

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

“A Sense of Freedom”: A Study of Virginia Woolf’s Short Fiction

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the University of Hull

by

Nena Škrbić, BA

October 2000

## Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
Chapter 1 Virginia Woolf and the Short Story: An Overview	17
Chapter 2 Through the Realist Frame: “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), “Memoirs of a Novelist” (1909) and “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906)	58
Chapter 3 “Sudden intensities”: Surrealistic Aspects of Woolf’s Early and Late Short Fiction	95
Chapter 4 “Across the border”: Ghostly Motifs in Woolf’s Early Short Fiction, “Kew Gardens” (1919) and “A Haunted House” (1921)	129
Chapter 5 “Reflecting what passes”: Reflections and Mirrors in “The New Dress” (1925), “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” (1929) and “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929)	158
Chapter 6 “Wild outbursts of freedom”: “Monday or Tuesday” (1921) and “Blue and Green” (1921)	191

Conclusion		214
<i>Appendices</i>		216
Appendix A	[ <i>The Manchester Zoo</i> . Apr. 1906]. 3 pp ts. (A 24 a.)	219
Appendix B	<i>Sunday up the River</i> . 1 p ms (A.23 a)	223
Appendix C	[ <i>The Penny Steamer</i> ]. 3 pp ms (A.23 b)	226
Appendix D	<i>Down the river to Greenwich</i> . 6 <sup>th</sup> July'08. 1p ms (A.23 d)	229
Appendix E	<i>Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions of a private house into cash</i> . 2 pp ts. (A.19)	234
Appendix F	Victor Brauner <i>L'étrange cas de Monsieur K (fragment)</i> (1934)	237
Appendix G	Umberto Boccioni <i>States of Mind II: Those who Go</i> (1911)	238
Appendix H	Umberto Boccioni <i>States of Mind II: Those who Stay</i> (1911)	239
<i>Bibliography</i>		240

*For Dušan and Sofija Škrbić*



## Acknowledgments

This work was made possible by a University of Hull Scholarship. Work on the Monks House Papers at Sussex University was facilitated by the support of the *Carl Baron Memorial Fund* and I would like to express my gratitude to the trustees.

The section on “Phyllis and Rosamond” in Chapter Two appears in the *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, No. 5 (September 2000). Chapter Four will appear, with slight variations, in *Trespassing Boundaries: A Collection of Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (forthcoming): to the editors of these publications, Kathryn Benzel, Stuart N. Clarke and Professor Ruth Hoberman, my thanks.

For permission to print transcriptions of the manuscripts of “Sunday up the River” (c.1906), “The Penny Steamer” (c.1906), “The Manchester Zoo” (1906) and “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) I wish to thank the Monks House Papers, Sussex University Library, Sussex University, Brighton who kindly made these previously unpublished stories from Virginia Woolf available and the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf who have kindly permitted them to be printed. The generous assistance of Mrs Elizabeth Ingles at the Monks House Papers is also gratefully acknowledged.

During work on this thesis I have consulted a number of people about the topic, each of whom have made valuable comments and suggestions. First and foremost I would like to extend my warmest appreciation to Professor Angela Leighton whose unwavering support, guidance and supervision throughout this study has been essential. I also gratefully acknowledge Dr Helen Baron whose editorial assistance on the Monks House Papers was invaluable and the advice and comments made by Kathryn Benzel, Dr James Booth, Stuart N. Clarke, Professor Ruth Hoberman, Dr Owen Knowles and Dr Patsy Stoneman.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Dušan and Sofija Škrbić, whose support and encouragement throughout my work on this project has been inestimable.

## Introduction

Virginia Woolf's short fiction forms a large part of her output (forty-five of her stories are collected in Susan Dick's 1985 collection *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*), but they are routinely sidelined in favour of her novels which remain her pre-eminent literary legacy.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, her short fiction is a rather ill-defined area and, apart from Dean Baldwin's brief history *Virginia Woolf: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1989), there is as yet no systematic treatment of it. Even though the forthcoming American study *Trespassing Boundaries: A Collection of Critical Essays on Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* suggests renewed interest, Woolf's short fiction is underpromoted to the extent that some of it remains unpublished to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Woolf is excluded from most histories of the short story form. In *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (1972) H.E. Bates concentrates on the short fiction of D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, but ignores Woolf, placing her alongside Aldous Huxley and claiming that "beside their novels" their short stories are "negligible" (196). Bates also excludes Woolf from his list of post-war women short story writers who "brought distinction to the modern short story" (208-09). Apart from Elizabeth Bowen, Kay Boyle, Katherine Mansfield, Katherine Ann Porter and Pauline Smith, some of the women who feature on this list, for example, Malachi Whitaker, Mary Arden, Dorothy Edwards, Winifred Williams and Ruth Suckow, are relatively unknown today. In *The Short Story:*

---

<sup>1</sup> Although Sandra Kemp collects fifteen short stories in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Short Stories*. (London: Penguin, 1993; repr. 2000) and a number of stories were translated into French in 1993 in *Kew Gardens and Other Short Stories*. Trans. Pierre Norden. (Paris: Livre de Poche, Les Langues Modernes, 1993), a collected edition of Woolf's stories have not been reissued in English since the second edition of Susan Dick's collection appeared in 1989. Five of Woolf's stories: "Kew Gardens" (1919), "Solid Objects" (1920), "The Duchess and the Jeweller" (1938), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1939) and "The Legacy" (1944) are issued as *Virginia Woolf: Five Short Stories* (1999) - Audiotapes read by Douglas and Thomas Verrall. Individual stories have appeared in anthologies, however. "A Haunted House" (1921) can be found in *The Omnibus of Twentieth Century Ghost Stories*. Ed. Robert Phillips. (London: Robinson, 1992), 279-80; "The New Dress" (1925) is in *That Kind of Woman: Stories from the Left Bank and Beyond*. Edited and Introduced by Bronte Adams and Trudi Tate. (London: Virago, 1997), 50-59; "The Legacy" appears in *The Chatto Book of Love Stories*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997); and "Solid Objects" is included in *The Oxford Book of English Short Stories*. Ed. A.S. Byatt. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 204-09. For a review of *Kew Gardens and Other Short Stories* (1993). see Mary Ann Caws, "Hauntings: French Translations of Woolf's Short Stories", *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*. No. 54 (Fall 1999), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> These unpublished stories are: "The Manchester Zoo" (1906), "The Penny Steamer" (c.1906), "Sunday up the River" (c.1906) and "Down the river to Greenwich" (1908) and first appear in an Appendix to this study.

*Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (1988) John Bayley makes no mention of Woolf, or any other female short story writer, in his list of “the great masters of the form” (viii) which comprises Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Henry James, Franz Kafka, Rudyard Kipling and D.H. Lawrence. Similarly, Ian Reid does not mention Woolf at all in his study *The Short Story* (1977) and Heather McClave’s collection of essays, *Women Writers of the Short Story* (1980) omits her entirely. Bernard Blackstone reiterates a commonly held misconception about Woolf’s relationship with the short story, when he asserts:

I don’t think Virginia Woolf was ever very successful in the short story form. She needed space to develop her impressionistic technique and her analysis of character, to build up her special atmosphere, and she didn’t find this in the short story (51).

Similarly, John Bayley considers that Woolf “of all writers, is least by nature a composer of short stories” (124) and Joanne Trautmann Banks also underestimates her affinity with the form when she maintains that “it was as a novelist that Woolf found her deepest pleasure” (1985: 63). My thesis addresses this misconception about Woolf’s apparently non-committal relationship with the short story and affirms that, contrary to these opinions, Woolf’s instinct from the very beginning of her career was for brevity.

The reasons behind the disregard of Woolf’s short fiction may stem from critical unease about the short story genre itself, particularly its ideological distinction from the novel. In his article “The Short Story: An Underrated Art” (1964) Thomas Gullason points out that, despite its longevity, the short story remains “underrated” in favour of the novel. This neglect of the short story - a criticism that is still relevant today - is due to the fact that it has neither the commercial potential nor the public appeal of the novel and is mainly “a private art, between writer and reader” (13).<sup>3</sup> Gullason goes on to argue that we rarely get

---

<sup>3</sup> Here Gullason echoes the comment of Frank O’Connor in *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1963) that the short story “began, and continues to function, as a private art intended to satisfy the standards of the individual, solitary, critical reader” (14). Also, see Gullason, “Revelation and Evolution: A Neglected Dimension of the Short Story”, *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 10 (1973), 347-56 where Gullason notes that one of the reasons why writers of short fiction remain with the form rather than concentrating on novels stems from a notion that the short story can “approximate truth and reality far more persuasively” than the novel (356); and “The Short Story: Revision and Renewal”, *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 19 (1982), 221-30 in

full-scale studies of writers' shorter fiction and, even if critics do refer to short stories, they often view them as "miniature pieces echoing the novels to come, or pieces left over from novels already published". This is despite the fact that the short story might be a novelist's "earliest and best medium" (14, 22). Through Gullason's comments, insights emerge into Woolf's own short fiction. In particular, the notion that the short story is "a private art" foregrounds one of the issues of this study, which is that Woolf's short story writing can be explained as a private rather than a public pursuit. What is most striking about Woolf's short fiction is the manner in which many of her stories were written. It was characteristic of Woolf to write short stories peripherally, displacing her energies into "side stories" (*Diary 3*: 106) whilst working on her novels or essays. Her short story writing might be seen as a private writing, a largely liminal activity that freed her from the anxiety of writing for a public and put her out of the view of the "official eye" (*Letters I*: 178) of editors and publishers. For example, "Phyllis and Rosamond" (1906), "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" (1906) and "Memoirs of a Novelist" (1909), examined in Chapter 2, can be traced to a particular impulse to thwart the official censor and answer a desperate need for secrecy, concealment and anonymity. These stories helped her to identify, develop and nurture her own voice before she had even begun to write novels, enabling her to gain confidence as a writer. But, perhaps the most interesting aspect of these stories is their female voice. In them, we find Woolf questioning the realist frame of traditional male storytelling which she inherited from the Victorians.

---

which Gullason expands upon his article "The Short Story: An Underrated Art" (1964) by arguing that, if the short story is to gain credibility, it needs to cast off "the ghost of Poe" (223) and his delimitive ideas of singleness of effect: "Great stories provide more questions than answers. They provide more effects than one effect. They have more than one story to tell; and they tell their stories in more than one way" (229).

Short story theorists argue that there is a link between the short story's frontier status and the position of the woman writer writing on the edges of patriarchal tradition. Clare Hanson claims that the short story "has been from its inception a particularly appropriate vehicle for the expression of the ex-centric, alienated vision of women" (1989: 3). Hermione Lee substantiates this view by conceding "some distinctive angles of vision" (1995: x) to the female short story writer. One of these is the conflict between the private and the public self or "secret visions and unwelcome realities" (xi). Certainly, for Woolf, the short story is particularly suited to articulating the silent female voice. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Woolf points to the unsuitability of the novel for the woman writer, questioning whether it is "rightly shaped" for women's use and explicitly addresses the relationship of the female writer to shorter fiction, stating that women's literary works should be "shorter, more concentrated, than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work" (77, 78). This idea of the different, female frame underpins most of her short fiction which resists the masculine, realist frame in favour of a move towards the nebulous margins of the feminine. "Phyllis and Rosamond" (1906), "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" (1906) and "Memoirs of a Novelist" (1909) reveal an intriguing chasm between the public image and the private woman who is socially withdrawn and removed from society. Whereas the masculine frame of representation strives for integration, the women in Woolf's short fiction move towards the periphery and pose a silent threat to the stable frame. As Bonnie Heather Hall observes:

Much of Woolf's short fiction can be seen as patterned on a search for the subjectivity of the female consciousness. She continually engages with the question of how one constructs a female subject in the face of both the idealized and prosaic images of women which are pervasive in literature (51).

"The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn", for example, through its diary format, challenges the narrative sequence which pushes female characters towards marriage and domesticity. According to Carolyn Heilbrun, Woolf "early realized, deeply if unconsciously, that the narratives provided for women were insufficient for her needs" (120) and it is in her early

stories in particular that Woolf begins to resist the masculine frame, seeking an authentic voice that might faithfully articulate female experience.

In addition, critical attention to Woolf's short fiction might be frustrated, on a wider level, with the genre's generic inscrutability. One of the alternative reasons Gullason gives for the dismissive attitude of critics towards the short story is the fact that there has occurred, with the use of the term 'short fiction' as an umbrella term covering the short story, the novella and the novel, a blurring of the short story's generic identity. Gullason argues that the short story has to be differentiated from other forms if it is to gain its own credibility and cast off its marginal status. Again, Woolf might be said to be taking advantage of the short story's obscurity in that she appears to intentionally invest her short texts with indeterminate and liminal generic status, creating hybrid forms that inhabit what Douglas Hesse refers to as a "boundary zone" (86) between genres. Clearly, editors face problems when classifying her stories. Susan Dick calls her edition of Woolf's short stories *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, thereby justifying her decision to include hybrid works such as "Memoirs of a Novelist" (1909) and "An Unwritten Novel" (1920) by subsuming them under this all-inclusive term.<sup>4</sup> Sandra Kemp also refers to the uncategorisable nature of Woolf's short fiction, stating that the stories collected in her edition of the *Selected Short Stories of Virginia Woolf* (2000) reflect "the metafictional processes of her art" in their attempt to "blur the generic spectrum" (xiv, xvii). Throughout my thesis I use the term 'short story' to cover all of Woolf's short works, for this is, I believe, true to her intention to re-define the short story's boundaries. Most of Woolf's stories walk a tightrope between genres. The cross-over into visual art and poetry in stories like "Monday or Tuesday" (1921) and "Blue and Green" (1921) where storytelling is

---

<sup>4</sup> The phrase 'short fiction' presents a dilemma for Clare Hanson. In *Short Stories and Short Fictions: 1880-1890* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985) Hanson distinguishes between short stories and short fictions using Eileen Baldeshwiler's opposition between the 'lyrical' and the 'epical' short story. (See Baldeshwiler's article "The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 6 (1969), 443-53.) According to Hanson, *short stories* are of the conventional, plot-based type and are epical. *Short fictions* are lyrical and plot is subordinate to subjectivity. Hanson's chapter on the modernists, "Moments of Being: Modernist Short Fiction", locates Woolf within the latter camp.

merely a sub-category of Woolf's larger obsession with language, reflect this idea. Such cross-border tactics make it impossible to generalise about Woolf's short fiction.

One of the pleasures of reading a short story, and, indeed, one of the "necessary qualities for a writer of short stories", Woolf argued, comes from an attention to "form" (*Collected Essays III*: 87). This insistence upon the importance of form in the short story is a central aspect of her own short fiction. In "On Re-reading Novels" (1922) Woolf defines 'form' not in terms of visible structure or "form which you see" but in terms of "emotion which you feel" (*Collected Essays III*: 340). This enthusiasm for form in terms of emotion exists on the same plane as the Post-Impressionist notion of "significant form" as expounded by Clive Bell and his idea that the form of a work of art is a catalyst for "aesthetic emotion" (1914: 8). For the writer, Woolf argues, emotion is a question of how words are used: "the more intense the writer's feeling the more exact without slip or chink its expressions in words" (*Collected Essays III*: 340). This argument has particular significance when it comes to Woolf's short fiction. She uses Flaubert's short story "Un Coeur Simple" (1877) to illustrate her case:

It is essential in "Un Coeur Simple" that we should feel the lapse of time; the incidents are significant because they are scattered so sparsely over so long a stretch of years, and the effect must be given in a few short pages. So Flaubert introduces a number of people for no purpose, as we think; but later we hear that they are now all dead, and we realise then for how long Félicité herself has lived. To realise that is to enforce the effect. It fastens our attention upon the story as a work of art, and gives us such a prise on it as we have already, thanks to their more rigid technique, upon drama and poetry, but have to contrive for fiction, afresh, each time we open a book (342).

In her analysis of Flaubert's story, Woolf highlights the specific and particular qualities of the short story. First, she suggests that it is the fact that the short story (like the drama; Woolf cites *Hamlet* in this regard) is "capable of being read... as a whole" (342) that gives it its independent identity. Second, and as a consequence of its brevity, the short story

demands a special kind of reading. Because the short story has to convey “the lapse of time” in only “a few short pages”, the short story writer relies a great deal upon the reader’s powers of inference. This does not call for a linear approach to reading, however, for it makes demands upon memory. We read the short story retroactively, with a greater reliance on remembered events and facts, retracing our steps, so that we realise only later the significance of past events.<sup>5</sup> This cross-referencing enables us to “trace and understand” emotions, to “sharpen our impressions”, in a way that we cannot do in the “long and crowded novel” (342). Significantly, this phrasing aptly defines Woolf’s project in the short story. The idea of the short story as drama makes its way into “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906); and as a “a work of art” or “poetry” into “Blue and Green” (1921) and “Monday or Tuesday” (1921). Rendering problematic the traditional concept of form and presenting it as no longer viable, Woolf evokes a sense that the short story is closer to an emotional truth. In Percy Lubbock’s description of form in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) which her essay reviews:

---

<sup>5</sup> Woolf’s comments can be linked to the development of modern short story theory. In 1904, H.S. Canby sharpens the distinction between the novel and the short story further, stating that it is the deliberate and conscious use of impressionistic methods, together with the increasing emphasis on situation, that primarily differentiates the short story from the novel. The aim of the modern short story writer is to convey a “unified, vivid, and distinct” impression (103). Canby substitutes for the term “short story” the term “Impression-story” - a literary type which resembles poetry insofar as it is “purely suggestive” (104). Similarly, for H.E. Bates, the short story exists not for what it states, since it states nothing, but for what it suggests or implies. He applies the term “prose poem” to the short story, hinting that the short story is less dependent upon exposition and logical arrangement than the novel, rather, it is reliant upon “the use of suggestion, implied action, indirect narration, and symbolism to convey what might otherwise be conveyed by a plain catalogue of solid words” (215). A.L. Bader addresses the common complaint that the modern short story has no structure. He tries to show, through a comparison of traditional and modern short fiction, that the difference between the two is not in structure, for the essential parts of each remain the same since the modern short story is not strictly plotless, but in the method of *arranging* these parts. In the traditional story we are presented with an action that progresses linearly through time. At the end of the story, conflict is resolved by means of the action taken during the story. Such a story of development and resolution with all parts harmoniously arranged has unity. The modern short story is, however, dependent upon oblique narration which Bader terms “indirection” and “perceived relationship” (88, 89). The writer concentrates only upon a small fragment of experience, a small span of time, in order to hint at a larger reality. Consequently, the conflict that lies nascent in the short story is a conflict which will only become apparent to the reader after he or she has completed the jigsaw puzzle that is the text. This sense of the short story as a microcosm is the touchstone of definitions of the short story. As Allan Pasco observes: “The short story shuns amplification in favor of ellipsis, inference, the understated and unstated” (1993: 447); and “The short story, in particular, has a noticeable affinity for the epigrammatic, the formulistic, the epitome, the essential truth or idea or image which rises above time and negates whatever chronological progression the work possesses” (1994: 126).



We feel the presence of an alien substance which requires to be visualised imposing itself upon emotions which we feel naturally, and name simply, and range in final order by feeling their right relations to each other (340).

Implicit in Woolf's own stories is a reworking of the unity, "order" and "relations" of traditional short fiction through language. Her own stories carry readings beyond literal interpretation, specifically, by means of deferring closure through an envelope structure, for example, in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929) and "Monday or Tuesday" (1921). Sometimes, emotion finds wordless expression in characters' movements. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", for example, displays an almost filmic sensibility. This is form not as a static concept but as a constantly shifting arrangement of relations.

Throughout Woolf's essays and reviews on the short story,<sup>6</sup> her comments on the genre are of interest - with a fervour for the short story as a depiction of "the most carefully hidden secrets of human nature" (*Collected Essays II*: 77-78); a need for the story that satisfies our "craving for something lighter, nearer to the life [we] know" (*Collected Essays II*: 7); and an admiration for the sketch that "however brief and elliptical...manages somehow to hold the attention, often to puzzle it" (*Collected Essays I*: 86). In spite of her apparent Englishness, Woolf felt closer to the Eastern Europeans than to her fellow English

---

<sup>6</sup> Woolf reviewed the following short story collections in her lifetime: Anderson, S. *The Triumph of the Egg and Other Stories* (1921); Brontë, C. *The Twelve Adventures and Other Stories*. Collected by Clement Shorter (1925); Brussov, V. *The Republic of the Southern Cross and Other Stories* (1918); Chekhov, A. *The Wife and Other Stories, The Witch and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnett (1918); *Nine Humorous Tales* (1918); Militsina, E. and Mikhail, S. *The Village Priest and Other Stories*. Trans. Beatrix L. Tollemache. With an introduction by C. Hagberg Wright (1918); *The Bishop and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnett (1919); Dostoevsky, F. *The Eternal Husband and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnett (1917); *The Gambler and Other Stories* Trans. Constance Garnett (1917); *An Honest Thief and Other Stories* Trans. Constance Garnett (1919); Dreiser, T. *Free and Other Stories* (1918); *Twelve Men* (1919); Forster, E.M. *The Celestial Omnibus* (1911); Hake, T.G. *Parables and Tales* (Elkin Mathews, 1917); Hemingway, E. *Men Without Women* (1927); Henderson, M.S. *After His Kind* (1906); Hergesheimer, J. *Gold and Iron* (1919); *The Happy End* (1920); Huxley, A. *Limbo* (1920); Jacks, L.P. *Mad Shepherds and Other Human Stories* (1910); *Among the Idolmakers* (1911); *From the Human End* (1916); *All Men Are Ghosts* (1913); *Philosophers in Trouble* (1916). In *Collected Writings*, 6 vols (1916-17); James, H. (1921); Meredith, G. "The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper", *Memorial Edition of the Works of George Meredith*, 1898, Vol. XXI (1910); Mordaunt, E. *Before Midnight* (1917); Pett Ridge, W. *Next-Door Neighbours* (1904); Robins, E. *The Mills of the Gods and Other Stories* (1920); Smith, L.P. *...from the Old Testament Retold* (1920); Song-Ling, P'ou *Strange Stories from the Lodge of Leisures*. Trans. George Soulié (1913) [the stories are originally entitled *Liao-chaochih-i* (1766)]; Stevens, W.D. *A Humble Romance and Other Stories* (1887) attributed to Mary Eleanor Wilkins (afterwards Freeman) in the British Library Catalogue London; Stevens, W.D. *A New England Nun and Other Stories* (1891); Turgenev, Ivan *Two Friends and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnett (1921); and Wells, C. *The Book of Catherine Wells*. With an introduction by H.G. Wells (1928).

short story writers. For Woolf, the lessons of the Russian short story writers, in particular, went deep. She focuses part of her essay "Modern Novels" (1919) around her enthusiasm for the Russian short story. In this essay she asserts her preference for the inconclusivity of Chekhov over the Edwardian materialists who present a false reality in "well constructed and solid" novels (*Collected Essays III*: 32). "Modern Novels" is not just an emphatic vindication of Chekhov, but an argument for the pre-eminence of shorter forms. Woolf calls for the outer boundaries of literature to be re-defined, for life "refuses to be contained any longer" in the novel and defiantly argues that it is a mistake to take for granted "that life exists more in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small" (33, 34). It is the job of the modernist writer to dismantle the materially embodied literary frame and invent "a different and obscure outline of form" (35) that might contain modern experience. Such a form, she suggests, is to be found in the indistinct and vague contours of the Russian short story and she ends her essay with a discussion of Chekhov's short story "Gusev". Woolf felt encouraged by the Russians' indifference to how 'story' ought to be written and in a story like "Gusev": "The emphasis is laid upon such unexpected places that at first it seems as if there were no emphasis at all" (35). This indifference to a story made its way into her own work. In "The Mark on the Wall" (1917), for example, there appears to be no central idea and, as in Chekhov's story, the very point of the story is missing. There is rarely any sense of climax, big scenes, or denouement in her short fiction. Her stories pivot around the smallest things: the drop of a pin; a reflection in a looking-glass; a snail in a flower bed or on a wall. Others rely purely on the play of light and colour. What makes them compelling is the reality of the emotion that lies behind them: this is what Woolf means when she says in "The Russian Point of View" (1925) - a propos of Chekhov's collection *The Witch and Other Stories* (1918) - "as we read these little stories about nothing at all, the horizon widens; the soul gains an astonishing sense of freedom" (*Collected Essays IV*: 185).

By virtue of the emotional charge generated by its form, the Woolfian short story has a unique relationship with reality. Her stories do not try to fix an immutable reality but instead reflect upon it, play with it, regard it not with a novelist's eye, but with a poet's. The mood behind many of her stories is, above all, one of dissociation and disengagement. This is demonstrated, for example, in her early, unpublished stories of childish escapism: "The Manchester Zoo" (1906), "Sunday up the River" (c. 1906), "A Penny Steamer" (c. 1906) and "Down the river to Greenwich" (1908) which I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4. These sketches are modelled tenuously on the travelogue; in them, the impulse to withdraw is strong. The prime principle governing the travelogue is that we are heading for somewhere in particular, but these stories begin by loosening the bonds with the real world. Leaving the cityscape behind and absenting herself from the 'real' world, Woolf explores the flipside of urban life, the unpeopled, nowhere-in-particular, silent spaces at the edge of the city, society and culture. Woolf's short stories often take place in non-places: gardens, trains, boats - transitional, ad hoc spaces where people pass through, but do not stop. This may not simply be a matter of escape, but also a reflection of the short story's suitability to present, what Valerie Shaw describes in relation to the location of Ernest Hemingway's short fiction, as "anonymous settings" (154). In many respects, in these stories Woolf might be accused of exploiting the wide credibility gap between the short story and the novel, appealing to the short story's obscurity as a counterpoint to her own longing for anonymity.

Much of the emphasis in Woolf's stories is on what is unspoken and unrecorded. The burden of the "unsayable" (*Moments of Being*: 108) is strongest in her ghostly stories: "A Walk By Night" (1905), "The Mysterious Case of Miss V" (1906), "Sunday up the River" (c. 1906), "Kew Gardens" (1919) and "A Haunted House" (1921) which I examine in Chapter 4. Although the ghost story is traditionally about awakening fear, in these stories Woolf shifts the focus from the malign demons of the traditional ghost story to the ghosts "within us" (*Collected Essays III*: 324) which are manifest in memory. In "Kew Gardens" and "A Haunted House" the sense of the uncanny is more subtle and originates in the indeterminacy and ambiguity of language. Through her use of internal repetition as an

alternative structure in these stories Woolf challenges the time-bound nature of the short story.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes it is not quite clear just where Woolf is taking these stories or what point she is making. This inconclusiveness is also recognised in incomplete plots - where the bits of the narrative that might clarify the full meaning of the story and the exact sequence of events are deliberately missing - but is also mirrored in the abstract and general language. "Kew Gardens" and "A Haunted House" in particular come close to eliminating the boundary line between poetry and prose and overcome the idea of a narrative destination. They attempt to establish a mood, not a narrative, and generate another approach to language, exploring the elusive unpredictability of words.

In Chapter 5 Woolf's experiments in the short story are set in the context of her innovations as a fiction writer. Her looking-glass stories - "The New Dress" (1925), "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929) and "The Fascination of the Pool" (1929) - which have a looking-glass as their central image (in the case of "The Fascination of the Pool" the mirror is a pool) are shown to put into practice the ideas put forward by Woolf in her seminal essays, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923) and "Modern Fiction" (1925),<sup>8</sup> specifically ideas concerning the modernist portrayal of character and her notion of fiction as an "envelope" (*Collected Essays IV*: 160). As Dominic Head observes, in Woolf's short fiction:

---

<sup>7</sup> Woolf's use of language is frequently highlighted as the most distinctive aspect of her short fiction and a number of studies have been undertaken in this area. In a detailed study of repetitive structures in Woolf's short fiction, Avrom Fleishman argues that Woolf's stories exhibit "a steady tendency toward circular forms" (68). They might begin and end with the same word, as in "The Duchess and the Jeweller" (1938), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1938) and "The Legacy" (1944) or with the same sentence as in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929); "Moments of Being: 'Slater's Pins Have No Points'" (1928) and "A Haunted House" (1921) or, like "Monday or Tuesday" (1921) and "The String Quartet" (1921), they might approximate the condition of music. This preference for circular repetition, argues Fleishman, manifests a tendency to "return to the given, rather than to pursue the unknown and possibly unknowable" (70). Another approach is offered by Clare Hanson who links Woolf's experimental use of language in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) with the stories in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914) which eliminate the noun as referent and "put in its place many associational words carrying 'sound sense', which would together approach more nearly the essential quality of the thing described" (1985: 64). Werner Wolf takes Woolf's "The String Quartet" as a main example of "the musicalisation of fiction" (97). James Hafley's account of the musical structure of "Moments of Being: 'Slater's Pins have no Points'" in his article "On One of Virginia Woolf's Short Stories", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 2 (1956), 13-16 is also insightful.

<sup>8</sup> "Modern Fiction" (1925) derives from Woolf's essay "Modern Novels" written in 1919, which she extensively revised for inclusion in the *Common Reader I*. "Character in Fiction" (1924), which was published in *The Criterion* in July 1924, similarly derives from "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923).

a concentration on literary form goes hand in hand with the development of character. But this formal element is *intensified* in Woolf: her most significant stories are really *experiments* in genre, investigations into the appropriateness of the short story form as a vehicle for her presentations of personality (78).

A retentive form that often conceals more than it discloses, the Woolfian short story offers only the allure of a potential narrative. Excluding the non-essential and extrinsic and segmenting the story by exclusive and selective cutting, the rigid frame of the mirror serves to abridge and curtail what is recorded. This violent curtailment fixes and determines the frame of the story. Woolf's particular skill in these stories is to sidestep the mirror's frame and penetrate the envelope outside the circumscribed area of the mirror's frame. The mirror is interesting not for what it reflects but for what it cuts out, that is life itself, "truth or reality" (*Collected Essays IV*: 160) and the "disconnected and incoherent" rhythms of consciousness (161). In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", for example, Isabella's restless movements on the periphery of the mirror teasingly suggest that the 'story' is happening on the edges, away from view. This notion of life outside the frame provokes reflections of a more general kind on women's lives and the mirror becomes a framework for the exploration of the marginalised woman. "The New Dress" (1925) uses the censorial looking-glass as the focal point for traditional feminine anxieties about status and appearance, exploring how women's sense of self-worth and value is tied up in their reflection. Although the looking-glass offers the temporary illusion of wholeness, once we step away from its frame and the public persona reflected in it we encounter the instability of selfhood and identity.

The liminal, socially excluded woman is the inspiration for many of Woolf's stories. In her article, "The Unspoken Word" (1972), Elizabeth Worrell argues that in each of the four of the stories that Woolf sets at Mrs Dalloway's party: "The New Dress" (1925), "The Man Who Loved His Kind" (1925), "Together and Apart" (1925), and "A Summing Up" (1925), Woolf demonstrates "the tragic withdrawal of the individual from the group" (191-92). Selma Meyerowitz, in her Marxist study: "What is to Console Us?: The Politics

of Deception in Woolf's Short Stories" (1981) stresses, like Worrell, women's outsider status in Woolf's stories. Woolf's female characters are often portrayed as "insecure, unsatisfied, and uncertain about their role in society" (241). Meyerowitz illustrates her case using "A Society" (1921), "The New Dress" (1925), "The Introduction" (1925), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1938), and "The Legacy" (which was rejected by *Harper's Bazaar* in October 1940 and published posthumously in *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* in 1944). According to her:

Woolf's political analysis of social experience in the short stories is presented through female characters whom she considers a society of outsiders. Because they are denied social and class privilege, women reveal the destructive nature of a classbound society and its effects on individual consciousness and interpersonal relationships (238).

In "The New Dress", for example, Woolf sensitively explores the misery of social exclusion and class consciousness. The physical frame of the looking-glass is evoked periodically to stress Mabel Waring's difference from the other partygoers and her outsider status. Voyeurism, surveillance, the complex, non-transparent relationships of self and image: all the elements that characterise Woolf's short fiction are in her looking-glass stories which are amongst her most humanly searching works. What defines Woolf's looking-glass stories most poignantly is their conveyance of withdrawn and brooding social isolation which finds suggestive analogies in short story theory. Just as Elizabeth Bowen affirms that the short story, more than the novel, is able to place man "alone on that stage which, inwardly, every man is conscious of occupying alone" (1994: 262) and Frank O'Connor argues that displacement is germane to the short story: "Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society" (19), so Woolf's stories give a voice to the displaced and exiled. In them, the vulnerable and damaged find a home.

In “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929) suicide is shown to be the invariable result of living on the fringe and outside the frame of the looking-glass. The story has its centre in a ‘moment of being’ (Woolf’s term for outstanding moments of revelation experienced during her life) that Woolf recalls in “A Sketch of the Past” when she was unable to cross a puddle for fear of its hidden depths. Woolf constructs a parallel between the mirror image and the moment of being. Woolf’s stories are a crucial artery to her inner emotional space and many are undercut by her autobiographical experiences. This is particularly true of stories like “Kew Gardens” (1919) and “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929) which have a moment of being at their centre. James King observes that the moment of being is the source of Woolf’s love of storytelling:

From early childhood, the instinct to tell stories was dominating, as was Virginia’s distinction between ‘being’ and ‘non-being’, between moments of being intensely alive and moments which simply passed (39).

Woolf described the moment of being as “always including a circle of the scene which they cut out” (*Moments of Being*: 79) and found its structural correlative in the short story. The short story, unlike the novel, can offer a unique experience of the elusive, passing moment by capturing it in its transient and intangible frame. Woolf’s way of making sense of the external world and her own past was to have absolute mastery over a very narrow area of it. Mary Burgan substantiates this argument by arguing that the titles of stories such as “Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points’” (1928), suggest “a conception of the short story as a form organizing the flow of time into a narrative configuration that can then be held by the atemporal fixity of the writer’s (and reader’s) attention” (381).<sup>9</sup> This view is supported by Joanne Trautmann Banks who believes that the short story structure is “superbly suited” (63) to presenting the isolated moment taken out of time.

