mating together. It is true that they are much less bound by ceremony and convention than we are. Royal words mate with commoners. English words marry French words, German words, Indian words, Negro words, if they have a fancy. Indeed, the less we enquire into the past of our dear Mother English the better it will be for that lady's reputation. For she has gone a-roving, a-roving fair maid (DoM, 131).

As readers rove in and about these metaphors of marriage they may recall that marriage, in the context of Edward and Mrs Simpson, is a direct threat to established hierarchies, that marriage is an institution implicated in public and private structures of meaning and power.¹³ In following the connotations of marriage, the reader marries the essayist in order to give birth to the meanings of the text and to themselves as reading, writing and dialogically constituting subjects.

The reading and writing subjects in the essay are constituted dialogically through a textual tactic that, like Woolf's other rhetorical manoeuvres in her essays — the use of the letter,

¹³Woolf noted that 'it looks as if this one little insignificant man had moved a pebble wh. dislodges an avalanche. Things — empires, hierarchies — moralities — will never be the same again' (D5, 39-40).

dialogue, character creation, the mingling of fact and fiction — makes dialogue part of the very structure of the essay. Bakhtin's terminology is especially relevant, not only because Woolf's own phraseology suggests his,¹⁴ but because it connects language, subject and history at the moment of dialogic utterance and constitution. While our view of history may be influenced by Foucault, our view of language by deconstructionists like Derrida, and our views of subjectivity by the various schools of feminism, Bakhtin is the theorist who suggests a framework in which all three strands can interweave yet retain their distinctive features. The suggestiveness of his theoretical approach means that there is room for a dialogue between his writing and Woolf's practice in her essays. This dialogue reveals a method for reading Woolf that locates her in her contemporary culture, essential if one is to recognise her as a participant in, and emblem of, culture, yet maintains a focus on the texture of her writing. Reading Woolf dialogically also allows the critic to conjoin notions of modernity and postmodernity, literature and literary history. It reveals a practice in the essays which promotes a new means of writing and thinking subjectivity, shaped by notions of genre, through the restrictions and possibilities of the essay; by means of textual production, through the location of the

¹⁴Woolf's assertion that 'words, English words are full of echoes, of memories, of associations — naturally. They have been out and about, on people's lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries (DoM, 129) echoes Bakhtin's writing on the word. He writes that 'all words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life [...] The word in language is half someone else's'. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 293

essay in the literary market place as journalism, with all its attendant problems of editorial influence; and by recognising the problems of gender, as a physical and psychological mode of conditioning and experience. And because dialogue, as Bakhtin conceived it, is not fixed to a rigid linear progression with an ultimate point of climax, the process can continue, and Woolf's essays themselves can talk to the future, suggesting both a method of looking at literature and culture and the potential of a genre and a rhetoric that could be most useful for a feminist literary criticism and the expression of a gendered subjectivity in writing.

To do so, to focus not on polarities of surface and depth, but to bob back and forth through the surface of silence, to live in both air and water yet experience the surface tension between them, to read out from metaphor, looking for pattern not progress, is the ramble round words that is 'Craftsmanship'. Eventually, words do fail Woolf, but by the time the concluding paragraph is reached our notion of what constitutes failure and success makes this final 'failure' but a pregnant pause, to echo Woolf's metaphor, before the promise of the birth of the next word. For, as she says in the final lines of her essay (DoM, 132),

. . . That pause was made, that veil of darkness was dropped, to tempt words to come together in one of those swift marriages which are perfect images and create everlasting beauty. But no — nothing of that sort is going to happen to-night. The little wretches are out of temper;

disobliging; disobedient; dumb. What is it that they are muttering? 'Time's up! Silence!'

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