---

<sup>9</sup> Burgan cites Woolf as a discoverer of “the modernist model of the short story” to argue that, although the designation of this “epiphanic illusion of integration” (383) originates from James Joyce’s discussion in *Stephen Hero*, its evolution in the short story owes greatly to the narrative experiments of writers like Woolf.

The formal shape that emotion takes is one of the modern short story's defining elements and Woolf's sketches, "Monday or Tuesday" (1921) and "Blue and Green" (1921), which I explore in Chapter 6, share a need to find a form of expression that can find a way into the unconscious mind. Both are preoccupied with the question: How can we register human experience in words and give form to our emotions? which stem from her essays "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923) and "Modern Fiction" (1925). This question places Woolf in a close relationship to the Post-Impressionist idea of 'significant form'. Of all her short works, "Monday or Tuesday" and "Blue and Green", most radically defy expectations of storyness principally by reformulating the definition of 'story' to eliminate its orientation towards an event. In both sketches words achieve 'significant form' through particularly poetic and emotive arrangements. "Blue and Green" describes the play of colour and light while "Monday or Tuesday" tries to present an incohesive stream of consciousness through a language of lyrical minimalism and a reconfiguration of the emphases of the traditional short story. Despite - or indeed, precisely because of - their brevity these are probably among the most difficult of Woolf's stories to categorise and exemplify her highly unusual and original approach.

This thesis follows Woolf's unpredictable and independent development as a short story writer and is concerned with recognising what the short story, apart from the novel, freed Woolf to do. It is a genre which Woolf used to develop and 'test out' her ideas about form, character and language in fiction. Ultimately, Woolf's short fiction is a testament to her libertarian philosophy, standing for dissidence, marginality and freedom from influence. Woolf never lost sight of the creative possibilities of the short story form and experimented with various types of short story structure. My aim is to show that the short story liberated Woolf rather than imprisoned her within a traditional frame and that her bold experiments with the short story form demonstrate a deep understanding of the genre's ambivalent and fugitive dimensions. After the publication of her first and only



collection of short fiction, *Monday or Tuesday* in 1921, a work which affirms her as a committed innovator of the short story, Woolf felt “a sense of freedom” (*Diary 2*: 166) for the first time and it is this assumption of the short story as an unparalleled source of aesthetic freedom that forms the core of this study.

## Chapter 1

### Virginia Woolf and the Short Story:

#### An Overview

In 1944, eighteen of Virginia Woolf's stories were collected by Leonard Woolf in *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*. His foreword to the collection outlines the method behind Virginia's story writing:

All through her life, Virginia Woolf used at intervals to write short stories. It was her custom, whenever an idea for one occurred to her, to sketch it out in a very rough form and then to put it away in a drawer. Later, if an editor asked her for a short story, and she felt in the mood to write one (which was not frequent), she would take a sketch out of her drawer and rewrite it, sometimes a great many times. Or if she felt, as she often did, while writing a novel that she required to rest her mind by working at something else for a time, she would either write a critical essay or work upon one of her sketches for short stories (7).

Leonard's foreword has implications for how we might view Woolf's short fiction. What emerges from it is that Woolf did not have a fixed or systematic approach to writing short stories, but wrote them "at intervals" which was an established practice that she adhered to throughout her life. Leonard makes an association between the short story and Woolf's mental state, claiming that Woolf wrote a story "whenever an idea for one occurred to her". This implies a direct relationship between the automatic impulses of thought and the spontaneous framework of the short story form. He also claims that Woolf wrote stories when "she felt in the mood". This harmonious correspondence between the short story and Woolf's temperament suggests that she had an emotional affinity with the genre. Whereas she had to write novels in spite of her mental condition, the short story worked in accord with her state of mind. Leonard hints at the private nature of Woolf's unfinished and informal stories by foregrounding the fact that she kept them in secret drawers. He sets up a metaphor of secrecy that is active in Woolf's short fiction where notions of the unwritten,

unrecorded and undelivered message prevail. Her stories were a constant background presence and she felt an unusual closeness to them, keeping them about her in secret drawers. The short story did not impose any restrictions of censorship on her until the obligation of writing for a public intervened. Then, informality would give way to self-conscious elaboration and spontaneous imagery concede to crafting, forcing her to rewrite a story “a great many times” to produce an aesthetically pleasing and polished work. Leonard ends by affirming the basic premise behind Woolf’s short fiction, stating that Woolf turned to the short story as a displacement activity to alleviate the stress of writing long novels and to “rest her mind”. This desire for displaced release is one of the central motivations behind her story writing. Altogether, Leonard’s foreword gives a telling glimpse into the method behind Woolf’s short fiction since he assimilates all the basic impulses towards anonymity, automatism and displacement behind it.

#### ***Juvenilia: The Formative Years 1887-1909***

Woolf had a continuous and highly conversant relationship with the short story and she chose to write fiction exclusively in this genre during her formative years: 1887-1909. At the age of five, Woolf would delight in telling her father amusing, off-the-cuff stories every night as part of a cleverly seductive trick to entice him away from his studies. Like the female narrator of the *Arabian Nights* tales, Schéhérazade, Woolf used storytelling as a powerful method of exerting influence over men. This gendering of story is active throughout Woolf’s short fiction, for example “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906) and “Memoirs of a Novelist” (1909) which foreground the silent, female voice. Woolf’s contributions to the *Hyde Park Gate News* (1891-95) - the Stephen children’s newspaper - are evidence of her early storytelling agility. The enchanting power of story was recognised by all the Stephen children who contributed collectively to the paper. Woolf recalls their storytelling sessions in “A Sketch of the Past”:

As we walked, to beguile the dulness [of] innumerable winter walks we made up stories, long long stories that were taken up at the same place and added to each in turn. There was the Jim Joe and Harry Hoe story; about three brothers who had herds of animals and adventures - I have forgotten what. But there again, the Jim Joe and Harry Hoe story was a London story; and inferior to the Talland House garden story about Beccage and Hollywinks; spirits of evil who lived on the rubbish heap; and disappeared through a hole in the escallonia hedge (*Moments of Being*: 76-77).

The stories the Stephen children told each other rely purely upon an impromptu impulse. They are improvisatory in character, “made up” and “taken up at the same place and added to...in turn”, and manifest no great narrative skill. This uninhibited and unstructured framework points to the escapist impulse and childhood restlessness behind the stories. Woolf’s juxtaposition of the “London story” and the “Talland House garden story” sets up a contrast between two alternative realities: the solid, public world of London and the private, fantasy world of Beccage and Hollywinks at Talland House. The psychological and spatial claustrophobia of London is in counterpoint to the expansive territory of the imagination. Woolf makes her preference for the fantastic explicit, perhaps identifying, at least on a sub-conscious level, with the dispossessed spirits who “lived on the rubbish heap”. This Surrealist retreat into a fairytale world is taken up in Woolf’s unpublished Surrealist and ghostly sketches, “The Manchester Zoo” (1906), “The Penny Steamer” (c. 1906), “Sunday up the River” (c. 1906) and “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) which deal with similarly vanished, unseen and inhuman worlds.

The path of Woolf’s personal and creative development was strewn with hurdles such as death, sexual abuse and psychiatric disorder. These harsh realities shape her short fiction in particular. In *Moments of Being*, Woolf notes that her childhood was marked by “collision, fracture” and a “sundering of the parts” (58). This sense of disintegration could not be expressed in permanent forms and the short story became an ideal vehicle for expressing a lack of coherence and integration. She wrote short stories during periods of

transition and at crucial life changes, one of which was the death of her mother in 1895. The death of Julia Stephen in 1895 had a dramatic effect on Woolf,<sup>10</sup> precipitating her first mental breakdown that summer and intermittent periods of mental ill-health during October 1896 and the spring of 1897. In the two years after her mother's death, Woolf also lost the will to write: "For two years I never wrote. The desire left me; which I have had all my life, with that two year break" (MHP, Sussex, MH/A.5c). After this two year period, the short story would be crucial to her. She would often send manuscripts of stories to her friends. The best known of these is her "strictly private" (*Letters I*: 29) account of a punting accident, entitled "A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond" (1899), which she sent to Emma Vaughan in September 1899. This story explores the closeness of life and death. It records an outing she, Vanessa, Adrian and Emma Vaughan took, punting at night-time at Warboys on 23 August 1899. When the boat capsized, they swam ashore. She recounts the event thus:

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 moonlight silvered the path to death - & perhaps tinged the last thoughts of the unfortunate sufferers with something of its own majestic serenity (*Passionate Apprentice*: 151).

Although the hyperbole of the extract and the grand manner of the narrator reads artificially, this excerpt does convey a serious message about the nature of Woolf's thoughts as a child, particularly the centrality of death in her mind. There is a very strong sense of inevitability and of powerlessness in the face of the "wrath" and tremendous power of the external world. More than this, though, as well as being a fanciful description of a "gruesome & heartrending tale", "A Terrible Tragedy in a Duckpond" strives to be a "narration of well authenticated facts" (151, 152) and the sincerity of Woolf's wish to give

---

<sup>10</sup> In *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art* (1977) Jean O. Love presents an image of Woolf as a woman imprisoned by her past: "she was never to escape her childhood completely. She could no more want to be finished with it than she could want to be free of the persons who had dominated it" (325). Lyndall Gordon devotes large sections of her biography to investigating the strengths of Woolf's relationship with her mother. According to her, "Julia Stephen was the most arresting figure in a Victorian past which her daughter tried to reconstruct and preserve" (4). James King writes that, after the "violent shock" of her mother's death, Woolf "saw all the strands holding life together. A pattern was revealed" (55).

voice to the “last thoughts of the unfortunate sufferers” (151) is not in doubt.<sup>11</sup> This emotional empathy is a strong characteristic of many of Woolf’s stories which privilege the individual voice of the victim and the victimised.

Woolf would often combine realism and fantasy in her stories which thrive on the interplay between the expected and unexpected, the mundane and the fantastical. The fantastic is a particularly salient feature in Woolf’s early stories. A trip to the zoo in “The Manchester Zoo” (1906) or a boat ride in “Sunday up the River” (c. 1906), “A Penny Steamer” (c. 1906) and “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) become journeys into uncanny and surrealistic realms. These sketches travel beyond single generic classification also, for in them Woolf renegotiates the boundaries of ‘story’ to include the form of the personal essay, or diary jotting. They are written by an adult from a child’s perspective and, all in all, are a strange and compelling testament to Woolf’s fantastic imagination. We are taken beyond the limits of reality and left floating in an idealised space where nothing happens and time is suspended. In these unpublished sketches Woolf uses the short story form as a displacement activity whilst she wrote *The Voyage Out* (1915). Constituting a rebellion against a logical view of the world and against traditional conceptions of time and space, they reject the restrictive qualities of “pattern”, “coherence” and “control” (*Letters II*: 82) to which she adhered in the novel. She felt that she had “so few of the gifts that make novels amusing” and one of the reasons why this was so was her poor talent for character delineation: “I want to bring out a stir of live men and women, against a background. I think I am quite right to attempt it, but it is immensely difficult to do” (*Letters I*: 383). Many of her first readers recognised this difficulty: “all my friends tell me its no good for *me* to write a novel. They say my creatures are all cold blooded” (*Letters I*: 379). But this did not suppress her desire to write one and she would, from time to time,

---

<sup>11</sup> A longer account of the event can be found in *The Charleston Magazine*, No. 1 (April 1990).

reiterate a need to work on a larger canvas: "Oh how I wish I could write a novel! People and their passions, or even their lives without passions, are the things to write about" (*Letters I*: 388).<sup>12</sup>

Storytelling was an impulse that Woolf inherited from her parents who in 1885 collaborated on a series of children's stories which Julia wrote and Leslie illustrated. Although her early stories acknowledge strong male influences such as her father, Daniel Defoe and Henry James, they are steeped in her mother's voice which haunted her throughout her life and which she connects with the voice of society in "A Sketch of the Past":

Until I was in the forties... the presence of my mother obsessed me... She was one of the invisible presences who after all play so important a part in every life. This influence, by which I mean the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think (*Moments of Being*: 80).

The presence of her mother seems to have impinged upon Woolf to the extent that she appears to have modelled her own sketches on her mother's short fiction. Like Woolf's stories, Julia's were unpublished during her lifetime, having only been discovered in 1979 and published eight years later by Diane F. Gillespie and Elizabeth Steele in *Julia Duckworth Stephen: Stories for Children, Essays for Adults* (1987). Reading her mother's fairytale stories populated by animals must have been an incentive behind Woolf's juvenilia and looking at Julia's stories and Woolf's Surrealist sketches of 1906-08 it is hard to deny that her mother was a source of inspiration. But, whereas her mother's stories owe a lot more to the fairytale genre and have a moral to expound, Woolf's are more sinister and amoral.

---

<sup>12</sup> To Clive Bell on 19 August 1908 Woolf wrote: "I think a great deal of my future, and settle what book I am to write - how I shall re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes... but tomorrow I know, I shall be sitting down to the inanimate old phrases" (*Letters I*: 356).

Woolf's unpublished sketches: "The Manchester Zoo", "Sunday up the River" and "A Penny Steamer" may have been among the manuscripts Woolf sent to Madge Vaughan for criticism on 27 April 1906. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks state that these manuscripts may have contained essays which Woolf had written at Giggleswick in April 1906 and claim that Woolf "may also have begun writing at this period more imaginative works, of fiction perhaps" (*Letters I*: 225) which have not survived. However, the existence of the above sketches might dispute this and Woolf may have had them in mind when she wrote to Madge Vaughan in June 1906:

my present feeling is that this vague and dream like world, without love, or heart, or passion, or sex, is the world I really care about, and find interesting. For, though they are dreams to you, and I cant express them at all adequately, these things are perfectly real to me.

One of the reasons why these stories were unpublished in Woolf's lifetime is because they present a fragmented view: "please dont think for a moment that I am satisfied, or think that my view takes in any whole". They are the product of infantile indulgence, "mere experiments" that are not meant for public consumption: "I shall never try to put them forward as my finished work. They shall sit in a desk till they are burnt!" (*Letters I*: 227). Woolf constantly reiterates a desire that her work should be kept private, stating: "I dont want immaturities, things torn out of time, preserved, unless in some strong casket, with one key only" and she urged Dickinson never to "read, or quote or show" (*Letters I*: 304, 313). Considering the illicit tendencies towards defiance and detachment exhibited in Woolf's early stories, it is no wonder that much of the story telling in her youth took place with "the door shut" (*Moments of Being*: 79).



In contrast to the novel which openly courts publicity, Woolf stressed the private nature of her unpublished stories. Writing stories away from the public gaze gave Woolf the anonymity she craved. She approached short story writing from a radically oblique angle from a very young age when, adopting a recusant stance in relation to her family, she would write stories from the edge. In her diary she recalls that writing stories made her the odd one out and describes herself as “a little creature, scribbling a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green plush sofa in the drawing room at St Ives while the grown ups dined” (*Diary V*: 192). It is not surprising that so many of her stories have a similar voyeuristic slant. “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), “The New Dress” (1925), and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” (1929) all work well in this regard. In “A Sketch of the Past”, Woolf describes her desk at Hyde Park Gate where “hidden under blotting paper” there were “sheets of foolscap covered with private writing” (*Moments of Being*: 122).<sup>13</sup> Many of these sheets were possibly sketches for stories and it is this notion of a “private writing” that underlies her short fiction. Often, the stories she sent to her friends were in a “nude, really indecent state” (*Letters I*: 82) and, as a consequence, she was insecure regarding their merit. To Violet Dickinson she wrote with regard to some material she had sent her: “those things are only essays and experiments and I dont think I want to print any of them” (*Letters I*: 163).

Woolf started writing articles and reviews for newspapers in 1904. Her first article on William Dean Howell’s *The Son of Royal Langbrith* appeared in *The Guardian* on 14 December 1904 and in the early months of 1905 she began contributing to *The Times Literary Supplement*, the *National Review* and the *Academy and Literature*. This taught her that “there is a knack of writing for newspapers which has to be learnt, and is quite independent of literary merits”. She was forced to pare down her work considerably:

---

<sup>13</sup> This reference to the manuscripts hidden under blotting paper has its origins in the *Memoir of Jane Austen* by her nephew J.E. Austen-Leigh in 1870. In the *Memoir*, Austen’s nephew writes that his aunt would hide her manuscripts under blotting paper. Woolf reviewed this book in 1913 and it is interesting that she should have, ever so implicitly, compared herself to her. It is interesting also that Woolf refers to her writing as “scribbling”. Perhaps, here, she is comparing herself to Fanny Burney (whom she referred to as “the Mother of English Fiction”) who described herself as “a mere scribbler”. Burney’s passion for writing was also a response to the early death of her mother.

“1,500 words rather apalls me. I could write 3,000 twice as easily; 1,500 is a very short article, and would have to be boiled down” (*Letters I*: 155). Writing with regard to strict shortness worked to her advantage when it came to writing short stories, however. The word “cut” obtrudes constantly in Woolf’s short stories. Writing for newspapers made Woolf conscious of writing for a censorial public and she felt vulnerable under the scrutiny of the public eye. She explains this sense of exposure in the following comment: “a poor wretch of an author keeps all his thoughts in a dark attic in his own brain, and when they come out in print they look so shivering and naked” (*Letters I*: 167). Violet Dickinson’s account of R.B. Haldane’s negative appraisal of Woolf’s article on Hawthorne (December 1904) was badly received by Woolf and she reacted thus: “Really I think I shall give up writing, or at any rate showing my things to other people: I only get criticism and abuse, and no one thinks it necessary to be grateful” (*Letters I*: 170). A too severe concision seemed to be as unacceptable to editors as undue prolixity and she wrote to Violet Dickinson: “I never expected him to take it, since I found that it would only make 2 Cornhill pages which is impossibly short of course” (*Letters I*: 171-72).

A number of rejections and orders to cut her articles swiftly followed this one. In January 1905 Reginald Smith, the editor of the *Cornhill*, returned her article on Boswell. On 22 February her review of Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* was also returned with a demand from Margaret Lyttelton, the editor of the *Guardian*, “to cut out quite half of it”. Woolf describes her infuriated response to this command in a letter to Violet Dickinson:

I gave up 10 minutes... to laying about me with a pair of scissors: literally I cut two sheets to pieces, wrote a scrawl to mend them together, and so sent the maimed thing off - with a curse. I never hope to see it again. It was quite good before the official eye fell upon it; now it is worthless (*Letters I*: 178).

The idea of the cut and the oppressive glare of the “official eye” runs through Woolf’s short fiction and is connected to the notion of how the frame severs what lies around its edges. This is particularly relevant in her story “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” (1929) in which the looking-glass serves as a censorial eye cutting out what lies beyond its frame. In

the same month, the *Academy and Literature*, to her extreme annoyance, reworked the title of one of her articles without her consent and made unwelcome changes to the rest of it:

they have changed the title from “A plague of Essays” to “The decay of essay writing” which means nothing; cut out a good half - and altered words on their own account, without giving me a chance to protest. I shouldn’t so much mind if they hadn’t clapped on my name in full at the end - to which I do object (*Letters I*: 181).<sup>14</sup>

Woolf’s irritation was compounded by the rejection of her article on Edith Sichel’s *Medici* by the *Times Literary Supplement* in April: “Bruce Richmond says the Times is an academic paper, and treats books in the academic spirit - whereas I do not” (*Letters I*: 188).

On Margaret Lyttleton of the *Guardian* she wrote that “she sticks her broad thumb into the middle of my delicate sentences and improves the moral tone” (*Letters I*: 214). To Violet Dickinson in May 1907 she articulates her loathing of the public eye: “O why do I ever let any one read what I write! Every time I have to go through a breakfast with a letter of criticism I swear I will write for my own praise and blame in future” (*Letters I*: 295).

Woolf’s response to the “official eye” that violated her privacy was to align herself with the position of the outsider. She felt like the archetypal outsider Christ himself: “I feel, as you read in the Bible, despised and rejected of men” (*Letters I*: 171). Woolf made the first public affirmation of her allegiance to the outsider in her essay “Street Music” (March 1905) in which she states that: “No artist...pays the least attention to criticism, and the artist of the streets is properly scornful of the judgment of the British public” (*Collected Essays I*: 27). This essay can be seen as a public avowal of her independent stance against censure. During January 1905 she continued to send her literary experiments to her friends.

---

<sup>14</sup> The article appeared in the *Academy and Literature* on 25 February 1905.

Throughout her life, writing short stories was a liminal activity which Woolf pursued from the margins. It was a means whereby Woolf could preserve her independence because she would sacrifice autonomy as soon as she gave her stories for money. Woolf's early unpublished stories gave her the anonymity which her articles did not and writing them, whilst contributing articles to newspapers, was an act of displacement. Woolf valued artistic and personal freedom above all else and, disenchanted with the world of editors and newspapers, she turned to short stories to fulfill her need for autonomy and anonymity: "I feel always that writing is an irreticent thing to be kept in the dark - like hysterics" (*Letters I*: 196) she wrote. Here she connects writing with insanity to stress how it ought to be kept from society's gaze: stories are "hysterics" - wild and uncontrollable outbursts. In January 1906 she also voiced a similar desire to keep her writing secret: "I have been writing all the mornings; not a word will ever be seen in print or by mortal eyes: except mine" (*Letters I*: 215).

Woolf's early fiction was an emotional release. In these works she was, she claimed to Violet Dickinson on 10 November 1904, engaged in an attempt "to prove to myself that there was nothing wrong with me - which I was already beginning to fear there was" (*Letters I*: 154). These sketches, particularly "Sunday up the River" (c. 1906), are influenced by her period of mental ill-health which began in May 1904 and culminated in her first severe breakdown. Violet Dickinson took her to her home, Burnham Wood, where Woolf tried to commit suicide by throwing herself from a window. Here she heard the birds singing to her in Greek. After this summer, she had to limit herself to short bursts of writing because of her delicate physical and mental health. As she states to Violet Dickinson: "I dont feel up to much, as far as my brain goes... I haven't tried to write, more than letters" (*Letters I*: 144). In October 1904, she was burdened by the same difficulty of having to limit her writing and was conscious of this when helping Fred Maitland with her father's biography: "I am very anxious to get on and write something, very short of course, which Fred can read and get a hint from or possibly quote from" (*Letters I*: 148). As we can see,

Woolf constantly stresses the importance of limiting herself to short pieces of writing during this period of ill-health.

By 1909, she felt confident enough to submit a short story for publication. She sent "Memoirs of a Novelist" to the *Cornhill Magazine*. But the risk proved to be in vain and her submission was rejected. "Memoirs of a Novelist" (1909), along with "Phyllis and Rosamond" (1906), "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" (1906), and "The Mysterious Case of Miss V" (1906), express an anxiety of influence. They try to escape from the realist frame by experimenting with a variety of genres, such as the diary form, history and biography. In these stories Woolf homes in on isolated young women, focusing on solitary figures - reflections of herself, perhaps - to explore the obsolescence, powerlessness and dependency of women's lives and the inadequate narratives used to describe them.

From the start, the short story was an emancipatory form that gave Woolf the opportunity to write unselfconsciously away from the public eye. The short story's liminality, its marginal and detached framework, lent an ideal shape to her thoughts. All in all, Woolf's juvenilia represents a real attempt to move beyond traditional formulae of story writing and is prescient of her future experimentation with the form. In the short story Woolf felt free to voice publicly unacknowledged anxieties. These anxieties ranged from thoughts about loss and death to women's experience. In many respects, the short story was an escape from bereavement and mental breakdown also and this connection between suffering and secret story writing clearly indicates that she was drawn to the short story as a personal and artistic outlet. It would not be presumptuous to claim that, during the years 1887-1909, Woolf built a relationship of dependency on the form.

### *“Working Free” 1917-29*

The period between the rejection of Woolf's first short story “Memoirs of a Novelist” for publication in 1909 and the publication of “Mark on the Wall” in July 1917 was an incubatory one in regard to Woolf's short fiction, since these years were dominated by the completion and publication of Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915).<sup>15</sup> “The Mark on the Wall” was published by her own Hogarth Press. The establishment of the Press in 1917 was a strategic move towards freedom, for it provided the Woolfs with the opportunity to publish their own works free from the comments of editors and publishers. The problem of public surveillance was solved by making the books published by the press available only to private subscribers. In *An Announcement of the Publications of the Hogarth Press* (c. 1919) the Woolfs state that their “object” in establishing the press is to publish “short works of merit, in prose or poetry, which could not, because of their merits, appeal to a very large public”. To Harriet Weaver in May 1918, Woolf stated that it was the aim of the press “to produce writing of merit which the ordinary publisher refuses” (*Letters II*: 242) and, in a joint review of two Hogarth Press publications,<sup>16</sup> “Is This Poetry?” (1919), Leonard and Virginia emphasise that the idea behind the Hogarth Press is to evade public censorship, claiming that its publications are directed towards an “invisible audience” and are of an “uncompromising nature, designed to please no one in particular” (*Collected Essays III*: 54). The press not only gave Woolf an exceptional creative freedom, but freed her from having to submit her books to her ex-abuser Gerald Duckworth for publication: “I dont like writing for my half brother George [Gerald]” (*Letters II*: 168) she wrote to David Garnett in July 1917.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> In 1917 we find H.E. Cory stating that the short story “is on its last legs” and “begins to show the surest signs of degeneration”. He also criticises the lack of exposition in the modern short story, that is, the too “rapid action” in which life is made to “whirl by, as we read, like the walls of a subway” (380).

<sup>16</sup> These were John Middleton Murry's *Critic in Judgment or Belshazzar of Baronscourt* (1919) and T.S. Eliot's *Poems* (1919).

<sup>17</sup> In ““Dinner is Served”: The Hogarth Press, Sexual Abuse, and the Ritual Site of the Dining Room”, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, No. 42 (Spring 1994), Virginia Blain connects the site of the Hogarth Press in the Woolfs' dining room at Hogarth House with the “slab outside the dining-room door” (*Moments of Being*: 69) on which Gerald Duckworth sexually abused Virginia at Talland House, St Ives. Blain identifies the dining-room with patriarchal oppression and violation and argues that the setting up of the Press in the dining-room was a gesture of freedom and stood for “the establishment of an unassailable means of maintaining autonomy in the future” (5).

“The Mark on the Wall” (1917) and “Kew Gardens” (1919) appeared in succession and Woolf took the decision to publish both of them with the Hogarth Press. This suggests that Woolf viewed these stories as synonymous with the independent and autonomous nature of the press: both made little concession to public taste. “The Mark on the Wall” in which, as Susan Dick claims, “the seeds of her new method were clearly sown” (1985: 1), explores the freedom of representation, for the mark might be any number of things. After David Garnett had praised the story, Woolf wrote to him stating:

In a way its easier to do a short thing, all in one flight than a novel. Novels are frightfully clumsy and overpowering of course; still if one could only get hold of them it would be superb. I daresay one ought to invent a completely new form. Anyhow its very amusing to try with these short things, and the greatest mercy to be able to do what one likes - no editors, or publishers, and only people to read who more or less like that sort of thing (*Letters II*: 167).

By contrast to the unwieldy format of the novel, the short story was a manageable and sustainable medium that gave her a sense of mastery. It was also a form that allowed her to express herself entirely on her own terms.

“Kew Gardens” had the unusual distinction of being published as an independent work. As Valerie Shaw observes, it is “an aesthetic object with its own atmospheric integrity” (8). Above all, it is an example of the new development of the short story after the First World War.<sup>18</sup> It is a palimpsest of impressions relayed cinematographically and its methodology was radical for the period. In a letter to Vanessa, Woolf claimed that the story was “a case of atmosphere”. To Violet Dickinson she called it “as simple as can be” (*Letters II*: 257, 355).<sup>19</sup> But Woolf felt that the story was “vague”, “slight & short” and, conscious no doubt that this was only her second published short story, she was worried

---

<sup>18</sup> In October 1927 a third English (limited) edition of *Kew Gardens*, which Vanessa decorated on each page, was being produced. This was reprinted in 1980 by Richard West.

<sup>19</sup> Woolf was pleased with Jacques-Émile Blanche’s translation of “Kew Gardens” in *Nouvelles Littéraires*, stating that he had seen “much more than there was to see, and have said it so much more brilliantly than I could have done had I tried...I feel that I owe much, in every way, to your own imagination, which has the advantage not only of being French, but of being a painter’s” (*Letters VI*: 516).

about its reception. Despite Leonard's opinion of it as "the best short piece" Woolf had yet done, she felt "rather sure" that she would get no praise for it (*Diary I*: 271).

Woolf's prediction of the story's unpopularity proved correct, for at first "Kew Gardens" sold at a disappointing rate. Sales did however increase after Harold Child's favourable review in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Child attaches seminal importance to "Kew Gardens", claiming that in the story "we have a new proof of the complete unimportance in art of the *hyle*, the subject-matter" (Majumdar: 67).<sup>20</sup> Roger Fry compared the structural virtues of the work with contemporary developments in painting, stating that "Survage is almost precisely the same thing in paint that Mrs Virginia Woolf is in prose" (Majumdar: 71). In the month that "Kew Gardens" was published Lytton Strachey praised Woolf as "the inventor of a new prose style, & the creator of a new version of the sentence". He also unfavourably compared his own traditional writing method to Woolf's experimentalism. Woolf recounted this discussion in her diary:

He asserted that he was disgusted by his own stereotyped ways: his two semi colons; his method of understatement; & his extreme definiteness. Without agreeing, I conveyed my sense of his dangers, & urged him to write plays - stories - anything to break the mould of the early Victorians (*Diary I*: 277).

The success of "The Mark on the Wall" and "Kew Gardens" established Woolf's reputation as a Modernist writer before her novels. Through them she discovered the path ahead, gaining new confidence and a growing immunity from the public eye. As a consequence, she felt secure enough to begin publishing her short stories in journals instead of at the Hogarth Press. This was also due to the increasing opportunities for experimental short story writers between the two wars in major journals such as *The Criterion* (1922-36) and *The London Mercury* (1919-39).

---

<sup>20</sup> A second edition of "Kew Gardens", although not printed by the Hogarth Press, was soon on order. Meanwhile, during June 1919, the Woolfs were having one thousand more copies of "The Mark on the Wall" reprinted and Virginia contemplated opening a bookshop. Cf. Virginia Woolf/Vanessa Bell Wednesday [18 June 1919], *Letters II*: 370.



Whilst composing “Kew Gardens” Woolf had contemplated writing “another little story” and wrote to Vanessa asking her to illustrate it (*Letters II*: 297). A week later she had started writing “Solid Objects” which was published in the *Athenaeum* on 22 October 1920. “Solid Objects” is a return to the traditional short story and according to Woolf, unlike “The Mark on the Wall” and “Kew Gardens”, had “some points as a way of telling a story” (*Letters VI*: 497). During the composition of “Kew Gardens” Woolf was also steadily writing her second novel *Night and Day*, which she finished writing on 21 November 1918 and had published on 20 October 1919. It is her most traditional novel and in it she concentrates on plot, setting and character more than in any other of her works. It is a step back from the innovative methodology of her short fiction and critics were forced to question her identity as a writer. Katherine Mansfield compares Woolf to Jane Austen: “There is not a chapter where one is unconscious of the writer, of her personality, her point of view, and her control of the situation”. *Night and Day* is “a novel in the tradition of the English novel” and is anomalous in such an “age of experiment” (Majumdar: 80, 82, 79). E.M. Forster expresses similar sentiments to Mansfield referring to the novel as “a deliberate exercise in classicism” that ‘condescends to many of the devices she so gaily derides in her essay on “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”’ (Majumdar: 173).

Woolf looked to a familiar psychological release whilst waiting for critical responses to *Night and Day* and had unspecified ambitions to write a number of “little stories” (*Diary I*: 308). She was more than ever dissatisfied with novels, deriding them as “clumsy and half extinct monsters at the best”. Writing them became a “moot point” (*Letters II*: 391, 394) and she articulated a wish to be free of long works: “O how I want now to write nothing longer than 10 pages for ever!” (*Letters II*: 395-96). The criticism of *Night and Day* may have inspired Woolf to write “An Unwritten Novel” published in the *London Mercury* in July 1920 in which the narrator scrutinises a woman on a train and imagines her life. The story marks a return to her favoured medium and, certainly, came at a time when she was seeking a new lease. With the publication of the story she anticipated ridicule, however: “*An unwritten novel* will certainly be abused; I can’t foretell what line

they'll take this time... 'Pretentious' they say; & then a woman writing well, & writing in The Times - that's the line of it" (*Diary 2*: 29-30). Woolf's sense of herself as "a woman writing" is explicitly connected to this story and the train journey that the story recounts could be interpreted as synonymous with Woolf's movement away from the frontiers of patriarchy. All in all, "An Unwritten Novel" battles with the sense of limitation Woolf felt as a woman writer.

"An Unwritten Novel" questions the meaning of the novel form in its title. There is a sense that the novel that faithfully explores the feminine character is yet to be written. The word "unwritten" suggests three things: (1) that something has been concealed - we get the sense that we are not being told the whole story about the woman in the train; (2) "unwritten" also refers to something that has not been recorded on paper which raises questions about the dispensability of the author; thus, Woolf seems to address Mansfield's criticisms of her too intrusive presence in *Night and Day* (1919); and (3) it refers to what the story excludes, to what is outside its boundaries and is unrepresented, that is, the unseen and unknowable aspects of human character. In a letter to Ethel Smyth in 1930 Woolf stresses the importance that "An Unwritten Novel" had for her development:

The Unwritten Novel was the great discovery... That - again in one second - showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it... I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made, when I discovered that method of approach, Jacobs Room, Mrs Dalloway etc - (*Letters IV*: 231).

"An Unwritten Novel" was the outcome of a spontaneous psychological moment which came to her "in one second" and was accompanied by an unprecedented sense of release. In the story Woolf uses the metaphor of the train journey (a familiar one from her surrealist sketches), to suggest the transgression, not only of geographical limits, but of generic ones as well. It confirmed for Woolf that the short story, more readily than the novel, allowed her to "embody" herself, to give appropriate "shape" to her thoughts. The shape of the tunnel is an image she often uses to describe her short fiction and its tendency to delve beneath the surface and its connection to unexplored areas. The notion of the tunnel also

gave her the idea for *Mrs Dalloway* in which she uses the “tunnelling process” to recall the past “by instalments” (*Diary 2*: 272). “An Unwritten Novel” also inspired *Jacob’s Room*. As she began writing the novel, Woolf noted: “I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance 2 weeks ago” in “An Unwritten Novel” and stated that: “I think from the ease with which I’m developing the unwritten novel there must be a path for me there” (*Diary 2*: 14). *Jacob’s Room*, which she began writing on the day that “An Unwritten Novel” was published, evolved out of this story. Writing to R.C. Trevelyan after the publication of *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf hints at what she tried to achieve in the novel, stating that “the effort of breaking with complete representation” was difficult (*Letters II*: 588). The inference from “An Unwritten Novel” is that there is a relationship between the short story and the unrepresentable that the explicit, realist framework of the novel cannot capture.

Although she was familiar with a wide range of short fiction, when Woolf made her public debut as a short story writer with “The Mark on the Wall” in July 1917, there were very few forerunners of the modern short story in England by whom she might have been influenced. It was not until the mid-1920s when a revolution in English literature occurred as a response to World War One (1914-18) that the most innovative short story writers began to appear. The First World War encouraged a symbolic severance from the influence of the past. The old narrative forms no longer seemed appropriate and new stories had to be created. In “How It Strikes a Contemporary” (1923) Woolf notes the effect of the war on traditional narrative and writes that the novel has to be superseded by shorter forms for “the writer of the present day must renounce his hope of making that complete statement which we call a masterpiece” and “must be content to be a taker of notes” (*Collected Essays III*: 359). The moderns’ disillusionment after the war is apparent in the fact that writers “cannot tell stories, because they do not believe that stories are true” (359).<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Many critics remark that the brevity and conciseness of the modern short story is conducive to representing the irresolute, fragmentary and inconclusive nature of modern experience. V.S. Pritchett writes that: “The

In the 1920s, progressive journals such as *The Criterion* (1922-36), *The London Mercury* (1919-39) and *The Adelphi* were a seedbed for the development of the short story. T.S. Eliot's preface to *The Criterion* outlines the journal's main aim, which is "to present to English readers, by essays and short stories, the work of important new foreign writers" (v). The journal published short fiction by D.H. Lawrence: "Jimmy and the Desperate Woman" in 1924, "The Woman Who Rode Away" in 1925 and "Mornings in Mexico" in 1926. Stories by more radical writers such as Marcel Proust's "The Death of Albertine" and Gertrude Stein's "The Fifteenth of November" appeared respectively in 1924 and 1926. The journal also published Woolf's most innovative short story, "In the Orchard" in 1923. In an editorial note to the opening issue of *The London Mercury* in November 1919, J.C. Squire alludes to the reductive effect of the war on literature. He urges prospective contributors to the journal to write only "if his natural genius impels him... in lines of one syllable" (3). Among the most original short fiction published in *The London Mercury* are Logan Pearsall Smith's "Misadventures" published in 1919 and "Trivia" which appears in 1920. James Stephen's "In the Beechwood" published in 1920 is also structurally innovative, being segmented into mini-chapters. More innovative stories were published in 1921, and these include "The Stranger" by Katherine Mansfield; "The Hurly-Burly" by A.E. Coppard and "Peronnik the Fool" by George Moore. Woolf's "An Unwritten Novel" (1920) appears in the second volume of the journal. It is indicative of the way in which Woolf viewed her short fiction that she chose to publish some of it in *The Criterion* and *The London Mercury*. In the opening number of *The Adelphi* on March 10 1923, John Middleton Murry outlines the importance of spontaneous composition to the journal's prospective contributors: "THE ADELPHI wants only those things that you can't help writing, because you will burst if you don't". He states that his preference is for short

---

modern nervous system is keyed up. The very collapse of standards, conventions and values, which has so bewildered the impersonal novelist, has been the making of the story writer who can catch any piece of life as it flies and make his personal performance out of it" (113). Similarly, Nadine Gordimer observes that the short story "is a fragmented and restless form, a matter of hit or miss, and it is perhaps for this reason that it suits modern consciousness - which seems best expressed as flashes of fearful insight alternating with near-hypnotic states of indifference" (265).

fiction, the main aim of the journal being to “try to discover one really good short story every month” and to “print any poem that seems to us as interesting as a good short story” (11). Most of the stories published in the journal were by Katherine Mansfield and D.H. Lawrence, but innovative stories appeared by H.M. Tomlinson, Henry Chester Tracy, Liam O’Flaherty, L.P. Russ, G.M. Hort, Thomas Burke and Malachi Whitaker.

The rise of the short story in these publications was accompanied by what J.C. Squire described in 1920 as the “deflation” (260) of the novel, attributable to the increasing proclivity of the modern writer towards the production of shorter works. In “Reflections on the Recent History of the English Novel” (1921), Edward Shanks also notes the decline of the traditional novel. Noting the lack of story in the novels of James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Woolf, whose books have “no plot to develop” and “no idea to expound” (177), he predicts the death of the novel, stating that “unless the novel changes, it will no longer be a living form of literature” (183).<sup>22</sup> In *The Athenæum* of 10 March 1923, John Middleton Murry mourned the novel’s demise:

The most original minds among those of the younger generation who have chosen prose-fiction for their medium have seemed to care less and less for plot. Not even a desultory story attracts them. Character, atmosphere, an attitude to life, a quality of perception - these things have interested a D.H. Lawrence, a Katherine Mansfield, a Virginia Woolf; but the old mechanism of story not at all... Not one of them has solved the problem of the *novel*... None of them has really any use for a story... The consequence is that the novel has reached a kind of *impasse* (882).

During 1917-21 and against this background Woolf was “working free” (*Diary 2*: 208) writing *Jacob’s Room* and her short story collection *Monday or Tuesday* (1921). Coming soon after the war, *Monday or Tuesday* reflects the post-war shift away from pre-war narrative towards a more streamlined modernity.<sup>23</sup> This collection includes such

---

<sup>22</sup> Shanks’s prediction seems to have come true by 1935, when Sean O’Faolain records the novel’s extinction in his article “It No Longer Matters or The Death of the English Novel” stating that “naturalism and externalism are crabtree fruit to-day and that when the orchard runs wild it is time for new plantings” (56).

<sup>23</sup> The collection had been rejected by the publishers George H. Doran Company, but was accepted by Harcourt, Brace and Co. who published it on 23 November 1921.

fragmentary stories as “Monday or Tuesday” (1921) and “Blue and Green” (1921). Also in the collection were revised versions of “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) and “Kew Gardens” (1919), “The Evening Party” (1918), “An Unwritten Novel” (1920), “A Haunted House” (1921), “A Society” (1921) and “The String Quartet” (1921). In it, Woolf dismantles the old frameworks, producing stories that, according to Blackstone “are not short stories in any recognisable sense” but “give one, sometimes, the impression of being passages from larger works” (51). John Johnstone reiterates Blackstone’s doubts about the stories’ generic classification claiming that their form “differs completely from the form of the traditional short story. In fact, they are not stories, properly so called, at all, but sketches” (327). According to the *British Weekly* (23 April 1921), the collection affirmed Woolf as “the ablest of women writers in fiction” (Majumdar: 14). All in all, *Monday or Tuesday* is an age-defining array of stories and gives an idea of the contemporary mood of post-war Britain. The collection appears to have given Woolf a sense of direction after *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* and is an important precursor to her first experimental novel, *Jacob’s Room* (1922). It might be true to say that, had she not written *Monday or Tuesday*, Woolf may not have developed the techniques of elliptic compression that enabled her to write *Jacob’s Room*. Indeed, as T.S. Eliot suggests in a letter to Woolf on 4 December 1922, without *Monday or Tuesday*, *Jacob’s Room* may never have been written for in it she had “bridged a certain gap” which existed between her other novels and the “experimental prose” of *Monday or Tuesday* (MHP, Sussex). In many of her *Monday or Tuesday* pieces, the story might be said to be simply missing. According to T.O. Beachcroft, Woolf was one of the first of the new generation of short story writers after the First World War to dispense with the ‘story’ element of the short story and to produce instead “moments of insight, seen as stories” which “are not so much narrated as revealed” (1968: 176, 177).

In *Monday or Tuesday*, Woolf takes liberties with the short story form, breaking new ground and pushing the genre into new directions, specifically in terms of its inconclusiveness and impressionistic qualities. These lyrical works, written in freely flowing, polyphonic prose, demonstrate Woolf's particular gift for catching the moment before it disappears. The collection demonstrates that Woolf is one of the few short story writers who tries to extend the scope of the short story by using fewer and fewer words. The shortest stories in the collection are "Monday or Tuesday" and "Blue and Green" which are of an exemplary brevity. They aim to make a visual statement and might best be described as passing observations rather than stories shaped by a clear narrative vision. The highly experimental economy of these stories is rarely paralleled within the body of modernist short fiction.

*Monday or Tuesday* brought into question for Woolf's readers the wisdom of her writing novels at all. On 30 April 1922 Gerald Brenan wrote to her, intimating that the future of English literature lay with the short story:

Why, Virginia, do you join the inconspicuous crowd, you who can do something that is much better? The novel, leave that to the Russians, leave that to Joyce... I think your *Haunted House*, *String Quartet*, *Kew Gardens*... extremely beautiful, and, more than that, valuable; valuable because there is a kind of future to this sort of writing which there is not, for instance, to Landor or Patmore; because your prose has dug into the language & extracted something from it, something that was hardly supposed before to exist there. A writer whose prose is in a fluid state has certain advantages for his descendants over one who lets it set hard into a fixed mould; where you lay down your pen others will take it up, and if you believe in the future of our literature, that thought ought to be a special pleasure to you (MHP, Sussex).

Woolf replied thus: "I agree with you that nothing is going to be achieved by us. Fragments - paragraphs - a page perhaps: but no more" (*Letters II*: 597-98). Two stories that most vividly embody Woolf's concept of fragmentation are "Monday or Tuesday" and "Blue and

Green” which seem like offcuts from a larger narrative. In them Woolf devotes herself almost solely to the description of atmosphere. With no characters or dialogue, sketches such as “Monday or Tuesday” and “Blue and Green” realise Woolf’s desire to “cut the whole psychology business altogether” (*Letters III*: 378). To Ethel Smyth she referred to the stories as “mere tangles of words; balls of string”. They are “little pieces... written by way of diversion” and are “the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style”. Elsewhere, she describes them as “the wild outbursts of freedom, inarticulate, ridiculous, unprintable mere outcries” (*Letters IV*: 231). The word “outcries” sums up Woolf’s stories which are, for the most part, written in protest against traditional narrative. There is a suggestion that she is embarrassed by them and wants to keep them private. In any case, she refused to reprint them.

*Monday or Tuesday* probably caused Woolf more anxiety than any of her novels and its publication was accompanied by much concern for her reputation and a strong feeling of being misunderstood. She anticipated “abuse” (*Letters II*: 553) and feared being accused of “virtuosity”, “obscurity” and of being “too much in love with the sound of my own voice” (*Diary 2*: 98). Responses to *Monday or Tuesday* were indeed negative and she was accused of being too ambitious in the collection. In the *Times Literary Supplement* (7 April 1921) Harold Child asserted that: “Prose may ‘aspire to the condition of music’; it cannot reach it” (Majumdar: 88). He does, however, make an interesting comparison between *Monday or Tuesday* and parallel developments in the visual arts, stating that the collection exemplifies “the ‘unrepresentational’ art which is creeping across from painting to see what it can make of words” (Majumdar: 87).

After *Monday or Tuesday*, Woolf was unable to continue writing *Jacob’s Room* for a short period of time because of depression. Anxieties about the perceived failure of the collection were exacerbated by the success of Lytton Strachey’s *Queen Victoria* which received three columns of praise in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 7 April and made Woolf “depressed as I ever am. I mean I thought of never writing any more - save reviews”. After reading Harold Child’s review of *Monday or Tuesday* in the same edition of the



*Times Literary Supplement* which was, although favourable, only half a column long, feelings of self-doubt, insecurity and worthlessness crept up on her: "I'm a failure as a writer. I'm out of fashion; old; shan't do any better; have no head piece; the spring is everywhere; my book [*Monday or Tuesday*] out (prematurely) & nipped, a damp firework".<sup>24</sup> Child had failed to see that she was "after something interesting. So that makes me suspect that I'm not" (*Diary 2*: 106). She wrote in her diary:

One wants...that people should be interested, & watch one's work. What depresses me is the thought that I have ceased to interest people - at the very moment when, by the help of the press, I thought I was becoming more myself. One does *not* want an established reputation, such as I think I was getting, as one of our leading female novelists (*Diary 2*: 106-07).

When one considers that *Monday or Tuesday* was the book in which she was becoming more herself, it is not surprising that Woolf took its apparent failure personally. Child's criticism constituted a personal affront and an attack upon her personal freedom. Would she have to compromise her values, her own point of view, in order to be accepted? She seriously considered stopping writing altogether:

I feel quite alert enough to stop, if I'm obsolete. I shan't become a machine, unless a machine for grinding articles. As I write, there rises somewhere in my head that queer, & very pleasant sense, of something which I want to write; my own point of view. I wonder, though, whether the feeling that I write for half a dozen instead of 1500 will pervert this? - make me eccentric, - no, I think not (*Diary 2*: 107).

She claimed that "private criticism" which she dreaded would be the "real test" however.<sup>25</sup>

The next few days proved to be auspicious and praise of *Monday or Tuesday* flooded in.

Woolf was reassured that she had not been rejected. Desmond MacCarthy's "Books in

---

<sup>24</sup> The fact that the book had been sent to the *Times* without the date of publication on it was a contributory factor to the inadequacy of Harold Child's review: "Thus a short notice is scrambled through to be in 'on Monday at latest', put in an obscure place, rather scrappy, complimentary enough, but quite unintelligent" (*Diary 2*: 106).

<sup>25</sup> As she writes in "Am I a Snob?" (1936) "The only criticisms of my books that draw blood are those that are unprinted; those that are private" (*Moments of Being*: 211).

General” page in the *New Statesman* on 9 April 1921 was mainly devoted to *Monday or Tuesday*. He hints at the stories’ loosely framed structure, referring to them as “a collection of sketches, rhapsodies and meditations” for which “there is no general name”. “It is these iridescent, quickly-pricked, quickly-blown-again bubbles, made of private thoughts and dreams, which the author is an adept at describing” (Majumdar: 89, 91), he writes. This review made her “feel important” (*Diary 2*: 108), although other worries began plaguing her. Was the selection of stories for the collection the right one?: “one begins to wish one had put in other stories - or left out the Haunted House, which may be sentimental”, she wrote. She was also apprehensive about the response to Leonard’s short story collection *Stories of the East* (1921): “shall I be jealous [?]” she asked herself (*Diary 2*: 108). However, fifty more copies of *Monday or Tuesday* were ordered by the distributors and her fear that private criticism would be harsh was unwarranted. Lytton Strachey praised “The String Quartet” as “marvellous” while Roger Fry thought her “on the track of real discoveries, & certainly not a fake”. Feelings of self-doubt were rapidly displaced by a strong sense of invulnerability: “fate cannot touch me; the reviewers may snap; & the sales decrease. What I had feared was that I was dismissed as negligible” (*Diary 2*: 109). As Woolf had predicted, the news that H. Hamilton Fyfe’s review of *Stories of the East* in the *Daily Mail* (2 May 1921) viewed Leonard’s story “Pearls and Swine” as among “the great stories of the world” made her jealous, but only “momentarily” (*Diary 2*: 116). This feeling of insecurity was intensified by a review of *Monday or Tuesday* in the *Daily News* of 2 May 1921 entitled “Limbo”, by R. Ellis Roberts. It describes “A Haunted House” as “by far the best thing” in the collection and concluded that “all this bereft world of inconsequent sensation is but a habitation for those lonely, dishevelled souls who are driven about by the great wind which blows through Limbo”. Woolf reacted with displeasure to this review, not least because she thought that the caption “Limbo” presented her as a lost, forgotten and unwanted writer:

I immediately think myself a failure - imagine myself peculiarly lacking in the qualities L[eonard] has. I feel fine drawn, misty, attenuated, inhuman, bloodless & niggling out trifles that don't move people. 'Limbo' is my sphere (*Diary 2*: 116).

T.S. Eliot's benign criticism of *Monday or Tuesday* was commendatory, however:

Eliot astounded me by praising Monday & Tuesday! This really delighted me. He picked out the String Quartet, especially the end of it. "Very good" he said, & meant it, I think. The Unwritten Novel he thought not successful: Haunted House "extremely interesting". It pleases me to think I could discuss my writing openly with him (*Diary 2*: 125).

But after the publication of *Monday or Tuesday* in New York in November 1921, seven months after the Hogarth Press edition, an anonymous review of it appeared in the February issue of the *Dial* (New York) which was disappointing. The meaning of the collection was unclear to the reviewer who, despite admiring Woolf's "exciting knack... of starting anywhere and arriving anywhere", expressed doubts about the stories' vague form and criticised the lack of "more frequent minor illuminations" (Majumdar: 92). This review, perhaps inordinately, depressed Woolf and in her diary she wrote: "It seems as if I succeed nowhere" (*Diary 2*: 166). The *Dial* review stated that *Monday or Tuesday* "never surpasses the technical superbness of *The Voyage Out*" (Majumdar: 92) and although Woolf was gratified to find recognition of *The Voyage Out* seven years after its publication, she feared that she would have to "wait 14 [years] for anyone to take Monday or Tuesday to heart" (*Diary 2*: 169). Regardless of such qualms, however, she considered the unfavourable criticism of *Monday or Tuesday* to be a first step towards immunity and independence. Public acknowledgment was disposable and she felt "a sense of freedom. I write what I like writing & there's an end on it" (*Diary 2*: 166).

Although the collection proved to be too esoteric for some, for many reviewers the mysticism of *Monday or Tuesday* was its appeal. In his paper entitled “Two Lesser Literary Ladies of London: Stella Benson and Virginia Woolf” (1923), Joseph Collins notes the “mysticism” and “spirituality” of *Monday or Tuesday*. He states that the collection has “an essence which escapes the bounds of realism” (187) and embarks upon a quest for truth which is “a lovely, tantalising wraith - always present but never attainable or definable” (188). According to Clive Bell in the *Dial* of December 1924, its value lies not so much in the subject matter but in its discovery of “an appropriate form”. Woolf “is in search of a form in which to express a vision - a vision of which she is now perfectly sure” (Majumdar: 142). Certainly, *Monday or Tuesday* was a necessary progression from *Night and Day* (1919) and was hugely significant in giving Woolf the confidence to try new techniques and take unprecedented risks in her novels. Ultimately, however, the criticism of *Monday or Tuesday* was bound up with issues concerning the value of the short story genre. So, even while critics praised the innovation of the collection, there remained a sense in which it was viewed as merely a second-rate achievement. To a certain extent, it put Woolf out of tune with her own generation. As E.M. Forster writes, Woolf “might have stayed folded up in her tree singing little songs like Blue-Green in the Monday or Tuesday volume, but fortunately for English Literature she did not do this” (1942: 17-18). This is a point reiterated by Raymond Mortimer who writes: “With *Monday or Tuesday* she emerged with the liveliest imagination and most delicate style of her time. But these were only sketches. *Jacob’s Room* was the first full-size canvas” (240).

“Monday or Tuesday” anticipated “the effort of breaking with complete representation” (*Letters II*: 569) in *Jacob’s Room* which draws centrally (if not exclusively) on the impressionistic method of her short fiction. Inevitably, critical response to *Jacob’s Room* was mixed. For some, the novel was “rather like the method of *Monday or Tuesday* applied to a continuous story” (Majumdar: 95). Others were more contemptuous of the crossover, with one anonymous reviewer complaining that it was not a “true novel”: “there is not only no story, but there is no perceptible development of any kind” (Majumdar: 99).

In August 1922, whilst busy revising *Jacob's Room*, Woolf had written "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street". In this story, Susan Dick observes, Woolf "first found a way to place her narrator within her character's mind and to present that character's thoughts and emotions as they occur" (1985: 3). Woolf had been working on this story since April 1922. But January to June 1922 was a period of ill-health. Leonard was advised that Virginia might not have long to live, and a series of illnesses in January, February and March kept her in bed at Hogarth House for most of that time. It was a state conducive to short bursts of creativity and during this period she wrote short stories intermittently. At one point in August, however, she put "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" to one side in a moment of depression initiated by Middleton Murry's criticism of her writing recounted to her by Sydney Waterlow: 'Sydney reproduced... exactly the phrases in which Murry dismisses my writing "merely silly - one simply doesn't read it - you're a back number"' (*Diary 2*: 190). But, three days later, Henry Noel Brailsford wrote to ask her to contribute stories to the *New Leader* and she began, "tentatively", to write the story again. But Brailsford's request was not enough to placate her, for Murray's criticism still troubled her and she wrote in her diary: "Oddly, though, sun shine, in these conditions, hardly illumines" (*Diary 2*: 194). Eventually, the story was published in the *Dial* in July 1923. "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" was the seed out of which *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) "branched into a book" (*Diary 2*: 207).<sup>26</sup> A number of stories written in 1925: "The New Dress", "Happiness", "Ancestors",

---

<sup>26</sup> For discussions on the conception of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and its relationship to "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" (1923) see Jacqueline Latham's article "The Origin of *Mrs Dalloway*", *Notes & Queries*, Vol. 211 (1966), 98-99 which argues that "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" is "an integral part of the novel" (99). The differences between the novel and the short story are examined by Judith P. Saunders in 'Mortal Stain: Literary Allusion and Female Sexuality in "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 15 (1978), 139-44. Saunders argues that, although both the short story and the novel rely upon literary allusion for their central structuring metaphor, the most important allusions in "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" are to Shelley's "Adonais" rather than to Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. Tadanobu Sakamoto's article 'Virginia Woolf: "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and *Mrs Dalloway*', *Studies in English Literature* (Tokyo) English No. 50, 1974, 75-88 examines the "independent value" (76) of the short story from the novel and identifies discrepancies between them. These discrepancies are specifically related to their generic difference. For further discussion of "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" by Tadanobu Sakamoto see "'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street'", *The Rising Generation*, Vol. CXVI, No. 9 (1970), 524-26. Other articles exploring the relationship of *Mrs Dalloway* to "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" are: A.J. Lewis, "From 'The Hours' to *Mrs Dalloway*", *British Museum Quarterly*, Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 1-2 (1964), 15-18; and Charles G. Hoffmann "From Short Story to Novel: The Manuscript Revisions of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 14 (Summer 1968), 171-86.

“The Introduction”, “Together and Apart”, “The Man Who Loved His Kind”, “A Simple Melody” and “A Summing Up” also grew out of the novel.<sup>27</sup>

The interconnectedness of the short stories and the novel raises issues that destabilise the notion of genre frames. It also forefronts the question of how the short story challenges the unity of the novel. *Mrs Dalloway* has the quality of a collection of short stories and it is precisely this effect that Woolf wanted to achieve. Writing the novel, Woolf reflected whether “one can keep the quality of a sketch in a finished & composed work?” (*Diary 2*: 312). Her notes tell of her intention to write a “book” that will “consist of the stories of people at Mrs. Dalloway’s party”. The stories are to be: “States of mind. Each separate from the other” (1983: 44) and her primary aim is to unify them but preserve each story as a self-referential whole: “The book of stories ought to be complete in itself. It must have some unity, though I want to publish each character separately” (45).<sup>28</sup>

The *Mrs Dalloway* stories, which Woolf set to work on after the completion of *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Common Reader* in December 1924, intrinsically challenge generic classification and Woolf herself doubted whether the title ‘short story’ was applicable to them. But she felt sure that she was arriving at a form that came closer to what she wanted to express:

I am less & less sure that they *are* stories, or what they are. Only I do feel fairly sure that I am grazing as near as I can to my own ideas, & getting a tolerable shape for them. I think there is less & less wastage (*Diary 2*: 325).

---

<sup>27</sup> Stella McNichol collects “The Man Who Loved His Kind”, “The Introduction”, “Ancestors”, “Together and Apart”, “The New Dress” and “A Summing Up” all written in 1925 in *Mrs Dalloway’s Party: A Short Story Sequence* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973). The stories “fit together to form a kind of mosaic which has behind it the inner logic of a psychological exploration induced by the particular situation and occasion of the party” (17) she writes.

<sup>28</sup> By the mid-twenties Woolf had become increasingly dissatisfied with the novel form. Writing to Vita Sackville-West in November 1925 she stated: “I want you to invent a name... which I can use instead of ‘novel’. Thinking it over, I see I cannot, never could, never shall, write a novel. What, then, to call it?” (*Letters III*: 221). To E.M. Forster in November 1927, she wrote about novels: “I detest them. They seem to me wrong from start to finish - my own included... I don’t want to go on, either writing them or reading them. This only proves I think that I am not a novelist”. She advised Julian Bell to write “every sort of thing” apart from novels (*Letters III*: 439). Her article “What Is a Novel?” (1927) attempts to answer this dilemma about the generic title of the novel by calling for its eradication altogether: “It is high time that this imaginary but still highly potent bogey was destroyed” (*Collected Essays IV*: 415).

In the winter of 1923, T.S. Eliot wrote to Woolf, requesting a story: "When I see you next I shall attack you again on the subject of a story or sketch from you for the 1923 Criterion - so be prepared with an ebauche" (MHP, Sussex). In response to his request Woolf sent him "In the Orchard" which she had composed while writing "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street". Resembling a Cubist collage, the story is a triadic and quasi-synthetic arrangement of fragments and is seemingly incomplete. It did not prove popular. As Katherine Cox put it rather disobligingly: "No. I don't think I really liked in the Orchard - but then I'm a jealous critic" (MHP, Sussex). Woolf did not feel threatened by this criticism, but found in it a confirmation of her autonomy and abandonment of convention, symbolised by the stuffy and claustrophobic ball gowns in the following citation:

At once I feel refreshed. I become anonymous, a person who writes for the love of it. She [Katherine Cox] takes away the motive of praise, & lets me feel that without any praise, I should be content to go on...I feel as if I slipped off all my ball dresses & stood naked - which as I remember was a very pleasant thing to do  
(*Diary 2*: 248).

Katherine Cox was not the only one to dislike the story, however, and when T.S. Eliot was to request another story from Woolf on 1 May 1924 he expressed an unfavourable opinion of the brevity of "In the Orchard", stating in a letter to Woolf that "what you gave me last year was far too short to represent such a distinguished name in the Criterion" (MHP, Sussex). Critics failed to notice something deeper going on behind the story's deceptive simplicity. A certain sophistication characterises the story's temporal organisation and Woolf had clearly thought hard about the best way to structure the story in order to give a sense of timelessness. The story is ambitious in its efforts to do away with narrative - to eliminate 'story' - and attempts to reject a sequential, narrative reading of any kind. Time appears irrelevant and the story floats freely, following no pattern, but that of free association and there is a very real sense of time stopping which is conveyed in repetition that is rhythmically very strong. We are not led to a necessary conclusion because the story does not submit to enclosure within a frame, does not meet at the end and, instead, hints at

a timeless prose capable of infinite extension. This abandonment of logical form and complex, fluid handling of narrative is prevalent throughout Woolf's short fiction, particularly in her prose poems "Blue and Green" and "Monday or Tuesday", in varying degrees of complexity and abstruseness.

Short story writing became more of a clandestine occupation during the composition of *To the Lighthouse*. Indeed, Woolf stopped writing stories for publication during the period 1924-26. On 23 April 1925 *The Common Reader* was due to come out, but Woolf claimed that she was not nervous for she immersed herself in writing the Mrs Dalloway stories: "I want as usual to dig deep down into my new stories, without having a looking glass flashed in my eyes" (*Diary 3*: 9). The phrase "dig deep" suggests that Woolf uses the method that she had discovered whilst writing *Mrs Dalloway* in August 1923, the method by which "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters" (*Diary 2*: 263). This "tunnelling process" by means of which Woolf recounts the past "by instalments" (272) took a year to perfect and was the means by which she developed multi-dimensional characters with inner lives and memories.

Woolf wanted to be anonymous and to pursue her experiments privately whilst writing the Mrs Dalloway stories. However, she could not escape the harsh glare of the looking-glass completely. In July 1925 she sent "The New Dress" to H.G. Leach, the editor of the *Forum* (New York). At first he rejected it and asked her to submit another. Woolf might have thought about sending Leach another of the Mrs Dalloway stories but decided that this would be a waste of time since they were "much in the same style as The New Dress" (*Letters III*: 217). Leach eventually published the story in May 1927.



Whilst working on the final revisions of *To the Lighthouse* Woolf contemplated a number of “side stories”. This plan centred on “a book of characters; the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence, like Clara Pater’s, ‘Don’t you find that Barker’s pins have no points to them?’” (*Diary 3*: 106). “Moments of Being: ‘Slater’s Pins Have No Points’”, first published in the *Forum* (New York) in January 1928, has its source in this diary entry. The idea for it came at an opportune moment when it seemed to Woolf that she had perfected the novel form in *To the Lighthouse*: “I have no idea yet of any other [novel] to follow it: which may mean that I have made my method perfect, & it will now stay like this, & serve whatever use I wish to put it to” (*Diary 3*: 117). But, whilst it appeared that her formal struggle with the novel was over, she continued to search for a new direction in her short fiction. In the same entry she contemplates writing:

some semi mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident - say the fall of a flower - might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist - nor time either (*Diary 3*: 118).

“Moments of Being” grew out of this idea and is an ironic comment on the act of telling stories. Clara Pater’s observation that “Barker’s pins have no points” (*Diary 3*: 106) is its starting point and the phrase reappears at the end of the story to form an envelope, threading the whole story together like an unbroken string. This idea that just five words can sustain and focus an entire narrative makes the art of weaving elaborate stories redundant. The story does not represent anything specific, but has its source in the incidental fall of a flower. Whether this can be classified as an ‘event’ in the traditional sense of a notable occurrence with an important outcome is debateable and, at the time, gave rise to editorial concern that the story, as its title suggests, lacked a “point” (*Letters III*: 431). This renunciation of an event is the point and purpose of many of Woolf’s stories. Unlike the novel which is very much dependant upon a larger narrative and the passing of time, “Moments of Being” is over in the time it takes to find a pin and is told “on one occasion”. Woolf refers to the sketch as her “nice little story about Sapphism” (*Letters III*:

431). The fall of the flower, rather than being an event in itself, is a richly suggestive catalyst for the “very profound” homosexual musings of Fanny Wilmot. It seems that time is indeed obliterated as Fanny Wilmot stands “transfixed” (*Complete Shorter Fiction*: 209) in her “moment of ecstasy” (214) which constitutes an arresting hiatus in the continuing flow of experience. This exponentiality of time and genre points to the irreconcilable distinction between the fleeting short story and the novel which seems to “go so slow” (*Letters VI*: 96).

Woolf liked to work periodically and would dissipate her energies thinking about a variety of projects simultaneously. In another defection from the novel form, she contributed “Street Haunting: A London Adventure” to the *Yale Review* in October 1927 - a work she referred to as both an “article” and an “essay” (*Letters III*: 356, 400). Depicting a surreal journey through London in the manner of her early sketches, the work is more of a short story and is an example of Woolf’s ambiguous genre classification. The story was popular and in May 1930, The Westgate Press, San Francisco, published a limited and signed edition of it. This period marks her growing confidence in the monetary worth of her short fiction. In November 1927 she wrote to the Managing Editor of the *Yale Review*, Helen McAfee, to inform her that in future she would “put rather a higher price on my stories” (*Letters III*: 436).

Short stories were ideally suited to Woolf’s erratic writing temperament. She enjoyed substituting one mode of writing for another and to Lady Robert Cecil wrote: “I am trying to write about Lord Chesterfield and de Quincey. But the moment I start writing, I think I should like to write a story. Then I begin a story: then I think about de Quincey” (*Letters III*: 444-45). During the laborious writing of “Phases of Fiction”, she longed to write short fiction: “All this criticism...may well be dislodged by the desire to write a story” (*Diary 3*: 190). To Desmond MacCarthy in September 1929 Woolf mentioned that she wanted to write a story. This eventually became “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” and was published in *Harper’s Magazine* in December 1929. That same month, she was “vaguely thinking” of producing some short stories, but found it “far best to

write as the mood comes" (*Letters IV*: 117, 118) and wrote an article entitled "The Collected Essays and Addresses of Augustine Birrell" to the *Yale Review* (June 1930) instead.

### **"Short Releases": 1930-42**

Throughout the next decade, Woolf was busy writing novels: *The Waves* (1931), *Flush* (1933), *The Years* (1937), *Three Guineas* (1938) and *Between the Acts* (1941). This period of intense productivity on her novels coincided with a steady decline in her short story output until 1938 when she wrote a number of stories for publication. By 1939 the exigencies of the Second World War were added to her writing and throughout the late Thirties, the short story would be crucial to her as a nervous release for the burgeoning anxieties about the war and as a way of easing financial strain.

The limitations of the novel became more frustratingly evident with each successive one she wrote and a diary entry in March 1929 finds her admitting her dissatisfaction with the "frame" of *The Waves* (*Diary 3*: 219). In May she felt "no great impulse" to begin the novel and, from sheer frustration, wrote stories instead: "Every morning I write a little sketch, to amuse myself" (*Diary 3*: 229). The stories she wrote (which remain unidentified) offered new perspectives and Woolf regarded them as a key to the method she would use in *The Waves* whose principal aim is to "give the moment whole" (*Diary 3*: 209): "I am not saying... that these sketches have any relevance. I am not trying to tell a story. Yet perhaps it might be done in that way. A mind thinking" (*Diary 3*: 229). The resulting novel all but bore out that assertion: there is a void where the story should be and critics seeking one were disappointed. Frank Swinnerton writes: "Hating story, denying story, Mrs Woolf tries to do without story" (Majumdar: 267).

In April 1930 Woolf wrote to Helen McAfee apologising for having no stories to send her. She was suffering from influenza and work on *The Waves* was consuming her time: "Thus I have not written any story or article since the autumn, and cannot yet say when I shall be free" (*Letters IV*: 157). On 7 February 1931, she finished the second draft of *The Waves*, but felt depressed. She wrote a series of five essays on *The London Scene*: entitled "The Docks of London", "Oxford Street Tide", "Great Men's Houses", "Abbeys and Cathedrals" and "This is the House of Commons" which appeared in *Good Housekeeping* from December 1931 to October 1932.<sup>29</sup> Woolf describes these essays as "pure brilliant description" (*Letters IV*: 301). They were the sort of things she loved writing and for the first time in a long while she experienced freedom: "A vast vista of intense and peaceful work stretches before me - a whole book on English lit; some stories; biographies: this is as I spin" (*Letters IV*: 321). While composing *The Common Reader: Second Series* in March 1932 she wanted "to write a little story" but was aware of the "odd gulf" between the world of criticism and fiction (*Diary 4*: 86).

Woolf began writing *Flush* (published on 5 October 1933) in August 1931. Alongside this short novel, which she worked on during October to December 1932, she made rapid progress with *The Years*, writing 60,000 words in nine weeks (none of which were published). Woolf very rarely felt any real satisfaction with the results of her novel writing, and *The Years* is perhaps a poignant example of this. 1936 was a year punctuated by alternate periods of despair and happiness and there are no entries in her diary between 9 April and 11 June of that year. On 8 April she posted the final pages of her revised transcript of *The Years* to the printers. Her intense work on the revision brought her close to breakdown. When the proofs of the novel were ready, she resorted to short story writing to steel herself against forthcoming criticism: "Now what am I to do about these proofs? send them off? But how exercise patience & courage? What shall I write? Sketches I think..." (*Diary 5*: 40 - ellipsis in original).

---

<sup>29</sup> These essays are collected in *The London Scene: Five Essays by Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975; repr. 1982).

These 'sketches' took the form of a collaborative project with Vanessa and consisted of a series of "incidents" described by Woolf and illustrated by Vanessa. They called the work "Faces and Voices" and for Woolf it was a break from writing *Three Guineas*. Woolf mentions the project in her diary entry for 20 February 1937: "I discussed a book of illustrated incidents with Nessa yesterday; we are going to produce 12 lithographs for Xmas, printed by ourselves" (*Diary 5*: 58). Four days later she wrote in her diary: "I'm off again, after 5 days lapse (writing Faces & Voices) on 3 Guineas" (*Diary 5*: 61). The work never materialised, although, according to Susan Dick, "Portraits" and "Uncle Vanya", both published for the first time in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (1985), are probably part of this work.<sup>30</sup>

Anticipating the publication of *The Years* on 11 March 1937, Woolf felt deeply apprehensive and, as the publication date drew nearer, she worked on stories. On 2 March she describes herself as "switched off doing Pictures in the morning" (*Diary 5*: 64) and that same day she records that the BBC asked her for a story. Writing an article on Congreve's comedies in June 1937 and taking a break from *Three Guineas*, she contemplated a short story entitled "The Symbol" which she completed in March 1941:

I wd. like to write a dream story about the top of a mountain. Now why? About lying in the snow; about rings of colour; silence... [ellipsis in original] & the solitude. I cant though. But shant I, one of these days, indulge myself in some short releases into that world? Short now for ever. No more long grinds: only sudden intensities (*Diary 5*: 95).

---

<sup>30</sup> According to Jan Marsh, Virginia and Vanessa were "sisters in shared artistic endeavour" and Virginia "honed her materials as carefully as Vanessa mixed her colours" (18, 19). In Vanessa, Virginia noted the presence of "a short story writer of great wit and able to bring off a situation in a way that rouses my envy... I wonder if I could write the Three Women in prose" (*Letters III*: 498) and "what a poet you are in colour" Woolf stated in a letter of 1940 (*Letters VI*: 381). Vanessa and Virginia were leading figures in Bloomsbury in their fields and their experiments in literature and art respectively epitomise the tendency of modern art to dispense with form and fact for the sake of an intensive exploration of the imagination. For an extended examination of the professional relationship between the sisters, see Diane Filby Gillespie's book length study *The Sisters' Arts. The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988). Also, see the chapter on visual images in Woolf's short stories: "Las imágenes visuales en la narrativa breve de Virginia Woolf", in Manuela Palacios González's thesis, *Virginia Woolf y la pintura*. (Ph.D Dissertation. Universidade de Santiago de Compostela. Servicio de Publicacións e Intercambio Científico, 1992), 170-248.

“The Symbol” takes us to the heart of what the short story meant to Woolf and sums up in one statement her entire endeavour in the genre. A dream adventure, the story isolates the main motivational force behind her short fiction which was “release”. The words “Short now for ever” reveal the full extent of her commitment to the short story and her dependency on it. Woolf revelled in the high-speed sensation and quick impact of the form: her reference to short stories as “sudden intensities” suggests that she viewed them as automatic, spontaneous and instinctive productions. This quality of instantaneous, impromptu and impulsive composition is unique to her short works.

In November 1937 John Lehmann asked Virginia to contribute stories to his twice-yearly journal, *New Writing*. But the plan never materialised and Woolf refused Lehmann’s request stating that she was “fed up with short stories” (*Diary 5*: 118). When, on 7 July 1938, Lehmann repeated his request, Woolf again refused,<sup>31</sup> this time explaining that the reason behind her refusal was that she found the foreword of *New Writing*, which declares an aim to “further the work of new and young authors”, to be “distinctly inhibiting”. To write stories for journals was to return to the pre-Hogarth Press days when she would be grilled by editors: “Probably I’m an incorrigible outsider. I always want to write only for the Hogarth Press, and feel if I’m forced to commit myself to anybody else that I’m writing what I don’t want to write” (*Letters VI*: 252). It was as if, after years of struggling with the demands of editors, she was at last prepared to totally forego such constraints. Nonetheless, a commission for a story came from *Harper’s Bazaar* in the summer of 1937 and happily rekindled her interest in the short story. She sent “The Duchess and the Jeweller” (1938)<sup>32</sup> and “The Shooting Party” (1938) to the magazine. The stories would appear in successive issues.

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Diary 5*: 155.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of this story see Olsen, Bruce F. “The Duchess and the Jeweller”. *Insight II: Analyses of Modern English Literature*. Eds. John V. Hagopian and Martin Dolch. (Frankfurt amM.: Hirschgraben, 1964), 363-67.

Woolf's short fiction took a new and unfamiliar turn in the late 1930s. Stories like "The Shooting Party" (1938), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1938) and "The Legacy" (1944) give us an insight into the furtive and squalid side of human nature and deal with murder, adultery and violence. Whereas, generally, one associates Woolf with a delicate and ephemeral writing style, the language she uses in these stories is perceptibly more violent than in her novels. It is not coincidental that her most surreal short fiction, for example, the unpublished sketch, "Fantasy upon a gentleman" (1937), "The Shooting Party" (1938) and "Lappin and Lapinova" (1938) were produced during the final years of her life when she was becoming increasingly conscious of her outsider status.<sup>33</sup>

In the late 1930s Woolf often described herself as being in a trance-like state, contemplating death, dream and reality which fears about the onset of the Second World War precipitated. She felt the strain of writing for mainstream journals: "oh the bore of writing out a story to make money!" (*Diary 5*: 189). However, encouraged by the eventual acceptance of "Lappin and Lapinova" by *Harper's Bazaar* in 1938, she further composed "The Searchlight" in protest against "Roger & facts" (*Diary 5*: 204). As World War Two became more imminent, writing short stories increasingly became a matter of financial security and Jacques Chambrun's offer of £200 for a story in August 1939 was welcomed by Woolf, the war having "tied up" her purse strings (*Diary 5*: 266). In a letter to Vita Sackville-West in August 1939 she uses the image of an empty envelope to record the "intolerable suspension of all reality" that "one cant fold... in any words" (*Letters VI*: 355). This affected her story writing: "I struggle out to my room, and cant believe I was ever writing a life of Roger Fry, or shall ever finish it. Then I try a story - no go" (*Letters VI*: 358). But, after completing the Roger Fry study, the desire to write stories returned and she wanted to be "winging off on small articles & stories". She contemplated "a nice little wild improbable story to spread my wings" (*Diary 5*: 272, 276), but found that she had to

---

<sup>33</sup> Woolf had contemplated writing a comedy about marriage in October 1938. Cf. Virginia Woolf/Vanessa Bell 24 October [1938], *Letters VI*: 294. In November 1938 she was "rehashing" "Lappin and Lapinova", "a story written I think at Ashcham 20 years ago or more: when I was writing *Night & Day* perhaps" (*Diary 5*: 188). This was published in *Harper's Bazaar* (New York) in April 1938.

compromise her own wishes for the sake of editors' demands. When the London office of *Harper's Bazaar* wrote to say that New York did not want "The Legacy",<sup>34</sup> old feelings of self-doubt returned. Woolf felt as though she was writing "in a vacuum" (*Letters VI*: 430) without an audience.<sup>35</sup>

In 1940 the Woolfs had discussed bringing out a second collection of short fiction by Virginia which was to include a number of stories from *Monday or Tuesday*. It is interesting that Woolf thought of this project just as she was returning to her old feelings about the censor: "I have been thinking about Censors. How visionary figures admonish us... All books now seem to me surrounded by a circle of invisible censors" (*Diary 5*: 229). Whether this idea for a new short story collection was a last attempt to challenge the censor or was borne out of a desire to escape the torpor that the war instilled, the project never transpired during Woolf's lifetime.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Leonard brought out *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* in 1944. It includes all of the *Monday or Tuesday* stories, excluding "Blue and Green" only, plus a number of stories that Woolf had written after *Monday or Tuesday* which were: "Solid Objects" (1920), "The New Dress", "Together and Apart", "The Man Who Loved His Kind" and "A Summing Up" which were all written in 1925 but were previously unpublished. Also included are "Moments of Being: 'Slater's Pins Have No Points'" (1928), "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929), "The Duchess and the Jeweller" (1938), "The Shooting Party" (1938), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1938), "The Searchlight" and "The Legacy".

---

<sup>34</sup> Woolf received the letter on 21 January 1941. For her letters of complaint to the journal see: Virginia Woolf/The Assistant Editor of *Harper's Bazaar* 23 January 1941, *Letters VI*: 463; Virginia Woolf/The Editor of *Harper's Bazaar* 3 February 1941, *Letters VI*: 469.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of Woolf's last short stories - "The Watering Place", "The Symbol" and an incomplete sketch "English Youth" in terms of Woolf's deepening mental depression see Dick 1989a. For Dick, "The Symbol" (1940) conveys "an overwhelming sense of loss and isolation" (144).

<sup>36</sup> Klaus Mann, the editor of the American journal *Decision: A Review of Free Culture*, wrote to Woolf on February 26 1941 expressing an interest in her short story "Moments of Being: 'Slater's Pins Have No Points'": "Miss Allanah Harper showed me, the other day, an issue of *Echanges*, dated December 1929, which contains a story by you entitled "Moments of Being. 'Slater's Pins Have No Points'". I think it is an admirable little piece of writing and I would like very much to reprint it in this magazine" (MHP, Sussex). Nothing came of Mann's request however.



*A Haunted House* was received less enthusiastically than *Monday or Tuesday*. Critics found the stories frustratingly ambivalent. In a review of the collection, Leo Kennedy claimed that: 'On reading, almost all these "stories" prove to be fragments in a way' (3). Another reviewer in *The Providence Sunday Journal* of 16 April 1944 claimed of the stories in the collection:

With sharp moments, altogether they are not anywhere near Virginia Woolf's novels in interest or importance. The short story was never her main concern; she touched it rarely and often with a cursory touch. One reads them primarily because Virginia Woolf, a very fine novelist, wrote them.

In her review of the collection entitled "Mirrors for Reality" (1944), Eudora Welty perhaps comes closest to unravelling one of the most important strands of Woolf's short fiction when she indicates its private nature and desire to escape the public eye, remarking that "regardless of how fine these stories seem to us, she considered many of them not for our eyes, and only temporarily set in their forms". Overall, the collection displays the technique of "a writer writing before her own eyes".<sup>37</sup>

*Between the Acts* (1941) was Woolf's shortest novel and it was her final affirmation of the fragmentary nature of storytelling, affirming in the minds of critics such as Malcolm Cowley that Woolf "in her heart did not believe in stories" (Majumdar: 448). The idea for the novel's structure came from "The Shooting Party" in which Woolf: "saw the form of a new novel [*Between the Acts*]. Its to be first the statement of the theme: then the restatement: & so on: repeating the same story: singling out this & then that: until the central idea is stated" (*Diary 5*: 114). On 26 February 1941, Woolf gave the typescript of the novel to Leonard to read and meditated upon something that she had heard in the ladies' lavatory at the Sussex Grill at Brighton that would be the impulse behind her final short story, "The Watering Place".<sup>38</sup> One of the last entries in Woolf's diary followed a synopsis of this story: "But shall I ever write again one of those sentences that gives me

---

<sup>37</sup> No page number.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Diary 5*: 356-57.

intense pleasure?" (*Diary 5*: 357). Woolf's final statement about her short story writing foregrounds the "intense pleasure" that the short story gave her and her lifelong belief that the smallest number of words might offer as much enlightenment as a great deal of discursive narrative. As she had observed in her early journals:

I have a theory that, better than all insight & knowledge, final & supreme fruit of it, is one single sentence, six words long maybe; & that if you have not this forming at the top of your pen you had better write sedately of other things (*Passionate Apprentice*: 367).

It was her father who taught Woolf the importance of economy: "To write in the fewest possible words... exactly what one meant - that was his only lesson in the art of writing" (*Collected Essays IV* 1967: 80). But, paradoxically, although Woolf applied her father's advice about economy in her short stories, it was in them that she first attempted to discard the Victorian tradition she had inherited from him. This was a task she set herself from the start of her career, although its achievement was to be a lifelong work.

## Chapter 2

Through the Realist Frame: “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906),

“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906) and “Memoirs of a Novelist” (1909)

Lyndall Gordon refers to the years 1906-09 as “the most experimental” of Woolf’s career. But she seems to be making a statement about *The Voyage Out* (1915) only, claiming that this period saw the conception of Woolf’s “innovative ideas for the modern novel” (111) and thus demerits the stories Woolf wrote during this time. These are: “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906) and “Memoirs of a Novelist” (1909) which galvanise some of the major, gender political concerns of Woolf’s later works such as *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and her final essays “Anon” and “The Reader” (1941). The burden of these stories lies in raising the profile of women and much of their emphasis falls upon unveiling the inside history of women whose intimate lives have been occluded from literature. Her framing of the stories through the eyes of the female characters takes us through the realist frame and the masculine ‘I’. This is realised through a split story technique whereby the first half of the story works almost like an explanatory prologue, setting up the narrator as an authoritative figure, and the second half de-emphasises this position. If, as Victor Brombert writes, the device of preliminary framing “separates the text from what it was not yet, defines and confines it” (495), then it is safe to say that “Phyllis and Rosamond”, “Memoirs of a Novelist” and “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” do not really begin until the masculine voice is discarded and the women are allowed to speak for themselves.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> According to Frank Kermode, in modern fiction “beginnings have lost their mythical rigidity” and a “remoteness and doubtfulness about ends and origins” (67) enters into literature. For discussions of the short story beginning see Susan Lohafer’s “Getting into Story”. *Coming to Terms with the Short Story*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 52-60, in which Lohafer observes that “the beginning of a story is the point of greatest ontological shock” (60). For other studies in short story beginnings see Joseph M. Backus ““He Came Into Her Line of Vision Walking Backwards”: Non-Sequential Sequence-Signals in Short Story Openings”, *Language Learning*, Vol. XV, Nos. 1 and 2 (1965), 67-83; and Suzanne Hunter Brown. “Discourse Analysis and the Short Story”. *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey. (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 217-48 in which Brown discusses readers’ activation of a frame at the beginning of a story.

Woolf wrote "Phyllis and Rosamond" between 20 and 23 June 1906. The story describes what might have been had Virginia and Vanessa (along with their brothers Adrian and Thoby) not moved from 22 Hyde Park Gate to "start life afresh" (*Moments of Being*: 184) at 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, after their father's death in February 1904. Two months after the completion of "Phyllis and Rosamond" Woolf wrote "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" which she was inspired to write during her stay at Blo'Norton Hall - an Elizabethan manor house dating from 1585 at East Harling in Norfolk - from 3 to 31 August 1906. It is Woolf's longest short story and is the culmination of her desire to write a historical work. She had written to Violet Dickinson in May 1905: "I am going to write history one of these days. I always did love it; if I could find the bit I want" (*Letters I*: 190). Like "Phyllis and Rosamond", "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" focuses on the cultural inheritance of women and their silent history. Woolf locates the story in feudal England (c. 1480) during the War of the Roses. I believe that her decision to do so is a strategic gesture intending to demonstrate to the reader that very little in relation to the familial and societal constraints of women has changed in modern society. "Memoirs of a Novelist" was written and submitted for publication to *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1909 and is the outcome of a wish to write "a very subtle work on the proper writing of lives" (*Letters I*: 325). The sketch is a synopsis of Woolf's views upon the art of the biographer and is neither a story nor an essay but spans the boundary between them. Reception of the work was initially hopeful. Clive Bell wrote to Woolf on 27 October 1909 praising the short story as "a new medium peculiarly suited to your genius" (Gordon: 97). He expected the story to be "the chef d'oeuvre of the century" (Bell I 1996: 154). His praise proved to be over-magnanimous however, for the response from Reginald Smith, the editor of *The Cornhill*, was disappointing: "My feeling is that you have impaled not a butterfly, but a bumble-bee upon a pin".<sup>40</sup> Implicit in Smith's metaphor of the bumble-bee upon a pin is that Woolf's subject escapes her because she has failed to use reliable means to grasp it

---

<sup>40</sup> Reginald Smith/Virginia Stephen 10 November 1909 (MHP, Sussex). Cf. Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf I*: 153-54.

completely. In effect, Smith hints that the short story is an inadequate form to deal with such a large subject as biography: Woolf's de-emphasis of disciplinary boundaries ultimately appears to have cost her publication. Dean Baldwin refers to "Phyllis and Rosamond", "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" and "Memoirs of a Novelist" as "exercises in traditional methods, not explorations of new approaches" (10). However, although these are traditional stories with a plot-based structure; a beginning, a middle and a climax at the end; recognisable character types; and a setting, these are all rapidly destabilised as Woolf tries to find her own voice. Challenging gender and generic canonisation, the single, most important motivation behind them is their reaction against an institutionalised and repressive frame.

Upon their move to Bloomsbury, Virginia and Vanessa became "free women" (*Letters I*: 228) and their lives changed crucially. Something of the freedom of Bloomsbury is delineated in "Phyllis and Rosamond" (1906), particularly in the lives of the Tristram sisters whom the eponymous subjects - the Stephen sisters' fictional embodiments - meet at one of the artistic gatherings based upon Thoby's 'Thursday evenings' of 1904. As Quentin Bell writes: "it is as though the Miss Stephens of 1903 were to call upon the Miss Stephens of 1905" (*I*: 99). Woolf likened the move to Bloomsbury to crossing a barrier, stating that "the gulf which we crossed between Kensington & Bloomsbury was the gulf between respectable mu[m]ified humbug & life crude & impertinent perhaps, but living" (*Diary I*: 206).

The metaphor of breaking through barriers and escaping frames is a useful analogy when we turn to the story which attempts to break through the masculine frame of representation in order to give voice to the silent lives of the women who are in the background. As James King notes: "Only someone who felt that she had escaped from gaol could have written this piece" (119). In "Phyllis and Rosamond" Woolf stands vertiginously on the threshold of tradition and modernity, caught in an odd, intergenerational dichotomy. This has implications for the structure of the work which looks forward to new ideas and expressions, yet cannot entirely break free from the

traditional frame of 'story'. Woolf attempts to transgress the boundaries that male writers have established for her use by positing in place of the sanctioned male voice the absent voice of women who are "behind the scenes" (17). The beginning of "Phyllis and Rosamond" manifests a willingness to break out of the traditional compartments of literature and out of the formal frame of literalistic portraiture in particular: "In this very curious age, when we are beginning to require pictures of people, their minds and their coats, a faithful outline, drawn with no skill but veracity, may possibly have some value" (17). The aim of the story is to give some idea of how traditional artistic values have shifted and it is strongly infused with a sense of living in a different and "very curious" age; indeed, the story begins as though it were written in another era. The idea for the preface follows realist convention. In *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story* (1982), Helmut Bonheim finds that stories which begin with a lengthy expository passage originate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the story was more closely related to the essay. The device of expository realism "declares the preliminary remarks to be a kind of extraterritorial adjunct to the story proper" (92-93) and has the function of framing the story. The point and purpose of this preliminary framing in "Phyllis and Rosamond" is to introduce a male narrator:

Let each man, I heard it said the other day, write down the details of a day's work; posterity will be as glad of the catalogue as we should be if we had such a record of how the door keeper at the Globe, and the man who kept the Park gates passed Saturday March 18<sup>th</sup> in the year of our Lord 1568.

The concern of this modishly self-dramatising and posturing narrator is the realist one of establishing "veracity" and of creating an authentic "catalogue" and "record" for "posterity" (17). He uses a formal language that is aggressive and invasive, referring to Phyllis and Rosamond as the "subject of special enquiry" and as "excellent material" (18) for investigation. This language is reminiscent of the pragmatic and scientific attitude of someone from the medical profession carrying out a medical examination or autopsy.

But, despite its initial tendency towards outmoded exposition, the story partially abandons this male voice and gender role-playing, however, to encapsulate her own reasons for writing the story:

as such portraits as we have are almost invariably of the male sex, who strut more prominently across the stage, it seems worth while to take as model one of those many women who cluster in the shade, for a study of history and biography convinces any right minded person that these obscure figures danced of their own accord, and cut what steps they chose; and the partial light which novelists and historians have begun to cast upon that dark and crowded place behind the scenes has done little as yet but show us how many wires there are, held in obscure hands, upon whose jerk or twist the whole figure of the dance depends.

In the above excerpt, Woolf inveighs against the all-pervasive presence of men in literature and the obscurity of women. There is something subhuman about the way women have been portrayed. They have clustered “in the shade” like frightened animals or skulked in “dark” and “crowded” caverns like goblins or sorceresses. Perhaps there is something threatening about them that they should be kept hidden. More especially, Woolf foregrounds the idea of women’s enforced submissiveness. The description of the dance has violent undertones and the cruel “jerk” and “twist” of the wires indicates physical torture and abuse by powerful and manipulative male hands. The preface sets the tone for the entire story which is characterised by a strong reaction against the exclusion of women from literature and makes a defiant gesture towards cutting the wires that have held women in bondage.

The first half of the story which is set in Kensington is concerned with traditional notions of sexuality and sex roles and sets out to describe the lives of two young women “born of well-to-do, respectable, official parents” (17) and to explore the “individual features of young ladydom” (18). It stays very much within the confines of the traditional boundaries of the family and echoes the closely observed domestic fiction of writers like Jane Austen. Memories of Hyde Park Gate infiltrate this half of the story. In *Moments of Being*, the principal metaphor that Woolf uses to describe their Kensington house is that of a “cage” (117). Further descriptions of the building, situated “near the blank brick wall at the end” of a street “which led nowhere” function as physical, concrete analogues of a mental state, of lives that are “numb with non-being” (119, 136). Similar images of confinement and spatial restriction predominate in Woolf’s descriptions of Kensington in “Phyllis and Rosamond”: “The stucco fronts, the irreproachable rows of Belgravia and South Kensington seemed to Phyllis the type of her lot; of a life trained to grow in an ugly pattern to match the staid ugliness of its fellows” (24). Here, the indistinguishable and uniform rows of houses are implicitly likened to the even tenor of the lives of their inhabitants. At the end of the day, the sisters retire to the top of the “great ugly” (19) house which, having no room of their own, they share. They might be rare, exotic birds whom “long captivity had corrupted...both within and without” (26). A line of physical demarcation is constructed around them through the setting of the drawing-room which Raymond Williams in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980) identifies as one of the primary settings of naturalist drama. Williams identifies a correspondence between the deterministic nature of inheritance and social obligation and the greatly foreshortened space of Naturalist theatre:

a shaping physical environment and a shaping social environment is the intellectual legacy of the new natural history and the new sociology of the nineteenth century. Whatever the variations of...attitude, among individual dramatists, this absolute sense of real limits and pressures - in physical inheritance, in types of family and social relationships, in social institutions and beliefs - is



common and preoccupying. To produce these limits and pressures, in actually staged environments, was the common aim [of Naturalist theatre] (141).

The “drawing-room stage” (Williams: 129) is a significant setting in “Phyllis and Rosamond” because it forms the outer limits around the sisters and is a prison-like space that isolates them as if they were performing in front of an audience. The sisters are “indigenous” to this setting and appear never to have “trod a rougher earth than the Turkey carpet, or reclined on harsher ground than the arm chair or the sofa”. It is society in miniature: their “place of business” and the “professional arena” in which they act out the roles “in which they have been instructed since childhood” (18). This suggestion of determinism links with the philosophy behind naturalism.

The dramatic metaphor is active throughout “Phyllis and Rosamond” and implies a number of limitations which the dramatist shares with the short story writer. Both are, primarily, compelled to compress their material by the lack of space: the drama by the borders of the stage and the story by the physical limits of the page. As Evelyn Albright explains, the techniques that the short story writer uses are essentially those of the dramatist. For example, in the short story: “The artificial isolation of a limited number of people and events, the artistic heightening of dialogue, the concentration on a single issue, the vivid picturing of a scene that is significant, are essentially dramatic” (9-10). For H.E. Bates also, in the short story, as in the drama, the “range of time, place, and movement is necessarily limited” (215). The fact that the short story, like the drama, must be exemplary and representative has implications for character delineation. In an unpublished essay entitled “The Dramatic in Life & Art” of about 1902, Woolf states that character delineation in the theatre is “a coarser process” and, although the hero in a novel is “shown in every conceivable light”, in a play:

The dramatist takes one simple pattern generally & embodies it in a character - the character only exists to emphasize this passion... Reasons for this are - short space in which the character is acted - shorter than a novel - must be more epitomised (MHP, Sussex. A. 26.c).

This quotation suggests that Woolf saw a correspondence between the delimited space of the drama and the circumscribed condition of its characters. In the case of “Phyllis and Rosamond” Woolf chooses the short story form as a structural correlative to express the imprisonment and delimitation of women. The short story - limited in action and range - is well-suited to represent the curtailed and narrow existence of the sisters.

However, the metaphor of the drama that is initially set up by the masculine ‘I’ is bound to fail. The reasons are suggested in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) where Woolf writes that:

literature is impoverished beyond our counting by the doors that have been shut upon women. Married against their will, kept in one room, and to one occupation, how could a dramatist give a full or interesting or truthful account of them? (83).

The male viewpoint of the beginning of the story is rapidly destabilised as Woolf tries to find her own voice by rejecting the already framed one of scholarly masculine authority, positing in its place the silent, absent voice of women who are behind the scenes. Unlike the male voice which introduces the story, Phyllis and Rosamond are passive, silent characters and one of the main things that is stressed about them is that they do not have a voice. They dress silently, eat breakfast with their father in silence, read in silence and silently depart to do the errands their mother has arranged for them. Woolf, however, is keen to immerse herself in their silent lives and extract from them what she might. Her voice is not that of the scholarly, disinterested, male spectator, but one of intimacy and disclosure which peers behind “the shadow of the letter ‘I’”, where “all is shapeless as mist” (*A Room of One’s Own*: 98). Phyllis and Rosamond represent real life going on off-stage, beyond the frame and “behind the scenes” (17). Woolf wants to be party to the sisters’ conversation “in the shade” (17) and “over the bedroom candle”. She wants to be “by them when they wake next morning” (18). Such an exchange occurs when Phyllis and Rosamond are alone in the school-room.

Woolf gives the sisters a voice, listening beyond the 'I' of patriarchal culture and ideology, and giving them the opportunity to speak for themselves. In this part of the story dialogue performs a crucial narrative function, for it establishes the urgency of Phyllis's marriage and the sisters' discontent with their lives. The dialogue is rendered with sensitivity and intimate insight. Woolf watches the sisters from an amused, but sympathetic perspective as though she is recalling intimate moments spent with her own sister at Hyde Park Gate. She keeps entirely out of the narrative and lets the story tell itself. Questions about the nature of female duty loom large. Marriage "might be a way out" for Phyllis, although both sisters acknowledge the deterministic imperative ruling their lives, concluding that the burden of their inheritance is inescapable: "there's no escaping facts" (22) states Phyllis. In this scene the freedom of the dialogue is also a counterpart to the setting. The sisters can only talk freely when they are in a private space. They dispense with formality and make unkind jokes about their suitors: "At each name her sister made a face" (23). The tone of the scene is playful and irreverent as they criticise their parents unashamedly, referring to them impersonally and coldly as "They" and satirising their mother as "her Ladyship" (22). They overtly condemn their parents' marriage as the epitome of what they do not want to become: "In short we would be a worthy pair: something like our parents!" states Phyllis about her possible marriage to Middleton. Woolf withdraws momentarily from this part of the story, but returns at its conclusion to praise the sisters' wit and "great reverence for intellect" (23). The scene contributes to instant character growth.

When the sisters arrive at Bloomsbury, two worlds are seen to collide. Whereas images of space and enclosure create a claustrophobic sense of isolation in the first half of the story, the transition to Bloomsbury is described in terms of space, light and exhilarating human interaction. Woolf's description of Gordon Square in *Moments of Being* is equally applicable to the description of Bloomsbury in "Phyllis and Rosamond". She describes Gordon Square as:

the most beautiful, the most exciting, the most romantic place in the world... The light and the air after the rich red gloom of Hyde Park Gate were a revelation. Things one had never seen in the darkness there... shone out for the first time in the drawing room at Gordon Square. After the muffled silence of Hyde Park Gate the roar of traffic was positively alarming... But what was even more exhilarating was the extraordinary increase of space. At Hyde Park Gate one had only a bedroom in which to read and see one's friends. Here Vanessa and I each had a sitting room; there was the large double drawing room; and a study on the ground floor... We were full of experiments and reforms. We were going to do without table napkins... to paint... to write... Everything was going to be new; everything was going to be different (*Moments of Being*: 184-85).

Bloomsbury resonates with a similar sense of unrestrained freedom. The "extraordinary increase of space" not only suggests an increase in physical space, but implies, also, a new door opening and new opportunity. Conversely, Hyde Park Gate is described as an enclosure, a place of stagnation and deathliness. It is in a cul-de-sac and at a dead-end. The "rich red gloom" inside the Kensington house suggests a dismal, cavernous, funereal atmosphere. Its "muffled silence" indicates reticence and reserve.

Woolf is determined to make the contrast between Kensington and Bloomsbury the center of the story and pays great attention to how the story is sequenced in order to give a clear sense of this disparity. Whereas the Victorian house in the first half of the story is laden with gloom, Bloomsbury has a particularly free-flowing, sensuous quality to it. Using words that connote brightness and warmth, Phyllis notes the "lighted windows which, open

in the summer night, let some of the talk and life within spill out upon the pavement". A harmonious relation between the inner and the outer world exists as windows are thrown wide open to ensure that, even in the close quarters of the town, the individual is in connection with the outer world. Here, there are no limitable borders or thresholds of enclosure, and boundaries are ill-defined, vague and inchoate. Bloomsbury, covered by "the pale green of umbrageous trees" (24), is a great space of hospitable openness, signifying sociability and an expansiveness of spirit. A deliberate contrast is implied between the world of Kensington, which stands for society and artificial restraint, and the world of Bloomsbury which represents the natural outpouring of feeling. Bloomsbury challenges both gender and generic canonisation. Here, the sound of the masculine 'I' no longer reverberates and is totally drowned in the candid, non-discriminatory and inclusive dialogue of both men and women which is "scornful of the commonplace" and "represented no conclusions" (25).

In this enterprising, free atmosphere, the staid, very feminine, appearance of Phyllis and Rosamond is a notable anomaly. Phyllis's "white silk" and "cherry ribbons" make her "conspicuous" (24) by the side of Sylvia Tristram who wears a masculine shooting jacket. This time, the sisters are the audience, the outsiders looking in. They feel lost outside the frame: "They sat thus, unconscious of their own silence, like people shut out from some merrymaking in the cold and the wind; invisible to the feasters within" (26). There are multiple images of framing: the sisters are like images in a painting by Romney; Phyllis feels like a caged bird "with wings pinioned" (24) and is enframed by the looking-glass which Sylvia Tristram holds up to her (26). All these images of framing serve to circumscribe the story, narrowing its margins and limiting its scope. The Tristrams, in contrast to the Hibberts, are "the real thing" (27).<sup>41</sup> At Bloomsbury there is no scope for

---

<sup>41</sup> Woolf has taken this phrase from Henry James's short story "The Real Thing" (1892). In fact, "Phyllis and Rosamond" bears a number of similarities to James's story. In James's story we meet a painter, a "presumptuous young modern searcher" (196) of real-life models for book illustrations. Among the subjects he paints are members of the royal family and rich notables. For these paintings he prefers to use people of the lower classes to sit for him. The arrival of a husband and wife from the upper classes requesting to sit for him disconcerts the painter who reluctantly obliges them. As he predicts, the paintings are a failure and his work risks rejection, confirming his "innate preference for the represented subject over the real one" (188-89).

false representation or for “those feminine graces which could veil so much” (24). The socially constructed boundaries between men and women have been lifted and there is no mystery between the sexes. It is a safe space of permissible intimacy. The sisters are uncomfortable because they feel that they have stepped outside the frame of a painting and are being scrutinised. The story reaches a point of dramatic irony when the sisters appear before Sylvia Tristram, “an artist of real promise” (25), and in the “unquestionably genuine” world of Bloomsbury are revealed as ““frauds”” (27). All the traditions the sisters had relied upon are examined and questioned. Even the way in which they think, for Rosamond is “surprised to find that her most profound discoveries were taken as the starting point of further investigations”. Their authenticity is questioned before this “strange new point of view” (25).

It seems appropriate to end the story shortly after the scene at Bloomsbury as the sisters return to their “gilded cage” (King: 119), feeling somewhat nonplussed having glimpsed a world vastly more stimulating than their own. The sisters find freedom outside the frame, but it is only a tentative freedom for they do not attempt to escape their situation and Phyllis’s “last thoughts that night were that it was rather a relief that Lady Hibbert had arranged a full day for them tomorrow: at any rate she need not think; and river parties were amusing” (29). It is a paralysing ending that, in the spirit of Bloomsbury, issues “no conclusions” (*Complete Shorter Fiction*: 25). As Marilyn Kurtz observes, it is an end that offers “no resolution; only a glimpse at two worlds: one of constrained domesticity, the other of artistic freedom” (27). Seeking freedom and self-definition, and fleeing from habit and style, in “Phyllis and Rosamond” Woolf puts considerable distance between herself and tradition, seeking her own voice by adopting, then rejecting, the male one, giving way to an unframed realism. However, in this early story she does not fully escape the confined cell of masculine representation - she only bends the bars a little.

---

Whereas the figure of the real duchess has “no variety of expression” (195), the working-class models he uses, because they have “no positive stamp” (196), possess a “talent for imitation” (196-97). In the end the real duke and duchess become the painter’s servants and “bowed their heads in bewilderment to the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal” (210).

Another 'insignificant' female life-story is told in "Memoirs of a Novelist" (1909) which continues Woolf's preoccupation with women's silence and lack of representation in literature. As well as being the outcome of Woolf's wish "to write a very subtle work on the proper writing of lives" (*Letters I*: 325), the work might also be viewed as the result of Woolf's humorous comment that she was going to "become a popular lady biographer, safe for - graceful portrait, and such a lady!" (*Letters I*: 356). In the work she satirises this image of the "popular lady biographer" and exhibits a pronounced degree of scepticism about the genre and its proprieties. Using an existing biography of Miss Willatt (a Victorian novelist who died in 1884) by her friend Miss Linsett<sup>42</sup> as her framework, and foreshadowing her essays "The New Biography" (1927) and "The Art of Biography" (1939), Woolf addresses the way in which biography censors the inner life of its subject. Miss Linsett shows little real engagement with Miss Willatt and her biography is taken as a typical example of the unoriginal and derivative nature of the genre.

Hovering between biography and its fictionalisation, "Memoirs of a Novelist" is a quasi-fictional narrative that uses a real-life subject. Despite the fact that it uses a real life as its layer of reference, and although a tissue of allusion grounds it in a non-story context, there remains a sense in which the "liberties" (68) Woolf takes with Miss Linsett's text are fictional, and this element of fictionality grows in dominance as the work progresses. Woolf makes a series of complaints that Miss Linsett's biography contains significant omissions (Miss Willatt's mother is barely mentioned, for example, and much of her youth is glossed over) and, as far as an assertion about her father is concerned, it is misleading. Other frustrating aspects of her book include her tendency to marginalise and ignore what she regards as "ugly" (65), leaving large parts of Miss Willatt's experience a "blank" (67). She fails to report on her first love affair and is reluctant to address her "unstable" (69) character. Woolf is forced to fill in these parts of the biography herself, which leads to a large amount of conjecture about Miss Willatt.

---

<sup>42</sup> Woolf also partly based Miss Willatt upon a woman who had been one of the greatest influences on her, her aunt Caroline Emelia Stephen who died in 1908, but before the composition of "Memoirs of a Novelist".

As a formal consolidation of biography, essay and story, there is no denying that “Memoirs of a Novelist” poses huge problems for generic categorisation, and critical response to the work is divided regarding this issue: is it an essay on biography? or is it an entirely fictional reworking of a life? According to Quentin Bell, it is “an attempt to publish fiction under the cloak of criticism, or rather, to combine both genres” (*I*: 153); Lyndall Gordon alludes to the work as an “experiment in fictional biography” (95); and John Mepham views it as “both a fictional biography and a meditation on biography” (22). More generally, the cross-genre potential of the work has had clear resonances for how it is anthologised. Susan Dick’s decision to include “Memoirs of a Novelist” in a collection of ‘short fiction’ is ambiguous and she concedes that “the line separating Virginia Woolf’s fiction from her essays is a very fine one” (1985: 2).

Woolf provides her own answer to this intractable dilemma in “The Art of Biography” (written in 1939, but first published by Leonard Woolf in *The Death of the Moth* in 1942) by placing biography in a “boundary zone” (Hesse: 86)<sup>43</sup> on the threshold “between fact and fiction” (1942: 123). This, it might be said, is because the fiction writer and the biographer are engaged in the same struggle: to find the absolute definition of character: as she had observed in “The New Biography” (1927) fictional devices are fundamental to the advancement of character in a biography and “the biographer’s imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist’s art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life” (*Collected Essays IV*: 478). This assumption of common ground constitutes the main premise behind “Memoirs of a Novelist” which incorporates elements of authorised biography into the structure of unauthorised ‘story’ in order to destabilise genre expectations. In “The New Biography” Woolf writes that the biographer proceeds in the mistaken view that “the true life of your subject shows itself in action which is evident rather than in that inner life of thought and emotion which

---

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Hesse argues that a precise boundary line between essays and short stories does not exist and that a number essays and short stories occupy a “boundary zone” (86). The basic characteristics of a work in the boundary zone are: first, the common use of a first-person narrator; second, the probability of a factual link between the text and real-life events; thirdly, relative length; and, finally, the prevalence of narration.



meanders darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul” (*Collected Essays IV*: 473). And it is there - between evident action and “the hidden channels of the soul” - that “*Memoirs of a Novelist*” situates itself, discouraging a straightforward reading one way or the other. A number of factors position it firmly in a ‘boundary zone’: (1) it ties into and echoes a number of statements that Woolf would make about biography in “*The New Biography*” (1927) and “*The Art of Biography*” (1939); (2) it opens with a series of questions about the moral issues of biography which it does not promise to answer and does not return to; and (3) the way Woolf gently absents herself and Miss Willatt comes to the fore in her diary and letters creates a sense of immediacy that is primarily achieved through fictional devices.

The moral framework that is created at the start of the story builds a context in which to view Woolf’s motives for writing the work. First of all, she addresses the relationship between Miss Linsett and Miss Willatt in terms of violation, encroachment and trespass. The initial citation Woolf isolates from Miss Linsett’s book, that ““the world had a right to know more of an admirable though retiring woman””, is a statement cloaked in power and control, stating the right of the masses to an account of Miss Willatt’s life. Woolf criticises the unwarranted presumption behind Miss Linsett’s egotistical methods, since: “From the choice of adjectives” used to describe Miss Willatt’s “retiring” personality, “it is clear that she would not have wished it herself”. The usurpation of another person’s right to privacy is psychologically fulfilling because it implies a mastery over one’s subject: “What right has the world to know about men and women? What can a biographer tell it? and then, in what sense can it be said that the world profits?” (63) Woolf demands.

Woolf also questions the biographer’s bonds of friendship or loyalty to the deceased and their family. The onus of responsibility upon the Victorian biographer is not to “break down the barriers” of decorum and respectability, not to reveal too much, and not to disclose unsavoury truths. As a consequence, the fact that Miss Linsett’s biography was produced “with the sanction” (63) of Miss Willatt’s family is ominous, for we get a sense

of the censorship behind this decision. The jury is packed, the scales are uneven, the “sanction” of the family for a work that may or may not have had the blessing of its deceased subject is an example of the misfeasance of nepotism. “Memoirs of a Novelist” exposes the limits of biography - its infirmity of purpose and half-hearted tergiversation - which ultimately forego what should be the real aim of biography, the exploration of a life, to “nervous prudery and dreary literary convention” (64). Although at first Woolf is tentative about exposing Miss Willatt and puts her doubts about her affection for her father, for example, in parentheses - “(she had always disliked him)” (68) - she gets bolder and the story expands into new and unexpected directions as it progresses. What is reassuring about an authorised biography is that ordinarily the reader knows where he or she stands, but “Memoirs of a Novelist” takes that surety away from us by deliberately overturning what is plausible and dramatising the conflict between censure and truth.

Finally, Woolf questions the motivations behind writing a biography, particularly the fairness of a biography recording “the lives of great men only”. As she observes in “The Art of Biography”: “Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography - the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what smallness?” (1942: 125). In “Memoirs of a Novelist” Woolf belittles what makes individuals so extraordinary that they should appear in a biography and questions the idea that it should tell the story of an exemplary life only. Miss Willatt is a humble and unremarkable figure. In fact: “It is likely that her name is scarcely known to the present generation; it is a mere chance whether one has read any of her books” (64).

Woolf disassociates herself from the intellectual underpinnings of her project - this is not going to be a coherent argument about the why and how of writing a biography - and cuts herself off from the impersonal lucidity of the essayist’s voice.

The objection to asking these questions is not only that they take so much room, but that they lead to an uncomfortable vagueness of mind... Yet, if it would be a waste of time to begin at the beginning and ask why lives are written, it may not be

entirely without interest to ask why the life of Miss Willatt was written, and so to answer the question who she was (63).

The crossover of essay into fiction is primarily represented by the reduction of focus from the biographies of non-specific “men and women” to a one-of-a-kindness: “the life of Miss Willatt”. The fact that “Memoirs of a Novelist” is largely a hypothetical exploration into human character is here made clear. Woolf’s real aim is to use Miss Willatt’s biography to urge a hypothetical cause, not to resolve any particular moral dilemmas and to convey the speculative nature of biography: human character as something that intrigues, puzzles, amuses and, ultimately, offers no definitive answers.

One of Woolf’s main arguments against Miss Linsett’s biography is its length. Choking the narrative with irrelevancies, crowding her book with minutiae which bear the hallmark of painstaking factual research, she wastes time and space recording unessential information, using “biographer’s tricks” as “a way of marking time, during those chill early pages when the hero will neither do nor say anything ‘characteristic’” (64). An important element in finding the individual quality of Miss Willatt is to eliminate all the vagueness surrounding her. Woolf’s life of Miss Willatt is notable, therefore, not for what it includes, but for what it eliminates. This is why the short story format works well here. Woolf retreats from the overburdened narrative replete with “large phrases” (63) and redundant, time-filling sidetracks which leave no room for character to give prominence to the indecipherability of the biographical subject. This is accomplished by sidestepping non-specific detail so that, where Miss Linsett takes two volumes to cover Miss Willatt’s life, Woolf does it in just short of eleven pages. This is human character made small-scale.

Miss Linsett’s biggest handicap is her reliance on a mechanistic model of biography, a model which forces her to “cut” (70) Miss Willatt’s life into thematic chapters and effectively isolates broader questions of character development (for example, her father’s death ends a chapter and her move to Bloomsbury begins the next one). The word “cut” suggests a manipulative edit or intrusive autopsy rather than a spiritual exploration and often resurfaces in Woolf’s stories - particularly in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass”

(1929) - where she uses it to describe the mirror's violent dissection of the subject it reflects. Miss Linsett has killed her subject, so that: "Almost unconsciously one begins to confuse Miss Willatt with her remains" (64). The majority of Victorian biographies, Woolf states in "The Art of Biography", are "like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, that were carried in funeral processions through the street - effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin" (1942: 121). Miss Willatt is similarly embalmed - her reputation preserved undecayed and intact: "we see only a wax work as it were of Miss Willatt preserved under glass" (68). She has passed into obscurity, occupying a place in the bookstore on a shelf hidden from view. She is "slightly ridiculous" now and has descended into bathos. The dusty, damaged volumes of her life are the derisory sum of her existence, the visual metaphor of her dead body. But how to bring her to life?

Curious rather than cautious, Woolf appropriates Miss Linsett's biography, entering and reimagining her text and subverting the ready-made frame it incorporates. Interspersed with digressions into Miss Willatt's diaries, letters and, later on, her novel *Lindamara: A Fantasy*, the story is constructed in such a way that we sometimes feel that we are reading a number of concurrent narratives. Depersonalising the narrative, spreading it among different voices, reducing the distance between the reader and the biographical subject, Woolf's preoccupation is to create a three-dimensional, living subject. This has subtle, yet resonant implications for the narrative. Since Miss Willatt's life has to be edited down to fit the short story it is specifically through the deployment of fictional devices such as suggestion and the manipulation of point of view that this illusion of subjective authenticity can be successfully achieved. The development of "Memoirs of a Novelist" is anything but logical and consistent. This desire for authenticity steers the narrative into an irresolute open-endedness as Woolf resists the temptation to contextualise Miss Willatt's life or build neat brackets around it.

In "Memoirs of a Novelist", attempts to impose a narrative on a life are futile; anecdote, not argument, is where true illumination lies. As Liz Dearden observes: "Virginia Woolf's theories about biography rested on a belief in an intuitive approach to a subject, letting the imagination tease out of life its decisive moments or 'moments of being'" (149). The emphasis on imagination and experience over interpretation is fully articulated in the following passage:

She fixed her eyes upon the festoons which draped the city arms and tried to fancy that she sat on a rock with the bees humming around her; she bethought her how no one in that room perhaps knew as well as she did what was meant by the Oath of Uniformity; then she thought how in sixty years, or less perhaps, the worm would feed upon them all; then she wondered whether somehow before that day, every man now dancing there would not have reason to respect her... And yet, it is likely that among all that company who danced in the Town Hall and are now fed on by the worm, Miss Willatt would have been the best to talk to, even if one did not wish to dance with her (66).

In this passage Woolf abandons the chronological imperative to create a linear history. This involves, centrally, a resistance to historical confinement suggested by the time gap of "sixty years". Woolf slips back and then swiftly forward in time bridging a sixty year gap easily and fluidly. The passage is evocative, re-creating a state of mind. The repetition of "then" emphasises its rootedness in a specific moment whilst an air of historical non-specificity is deftly achieved in Miss Willatt's reverie. Absenting herself, divorcing herself from time and historical context, Miss Willatt imagines herself "on a rock with the bees humming around her". Simultaneously, a shift to a different mode takes place; the language becomes more poetic - "the worm would feed upon them all" - and the literal meanings of certain allusions - the Oath of Uniformity for example - are hard to determine. We slip back into the present in the next line when we abruptly leave Miss Willatt's consciousness and the voice of present-day interpretation intervenes. The dual temporal movement reflects the division between biography and art and confronts the problems of creating a line between

them. In turn, the word “likely” makes the opposition between biography and fictional reality all-too-evident and reveals that however much the biographer may appear to know, it is not quite the case that he or she is all-knowing.

The sharpest indication of this is at the story’s half-way point where Woolf abandons Miss Linsett’s book altogether in an arresting admittance of frustration. And a dull, pious biography becomes an energised and revealing drama about the protean nature of human character (it is no coincidence that the break is punctuated, as in “Phyllis and Rosamond”, by Miss Willatt’s move to Bloomsbury). If the first half of the story is about control, with Miss Linsett as the arbiter and creator of Miss Willatt’s life and Miss Willatt as the passive subject, the second half opens an escape route for her, relinquishes control and raises questions about the honesty and fundamental format of biographies. At odds with the tenor of Miss Linsett’s formal and elaborate discourse, Woolf aims for lightness rather than portentousness. Although she adopts a sceptical stance towards Miss Linsett’s biography she is not keen to portray herself as a cynical observer: “satire” she states is “an afterthought” (68). It is fair to assume that Woolf is not really offering us a moral dilemma but is more concerned with conveying the “ugly” (65) truth about human character. The second half of the story is more diary-heavy and the tone is altogether more fragile and penetrating. Miss Willatt - a character-in-waiting in the first half - is given “liberties” (68) to roam and whereas in the first half of the story we are conscious of two voices - that of Miss Linsett and that of Woolf - striking discordantly against each other, here Woolf blends, assimilates and weaves Miss Willatt’s voice into her own in an open and egalitarian equilibrium. Looking for a doorway into the underlying self-loathing beneath the happy exterior, Woolf humanises Miss Willatt, and in so doing creates a portrait of a pained, mixed-up and thwarted individual with hints that the woman we think we know behind the “sleek” and “sober” portrait may be some one quite different and inscrutable:

she has often to rebuke her 'unstable spirit that is always seeking to distract me, and asking 'Whither?' Perhaps therefore she was not so well content with her philanthropy as Miss Linsett would have us believe. 'Do I know what happiness is?' she asks in 1859, with rare candour, and answers after thinking it over, 'No.' To imagine her then, as the sleek sober woman that her friend paints her, doing good wearily but with steadfast faith, is quite untrue; on the contrary she was a restless and discontented woman, who sought her own happiness rather than other people's (69).

Bridging the considerable distance in time and space, Woolf positions herself behind Miss Willatt's shoulder, determined to engage her in frank and uninhibited self-confession; gently, but persistently, urging her on to her emotional epiphany. Woolf puts herself in the position of a humanised, unbuttoned narrator, tempering her own contributions with qualifying phrases: "not so well content"; "quite untrue"; "perhaps", which ensure that her voice does not stray into portentousness, but preserves an evaluative, though tentative and light tone. In the tantalising fragments of her diary Woolf creates a voice that is pressing, troubled, "restless and discontented". Uncowed by convention, unfazed by unnerving "blank" (67) and asterisked spaces, probing the areas of her life and aspects of her character that have been denied, thrown out or zealously guarded, Woolf brings many aspects of Miss Willatt together that contradict Miss Linsett's version of her: the self-consciousness; the depression; the failed love affair; the suspect filial affection (how Miss Willatt's "spirits rose" (68) after her father's death); her "innumerable torments" (67) and "complicated spiritual state" (69). One of the problems of the biographic mode is that gender stereotypes - the representation of women as saintly for example - inhibit the reader's understanding of the real woman who seeks "her own happiness rather than other people's" (69). This mistaken assumption is evident in the wry humour that Woolf extracts from Miss Linsett's naive portrayal of Miss Willatt's "benevolence" and "strict uprightness of character" (68). In fact she has a non-vocation for philanthropy; is "without many virtues" (69); and the accounts of passion "under the tropical stars and beneath the

umbrageous elms of England” (70) in her novel indicate a fiery, highly sensual nature constrained by convention and cultural propriety. Woolf portrays Miss Willatt as out of touch with reality, living in a story of her own devising, taking “flights into obscurity” (71) and fabricating a universe that she occupies “like some gorged spider at the centre of her web” (72). Through Woolf’s lens, Miss Willatt is a woman of questionable sanity. Her conversion experience - her efforts to save her soul - represents her final breakdown. The image of the bullying prophetess is a reservedly comic diversion which suggests that, rather than being framed up tidily, Miss Willatt is fraying at the edges. In “Memoirs of a Novelist” Woolf is still negotiating her ideas on biography and exploring the most effective ways to explore human character. Woolf’s interiorised portrayal of Miss Willatt does not quite fit with Linsett’s brand of over-determined and neatly framed historiography and comes into its own as a work that addresses the moral implications of biography while being fully aware of its status as fiction.

This tension between the true life of the subject and historical truth is at its most powerful in Woolf’s “revolutionizing historical piece” (Gordon: 86) “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” written during her stay at Blo’Norton Hall in June 1906. As in “Phyllis and Rosamond” and “Memoirs of a Novelist”, in this story Woolf is keen to de-emphasise the self-conscious and self-dramatising male voice in order to give precedence to the silenced female one.<sup>44</sup> Mocking the historian’s tools of rationalist enquiry and preoccupation with authentic and correctly interpreted sources, Woolf uses the diary form as a means of unveiling the intimate and personal life of her subject, Joan Martyn. For Louise De Salvo “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” is Woolf’s “first fully realized story about the life of a young woman” (265) and is directional, indicating exactly where Woolf’s feminist leanings will take her. Forefronting the alienated and anonymous female figure that is absent from historiographic records, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” is certainly Woolf’s first attempt to rewrite history to include the eclipsed and unseen lives of

---

<sup>44</sup> “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”, edited and introduced by Susan M. Squier and Louise A. De Salvo first appears in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 25, Nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 1979), 237-69.



women. Later, Woolf would address the same dilemma in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) where she considers the figure of the Elizabethan woman, Mrs Martyn who is absent from history: "One knows nothing detailed, nothing perfectly true and substantial about her. History scarcely mentions her" (46).

"The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" features a female historian Rosamond Merridew. Sabine Hotho-Jackson states that Merridew's views about how history should be written "are clearly Woolf's own" (297) and Melba Cuddy-Keane views her as a liberator, making manifest the "occluded history... of the common *woman*" (61). In abrupt contrast to this view of Merridew as a feminist figure, Bernd Engler considers that she is "just as conceited as her despised fellow historians are" and is "an absolutely unreliable narrator" (12, 15). Yes, Woolf might be said to share in Merridew's fervent enthusiasm for Joan's diary, but there is a sense in which her "poor private voice" (33) cannot be said to speak totally for Woolf. In particular, this is because Woolf hints that Merridew's appropriation of Joan's diary is an act of masculine coerciveness and violation. Eager to establish the authenticity of Joan's diary, Merridew is declamatory and arrogant. She betrays her dependency on public recognition and is keen to assert her authority and professionalism, boasting that she has achieved "considerable fame" in her "investigations". She is a scholar who records data accurately and exploits her findings since, for her, history is "the most merchantable of qualities" (33). Moreover, in her preliminary framing of the diary, Merridew constructs a realist frame around it. She circumscribes the story from the start by stating that she attempts to show scenes from history "vividly as in a picture" (34). She invokes the frame of portraiture to describe Martyn Hall, creating a romantic picture of ideal rusticity in her description of the hall as "a little square picture, framed delicately" (35). Mrs Martyn is framed within a type also and falls easily beneath a "recognised heading" (38). Woolf distances herself from Merridew's attempts to create a formal structure and this possibly explains why she decides to abandon her altogether in favour of letting the diary speak for itself.

In the same way that Rosamond Merridew constructs a solid frame around the past, Mr Martyn has a disciplined and schematic approach to history. His disavowal and neglect of women's history is conveyed using the metaphor of the cut. As Mr Martyn slashes the air with his riding crop, directing Merridew's attention to his paintings, he simultaneously carves through "wives and daughters" who "at length dropped out altogether" (40). Similarly, the idea of the cut is used to describe the exclusion of women from the family tree which is "lopped unmercifully by the limits of the sheet" (42) excluding the wife from its branch. Women are quite literally severed from representation. This point is vividly made in the scene in which Mr Martyn gives the diary to Merridew, an episode which seizes on the contradictions between male and female history. Here, the description of the diary perfectly conveys Joan's marginality in the orthodox history of her family. As opposed to the ordered and shelved "volumes" (43) of male history that are "bound in parchment" (42) there is no category for this tossed away, unenveloped and unframed "bundle of parchment sheets" (43). The diary also stands for the physical extreme of the archetypal divide between physical and spiritual; whereas the diary risks "desecrating" (41) anything it touches, the family's estate books have an almost religious significance for they are "all written out like a bible" and as Mr Martyn follows his family tree his voice "murmured on as though it repeated a list of Saints or Virtues in some monotonous prayer". The very title the "book of Jasper" (42) hints at a biblical chapter. This divide applies equally to the nature of woman and the nature of art. When Woolf describes the physical attributes of Joan's diary, she is commenting on female history itself, its limits and its constraints, for the diary adumbrates the failure of women's history to become anything more than a substitute for "the genuine thing" (41). Metaphors of monetary value grasp at the idea of the commercial non-viability of female history. Kept among "butcher's bills, and the year's receipts" the diary is uncommodifiable. Merridew's enthusiasm to appropriate it is "a very cheap article". Mr Martyn roughly fingers the documents as if they were "a pack of cards" taking a gamble on which one is the most lucrative bet. Most significantly perhaps, Joan Martyn's final resting place - amongst dead animals in display cases and

amongst the records of dead horses - attests to her worthlessness. With no history and no face, she has no claim to humanity.

But what comes across most powerfully are Mr Marytn's efforts to censor Joan's diary. First, he makes indirect attempts at censoring it by drawing Merridew's attention to the Household Books of Jasper and the Stud Book of Willoughby instead. Second, when asked to tell her history he gives, "in the voice of a showman", a chronological survey of the 'main' events in her life. Among the most important facts are that she had three brothers and never married. Third, the word "queer" is reiterated by Mr Martyn in his description of his grandmother: "queer old lady she must have been". And, in reference to her diary: "there are some queer things in it". The diary is viewed as unorthodox and deviant; there is something disturbing inside it which needs to be restrained and kept hidden. Indeed, the "thick cord" and "bars" (41) which hold it together indicate a stranglehold. This fear of the diary's contents becomes more apparent when it has to be disguised in brown paper. This preparatory framing of the diary builds a set of assumptions regarding how it should be read. Framing off the disciplined male voice from the "queer", volatile and incoherent female voice, Woolf constructs an engaging contrast between the definitive view of male history and a view of female history which perceives it as deviant and unassimilable into the context of male historiography. This decontextualisation sets Joan firmly apart from her male forbears. However, it is this very apartness that determines the story's point of view; since, by isolating the diary in this way, Woolf not only foregrounds and privileges Joan's voice but warns us that this is going to be anything but a conventional look at her past.

The primary unconventionality of “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” lies in its capricious, complexly textured format which is made up of diary notes that are separated either by a natural page break or section numbers.<sup>45</sup> H.P. Abbot writes that the “diary strategy” in works of fiction functions mimetically to create “the illusion of the real” (18). In “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” it is a strategy which has several advantages. Primarily, the diary effects a narrowing of both spatial and temporal distance. It is the historical specificity of the moment in the use of the diary which makes it feel as though it were being freshly narrated by Joan Martyn herself. Second, this absence of a censorial narrator minimises the distance between the reader and the narrative source. Diary writing is an escape into the free expanse of the unconscious, a private act of revelation and an unburdening of the self that frees one from the censorial eye. As Woolf wrote about her own diary writing: “The main requisite, I think on re-reading my old volumes, is not to play the part of censor, but to write as the mood comes...the habit of writing thus for my own eye only is good practise” (*Diary 1*: 266). The shift to the diary in “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” is an attempt to relocate referentiality from the external world to the realm of consciousness. The diary introduces framelessness, for it necessitates a shift from the masculine ‘I’ to the female, autobiographical ‘I’, thus dispensing with a narrator who decides what you can and cannot see. Third, Joan’s diary is episodic and presents fragmentary scenes which have little regard for temporal connectivity. With these cuts much of the denseness and binding sense of history is lost. Woolf attempts no synthesis and lets the missing links that would have connected these multiple, loose pages visually analogise the glaring lacunae in women’s long-suppressed histories. The ‘diary strategy’ is a flexible, lightweight approach to history. Each section break in this bisected eight-part structure signifies a change in mood: lyrical, reflective, playful, poignant and mysterious by turns. But, although it appears that the work is unsure about which of the storylines it is developing, its apparently diffuse and unbounded structure is galvanised by Woolf’s

---

<sup>45</sup> The first, second and third excerpts are natural page breaks in the original text (see De Salvo and Squier: 251, 254 and 255) and Woolf omitted to number them.

precise and close focus on Joan's impending marriage which helps to thread the parts together. Around the situation of her marriage Woolf weaves a number of female conflicts highlighted through detours into Joan's restive consciousness and personal storyworlds. Her cautious resistance to her marriage visually splinters the story into a series of loosely sequential interludes centering alternatively on her dreams of escape; anxiety about her marriage which is connected to the story's sub-text of sexual violation; her meeting with the storyteller who disturbs her with his storybook fantasies of physical love; her saintly self-sacrifice at the shrine with its touch of repressed homoeroticism; and ultimately her death. The net result might give the story the feel of a collage, but is ultimately a demonstration that the most pleasing histories have less to do with a linear development than with self-generation.

The opening of the diary and the removal of the bars that keep it together is a literal as well as a metaphoric event: loosening itself from the silken cords, Joan's eruptive and impassioned voice speaks out. The urgency of this shift in point of view, which establishes us inside Joan's head, is conveyed in the violent impulses and pent-up anger of the diary's opening; an opening so turbulent that Woolf is forced to relinquish control over Joan, leaving the diary firmly in her hands. It is an emotionally charged and rousing beginning which is particularly poignant in juxtaposing the freedom of "all England and the sea, and the lands beyond" - which holds an almost fictional allure - with the prison-like enclosure of Joan herself:

I am very bold and impatient sometimes, when the moon rises, over a land gleaming with frost; and I think I feel the pressure of all this free and beautiful place - all England and the sea, and the lands beyond - rolling like sea waves, against our iron gates, breaking, and withdrawing - and breaking again - all through the long black night (45).

The circular narrative drive - the slow, deliberate, alternately speeded up then slowed down rhythms in "breaking, and withdrawing - and breaking again" - not only generates a sense in which the reader can experience Joan's frustration, but its repetitive rhythm is a time-slipping formula that bypasses causality, leaving both Joan and the story itself stranded. It is the polarity of stasis and dynamic movement that gives this scene its poignancy: as the land slides past like a moving slide-show, she can only watch compulsively, physically incapable of acting on her impulses.

But not only does this opening convey a desire to escape, it gives a real sense of danger and sexual violence in particular. A major motif of the story is the imagery of perilous barricades or unstable frames and imminent violation, while the opening imagery of the journal positions Joan on the frontline. The imagery of "breaking, and withdrawing - and breaking again" hints at rape and the sublimated reference to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress", particularly the lines: "tear our pleasures with rough strife,/Thorough the iron grates of life" (51, ll. 43-44) introduces the notion of cutting in connection with sexual violation. The story of "Jane Moryson carried off on the eve of her wedding only last year" (47) by male soldiers also hints at male sexual violence, and thus troubles Joan, making her afraid of nightfall which "lets loose all those fierce creatures, who have lain hidden in the day" (49). The patriarchal pastime of war thus takes on priapic significance, revealing women's powerlessness in the realm of male public life. Joan's weak defences against the would-be takers of her virginity highlights the deterministic nature of women's thralldom to patriarchy:

The window in my room is broken, and stuffed with straw, but gusts come in and lift the tapestry on the wall, till I think that horses and men in armour are charging down upon me. My prayer last night was, that the great gates might hold fast, and all robbers and murderers might pass us by (47).

In this context of violence and physical danger the window's frame is a potent signifier of order. The fact that the window is broken, however, not only indicates Joan's fragile defence against her male attackers, but suggests the perilous nature of the frame itself and

the fragility of her insulated world. But just as interesting is the degree to which the window is viewed as a barrier to experience in the next section of the diary:

I pull aside the thick curtains, and search for the first glow in the sky which shows that life is breaking through. And with my cheek leant upon the window pane I like to fancy that I am pressing as closely as can be upon the massy wall of time, which is for ever lifting and pulling and letting fresh spaces of life in upon us. May it be mine to taste the moment before it has spread itself over the rest of the world! (48).

Here, the visual confrontation of the window - which encloses space, like a picture, within its framed boundary - and the sky - which is infinite and boundless and stands for frameless space - makes for an intensely claustrophobic experience. Looking out of her window, outside the barrier which separates her from what she wishes to experience, and watching the silent footage it frames, Joan is anxious, uneasy and intensely desirous of that unknown knowledge which has been "barred away" (45) from her. Like Tennyson's Mariana, who "drew her casement-curtain by,/And glanced athwart the glooming flats" saying "I am aweary, aweary,/I would that I were dead!" (188, ll. 19-20 & 23-24), she is isolated, frustrated and unfulfilled. This is intensified by the image of time as a giant wall mural that covers the earth. The continuous passage of time is like a needle "breaking through" fabric; the words "lifting and pulling" indicate a repeated sewing action enclosing and sealing the moment which Joan is anxious to "taste" before it has been woven into the tapestry of history.

But, as the diary progresses, it becomes clearer that this is a girl whose history is very much sewn up. From the contemplation of wide-open, timeless spaces the narrative brings us back down to earth in the next section to focus on the "gravity" (51) of Joan's imminent thralldom in marriage. As her mother "solemnly" (49) informs her of her vassal status which binds her morally to a position of subjection, servitude and dependency to her future husband, she confronts the "burden" (50, 51) of a history already laid out for her and signposted. As Hermione Lee observes, Joan Martyn is "the voice of a girl whose passion for experience and freedom - at a time of great social upheaval - is circumscribed by her

mother's traditional ideas about women's roles" (1996: 14). The scene is full of metaphoric visual imagery which powerfully underlines this circumscription. First, the sheet of paper that her mother taps meditatively is a stark image of inevitability, its written form carrying the notion of ordainment or prophesy. On this sheet Joan's history is inscribed, her life already scripted. Second, the running metaphor of land and boundaries suggests definite limits and rigid frontiers. Woolf suggests the period skilfully here by highlighting the accepted social practice at the time which viewed marriage as a property transaction: "your land would touch ours" (50) Joan's mother notes favourably. Her marriage entails a forfeiture or sacrifice of herself and her name - with it she becomes public property - and will bear "the burden of a great name and of great lands" (51). The exchange of land which Joan's mother hopes to gain from her daughter's marriage is a metaphor for the position of women in society, the idea of femininity as property in common, where women have been reduced to physical, bargainable carriers of estates and incomes.

Her mother's idea of land and Joan's are antithetical as metaphors. Against her mother's interests in land ownership, with its attendant implications of monopoly, patrimony and female imprisonment, Woolf posits Joan's view of land as the site of an unmediated relationship with the world, of creative and artistic empowerment. Her mother's heavy-handed emphasis on historical mores and social obligation off-sets the unpredictable rhythms of Joan's imagination. She is losing her childhood, becoming a woman, and becoming disenchanted, and this abdication of her childhood is recognised soberly: "I lose my youth" (51). What is implicated in this transition to adulthood is the loss of her personal storyworld and her mother's advice to untangle myth from reality, to construct a boundaryline between the real world and fiction, is a pointed indication of this: "We will not talk of love - as that songwriter of yours talks of love, as a passion and a fire and a madness...such things are not to be found in real life" (50).



The real extent of this gulf between storytelling and “real life” is indicated in the following passage which takes up this opposition of oppressive, rigidly demarcated frontiers and the inner, open, boundary-melting landscape of the mind:

how blessed it would be never to marry, or grow old; but to spend one’s life innocently and indifferently among the trees and rivers which alone can keep one cool and childlike in the midst of the troubles of the world! Marriage or any other great joy would confuse the clear vision that is still mine (52).

Here, the safe pleasures of story are linked with childlike - and, in particular, sexual - innocence. This is not land as the patriarchal site of political turmoil to which Joan is indifferent but land as a conceptual playground and conduit to the “clear” membrane between the inner and the outer.

Into this debate steps Anon - the medieval professional storyteller who figures in Woolf’s penultimate essay “Anon” - with his storybook fantasies of romance and love. His entrance is a real transition and introduces a lateral theme running parallel to the male vision of circumscribed borders and strictly mapped out boundaries.<sup>46</sup> Anon stands for the storyteller who sees the world before “self consciousness had...raised its mirror” and appeals to the “anonymous” mental landscape that is “beneath...consciousness” (384, 385).<sup>47</sup> His arrival is a moment of stark disruption which creates within Joan a sense of rapture not entirely untinged by a measure of sexual desire. A central focus is created which considers Joan’s struggle to come to terms with her imminent marriage as a battle between her imagination, instinctive desires and social obligation.

---

<sup>46</sup> This scene may originate in Woolf’s own unexplained encounter with “the wondering voice” of a lost traveller in 1899 (*Passionate Apprentice*: 146), but the wider source of Anon is perhaps the travelling storyteller in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* whose stealthy appearance resembles the storyteller’s approach in Woolf’s story: “Shown by a sudden turning of the road,/So near that, slipping back into the shade/Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him/well, Myself unseen” (ll. 387-90). Like Wordsworth, Woolf emphasises the storyteller’s economy of words. Where in *The Prelude* the storyteller “told in few plain words a soldier’s tale” (l. 421), in “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” “words seemed dear” (55) to the storyteller.

<sup>47</sup> Anonymity “gave the early writing an impersonality, a generality... It allowed us to know nothing of the writer: and so to concentrate upon his song. Anon had great privileges. He was not responsible. He was not self conscious” (“Anon” and “The Reader”: 397). Woolf attributes the death of Anon to the year 1477 and the advent of Caxton’s printing press. She writes that: “The first blow has been aimed at Anon when the authors name is attached to the book” (385).

The lyrical aura that encircles the storyteller is both exhilarating and intoxicating “as though the fine music of his own songs clung to him and set him above ordinary thoughts” (54). He is nimble-witted, a pointed humorist of scintillating intelligence, who speaks “as I have never heard any man talk” (55). But Joan is disturbed by this enigmatic male figure who introduces her to a world of passion and sex previously unknown. He tells the story of *Tristram and Iseult* - a sexually-charged tale with an adult theme of forbidden and adulterous love. According to Denis de Rougemont this classic tale explores “the inescapable conflict in the West between passion and marriage” and is an “archetype of our most complex feelings of unrest” (8, 18). The play also expresses “the dark and unmentionable fact that passion is linked to death” (21). By telling the story of *Tristram and Iseult* to Joan, the storyteller urges her to look at the dark, secret realities of sexual love. The intense physicality of his expression betokens an urgency and violence, for “as the story grew passionate his voice rose, and his fists clenched, and he raised his foot and stretched forth his arms”. His narration seduces Joan’s visual and aural senses: “the morning was full, suddenly, of whispers, and sighs, and lovers’ laments” (56). His seductive invitation to Joan to participate in this illicit passion is a dangerous one for which Joan is unprepared and unshielded.

Through a surreal transposition, the textual landscape frames the actual landscape, creating a strange juxtaposition of dream and reality. The lavish scenes inside Joan’s head are crystalline and make for some remarkable images rendered in “bright blue” and “golden” porcelain-like sequences. Live action and animated characters coexist: the air is full of Knights and Ladies, ghostly figures float through the air and princes and princesses walk through the town. Joan contemplates the freedom of the “broad spaces of colour” and dreams of dismantling the frame of language to roam in the interstices of words:

for the capital letters framed bright blue skies, and golden robes; and in the midst of the writing there came broad spaces of colour, in which you might see princes and princesses walking in procession and towns with churches upon steep hills, and the sea breaking blue beneath them (56).

But although Joan wants to play Iseult and indulge in hedonistic pleasures, she aspires to be like her mother too. The tension of that opposition between lush sensuality and exalted womanhood is explored when Joan makes her journey to the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Walsingham. Joan's midsummer pilgrimage to the shrine - a celebration of the midsummer solstice - is a ceremonial rite of passage and is intended to invoke two things. First, her sexual awakening; and second, it is a "making ready" for her marriage which is due to occur at the time of the winter solstice. The midsummer solstice and the winter solstice mark her progress from puberty to adult womanhood. There are two emphases in this section: what takes place inside Joan's fabricated personal storyworld and the pull of the real world. This conflict is demonstrated in the suggestive juxtaposition of Anon - who retroactively haunts this section - and the Virgin Mary: one shows the potent allure of the imagination, the other the stern, unsympathetic authority of the censorial mother.<sup>48</sup> This contrast comes sharply into focus at the point when the Image first comes into view:

The midday sun lit up all the soft greens and blues of the fen land; and made it seem as though one passed through a soft and luxurious land, glowing like a painted book; towards a stern summit, where the light struck upon something pointing upwards that was pale as bone (58).

Woolf approaches the encounter with the Virgin head-on through a number of highly-defined visual contrasts: the soft-edged, filmy liquidity of the fen land that symbolically visualises Joan's distinctive storyworld rebounds against the ossified statue of the Virgin that sharply forces itself into the picture; the Virgin, "pale as bone", has a deathly pallor against the dazzling greens and blues of the fen land; and the "stern summit" is a queasy spectacle and unlike Joan's intimate relationship with the fen land which she passes through unimpeded, is an uncompromising and inflexible reference point. At the same time, Joan's upward gaze towards it has a distancing effect. Joan's encounter with the

---

<sup>48</sup> There may be a self-referential note to the scene, for the iconic figure of the Virgin might be a portrait of Woolf's own mother. As Jane Dunn observes, Woolf was obsessed with "the seductive spectre of her mother as an ideal of womanhood" and felt for her "both censure and veneration" (227).

Virgin is relayed as a sudden, violent, physical blow that roughly puts all her thoughts aside, cutting into her fantasies about the “strange, merry stories” that the pilgrims would have to tell:

But then the pale cross with the Image struck my eyes, and drew all my mind, in reverence towards it. I will not pretend that I found that summons other than stern; for the sun and the storm have made the figure harsh and white; but the endeavour to adore Her as others were doing round me filled my mind with an image that was so large and white that no other thought had room there. For one moment I submitted myself to her as I have never submitted to man or woman, and bruised my lips on the rough stone of her garment (59).

Although Joan’s imaginative fantasies and the towering statue are visually worlds apart, it is a contrast that resonates on many other levels. Primarily, the relationship between Anon and the Virgin, compared and contrasted, encapsulates the story’s conflicts between the imagination and the real world. Whereas the meeting with Anon rests on intense mental inter-penetration, here the focus is very much on the external - on the movements of Joan’s body and her physical gestures. It is a combative union whereby Joan’s soundless outpouring of emotion is stymied by the faceless figure’s cold and unreflecting emotional distance. Her body is met by “rough stone” and the word “bruised” suggests physical violence. Submissive, corpse-like she falls prostrate before the statue in a grand operatic gesture. But although the body achieves contact, the mind is emptied for “no other thought had room there”. It is an encounter that annexes the imagination. There is no conceptual identification with the Image. This is accentuated by the note of frustrated homoeroticism as Joan’s powerful feelings of “ecstasy” (59) go brutally unrequited. Where Anon is earthy and sensuous, the Virgin is pure white. As the emblem of exalted femininity, the Virgin contrasts vividly with the dark figure of the adulteress in Anon’s tales. In turn, the austerity of the figure, its steely, iron-like hardness, is far removed from the dramatic physicality and emotional expressiveness of Anon’s performance.

The figure of the censorious mother returns in the diary's penultimate section. With her marriage "not far off" (59), Joan's mother talks of constructing violently invasive borders - a delimitative vision which marks out the frontiers of Joan's own future:

how, in these times, one is as the Ruler of a small island set in the midst of turbulent waters; how one must plant it and cultivate it; and drive roads through it, and fence it securely from the tides (59-60).

Superficially, the language her mother uses suggests taking sensible precautions against enemy attack, but is also full of dual references that hint at alienation as opposed to sensuous contact with the world, civilisation not sensibility, and brutal masculinity in contrast to feminine nurture. To "plant" and "cultivate" suggests to nurture, but more specifically to create the right environment for successful reproduction and to civilise; "drive...through" may be understood as penetration and sexual aggression; to "fence...securely" suggests to make the land safe from invasion but also hints more ominously at impassible barriers. Joan describes her mother's vision of closed borders as "a picture, painted before me" which she "cannot think it pleasant to look upon" (60) because it is a vision of her own disenfranchised future.

Joan's anxieties about her future are focused in the Last Pages which seem chillingly premonitory of her death. The main emphasis in this section is the perishability of history and the sad realisation that it could all be lost. The significance of documenting history is highlighted by Joan's father who is made into a highly sympathetic figure: "Ah," he cried, 'if my father had only kept a diary?... There's John and Pierce and Stephen all lying in the church yonder, and no word left to say whether they were good men or bad' (61). Due to this circumstance he is at pains to demonstrate the historical salience of Joan's diary and tells her that she must entrust her diary to him upon her marriage: "I must keep it for you. For you are going to leave us'" (61). The historical transaction inscribed in this scene captures the past in a way that has meaning for the present. And so, by the same token, does Joan's knowing reference to her own death when she visits the family tomb:

As a child I know the stark white figures used to frighten me; especially when I could read that they bore my name; but now that I know that they never move from their backs, and keep their hands crossed always, I pity them; and would fain do some small act that would give them pleasure. It must be something secret, and unthought of - a kiss or a stroke, such as you give a living person (62).

Here the dead are positioned not as distant icons of a consecrated past but as representative of a sentient present. Joan brings this to our attention in the un-sacral irreverence with which she approaches the figures in the tomb. This is not the terror or the ritual-induced “ecstasy” (59) experienced at the feet of the Virgin, but a private, “small act” of interconnectivity with the past. It is not a glorification of the dead but rather the evocation of an uncanny familiarity. Her self-objectification in the line “especially when I could read that they bore my name” negotiates and inverts the borders between past and present, so that Joan stands as a living symbol of death. But as well as staking out a place for herself in history, she seems to be staging questions about the role of the historian. Ultimately, she holds to question the historian’s relationship with his or her subject, and, by implication, the barriers erected between the two. Joan’s desire to “kiss” and “stroke” these figures; to share a spontaneous, “unthought of” relationship with them; and to establish a “secret” dialogue with them intimately challenges the process of viewing history as dead and buried.

This sense of the non-specificity of the historical moment implies that you cannot go into history knowing where you are headed. The implicit declaration that you need to explore and investigate and discover history as you go along, fits in with what Woolf is trying to do with the diary format and, furthermore, meshes neatly with its open-endedness. The absence of a final framing-up that would distinguish past from present leaves the trajectory of history open. As Jan VanStavern observes, Woolf “does not close the frame or provide a reassuring bracket to the unhappy diary” (258). But this rejection of a conclusive ending is a liberating decision for Joan whose death before marriage is a conventional means of escape from traditional plot-requirements. But Joan’s death prior to her marriage

does mean that much of the story has been wasted contemplating a future that never comes to pass and we are left with the sense that the inherent story is finally redundant.

Reaching no firm conclusions, each of the stories examined in this chapter takes us beyond a simple, unifying explanation. In “Phyllis and Rosamond”, “Memoirs of a Novelist” and “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” Woolf finds new ways of conceptualising ‘story’, erasing the boundaries between history, biography and fiction. Although her personal style is as yet undefined, and although she is still working within the narrow limits sanctioned by a realist tradition, in these stories she begins to question the power structures of writing. She raises and complicates the question of what constitutes story and in that complication she searches for the lost, hidden lives of women. Bernd Engler notes that “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” gave Woolf “that sense of freedom she was desperately in need of at the outset of her career” (22). Indeed, this is an observation that can be made with regard to “Phyllis and Rosamond” and “Memoirs of a Novelist” also.

## Chapter 3

### “Sudden Intensities”: Surrealist Aspects of Virginia Woolf’s Early and Late Short Fiction

In this chapter I would like to extend my analysis of Virginia Woolf’s early short fiction by looking at three of her unpublished sketches entitled “The Manchester Zoo” (1906), “The Penny Steamer” (c. 1906) and “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) (see Appendices A, B and D). These sketches can be seen as a continuation of the concerns of her earlier stories. They are still motivated by a resistance to a frame sanctioned by an authoritative male ‘I’ and continue Woolf’s quest for what has been silenced and marginalised. But, where each of the characters in “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), “Memoirs of a Novelist” (1909) and “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906) might be said to have a foot in two worlds - on the one hand, fettered to the frameworks of biography and history and, on the other, seeking subjective freedom in story - “The Manchester Zoo”, “The Penny Steamer” and “Down the river to Greenwich” are less explicitly trapped in a context and take a decisive leap into the imagination.

More fundamentally, these sketches extend the boundaries of Woolf’s early short fiction into the realm of the surreal.<sup>49</sup> “The Manchester Zoo” and “A Penny Steamer” (along with “Sunday up the River” (c. 1906) which I will discuss in Chapter 4) may have

---

<sup>49</sup> Woolf’s links to the Surrealist movement are tenuous and none of her friends or relations were members of the group although, according to Herbert Read, Roger Fry was a painter who “actually transformed the topographical canvas which he had inherited into a veritable truth of sensational fury” (59). Woolf’s contact with the Surrealists was limited to short meetings and brief acquaintances. On 13 July 1933 she had gone to see *Les Présages*, a new ballet by the Ballets Russes for which the French Surrealist painter André Masson had designed the abstract backdrop. Woolf met Masson and in her diary refers to him as “the ballet maker” (*Diary 4*: 168). Cf. *Letters 5*: 207. Woolf also met the Surrealist painter and photographer, Man Ray at a private view of his photographs at Bedford Square in November 1934. At this meeting he asked if he could photograph her and Woolf, normally hostile to photographers, seems to have accepted his proposal amiably. Cf. *Diary 4*: 263-64. However, she did attend the private viewing of Picasso’s *Guernica* at the New Burlington Galleries on 3 October 1938. Furthermore, she was - along with Douglas Cooper, Bonamy Dobree, E.M. Forster, Naomi Mitchison, and Harry Pollitt - a patron of the committee of the New Burlington Galleries. This committee had Herbert Read - the author of *Surrealism* (1936) - as its chairman. As well as meeting him, Woolf may even have read his book when it was published in November 1936. Her connection with Sigmund Freud was also a prolonged one. Woolf may also have attended the Great International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries which had 25,000 visitors altogether and ran from 11 June to 4 July although there is no record of this.



been among the manuscripts Woolf sent to Madge Vaughan for criticism on 27 April 1906 and she may have had the sketches in mind when she wrote to Madge Vaughan in June 1906: “my present feeling is that this vague and dream like world, without love, or heart, or passion, or sex, is the world I really care about, and find interesting. For, though they are dreams to you, and I cant express them at all adequately, these things are perfectly real to me” (*Letters I*: 227). Woolf characterises these narratives as strangely elusive, aloof and detached from the real world and as the forum for dream and introspection. In each of them she uses the main defamiliarising techniques of surrealism, employing a non-uniform perspective which radically shifts from the mundane to the fantastic, and manipulating time and space to create an unsettling and disorientating reading experience which is not resolved. These stories stand for pure spontaneity giving her the freedom to wander imaginatively on fantastic, though psychologically dangerous, trajectories. These early sketches anticipate Woolf’s experiments with the surreal in two later stories “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) and “Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions of a house into cash” written in 1937 (but posthumously published by Quentin Bell in his biography of Woolf) which create their surrealistic effects through a form of automatic expression. I will return to these stories later in the chapter.

At the heart of Surrealism is an overriding restlessness with constructed ways of seeing the world. Surrealism strives for the seamless conjunction of inner and outer worlds and seeks to break down the boundaries between rationality and irrationality; as Herbert Read observes, the Surrealist deals with the dialectic of the “continual state of opposition and interaction between the world of objective fact...and the world of subjective fantasy” (40). To a large degree, the fantastic provokes intrigue because of its emphasis on what is hidden, undisclosed and unarticulated. As Rosemary Jackson observes, the fantastic “traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture; that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (4).

Surrealism foregrounds that which material tradition has pre-determined as impossible and unattainable and explores the realms of dream, madness, and the imaginative freedom of childhood. The core idea behind the surreal is the primacy of the imagination, made manifest in André Breton's belief in *Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality* (1924) that "the imaginary is what tends to become real".<sup>50</sup> In the first Surrealist manifesto, Breton refers to mankind as an "inveterate dreamer, daily more discontent with his destiny":

all he can do is turn back toward his childhood which, however his guides and mentors may have botched it, still strikes him as somehow charming. There, the absence of any known restrictions allows him the perspective of several lives lived at once; this illusion becomes firmly rooted within him; now he is only interested in the fleeting, the extreme facility of everything (Seaver and Lane: 3).

Surrealism takes an about face: out go the "guides and mentors" of the controlling adult world and in comes the liberal, candid, charmingly oblivious world of childhood. The Surrealists look out at the world with childlike wonder and curiosity as real spaces are transformed into settings for a more cerebral consideration of identity. Identity is fragmented, dissipated amidst multiple views, giving the illusion of "several lives lived at once".

One of the more pertinent points arising from this fragmentation is that Surrealism has its correlative in short forms and, more implicitly perhaps, in the short story. First, it is clear that, since the surreal is a concept that is closely associated with a spirit of rebellion and non-conformity - devoid of "any known restrictions" - it requires, virtually as a precondition, a relatively relaxed and accommodating framework in which to express itself. This is a challenge that the short story can handle fairly easily. Further, the surreal, as a constantly changing set of circumstances, appeals to the short story's sense of possibility and mobility - its ability to reflect "the fleeting" and incorporate "the extreme facility of

---

<sup>50</sup> No page number.

everything". This point is stressed by Paul Éluard who (in a paper originally given as a lecture at the New Burlington Galleries on 24 June 1936) stressed the fugitive and instantaneous nature of Surrealist poetry, claiming that:

The unprecedented is familiar to them, premeditation unknown. They are aware that the relationships between things fade as soon as they are established, to give place to other relationships just as fugitive (175).

Éluard's observations on the "fugitive" nature of Surrealism suggest that it is particularly suited to expression in ephemeral forms. The surreal fades as soon as it falls into focus - it has no preconditions and no control. It makes explicit the unpredictable, unexpected and irrational. As Cardinal and Short go some way to suggesting, the surreal is critically dependent on the form its expression takes. As with the Dadaists, for the Surrealists "The real activity of the mind was too fluid, immediate and spontaneous to be fixed or frozen in permanent form" (16). The impact of the surreal is immediate and visceral and there is a sense in which the longevity of the novel, for example, would forfeit this immediacy.<sup>51</sup> E.M. Forster, in his chapter on "Fantasy" in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927),<sup>52</sup> makes a similar suggestion that the fantastic is incompatible with the novel's literal tone:

The general tone of novels is so literal that when the fantastic is introduced it produces a special effect: some readers are thrilled, others choked off: it demands an additional adjustment because of the oddness of its method or subject matter - like a sideshow in an exhibition where you pay sixpence as well as the original entrance fee (102).

---

<sup>51</sup> Mary Rohrberger, in her genre-defining essay "The Short Story: A Proposed Definition" (1976), uses the surreal as a way of defining the short story. The short story, she observes, has a unique relationship with reality: "The metaphysical view that there is more to the world than that which can be apprehended through the senses provides the rationale for the structure of the short story which is a vehicle for the author's probing of the nature of the real. As in the metaphysical view, reality lies beyond the ordinary world of appearances, so in the short story, meaning lies beneath the surface of the narrative. The framework of the narrative embodies symbols which function to question the world of appearances and to point to a reality beyond the facts of the extensional world" (81).

<sup>52</sup> Woolf had read Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and had praised it highly in a letter to Forster on 21 November 1927. Cf. *Letters III*: 438-39.

Unlike the novel, however, the short story can centralise the side-show - privileging the sectioned-off space of the imagination and give precedence to the marginal through a sideways look at the real world. The crucial advantage of the short story is that, as the natural expression of temporariness, it most often works as the documentation of a transitory happening and can be said to share the Surrealist purpose of momentarily disorientating the reader. In other words, by preserving the sense of spontaneity that typifies the experience of the surreal, the short story can be said to italicise the surreal creating a brief and concentrated intensity that the novel cannot sustain.<sup>53</sup>

This correlation between the spontaneous and transitory power of the surreal and the ambivalent and fugitive dimensions of the short story seems especially apt in relation to Woolf's sketches, "The Manchester Zoo" (1906), "The Penny Steamer" (c. 1906) and "Down the river to Greenwich" (1908), which provide a persuasive link between Surrealism and the short story.<sup>54</sup> Here Woolf uses the short story to convey and underline more expressively the skittery line between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, objectivity and subjectivity. Surrealist strategies of defamiliarisation are intrinsic to many of these stories' concerns: their oblique logic; the questions they raise about the imagination and the arbitrary; and the fracturing of time and sequence all vividly reflect a sense of being torn away from a context and conjure up an enigmatic world that cannot be said to hold coherence. The stories primarily achieve a defamiliar effect through their brevity and are

---

<sup>53</sup> This unsuitability, no doubt, explains the Surrealists' deep resistance to the novel. In the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) Breton delivers a firm condemnation of the nineteenth-century novel. He refers to the novelist as "severely circumscribed" (Seaver and Lane: 7) and to the novel as an "inferior" (14) genre because of the limitations of its "purely informative style" (7) as a medium for the surreal. This notion of the novel as incompatible with the surreal was voiced by Comte de Lautréamont also who, in *Poésies I*, claims that the novel is a "false genre" (331). (Woolf was familiar with the work of Lautréamont who inspired the Surrealists and a copy of *Les Chants De Maldoror* (Paris, 1920) was given to her by Roger Fry. Cf. *Catalogue of books from the library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf*, "Books from the library of the late Virginia and Leonard Woolf from 24, Victoria Square, Westminster London, S.W.1", *Section V: Miscellaneous - Some with Slight Association*.) For a discussion of the relationship between Surrealism and the novel see Armand Hoog, "The Surrealist Novel", *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 8 (1951), 17-25; "The Surrealist Anti-Novel", Germaine Brée and Margaret Guiton, *An Age of Fiction*. (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 134-40; and Paul C. Ray, "Some Notes On Surrealism in the Novel", *Romance Notes*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (Autumn 1965), 1-4.

<sup>54</sup> It is a relationship that Woolf praised in E.M. Forster's collection of short stories *The Celestial Omnibus* (1911) which through their minimalism "release the fantasticality which is laid under such heavy burdens in the novels" (*Collected Essays IV*: 497).

particularly disquieting and surreal because they manage to capture the precise moment when a seemingly immutable reality is perceived as perilously fragmentary.

Motivated by escapist influences, “The Manchester Zoo” (1906), “The Penny Steamer” (c. 1906) and “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) are the outcome of a general disaffection with society and contain no dialogue and few, if any, people. There is a strong sense of the fantastic in these stories, thriving as they do on the interplay between the expected and unexpected, reality and dreamland. They exhibit a covert Surrealist impulse, depicting fairytale worlds in which talking animals stalk through desolate landscapes and spirits lurk in boats on rivers. Written by an adult from a child’s perspective, all in all, they are a strange and compelling testament to Woolf’s Surrealist imagination. These sketches are not really qualifiable as ‘short stories’ and do not, for the most part, defer to any formula. By their titles they are ostensibly travelogues and have their precedent in travel literature such as the *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-20). In “The Manchester Zoo”, for example, Woolf portrays herself in the traditional guise of the explorer venturing away from modern urban life into unfamiliar and unknown regions with “eagerness and exultation” (Appendix A). However, although she is keen to create an illusion of authenticity, she has scant regard for the authenticity of the travel essay. Moving further and further away from a recognisable topography and out into surreal landscapes, these sketches are not objective accounts of journeys taken, but subjective impressions. As Jan Morris writes about Woolf’s travel writing in general, they are “seldom descriptions of places, they are records of the effect of place upon a particular sensibility” (9).

Like Surrealist literature, “The Manchester Zoo”, “A Penny Steamer” and “Down the river to Greenwich” have their basis in childhood dreams and repressed anxieties. One of the main sources of these anxieties was the death of Woolf’s mother in 1895. In *Moments of Being* Woolf recalls her mother’s “central”, enveloping presence which provided a covering, or “panoply”, which protected her from the outside world. Similarly, the death of Stella Duckworth, who had become a substitute mother for Woolf, is described in terms of emerging from the protective amniotic fluid: “the second blow of death, struck on me; tremulous, filmy eyed as I was, with my wings still creased, sitting there on the edge of my broken chrysalis” (*Moments of Being*: 124). We can trace Woolf’s early stories to the disappearance of this protective envelope and the alternative shield which her short fiction provided by giving her privacy and a haven from the outside world. The porous, semi-transparent envelope was broken by the traumatic fact of death. As Woolf notes in “A Sketch of the Past”, after her mother’s death, “even the notepaper was so black bordered that only a little space for writing remained” (*Moments of Being*: 94). Suzanne Raitt writes that Julia Stephen’s death “precipitated Woolf from the fantasy world of childish pleasure into the adult world where responsibilities must be shouldered, and there is no longer a protective maternal presence” (81). But her Surrealist sketches are all about the continuation of the fantasy world. As Susan and Edwin Kenney write in “Virginia Woolf and the Art of Madness” (1982), Woolf “did not want to move forward out of childhood, away from being taken care of” and “felt herself being pulled forward out of that comfortable cocoon she had never quite managed to kick loose” (174). In “Reminiscences” Woolf describes her mother’s death as:

the greatest disaster that could happen; it was as though on some brilliant day of spring the racing clouds of a sudden stood still, grew dark, and massed themselves; the wind flagged, and all creatures on the earth moaned or wandered seeking aimlessly (*Moments of Being*: 40).

This anthropomorphic identification finds its way into “The Manchester Zoo” which appears to be modelled closely on her mother’s fairy tales. Writing stories that mirrored her mother’s was a way of preserving the protective panoply she had constructed for her. Woolf admired her mother’s ability to “stamp people with characters at once” (*Moments of Being*: 35). Her stories are resourcefully written and, as Diane F. Gillespie and Elizabeth Steele in *Julia Duckworth Stephen: Stories for Children, Essays for Adults* (1987) note, have an affinity with the fantastic tales of Lewis Carroll. They deal with childish fantasy worlds of impossible events and anthropomorphic animals who talk to each other, as in the meeting between Jocko the pipe-smoking monkey and the fox in “The Monkey on the Moor”:

The fox was very much surprised when he saw Jocko. He had never seen a monkey before and he could not make out whether he was a hare - or a hairy little boy. He thought he must be a boy so he spoke very politely, for foxes don’t like boys or men (Gillespie and Steele: 51).

The flirtatious repartee between the monkey and Mrs Owl is amusing:

“I should like to come nearer you, madam, if I may, to see all the shining gold you wear.” The wicked little monkey was feeling very cold and thought it would be very nice to get close to the soft down of the owl. “Pray come as close as you like,” she said kindly and opened her wings a little (57).

Other stories such as “[Dinner at Baron Bruin’s]”, “The Black Cat or the Grey Parrot” and “The Wandering Pigs” have animals that talk. In “Emlycaunt” she writes about the cruelty of keeping animals caged in zoos and circuses. Emlycaunt is, on the contrary, an imaginary place which is “full of the animals the children have been kind to” (75) where animals are free to roam at leisure:

Big oaks and elms shaded a quick rushing river; the branches of the trees were full of birds who sang as if they had never sung before. They were telling each other their histories, how they had got free. All were singing songs of joy and freedom (78).

As in her mother's stories, in Woolf's early stories and some of her later ones such as "The Shooting Party" (1938), "Lappin and Lapinova" (1939) and "The Widow and the Parrot", published in *Redbook Magazine* in July 1982, animals play a large part in her portrayal of the world. But, whereas Julia Stephen's stories return us to a safely circumscribed world of fact, manifest in parental authority and control, Woolf's sketches do not return to 'normality'. Her Surrealist sketches are not only a blend of fact and fantasy, but are also about loss and bereavement and, unlike her mother's tales, are not written with children in mind. The distinction between adult and children's fiction - two alternative realities which her mother distinguishes - are therefore blurred by Woolf's preoccupation with giving voice to the child within the adult.

"The Manchester Zoo" was written after Woolf had taken her nieces and nephews to the zoo in April 1906. The start of the story gives a definite time - six o'clock - and location - the north - that is recognisable to us. But, no sooner have we got settled, than this certainty is made fragile as Woolf spends the introductory paragraph playing down the authority of the sophisticated and informed travel writer who knows his way around. She does this through a series of qualifying, non-committal statements - "it seems"; "I cannot pretend to be an authority"; and "Perhaps" - which destabilise the confident and authoritative tone of the seasoned traveller. The authority that would invest the sketch with a sense of objectivity and accuracy is consequently missing. Instead, anxious to shake and undermine our confidence in the mundane and matter-of-fact, Woolf directs the story to the "reflective" reader. This results in a sense of unfettered imaginary freedom as we are surrealistically transported to the imaginary world of the Manchester Zoo. Woolf is quite explicit that there will be no signposting and structures the sketch according to strange disjunctions - whereby the bits of the narrative that might have explained the exact sequence of events are deliberately missing:



But without troubling to enumerate the different stages of our journey - a wearisome proceeding - I will only state that by half past eleven we were in the Zoological Gardens at Manchester; and perhaps that statement is better left for the present unsupported (see Appendix A).

The work is not going to be entirely logical and will bear little relation to the formal order of narrative - this is not going to be a topographic journey, in fact, it matters little where the narrator is physically heading. Consequently, a strong sense of aimlessness filters into things as Woolf magically transports us into another realm which is romanticised:

To the reflective mind it will seem a more remarkable fact than if I had said that we stood at that hour upon the topmost peak of Kilimanjaro, or moored our boat in the rushes of the Euphrates, or peeped into the boiling crater of Vesuvius. For, while the number of those who have circumnavigated the world is few, there are but few I may confidently assert, who have ever been or ever will be in the Zoological Gardens at Manchester.

In an echo of E.M. Forster's celestial omnibus, the trams do nothing to disrupt this surreal journey, but catapult us into an unfamiliar landscape that is beyond simple chronology. It is as though we are on a train, bound for a specific location, but are taken on an aberrant course. Propelled by some mysterious force, "the traveller neither knows whence they came or whither they go, or upon what stealthy errand they are bound". For the reader the trajectory is uncertain and not marked out for us with the traditional signposts:

The electric trams evidently are the creatures of the atmosphere. They follow each other swiftly and with perfect smoothness although the traveller neither knows whence they come or whither they go, or upon what stealthy errand they are bound. The organisation however is elaborate and complete, and in the course of time you are made to descend precisely at the door of your destination.

This swift and smooth sense of urgency, which is compounded by the lack of a firm hand in charge, makes for an engaging, if disorientating, start, thrusting you into the position of following in Woolf's eager footsteps. However, there is an unescapable sense that Woolf is treading on perilous ground as the "dusty grass" might crumble at any moment.

Woolf takes us on a detour into a highly irrational, numinous place where animals have power of speech and darkness reigns. It is neither a zoo nor a garden and Woolf hesitates to supply a name:

although there were certain conservatories in which parrots might be housed, they were of a far too modest and retiring disposition I feel sure to be called a Zoo; and although there were earthen beds in the asphalt I do not think that the trees which grew there would have claimed the title of garden. Places indeed where the pavement is of asphalt, where grottoes made of cinders spring up in grotesque and superfluous arches and alleys, where things called pagodas offer you refreshment at every turn, where there are empty bandstands and tiers of vacant seats, considering a lake with a steamer wrapped in oil cloth, yet these places certainly deserve a name which shall distinguish them from any other place of the dead or the living on the face of the globe.

On first reading, this might appear to be an idealised landscape. But it is not. Rather, the fake grandeur and the forced, gaudy sense of elegance in the "grotesque and superfluous arches and alleys", appear to be attempts to embellish, solidify and lend respectability to what is, in effect, a failed utopian landscape made of "cinders". There is something inherently banal about the crude design of the grottoes and the bandstand's decorative emptiness. This seems to be a postcard setting: soulless and plastic, with a certain throwaway, chocolate-box appeal. This is not a world we are meant to recognise - it is not conventional realism. Rather, what we have here is a weird conjunction of the familiar and the unplaceable. Factuality - the security we get from naming things - is banished as Woolf irreverently and inventively manipulates language, at the same time manipulating our expectations. No attempt will be made to place "Belle Vue" in a familiar context.

Mysteriously deserted, “empty” and “vacant” it is an environment that is hostile to human beings and what is noticeable is the absence of any intimate connection with the human world. The gatekeeper of this fantasyland - the woman in curling tongs - reluctantly opens the door to this private world “and suggested somehow that we were unwonted and probably unwelcome intruders”.

But, despite the absence of an affable tour-guide, we get the sense that Woolf feels at home in this peopleless place: this anti-social, insular and closed-off world is pleasant to her. The animals, who display an amusing excess of humankind’s social pretensions, are a source of intrigue:

a certain look and smell and even taste of last nights dissipation clung to everybody and everything... The animals... were as bored as though they had been making small talk till three a.m. The tiger had a headache and the hippopotamus could not make up his mind to get into his bath. And we had come with our homely nuts and unsophisticated buns, our humorous umbrellas and our familiar jests, to tempt the palates of these debauchees who had been feasting as likely as not on plovers eggs and champagne.

The scene is lit up by a child’s active and colourful imagination. Woolf is a sensualist, wanting to convey, not only the “look” and “smell” of the place, but the “taste” as well. Sharing the Surrealist aim of “dislocating the sense-impressions of the onlooker” (Cardinal: 90), Woolf views the animals with awe and amusement. In this topsy-turvy world view, full of cartoonish details, the animals have human qualities: the tiger suffers from human ailments and the hippopotamus is indecisive. Cutting against this strain of humour, however, is the refusal of the animals to entertain us and play to our voyeuristic fantasies. This spirit of rebellion is reflected in the fact that they turn the tables on us, and, conversely, reduce humankind to an ironic, superficial and degraded spectacle that is primitive, “unsophisticated” and “humorous”. By process, a disturbing disjuncture is created, as the animals at the zoo - simple and innocent images taken from childhood - are sullied by their transposition into an adult world of dissipation.

This lack of a warm welcome to humans extends to the end of the sketch which ends abruptly on a “cold and cynical” note:

You must conceive two elderly workmen in their shirt-sleeves, issuing from a Pagoda at twelve thirty, and fumbling with an iron rod by a grotto. Then there was a melancholy whizz and a rocket shot up in to the air; but evaporated beneath the cold and cynical eye of that April morning. No pleasantry indeed could have been more ill-timed.

Fantasy evaporates under the cold light of day; the fireworks have lost their brilliance and the scales fall from our eyes as the appearance of the elderly workmen making adjustments to a grotto reveal us to be willing victims of a form of window dressing designed to titillate the eye only. We get the sense that this rude awakening is “ill-timed” - it is as though Woolf wants to stay in this enchanted place. Consequently, loathe to return to the ‘familiar’ world, Woolf does not provide a conclusive ending to the sketch and does nothing to suggest a return, but leaves the reader stranded in this comic-strip realm.

In “The Penny Steamer” (1906) the metaphor of travel effects a similar transference into surreality and is used, as in “The Manchester Zoo”, to present a disengagement and disconnection from reality. Annexing the ‘real’ world and retreating from social ‘normality’, the sketch takes us on a fantastic diversion away from London and “the uproarious Strand”, dispatching the reader “down one of those narrow and silent channels which lead like a peaceful backwater off the main stream” (see Appendix C). What Woolf wants to stress in “The Penny Steamer” are the “sudden and puzzling transitions”, the “incongruity” and “discrepancy” inherent in the humdrum world we take for granted and she does this by contrasting the fixed and immutable world of London with the fleeting and transient world of the steamer:

the fresh virginal white stone stands besides the brick that has been bleached and baked dry through centuries. The river again seems always another incongruity: what has a city of stable houses, deep rooted in the ground to do with mutable waters, which even beneath London Bridge, obey the far impulse of the sea. The

discrepancy is felt the moment one ceases to tap the pavement and takes ones place upon the swaying deck of the little steamer.

However, unlike “The Manchester Zoo”, this sketch seems both traditional and surreal and there is a sense in which Woolf tries to assuage our anxieties about its displacement with the evocation of the familiar. Traditional references to the Strand and London Bridge and to the “stable” and “solid” London houses have powerful historic reverberations and give off a strong sense of place. London is a stable foil to the evanescent, surreal world and stands for tradition and a robust reality: “One might halt a moment in a court of ruddy old brick with a flagged pavement and watch the autumn leaves eddy and sink, while the barristers lounge arm in arm like boys out of school”. At the same time, however, placing herself on board the steamer, Woolf tries to distance herself from tradition. Playing on the ambivalence between tradition and “incongruity”, she compounds the uncertainty between the real and the illusory. This ambivalence is maintained throughout for:

this impression of detachment, of unreality in the whole prospect on the banks, lasts only so long as you are in view of those churches and solid London houses which seem earthy.

Simultaneously detached from and engaged with reality, this ambivalence creates a tension between absence and presence, between belonging and losing a sense of community.

The transition from the real world to the surreal is made explicit on board the steamer. On the steamer everything has the “impression of detachment, of unreality” and Woolf’s intention is to disorientate and disconcert the reader by a precipitant jolt into surreality. The “discrepancy” between the solid world of London and the fleeting world of the steamer is made apparent now and Woolf defines this shift in gear between the two worlds as being as incommensurable as the difference between speech and music. The surreal hums a mesmerising tune and its rhythms are simple and strong:

on the street the footsteps, and the clatter of hoofs are like the separate words of some articulate language: but the sounds of the waters and the rush of boats playing as the undulations of the violin, always swelling and falling in pulsing curves of sound.

The regimented, leaden-footed movement of the pedestrians and horses is in remarkable contrast to the fast-paced and free-flowing animation of the river. As though she is leaving the human world behind, Woolf exchanges the “separate words” of a controlled and ordered language for the fluent, primal rhythms of the river - a melodic impulse composed of indistinguishable “sounds” that melt into one. This sense of movement gives a strong sense of participation in the surreal and it feels as though we are physically crossing a boundary as the surreal comes alive under the feet. This skittish and light-hearted leap into the surreal takes the mood from despair to exultant liberation. Added to this, there is something reassuringly motherly and nurturing about the undulating motion of the river which flows rhythmically - expanding and contracting, “swelling” and “falling” as though breathing freely. The waves are like the “curves” of a female breast and pulse like a heart beat - which makes this an emotional transition as well as a topographical one. In sync with the free movement of this almost maternal body, the city - the emblem of patriarchal control - fleetingly phases in and out of vision. Seen from the “swiftly moving platform” of the steamer, London appears to be without any moorings in the real world and has a “transitory look as though it had not been chained there for centuries but had something of motion in it and might be broken up and sent sailing in like clouds in the wind”. The animated movement of fantasy is in direct contrast to the “dead world” of the city that Woolf leaves behind.

Yet what might appear as a framework of gentle surreality - sublime, playful, conditioned by magic, romance and poetry - is rendered "sinister". In an essay reviewing the complete works of Lewis Carroll written in January 1939, Woolf locates the danger lurking beneath the surface of the fairytale:

In order to make us into children, he first makes us asleep... Down, down, down we fall into that terrifying, wildly inconsequent, yet perfectly logical world where time races, then stands still; where space stretches then contracts. It is the world of sleep; it is also the world of dreams... It is for this reason that the two Alices are not books for children; they are the only books in which we become children (1966: 255).

Quite apart from the fairytale's traditional mission to divert and delight, Carroll's fantasy tales are unsafe. The words "makes us asleep" are predatory and menacing, whilst the phrase "where space stretches then contracts" seems to connote some conception of the expansion of consciousness but also suggests the impossibility of escape or a trap that seductively lies in wait for the unsuspecting child. These are not leisurely adventures, rather they are trips through threatening oneiric landscapes.

This element of danger finds its way into Woolf's description of London in "The Penny Steamer". Even though Woolf was enchanted by London, she was slightly in awe of it. Jan Morris is illuminating in this respect: "As a child, suffering the first symptoms of madness, she had sometimes found the life of the city sinister and frightening" (17). Certainly, a "sinister" element enters into Woolf's description of London in which the prevailing imagery is of death and decay:

Beyond Blackfriars Bridge the wharves black waters chaffing on the river are of an amphibious nature: the water laps against their bases and stains them with green weeds; houses they are not, but merely barges that have grown into the ground. You might imagine them inhabited by those sinister looking cranes, which are perpetually cramming them with sacks and barrels; no human being seems to have any interest in them.

Woolf dislocates everyday objects from the context of reality: the wharves are of “an amphibious nature”, belonging neither to the land or to the water; the houses are barges; the cranes might be human figures. It is a peopleless environment since the houses are empty and the atmosphere of death pervades: “Here too are the ships travellers who have been in the deep seas, all rusted and dented with voyages, lying like whales washed ashore against a perspective of smoke and chimneys”. We are going deeper and deeper into a world we do not recognise:

Fancy has it that the air up the river grows more and more boisterous; as the water beneath us answers the call of the sea, so we surely taste its breath. We are coming to the world of waves and fields leaving behind us the dead world of cities.

For Woolf, the surreal world is the living world and the populous world of the cities is paradoxically “the dead world”. Looking for a “way out” of London we are precipitated into a mobile and fluctuant place, as the water eddies on beyond our control like a vortex: “This is the way out, down the river out on to the sea; here ships are passing from one land to the next; the earth is moving and growing nothing is stagnant”. Woolf is not too concerned with finding her way back from this strange, stranded haven of waves and fields and the story ends very far from where it started.

“Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) negotiates more intimate interfaces with the outside world and chronicles both an inner and an outer journey. Here Woolf is anxious to revitalise a childhood moment. The irony is that, as Woolf travels towards Greenwich - site of the Royal Observatory, accepted as the basis of Greenwich Mean Time - she simultaneously travels against the current of the proverbial river of time, back in history to her childhood. “Down the river to Greenwich” might be described as a mini-odyssey that, despite its brevity, spans between childhood and adulthood, past and present in a vast, almost filmic sweep. Cities, time, history are left behind and childhood is relived in a sentence: “we are all children again at what ever age we go, good children on a holiday”.



The main critical insight which emerges from the editorial process of “Down the river to Greenwich” is that Woolf is driven by an impulsion to find her own voice. But this is not achieved without a struggle, and the greater part of the facsimile transcript (reproduced on p 230) enacts a dialogue that takes place between the intrusive ‘I’ and the “you”, “us” and “we” forms that, in “The Manchester Zoo” and “The Penny Steamer”, establish intimacy and draw the reader in as an implicated witness. This contradiction between voices - as the dominant ‘I’ periodically steps forward to interrupt the illusion - echoes that tension in childhood between the world of fantasy and that beholden to adult strictures.

The sketch opens, as did “The Manchester Zoo”, in a self-preoccupied, mannered style whereby Woolf sets up an authoritative voice at the start which tells us how the story might be read. This public male voice has its prototype in the travel essay, but Woolf soon tires of it and visibly expurgates it in the facsimile transcript: <To speak quite seri> and <It is not possible> at lines 4-5 (see Appendix D). The male voice uses the passive and impersonal construction “is to be tasted” at line 5 and the old-fashioned conditional in “I should not believe” (line 15) which Woolf gets rid of. This poignant tension between the public and the private that underlies the interweaving of Woolf’s voice and that of the male narrator is continued throughout the story. Woolf’s resistance to this voice of authority is manifest in the sentences she cuts out, which we do not see in the edited final text. The facsimile transcript shows her visibly cutting out the censor. As opposed to the male voice which is ardent in its opinions and is “<convinced>” (line 12) about what it relates, Woolf’s own voice is earnest and unsure and is associated with the “candid” and “ingenuous” (line 9). In a voice that whispers rather than announces itself loudly, she constantly shifts the emphasis away from the too self-referential and overbearing male voice to her own familiar and intimate one. The lecturing tone of “<You take him for a candid ingenuous person who is not ashamed of an unsophisticated palate>” (lines 9-10) is cut out.

Just as the other voice tries to assert itself and intervene in the imaginative prose, Woolf, quite literally, blots it out. She does this by assuming that the reader knows about the places she describes by substituting the logical and precise and impersonal “to these places” for the more specific word “there” (line 18) which assumes a more taken-for-granted knowledge and is in an attempt to be more familiar. Woolf sometimes obeys the censorial imperative to re-define her own voice and feels the need to excuse herself for being too candid when she writes “for the small ridiculous reason that I was taken there as a child” (line 18). But the lecturing male is occluded at the end of paragraph three in favour of a return to childhood “we are all children again at what ever age we go, good children on a holiday” (line 19-20).

Woolf’s unhappy youth forced her to abandon her illusions, but in “Down the river to Greenwich” she wants to exclude death and keep the pantomime going. Her decision to excise the word “suffer” (line 15) is an indication of this desire. The shift in narrative voice in the final paragraph is revealing and Woolf’s attempts at an intimate tone are abandoned here because she does not want to appear sentimental. The deletion of “carried” in “<carried> in one’s own heart” (line 22) and the exclusion of “the old magic returns” (line 23) is a rejection of sentiment and a return to the precise and factual in “the fact that you have never been in any other mood” (line 23).

In these sketches Woolf quite literally puts distance between herself and the world. Important in each of them is the sense of movement and the illusion of escape from human contact. The metaphor of travel creates this illusion of space and movement and initiates an enforced separation and disconnection from the real world. It is as though we have a one way ticket only. Disorientating, defamiliarising and questioning the notion of absolute time and space, these sketches prefigure the basic tenets of Surrealism. Akhter Ahsen writes that: “There is no end to where we can go in surreality” (287) and this awareness that there is no definite destination has its analogue on the narrative level in the forestalled and put-off ending of these stories which leave us adrift on a sea of incertitude.

With “The Mark on the Wall” (1917) - Woolf’s public debut in the short story form - the question about the borders between the rational and the irrational becomes more insistent as a consequence of the First World War. As Woolf notes in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) the war was “the catastrophe...that destroyed illusion and put truth in its place”, but “which was truth and which was illusion, I asked myself?” (17). The crossover of subjective experience and social reality, of truth and illusion, is the point of departure for Woolf in “The Mark on the Wall” which conveys a sense of numbed, traumatised *ennui*. The story recalls a past moment when the narrator spotted a black mark on a wall and speculated over its origins; attempts to ascertain what the mark is prove fruitless until the end of the story when it is revealed, perhaps, as a snail. Written at the height of the Great War of 1914-18, the story suggests the power of the imagination as a stance against the barbarism of war and also demonstrates the “painful jolt in the perspective” (*Collected Essays II*: 87) that the war had engendered. But, unlike Woolf’s travel sketches, there is no sense of physical displacement here since we are restricted to one room. Rather, the story takes us on a vertiginous journey through the mind and speculation about appearance and reality and the significance of knowledge itself.

War-weary, remote and barely acknowledging what is happening in the world around her, the perusal of the mark is a welcome diversion for the narrator; a way of “putting a stop to one’s disagreeable thoughts” (82). This connection between “The Mark on the Wall” and the war is made explicit by Woolf in a notebook entry made two decades later for a story entitled “Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions of a house into cash” (1937). For crucially - and what has not yet been noted - the mark on the wall is here explained as a bug inflated with blood. On the first page of this notebook Woolf writes: “The inflated brown bug: Inflated with blood. Mark on the Wall. Comes steals [ ] wants to be ‘seen’. [ ] Suck of blood. Sets three slides off: making studies” (MHP, Sussex).<sup>55</sup> Both “The Mark on the Wall” and “Fantasy upon a gentleman” explore

---

<sup>55</sup> [ ] stands in place of an unintelligible word or words.

the tensions between the public and the private. In "Fantasy upon a gentleman" this tension is concentrated into the image of the metamorphic journalist who stands for the dehumanised and predatory figure of the censor. At the same time, in "The Mark on the Wall", the mark's engorgement with blood points to the very public, repugnant and bestial brutality of war. In both stories what really seems to be at stake is the private freedom to imagine.

Woolf addresses this interface between the public and the private in the first paragraph of the story through a veiled allusion to Plato's allegory of the cave in Book VII of *The Republic*. Plato's myth of human beings as tragic prisoners in a cave who can see only shadows of reality flickering on the wall is seen as fundamental to contemporary anxieties about World War One.<sup>56</sup> Confined in Plato's self-reflective cave, reality is thus knowingly subjected to illusion. The quasi-utopian, dream-driven aspect of the story has something extremely comforting in the face of the devastation of the contemporary moment. What distinguishes "The Mark on the Wall" is that it relates to the reader on an intimate visceral level. The self-sufficiency of the mark as subject-matter, might function in tandem with the self-referentiality of a creative project: it is a story bent on shedding its ties to the 'real' world beyond the work of art. The abstracted perspective of the narrator is characterised by a disengagement from reality,<sup>57</sup> and he or she is in a position of total receptivity, passivity and subordination to the mark which seems to have a hypnotic power. The present is unverifiable and hypothetical, shrouded in a "film of yellow light" (77) which acts as a mysterious envelope from the outside world.

---

<sup>56</sup> The Platonic myth is certainly very much alive for Katherine Hilbery in *Night and Day* (1919), for whom: "The dream nature of our life had never been more apparent to her, never had life been more certainly an affair of four walls, whose objects existed only within the range of lights and fires, beyond which lay nothing, or nothing more than darkness" (299).

<sup>57</sup> According to James Naremore, "The Mark on the Wall" is a "Freudian daydream" (58-59). Wayne Narey suggests that "the free-associative quality of the protagonist's thoughts" is "the only 'action': in a tale in which the daydreamer never moves from the chair" (35).

The First World War opened a whole new chapter in literature and resulted in a rupture from the past. Concomitant with this severance from an historical context, established narrative forms no longer seemed appropriate. In "How It Strikes a Contemporary" (1923) Woolf notes the effect that the war had on traditional narrative and, in particular, the increasing relevance of small-scale works: "the writer of the present day must renounce his hope of making that complete statement which we call a masterpiece" and "must be content to be a taker of notes" (359) she observes. The old-fashioned conception of fiction as a repository of moral and psychological truth was gone; writers "cannot tell stories, because they do not believe that stories are true" (359). "The Mark on the Wall", written in 1917, consequently finds itself in the middle of a political war and a war of aesthetics.

Arising precisely from the sense that history has been lost, it confronts the nature of contemporary writing, forefronting the impossibility of telling a complete story. This notion of an incomplete statement or an uncontextualised story is addressed in the opening paragraph and is described through the familiar metaphor of the train journey. The narrator thinks about the prior occupants of the house:

I think of them so often, in such queer places, because one will never see them again, never know what happened next. They wanted to leave this house because they wanted to change their style of furniture, so he said, and he was in the process of saying that in his opinion art should have ideas behind it when we were torn asunder, as one is torn from the old lady about to pour tea and the young man about to hit the tennis ball in the back garden of the suburban villa as one rushes past in the train (77).

The notion of being "torn" away from a larger narrative was an integral part of the conception of the story which Woolf described as occurring to her "all in a flash, as if flying" (*Letters IV*: 231). Indeed, this description determines the perspective of "The Mark on the Wall" which reads as if we were looking out of the window of a train at the landscape flashing by, trying to make sense of a sequence of skimpy - yet tantalising -

images that are part of the detail of a larger, concealed story. The mark is turned into a metonym for the imagination and its mutations act out the possibilities of (his)story. As Laura Marcus observes:

Intentionally keeping a distance from the eponymous “mark on the wall” while wondering about its identity, the narrator finds that perceptual undecidability allows the mind to wander freely, into and through history, pre-history, and post-history (19).

Essentially, it is a story that cannot be nailed down; automatic, picking up things here and there, sifting through the detritus of history, once we think we know what the mark is it mutates again. One of the key pleasures of the story is that the mark can be anything which opens up possibilities for creative interpretation rather than closing them down.

In this context of the death of history, memory and loss are guiding terms and perhaps part of writing “The Mark on the Wall” was a feeling of nostalgia for the past and a fear of what the future held. The mark - “black upon the white wall” (77) - gives the story an old-fashioned, black and white newsreel quality. Substituting for temporal succession a selection of disconnected snapshots salvaged from memory, it traces a history now fragmented. The story refers, I believe, to two of Woolf’s childhood memories in particular. The first of these, which Woolf takes as the story’s starting-point, is the fire burning ominously in the nursery at Hyde Park Gate which is described in “A Sketch of the Past”:

“I was very anxious to see that the fire was low, because it frightened me if it burnt after we went to bed. I dreaded that little flickering flame on the walls” (*Moments of Being*: 78). The fire in the story recollects “that old fancy” of “the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower” and “the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock” (77). This is a stark image of war-time with its evocations of battle and national flag-waving. The second childhood memory which Woolf refers to in this story, which is alluded to in “A Sketch of the Past” as her “first memory”, is related to the recollection of her mother’s dress which had “red and purple flowers on a black background” (*Moments of Being*: 64). These colours are also imaginatively conceived in “The Mark on the Wall” in the cup of

the flower which she imagines enveloping her with a magical “purple and red light” (78). The cup of the flower might be an incubator or cocoon and is a positive image of re-birth and regeneration.

The sense of a lost historical context, a context upon which we can no longer rely, is especially pronounced in Woolf’s description of a heap of discarded historic junk, a description which might be appropriate for a post-bombing scene:

let me just count over a few of the things lost in our lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses - what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble - three pale blue canisters of book-binding tools? Then there were the bird cages, the iron hoops, the steel skates, the Queen Anne coal-scuttle, the bagatelle board, the hand organ - all gone, and jewels too. Opals and emeralds, they lie about the roots of turnips (78).

As shattered icons of memory or history - torn off fragments of somebody else’s story - none of these objects provide the basis for a wholly satisfactory account of history. Like a shuffled pile of black and white snapshots, the objects are not arranged historically and cannot be contextualised; book-binding tools, which give the illusion of completeness, are notably consigned to the dustbin of history. The same haphazard, cluttered logic prevails in the incongruous associations of jewels strewn amongst the roots of turnips and, later on, “a flower growing on a dust heap” (79). The pre-echo of T.S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton” (1935) is inescapable: “Garlic and sapphires in the mud/clot the bedded axle-tree” (190, II. 1-2). But, where Eliot’s sapphires suggest stars gleaming in the heavens, Woolf’s jewels constitute solely remembered intuitions of beauty.

Still, Woolf is less concerned with recreating a convincing old world than with exploring the shattered present. This is most telling in her articulation of the shattered interdependency between fiction and 'truth':

As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realise more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories (79-80).

Dominant, here, is a general disaffection with clear-eyed realism. Glazed, out-of-focus, avoiding looking the real world in the eye, the blank, childlike gaze hints at endless machinations going on inside the mind. Stories - phantom like - disappear and fade away into invisibility and hint at never-quite-explained depths. The established schemata for representation and recognition have broken down into "an almost infinite number" of possible stories. These potential failings to tell a complete story - to configurate some sort of whole from the scattered perceptions and fragmented shards of reality - are explored more graphically in the following excerpt:

There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour - dim pinks and blues - which will, as time goes on, become more definite, become - I don't know what... (78).

Here Woolf suggests a Post-Impressionist artist musing in front of a canvas; it is a deconstructivist picture that lays bare the anatomy and construction of a wartime canvas. On the surface, it seems like an idyllic image, but the fact that a definite picture is not allowed to appear, that the canvas stays "indistinct" and "dim", peppered with just a few ambivalent strokes, suggests a deep unease with artistic creation. The "spaces of light and dark" create gaping voids on the canvas; the gigantic, looming, "thick stalks" cut through the canvas menacingly; actual roses are substituted by messy "rose-shaped blots" - residual



images of a half-morphed beauty. It is only a fragment from an ideal landscape, cut off from a wider picture with a parenthetical dash that suspends the narrative while simultaneously freezing the artist's brush with the embryonic line "become - I don't know what...". The final ellipsis is a visual filter of possibilities.

This inability to arrive at a coherent image or provide a satisfactory definition is registered through an elliptically connected narrative, a method that is consistent with Surrealist experimentation with automatism. Surrealist writers made automatic writing a literary form, writing down whatever words came into their conscious mind without alteration. Automatism is at the centre of Surrealist theory about literature which gives precedence to the unexpurgated and uncensored flow of thought. In the first manifesto Breton describes it as:

a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*. It had seemed to me...that the speed of thought is no greater than the speed of speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the fast-moving pen (23).

This liberation has consequences for language production in automatic writing which Franklin Rosemont defines as:

writing without conscious interferences; the hand, holding a pen, runs along the page quite heedless of the promptings of immediate consciousness, whether these promptings take the form of critical, aesthetic or moral preoccupations (20).

As has been noted, the composition of "The Mark on the Wall" was automatic, conceived "all in a flash, as if flying" (*Letters IV*: 231), and critical attention to the story is principally devoted to this automatic element. Clive Bell wrote to Woolf on 19 July 1917: "It's most surprising and as clear as day... You have only got to put down what goes on in your own head, they will say" (MHP, Sussex). Likewise, on 18 October 1918, Roger Fry wrote to praise Woolf as one who "uses language as a medium of art" and "makes the very texture

of the word have a meaning and a quality" (MHP, Sussex). Woolf's response was illuminating: "I'm not sure that a perverted plastic sense doesn't somehow work itself out in words for me" (*Letters II*: 285).<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the story's distinction is this 'plasticity'. The narrative has, as its essence, a pressing need to record consciousness and is responsive to the erratic forces of "automatic fancy" (77). It is the sheer persistence of the story's central consciousness that holds the narrative together:

I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts. To steady myself, let me catch hold of the first idea that passes....Shakespeare....Well, he will do as well as another (78-79 - ellipses in original).

Mining the intersection between determinedly artistic and truly spontaneous imagination, the narrator confronts the problem of how the time-specific nature of narrative inhibits a totally fluid exchange between thought and its transcription. Motivated by a need to "think...spaciouly", to transcend the linearity of time, the narrator moves towards the edge of consciousness (the pool is a metaphor for the mind that Woolf will return to in "The Fascination of the Pool" (1929)). Here, in the ill-mapped territory of the mind, outside the mainstream of narrative "with its hard separate facts", stories exist as a fluid set of possibilities which the narrator can "slip" in and out of. But there is a sense of danger underpinning the removal of the obstacles to personal subjectivity. Not quite ready to take the plunge, the narrator steadies him or herself, stepping back from the edge and catching

---

<sup>58</sup> E.M. Forster singled out the story's erratic quality, comparing "The Mark on the Wall" to *Tristram Shandy* and concluding that Woolf and Laurence Sterne were both "fantasists": "They start with a little object, take a flutter from it, and settle on it again... There is even the same tone in their voices - a rather deliberate bewilderment, an announcement to all and sundry that they do not know where they are going" (22). More recently, Janet Lumpkin writes: "The style is fluid, full of dashes and ellipses. Emphasis is on evocative prose rather than structure or plot" (33). For Wayne Narey, the story does not have a correct sequence and "engages in a reality of subjective experience so personal that narrative is rendered inarticulate; only a monologue of memories will do, each a series of sensations without connection or logical progression" (38). Jeanne Delbaere-Grant, however, believes that the story is not as uncontrolled as it appears: "Nothing is further removed from automatic fancy than this kind of prose which looks so much like it but is submitted, beneath the smooth surface, to an extremely strict organisation" (464).

hold of ideas as a safety net. In sync with this indeterminacy, the narrative breaks down in the last line as the tightly configured, sure-footed pacing of the first three lines in which the narrator proclaims his determined intentions yields to a more generous, long-breathed syntax in "... Shakespeare...". Here the ellipses on either side of the thought are judiciously judged, courteously giving the narrator room to think.

But, absolute meanings are ultimately unattainable and this realisation has its stylistic analogue in the narrative's jumbled and evasive syntax which clearly captures the limitations of forging meaning:

if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really - what shall I say? - the head of a gigantic old nail... what should I gain? Knowledge? Matter for further speculation?... And what is knowledge? (81- my ellipses).

Words are liberated from a structure and are tethered to each other only by tenuous ellipses: it is a narrative tied only by the agreement that anything goes. Correlative to this, the ellipses provide a tenuous scaffolding for the text's fragile structure - as if the story might fall apart without them - whilst at the same time these large, white spaces encourage the reader to linger and muse over what it all means.

In the following excerpt, the narrator starts another cautious line of argument, but reality keeps "getting in the way", cutting in and causing stress points in the narrative:

It is full of happy thoughts this tree. I should like to take each one separately - but something is getting in the way... Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of Asphodel? I can't remember a thing. Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing.... There is a vast upheaval of matter (83).

Ultimately, the authoritative 'I' of "historical fiction" (79) has become a mass of contradictions, unsure of itself and displaying its hesitancy in stuttering syntax. The result is a number of precarious beginnings, a frustrated series of false starts, rather than developments. The dashes, pauses and re-startings mimic a fragmented, disconnected

reverie and cut into the narrative's "happy thoughts". A volley of lonely, fragmented images come together in a single stream - "A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of Asphodel?" - as the scramble to stay afloat is laid bare. Finally, the narrator slips off the edge but is saved from drowning by the intervention of cold reality as the war is made literal.

The tensions that underlie the conflictual interplay of the public and the private voice is particularly central to a much later work, entitled "Fantasy upon a gentleman" (1937) which was unpublished during Woolf's lifetime.<sup>59</sup> The origin of the work is the unexpected and unwelcome arrival of a journalist at the Woolfs' home in Tavistock Square on 28 March 1937 which Woolf recorded in her diary:

Yesterday a reporter for the N. York Times rang up: was told he cd. look at the outside of 52 if he chose. At 4.30 as I was boiling the kettle a huge black Daimler drew up. Then a dapper little man in a tweed coat appeared in the garden. I reached the sitting room - saw him standing there looking round... Then I guessed. He had a green note book & stood looking about jotting things down. I ducked my head - he almost caught me. At last L. turned & fronted him. No Mrs W. didnt want that kind of publicity. I raged. A bug walking over ones skin - cdn't crush him. The bug taking note... bugs, to come & steal in & take notes (*Diary 5: 72-73*).

Woolf's outrage at this intrusion is expressed in "Fantasy upon a gentleman" which was written shortly after the event. The sketch - with its depiction of the metamorphosis of the journalist - is directly reminiscent of Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" which was translated into English in 1937. In Kafka's story the protagonist, an insurance agent, wakes up to find that he has turned into an enormous insect. Woolf's story draws on Kafka's nightmarish world of human bestiality and she perhaps borrowed her imagery of the journalist, metamorphosed into an insect from it. (Woolf's description of the journalist is also similar to the images of metamorphic and sometimes grotesque human forms in

---

<sup>59</sup> Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf II*, Appendix B, 253-54 has a version of the story. My own version with textual notes can be found in Appendix E.

Surrealist paintings, particularly in Victor Brauner's *L'étrange cas de Monsieur K (fragment)* (1934) (see Appendix F) which Woolf might have seen.) However, Woolf's story - a verbal cartoon - is only similar to Kafka's tale in idea and not in execution. Written in the form of a poem, the sketch constitutes Woolf's most virulent attack on journalists and, although her reaction seems incommensurate with the event itself, the story should rather be seen as the culmination of her life-long antipathy towards the figure of the predatory censor. Composed in the first flush of anger,<sup>60</sup> the story is characterised by its spontaneous and sustained burst of rapid-fire prose. The mood swings that punctuate this work give it its impetuous and surrealistic volatility. It is as though the repressed anger Woolf has felt towards the censor all her life is suddenly released.

The story's bold beginning conveys something of the journalist's brusque encroachment. His desire to see "the lady of the house" is announced with what seems a calm, flat gravitas. The repetitious phrase, "in the morning, the precious morning" conveys tension and disbelief and ultimately Woolf's anger at the prospect of losing a morning's work. The association of "year" and "chair" in the sentence "in the spring of the year, on a chair" is aimless, as though Woolf is putting words together just because they half-rhyme. The journalist's solemn tones are countered by Woolf's easy rhymes which weightlessly convey a lack of density. This is the case in: "his self satisfaction, his profound unhappy sense of his lack of attraction"; "uneasy, queasy"; "greasy complacency" and "streaming with the steam". Her exasperation is communicated in repetition and in the assertion of nonsense against sense, sound against fact. For example, the short exclamation, "Yes, I see; I see", imparts irritation, as though the language itself is being bugged; creating a direct correlative between language and thought.

---

<sup>60</sup> "Fantasy upon a gentleman" seems to have been written immediately in typescript, for no other manuscript of it exists besides a brief reference to the story as "the inflated brown bug" in her *Three Guineas* writing book, from which a citation is transcribed in Appendix E.

The story's poetic stylisation, radically discordant syntax and inconsistent punctuation are akin to Surrealist poetry in which the imagination predominates over any structural laws. As Balakian observes:

what essentially separates the surrealist way of writing from the poetry of the preceding generations is...in the use of words: an enrichment of the active vocabulary of poetry, a release from verbal inhibitions, a selection of word association beyond the barriers set up by logic, a new metaphor built upon these incongruous word groupings, and the images resulting from the association of one metaphor with another (135).

Balakian's analysis of Surrealist poetry alerts us to aspects of "Fantasy upon a gentleman" and her notion of freedom from "verbal inhibitions" is specially relevant to the sketch. In "Fantasy upon a gentleman" Woolf's playful manipulation of words can be taken as a ridicule of the journalist's medium and, unlike the journalist who wants to make his work as accessible as possible to the public, Woolf's private play with language counters his note-taking. So, while the journalist's art seems to be about attempting to establish some kind of contact, Woolf's counter-language is all about severance. Just as scrawling graffiti on a wall represents a child-like response to powerlessness, Woolf's abandon and improvisatory freedom feels like an intelligent alternative to the journalist's formal print. Provocatively refusing information and cryptically uninvolved in its incongruity the language alienates the reader.

Perhaps "Fantasy upon a gentleman" is incoherent. Yet, it generates an immediacy and the language seems in sympathy with Woolf's outpouring. Surrealist discordancy is evident throughout Woolf's story and its frenetic wording encapsulates her disaffection with language.<sup>61</sup> This friction is evinced in the juxtaposition of odd words such as

---

<sup>61</sup> Graham Dunston Martin in "A Measure of Distance: The Rhetoric of the Surrealist Adjective" (1986) looks at dissonance as a feature of automatic, Surrealist writing and states that, "the highest degree of dissonance is shown by words which, in combination, appear to have no element in common, or...which appear to be irrelevant to each other" (13). As Fiona Bradley also notes: "Automatic writing frees words from ordinary usage. As in word association games it is the sight and sound of one word as much as its meaning which influences the choice of another" (25).

“corkscrew urge” or in child-like language which defies categorisation altogether, as in “pobbing and boobling” and “gobbets and gibbets” or in obsessive parataxis as in “dousing the clean the clear the bright the sharp”. Such dissonance highlights the intractable and refractory nature of language, trying to live against the rigid mould of literary expectations. What is notable in “Fantasy upon a gentleman” is the lack of full stops, as if the writing cannot stop but has a force and vitality of its own. Fidelity to correct grammatical construction cannot be allowed to thwart, hinder or impede the flow of the imagination. The phrases “the shifting shuffling uneasy, queasy, egotists journalists pobbing and boobling” and “J.B. John Bug; James Bug Bug bug bug” demonstrate the seemingly involuntary perpetuation of words. Words have no boundaries and the language itself mimics the journalist’s act of violation by violating its own space. There is very little subordination of clauses in the story and order is loosely maintained by abundant semi-colons which facilitate juxtaposition but do not establish any sequence, connection or interdependent relationship between words or clauses. Woolf, literally, does not pause to create logical sentence constructions and this is most concentrated in the second paragraph which is entirely made up of non-coordinated word constructions:

Monarch of the drab world; of the shifting shuffling/uneasy, queasy, egotists journalists pobbing and/boobling, like a stew asimmer, asking for sympathy/dousing the clean the clear the bright the sharp in/the stew of his greasy complacency; his self satisfaction/his profound unhappy sense of his lack of attraction;/his desire to be scratched cleansed, rubbed clean of/the moss and the slime; demanding as a right,/other people’s time; sitting there on the chair;/ blocking out the light with his rubbed grease stained/tweeds.

Some sentences are almost wholly adjectival and this is the case in the following lines: “to be seen sitting there, sprawling, self conscious,/conscious only of nothing, blear eyed, blubber/lipped, thick thumbbed, squirming, to be seen”. Woolf asks questions, but does not give any answers: “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? when

the spring was there?“. This is neither sober, nor conscious prose, but a wandering and irrational enunciation of vehement emotion. It is as though the narrative may, at any moment, collapse and this might be said to mimic the mental strain that Woolf is under.

“Fantasy upon a gentleman” sets up a relationship between the short story form and the desultory and incidental way in which the surreal asserts itself. As Geoffrey Harpham points out, the grotesque is dependent on immediacy, for it “cannot serve as structural basis for a work of any great length; it remains primarily a pictorial form, with its greatest impact in moments of sudden insight” (465). The unpredictable structure of the short story is therefore particularly suited to presenting grotesque transformations. The language becomes more insistent as Woolf comes to the description of the journalist and tries to keep up with his body’s mutations:

Brown like a bug that slips out on a lodging house/wall; J.B. John Bug; James Bug  
Bug bug bug, as he/talked he slipped like a bug malodorous glistening/but only  
semi transparent; as if while he talked he/sipped blood, my blood; anybody’s blood  
to make a/bugs body blue black. There he sat on the chair,/with his hair unbrushed;  
his mouth dribbling; his eyes/streaming with the steam of some lodging house  
stew./A bug; Always on the wall. The bug of the house/that comes. But if you kill  
bugs they leave marks/on the wall. Just as the bugs body bleeds in pale/ink  
recording his impressions of a private house/in the newspapers for cash.

As Woolf tries to hide her own body, the journalist, firmly rooted in his chair, makes us acutely aware of his. His looming frame blocks out all the light so that Woolf is quite literally in his shadow, while his oily griminess threatens to smear her furnishings and her walls. At the same time, his simmering discontent - like a bubbling stew - threatens to boil over and erupt.<sup>62</sup> But, reducing the journalist to a set of body parts: “blear eyed,

---

<sup>62</sup> Wolfgang Kayser in *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (1981) writes that the body represents: “The distortion of all ingredients, the fusion of different realms, the coexistence of beautiful, bizarre, ghastly, and repulsive elements, the merger of the parts into a turbulent whole, the withdrawal into a phantasmagoric and nocturnal world” (79). For Lucie Armitte the typical grotesque body “is always in the process of breaking open: orifices gaping, fluids overrunning. As a form which is continually resistant to closure, the openings of the body also mimic the openings of the text: gaps to be explored, crevices to be fingered, folds and creases which invite a smoothing out” (69).



blubber/lipped, thick thumbed”; “with his hair unbrushed; his mouth dribbling; his eyes/streaming”, we get the sense that Woolf is enjoying pulling the journalist’s genteel, tailor-made formality apart.<sup>63</sup> What was a menacing, censorious figure is reduced to a pitiful, risible victim of a humiliating locker-room prank. We can imagine Woolf circling the journalist’s chair, prodding him, ruffling his hair, mercilessly pulling at his gentlemanly tweeds. The language joins in with picking the journalist apart, chopping him up into digestible pieces, then disgorging him into a glut of undigested prose.

The text becomes sated with words as the journalist is sated with the blood of his victims and the insistent repetition of the word “bug” in the last paragraph conveys something of the unrelenting and importunate nature of his actions. The pun on “bug” to mean a disease, to spy and to irritate, converge to suggest the metamorphic nature of language itself. Linguistically surprising, “Fantasy upon a gentleman” is a bold experiment with language which demonstrates that, although Woolf may not have sympathised fully with the idea of automatism, she was intrigued enough to try it. In doing so, she probes the intersection between pre-determined art and truly spontaneous imagination with a measure of curiosity, uncertainty and hesitancy that characterises each of her Surrealist works.

---

<sup>63</sup> The journalist’s “thick” thumb is reminiscent of Margaret Lyttleton, the censorious editor of the *Guardian* in regard to whom Woolf wrote: “she sticks her broad thumb into the middle of my delicate sentences and improves the moral tone” (*Letters I*: 214).

## Chapter 4

### “Across the border”: Ghostly Motifs in Woolf’s Early Short Fiction, “Kew Gardens” (1919) and “A Haunted House” (1921)

Virginia Woolf is not normally associated with the ghost story genre. In fact, it is common knowledge that she was sceptical of the supernatural. But, as a child, she often used to tell ghost stories and began her literary career writing them.<sup>64</sup> The lineage of her earliest ghost story, “A Dance in Queen’s Gate” (1903), for example, is overt and has its source in Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Masque of Red Death”.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, “The Mysterious Case of Miss V” (1906), finds an echo in Daniel Defoe’s *A True Relation of the Apparition of Mrs Veal* (1706). However, although Woolf wrote with an awareness of the traditional ghost story, demonstrating an assured use of its frame, she was unhindered by its conventions. What is important to my discussion is Woolf’s unique interpretation of the

---

<sup>64</sup> In a journal entry of January 1897 Woolf records ghost stories told about evening fires: “Everything cold, and uncomfortable... After tea we told ghost stories” (*Passionate Apprentice*: 20). Woolf remained intrigued by ghosts throughout her life and was often inspired to find out more about them. In 1910 she invited Violet Dickinson to the Friday Club to “hear Helen Verrall read a paper upon ghosts? They have found out something about the soul, which one ought to know” (*Letters I*: 437-38). In 1928 we find her talking with Raymond Mortimer about “ghosts; consciousness; novels: not people much” (*Diary 3*: 182).

<sup>65</sup> Woolf began writing ghostly fictions in the wake of Edgar Allan Poe and, although she never professed an indebtedness to this master of the ghost story, her earliest foray into the genre “A Dance in Queen’s Gate” exhibits Poe’s fascination with the state of life-in-death and is strongly reminiscent of his hallucinatory work, “The Masque of Red Death”. Both stories use the Gothic motif of the *dance macabre* as the controlling metaphor. From the privacy of her bedroom at Hyde Park Gate, Woolf describes the noise and activities of a ball taking place in a house nearby. The reverberation of the hour symbolizes the death-blow: “no waltzer will out waltz it” (*Passionate Apprentice*: 165). The word ‘it’ stands for death and, italicised, gives brutal significance to her meaning. ‘It’ recurs in “Kew Gardens” (1919) and “A Haunted House” (1921) as an evocation of something intangible. In “A Dance in Queen’s Gate” and “The Masque of Red Death” the strike of the clock hails the presence of death. In Woolf’s story, as in Poe’s, the dance takes on a horrific, iconic significance after the striking of the clock as the revellers dance to their graves, appearing as “pale phantoms because so long as the music sounds they *must* dance - no help for them” (166). The instrumentalists are the executants of a dirge or threnody and the dawn is the harbinger of some malign revelation, signifying the end of life itself: “I said it was dark & tragic before - now it is more terrible. For the sky is deathly pale - but alive: it is very chaste, & very pure. & the breeze is ice cold, as though it blew off fields the sun has never warmed. The dawn is folding the world in its pure morning kiss of salutation. No lamplight can burn in the radiance of that whiteness - no music can sound in the pause of that awful silence. The Dance is over” (167). “A Dance in Queen’s Gate” is a fascinating, though mildly hyperbolic, piece of writing, the iconic significance of which is haunting and disturbing to read. There is evidence to suggest that Woolf was reading Poe in 1903. In the *Catalogue of books from the library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf* (1975), “Books from the library of the late Virginia and Leonard Woolf from 24, Victoria Square, Westminster London, S.W.1”, *Section II: Items belonging to or Presented to Virginia Woolf* it is noted that they owned a copy of Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* and other tales and prose writings which is marked with the inscription: “Virginia Stephen Florence 1903”. This dating is ambiguous however since Woolf’s first trip to Florence was after her father’s death in February 1904.

ghost story, for her ghostly stories do not conform definitively to any model. Instead, she refines the traditional ghost story in three ways: (1) by blurring the interface between humans and ghosts; (2) by questioning the leading motivation of the ghost story writer: to induce fear; and (3) by highlighting the limited value of prose as a vehicle for telling ghost stories. This third point is closely integrated with her preferential use of the short story genre to foreground an explicit parallel between ghosts and the short story. The traditional definition of a ghost is given by the *Collins English Dictionary* (1986):

ghost *n.* 1. the disembodied spirit of a dead person, supposed to haunt the living as a pale or shadowy vision; phantom.

This definition insists upon a distinction between ghosts and human beings; the living and the dead; the corporeal and the incorporeal. The ghost is freed from the body and lacks any firm relation to reality. One of the main things that Woolf does in her stories is to question such a distinction between the supernatural and the human world.

A look at Woolf's criticism of ghost stories will initially help to define Woolf's approach to the ghost story tradition. Woolf was well acquainted with the ghost story genre through the work of occasional ghost story writers like P'ou Song-lin, Elizabeth Robins and Catherine Wells. She reviewed a number of ghost story collections during 1917-21 in particular. These were Elinor Mordaunt's *Before Midnight* (1917) in March 1917; *All Men Are Ghosts* (1913) by L.P. Jacks in January 1918 and, in December 1921, she reviewed Henry James's ghost stories.<sup>66</sup> Woolf was not only familiar with supernatural fiction, but also reviewed one of the first book length studies of the ghost story, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917) by Dorothy Scarborough, in an article entitled "Across the Border" (1918). In 1921, in "Gothic Romance", she reviewed Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror. A Study of the Gothic Romance* (1921). In these essays Woolf ardently criticises and distances herself from the flagrant supernatural horror of the Gothicists. In "Gothic

---

<sup>66</sup> On 24 January 1918 Woolf records going to the London Library "to get a handful of stories on the supernatural" (*Diary 1*: 112-13) and a day later she met Walt Whitman who "had dabbled in mysticism, & had made tables wal[t]z & heard phantom raps & believed it all" (*Diary 1*: 114).

Romance" (1921) she asserts that the "absurdity of the visions" which the Gothicists "conjure up" (*Collected Essays III*: 305) are over-stylised and fabricated. Similarly, Elinor Mordaunt's crude attempts at wizardry and "magic" (*Collected Essays II*: 88) in *Before Midnight* (1917) have the effect of excessively straining realism. Such exaggerated methods belong to "the conjuror" who appeals to the gullible to be "satisfied with a trick" (87).

The main reason for the displacement of the traditional ghost story was the First World War, as a consequence of which the gulf between the living and the dead no longer seemed an insurmountable barrier.<sup>67</sup> The war brought the unwelcome reality home to people that life held enough horrors of its own, and after 1914 the popularity of the traditional ghost story declined. As Julia Briggs notes:

Beside the everyday sights, sounds and smells of the Western Front, the charnel-house trenches full of rats, skeletons and mouldering corpses, the horrors of the ghost story now suddenly appeared childish, trivial and of no account, its terrors falling far short of reality (165).<sup>68</sup>

In an article entitled "The Mills of the Gods" (1920), on the short fiction of Elizabeth Robins, Woolf comments upon the story "The Derrington Ghost", describing Robins as "a pre-war writer" (*Collected Essays III*: 228) whose concerns are anachronistic. In pre-war

---

<sup>67</sup> For Woolf, the war had an implausibility about it which could only be fathomed in terms of the inexplicable and uncanny. The experience of war extended beyond the boundaries of rational understanding. She felt as if a "curtain" had been lowered between herself and the real world (*Diary 1*: 189) and was struck by the "unreality of the whole affair" (*Diary 1*: 215). In December 1917 she recounts sleeping in the kitchen while the moon was up due to fear of bombing and listening to the "prolonged ghostly whistlings" of the noises outside (*Diary 1*: 85). The prospect of peace made her "fairly positive that never again in all our lives need we dread the moonlight" (*Diary 1*: 206). War made death the *only* certainty. As Woolf writes, the expendability of human life and habitualness of death, was "a particular touch of horror" that the war brought (*Diary 1*: 153). It is not remarkable, therefore, that she became more interested in ghosts during this period than at any other time in her life.

<sup>68</sup> Woolf was struck by the grotesque, inhuman aspect of war. In her diary she records a conversation she had with her brother Adrian about its physical horrors: "One thing Adrian said amused me - how it positively frightened him to see peoples' faces on the Heath 'like gorillas, like orang-outangs - perfectly inhuman - frightful'... He attributes this to the war... Perhaps the horrible sense of community which the war produces, as if we all sat in a third class railway carriage together, draws one's attention to the animal human being more closely" (*Diary 1*: 153). One of the most grotesque and frightening consequences of war was human deformity, "stiff legs, single legs, sticks shod with rubber, & empty sleeves are common enough. Also at Waterloo I sometimes see dreadful looking spiders propelling themselves along the platform - men all body - legs trimmed off close to the body" (*Diary 2*: 93). The war gave Woolf a ghoulish image of humankind. For example, in "The War from the Street" (1919), she refers to mankind as "a vast, featureless, almost shapeless jelly of human stuff taking the reflection of the things that individuals do" (*Collected Essays III*: 3).

days, haunted houses were dealt with in literature for “life itself was a great deal more at the mercy of coincidence and mystery than it is now”, but after the war such concerns were out of date. Woolf adds: “If there had not been a war we should not have felt this with anything like the same force. The war withered a generation before its time” (228). As she states in “Across the Border” (1918), the post-war reader is unlikely to be fooled by flagrant shock tactics and is likely to view the dead, not with fear, but through admiring and idolatrous eyes:

the vision of the dead carousing would now be treated in a...romantic or perhaps patriotic spirit, but scarcely with any hope of making our flesh creep. To do that the author must change his direction; he must seek to terrify us not by the ghosts of the dead, but by those ghosts which are living within ourselves (*Collected Essays II*: 218-19).

Whereas the traditional ghost story is about arousing fear by a frightening apparition, the modern ghost story is *not* about fear and is distinguished by the absence of any supernatural presence. Woolf maintains that:

it would be a mistake to suppose that supernatural fiction always seeks to produce fear, or that the best ghost stories are those which most accurately and medically describe abnormal states of mind. On the contrary, a vast amount of fiction both in prose and in verse now assures us that the world to which we shut our eyes is far more friendly and inviting...than the world which we persist in thinking the real world (*Collected Essays II*: 220).

In “Gothic Romance” (1921) Woolf outlines the demise of the traditional ghost. Gone are the chain-rattling ghouls of archetypal horror to make way for the suppressed demons of our own psyche:

In our day we flatter ourselves the effect is produced by subtler means. It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder, and not at the decaying bodies of barons or the subterranean activities of ghouls (*Collected Essays III*: 306-07)

In "Henry James's Ghost Stories" (1921) she reiterates this view, arguing for the existence of a modern ghost. In contrast to the "violent old ghosts" of Gothic literature, the modern ghost is a rarefied phenomenon that has its origin "within us" (*Collected Essays III*: 324).

The rearrangement of the traditional emphasis of the ghost story to reflect a greater assimilation between the human and the supernatural was first attempted by L.P. Jacks in *All Men Are Ghosts* (1913). As he asserts matter-of-factly:

The conception which the ghost has of its own being is fundamentally different from yours. Because it lacks solidity you deem it less real than yourself. The ghost thinks the opposite...Far from admitting that they are less real than you, they regard themselves as possessed of reality vastly more intense than yours (1-2).

The core issue for Jacks is the far more convincing reality of ghosts over humans which goes against the whole tradition of ghostly literature. Jacks challenges what we mean by 'ghosts' in the first place and argues for the "inner mind of ghosts" (3).<sup>69</sup> This provocative assumption about the ghostliness of human nature and the humanity of ghosts forms the core of Woolf's own ghost stories, which explore the topsy-turvy nature of reality and the ghostly transformations that permeate everyday life. But Woolf goes further than Jacks to reformulate the traditional notion of the ghost as something other than a supernatural presence. She adopts a wider definition of the ghost story to encompass the "uncharted territories of the mind" (*Collected Essays II*: 87) or "the supernatural in the soul of man" (*Collected Essays II*: 219). This notion of the human mind as a ghostly hinterland is connected to Woolf's use of memory as a manifestation of ghostliness in her fiction. Most of the stories I discuss here draw an explicit parallel between memories and ghosts: both are arbitrary-seeming, ambient and amorphous. Woolf reformulates the traditional notion of the ghost as something other than a supernatural presence. The ghost is a personal construction rather than a universal force. Ghosts are the personal means whereby we explain the irrationality and inexplicability of our lives. Rather than insisting on a precise

---

<sup>69</sup> As Woolf wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell in 1932: "perhaps real people have ghosts" (*Letters V*: 6).

boundary line between the real and the supernatural worlds, Woolf explores their collusiveness. Her later ghost stories, in particular, "Kew Gardens" and "A Haunted House", point to a threshold beyond which experience is intangible. In them, Woolf chiefly revises the framework of the traditional ghost story and uses the ghost as a powerful metaphor for the inscrutable and elusive nature of human character and life itself.<sup>70</sup>

Woolf's distinction between ghosts and the ghostly might best be defined by consulting Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" (1919) in which Freud implies that the ghostly is not a parallel, but an integral universe:

an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolises (244).

Woolf uses similar terms that are suggestive of transgression and defiance to describe the ghostly. In "Across the Border" - an essay which not only constitutes something of a rewriting of the traditional ghost story, but unerringly approaches the Freudian concept of the uncanny - she asserts that it is the assurance that ghost stories provide "of the mind's capacity to penetrate those barriers which for twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four remain impassable" (*Collected Essays II*: 217) which constitutes their appeal. Ghost stories allow for "the licit gratification of certain instincts which we are wont to treat as outlaws" (218). She states that what we are afraid of is "the power that our minds possess for such excursions into the darkness" for, "when certain lights sink or certain barriers are lowered, the ghosts of the mind, untracked desires, indistinct intimations, are seen to be a large

---

<sup>70</sup> Jack Sullivan states that the traditional ghost story might be a paradigm for the emphases in modernist literature on the irrational and intangible aspects of experience: "the ghost story represents the most concrete...manifestation of definitive trends in the major fiction of Lawrence, Joyce, Conrad, Hardy and Woolf: the fascination with darkness and irrationality, the focus on unorthodox states of consciousness and perception, the projection of apocalypse and chaos, and above all the preoccupation with timeless 'moments' and 'visions'...the English ghost story offered a trim, ready-made apparatus for all of these themes" (2). Similarly, Valerie Shaw attributes the inconclusive ending of the modern short story to its origins in the supernatural tale "where an aura of mystery was essential, the short story cultivated, early on in its history, endings which were convincingly inevitable and yet capable of prolonging an atmosphere of strangeness" (218).

company” (*Collected Essays II*: 219). For Woolf the ghostly is inherent in real life. She uses familiar settings in her ghost stories to produce greater verisimilitude. Freud writes of:

superior spiritual beings such as daemonic spirits or ghosts of the dead. So long as they remain within their setting of poetic reality, such figures lose any uncanniness which they might possess. The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts as well all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story (250).

In “Kew Gardens” (1918), for example, Woolf makes the ghostly intrude into the everyday in order to erase the security of knowing that the ghostly emanations described are only make-believe. For example, Woolf considered that Walter Scott’s ghostly tale of the blind musician Willie Steenson in *Redgauntlet* (1824), gains “immensely from the homely truth of the setting” for “the country is as solid as can be” (*Collected Essays II*: 218).

So far, we have discussed how Woolf reconfigures the popular ghost story by exploring the cross-over potential of the human and the supernatural worlds. But, although Woolf broke all the usual rules concerning what we mean by ‘ghosts’, she stuck to received ideas about the structure of the ghost story, recognising the natural affinity that the ghostly has with the short story form. Woolf’s ghost stories, by virtue of their form, foreground an explicit parallel between ghosts and the short story and offer a highly convincing evocation of the uncanny. The intrinsic liminality of the short story, its indeterminate generic status and unstable frame, held a particular charm for Woolf, enabling her to explore the marginal - the boundary between being and non-being. This is possibly why her fascination with the ghostly found expression, almost uniquely, in her short fiction. The short story is an ephemeral literary form and is, by virtue of its brevity and pared-down immediacy, particularly suited to represent the instantaneous and fleeting emanations of the uncanny. As Penzoldt observes in *The Supernatural in Fiction* (1952), the uncanny, although it works well in short segments, cannot be sustained in a longer work of prose. This is because the reader’s “willing suspension of disbelief”, though it may last for thirty or fifty



pages, is liable to disappear before the end of a long novel” (81). Second, because the short story can show only a small part of a much greater whole, it decontextualises reality. One of the main elements of the traditional ghost story is therefore inexplicability for, by not providing a wider context in which to place its outlandish events, the ghost story affirms the supernatural by placing it in an autonomous frame.<sup>71</sup> The ghost story, as Jack Sullivan writes, provides a “ready-made” frame that embodies “darkness and irrationality” and “unorthodox states of consciousness and perception” (2). The short story framework is the one best able to convey the sense that reality is itself tenuous and a component of the ghost story that is closely linked to the short story is inconclusiveness. Because the short story does not aspire towards lengthy narrative, it does not necessarily evolve towards a conclusion.<sup>72</sup> As Briggs observes, ghost stories make “no attempt to explain away their terrors in plausible terms” (11). With some of her ghost stories as short as one and a half pages, for example, “The Mysterious Case of Miss V”, “Sunday up the River” and “A Haunted House”, and none longer than six, Woolf’s ghost stories are typically elliptical. They are also characterised by their absent plotline and do not aspire to connected narrative. They are not bent upon making a specific point either; rather, they are intent upon creating an effect. Woolf leaves her stories open-ended so that the supernatural is hinted at in an ambivalent way that leaves the issue open. This inconclusiveness is also mirrored in the abstract and general language that might be described as ‘ghostly’. In the

---

<sup>71</sup> For Sean O’Faolain, the short story is a ghostly and ambiguous genre because its very form is transient and intangible. Since it can only offer a small segment of what it purports to represent, intimating “a whole ‘idea’ which may never be clearly perceived” (188), it suggests a reality which may not exist and is, therefore, nothing more than an “an immense illusion” (197). In “The Nature of Knowledge in Short Fiction” (1984), Charles May argues that the short story, unlike the novel which exists to “reaffirm” (333) the external world, defamiliarises the everyday: “The reality the short story presents us with is the reality of those subuniverses of the supernatural and the fable which exist within the so-called ‘real’ world of sense perception and conceptual abstraction. It presents moments in which we become aware of anxiety, loneliness, dread, concern and thus find the safe, secure and systematic life we usually lead disrupted and momentarily destroyed” (337-38).

<sup>72</sup> John Bayley claims that the short story is enveloped in mystery because of its brevity. Where in the novel “there is no mystery, and there *is* an answer”, the short story “must supply...commentary without giving it; while suggesting that its mystery cannot be yielded up: is far more deeply interfused; not to be understood” (11, 26).

end, Woolf asks more questions about ghosts than she attempts to answer and each of her stories is left beguilingly open-ended.

For all her reliance upon the traditional ghost story structure, Woolf did put a new spin on this all-too-familiar formula. In modern times, the effect of ghostliness is achieved by subtler methods and “Kew Gardens” and “A Haunted House” in particular evolve out of Woolf’s sense of the subtle poetry of the supernatural. Ultimately, it is the poetic beauty of “Kew Gardens” and “A Haunted House” that makes Woolf’s interpretation of the traditional ghost story very special indeed. This link between poetry and the supernatural is clarified in “Across the Border” when Woolf points out that:

Some element of the supernatural is so constant in poetry that one has come to look upon it as part of the normal fabric of the art; but in poetry, being etherealised, it scarcely provokes any emotion so gross as fear. Nobody was ever afraid to walk down a dark passage after reading *The Ancient Mariner*, but rather inclined to venture out to meet whatever ghosts might deign to visit him. Probably some degree of reality is necessary in order to produce fear; and reality is best conveyed by prose (*Collected Essays II*: 218).

The usual motive of language to demystify things is rejected in poetry where language is ‘etherealised’ or defamiliarised. “Kew Gardens” and “A Haunted House”, in particular, explore the ambiguity of literal truth by using an indeterminate language to conjure up ghostly effects. They foreground the limited value of prose and evoke an uncanniness which subtly unsettles the reader. This abandonment of the literal is characteristic of Henry James’s ghost stories which, Woolf argues in “Henry James’s Ghost Stories” (1921), have a close relationship to poetry and rely on the appeal of half-buried symbolism:

the ghost story, besides its virtue as a ghost story, has the additional charm of being also symbolical... The use of the supernatural draws out a harmony which would otherwise be inaudible. We hear the first note close at hand, and then, a moment after, the second chimes far away (*Collected Essays III*: 324).

Woolf might be describing her own ghosts when she describes Henry James's ghosts which "have nothing in common with the violent old ghosts... They have their origin within us. They are present whenever the significant overflows our powers of expressing it; whenever the ordinary appears ringed by the strange" (324). Our fear stems from the uncategorisable, of "something, unnamed" (325) that eludes language. Poetry provides the most accessible route to the mind. The fear we get from a ghost story, Woolf claims in "Across the Border" (1918), is "a refined and spiritualised essence of fear" which is a "proof of sensibility" (*Collected Essays II*: 218). "Kew Gardens" and "A Haunted House" stray far from prose and use a poignantly poetic style to explore the tantalising and seductive world of the supernatural. An emotional charge that escapes 'rational' prose inspires these stories with a rhythmic sensibility that makes them, not mentally unsettling, but uncannily uplifting.

One of Woolf's earliest ghost stories was "The Mysterious Case of Miss V", which was unpublished during her lifetime. Revised during her stay at Blo'Norton Hall in June 1906, its source is, as no-one I believe has yet noted, Defoe's quasi-reportorial account of Mrs Veal's appearance to Mrs Bargrave after her death in *A True Relation* (1706).<sup>73</sup> *A True Relation* is the most famous ghost story of the eighteenth century and it is likely that Woolf knew of it from her father who, in *Hours in a Library* (1895), devotes a number of pages to that "admirable ghost Mrs. Veal" (5).<sup>74</sup> Defoe's story encourages sceptics to believe in Mrs Veal's apparition and is an explicit and discursive presentation of an overtly religious and didactic viewpoint, as its Preface claims: "This relation is Matter of Fact, and attended with

---

<sup>73</sup> The background to Defoe's account is a real event which took place on 8 September 1705. Barbara Bargrave, a Canterbury maltster's wife, alleged that she had been visited by Mrs Veal twenty-four hours after her friend's death in Dover. Defoe made thorough enquiries into this ghost and published *A True Relation* as a result of it. For an account of the historical context of Defoe's tale see Coleman O. Parsons "Ghost-Stories Before Defoe", *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 201 (July 1956), 293-98. For further discussion of *A True Relation* and its source see George A. Aitkin, "Defoe's Apparition of Mrs Veal", *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXXVII (1895), 95-100. See, also, Sir Charles Firth, "Defoe's *True Relation*", *Review of English Studies*, Vol. VII (1931), 1-6; Dorothy Gardiner, "What Canterbury Knew of Mrs Veal and Her Friends", *Review of English Studies*, Vol. VII (1931), 188-97; Rodney M. Baine, "The Apparition of Mrs Veal: A Neglected Account", *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. LXIX (1954), 523-41; "Defoe and Mrs Bargrave's Story", *Philological Quarterly*, Vol. XXXIII (1954), 388-95; "A September Day in Canterbury: The Veal-Bargrave Story", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 54 (1955), 639-50.

<sup>74</sup> Her father's book was an invaluable wellspring for Woolf's own work and in "A Sketch of the Past" she writes: "I always read *Hours in a Library* by way of filling out my ideas" (115).

such Circumstances as may induce any Reasonable Man to believe it".<sup>75</sup> In "Miss V" Woolf re-writes Defoe's account almost beyond recognition, writing it into her own time and frame of reference. Unlike Defoe's Mrs Veal, Woolf's Miss V is very much a living character.

Woolf uses Defoe's account as a model upon which to base her own reflections about the ghostliness of women and uses the traditional figure of the ghost as a vehicle to explore the radical anonymity and liminality of women. There is evidence to suggest that Virginia and Vanessa are the ghostly sisters in the tale in Woolf's comment to Violet Dickinson in 1906 when she refers to herself and Vanessa by their initials only: "So now about V: well, V. does equally for I and for Vanessa - but I am surfeited with Vanessa" (*Letters I*: 261). This affinity that Woolf feels with Defoe's ghost results in an ambiguous split between the narrator and her character, making Woolf a ghost in her own story. Miss V emblematises universal sisterhood as with Phyllis and Rosamond and Virginia and Vanessa themselves: "indeed one might mention a dozen such sisters in one breath" (30). She is an emblem of society women who glide in perfect synchronicity about London meeting the same people and saying the same things repeatedly. These women possess no singular characteristics. Essentially, they are phantasmagoria; they "glide" about, "melt" into things, dematerialise and dissolve. Woolf is fascinated by such women and yearns to ascertain their characters in the spirit of real social contact. Miss V eludes Woolf with her tendency to "haunt" (31) her surroundings and then "fade away" (31). The ghost of Miss V is perhaps an early evocation of that "will-o'-the-wisp" (*Collected Essays III*: 387) "Mrs Brown", whom Woolf introduces in "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1923). Her intention is to track down her elusive protagonist and endow her with some sort of fixed presence: "to see where she lived and if she lived, and talk to her as though she were a person like the rest of us!" (31), but for all her efforts to give Miss V a voice, she remains intriguingly ambivalent. This is due to the fact that Woolf does not give her a name.

---

<sup>75</sup> No page number.

The uncanny effect of the story is almost wholly attributable to this reluctance to name things and the story is shot through with ambiguity. The ambivalent semantics of “case” and “story” (30) strike at the heart of Woolf’s intention to problematise the relationship between the authentic and the illusory, the visionary and the matter-of-fact. At the start, Woolf promises that the story will be told with “no insincerity” (31), but then proceeds to confuse us with unclear references to her “nameless” protagonist, referring to her as “something” and in inanimate “neuter” terms as a “colourless epithet, used merely to round a period”. In “Miss V” the imperative to name things, instead of cutting through the fog, creates ambiguity. Miss V is a depersonalised abstraction. Woolf’s recurring use of the word “shadow” to describe her suggests her unfathomable, impenetrable and enigmatic nature. She is a metaphoric tool, employed by Woolf as an emblem rather than a human being, with body, soul and functional inner life.

Paradoxically, it is in death that Miss V is most alive, and it is symbolic that this occurs at the moment when she gains acknowledgment: “she had died yesterday morning, at the very hour when I called her name” (32). On one level, Woolf seems to be suggesting that language gives us control over life and death, since Miss V died “at the very hour” she was named. It is as if naming things causes their death. On another level, though, Woolf suggests that it is absurdly inadequate, and suggests that Miss V is no more than a name, a mere figment of the narrator speaking. This is conveyed at the end of the story when she finally eludes her creator, and it is “stated ambiguously...that she was both out and in” (32).

In “A Walk By Night” flesh and blood people similarly elude Woolf. The story expresses the personal trauma Woolf felt at her parents’ death and we almost feel the undying spirit of her parents breeze through it.<sup>76</sup> Woolf was haunted by the memory of the

---

<sup>76</sup> “A Walk By Night” first appears in S.P. Rosenbaum “Three Unknown Early Essays by Virginia Woolf”, *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, Vol. 26 (Spring 1986), 1-2. It reappears in *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf I* in the same year under the editorship of Andrew McNeillie. It occupies a generically indeterminate position in Woolf’s work since it is popularly classified as a personal essay. Rosenbaum refers to the story as a “strictly literary” essay (1) for example, but my analysis contravenes this rigid classification in the interest of extending the boundaries of Woolf’s short fiction.

summers she spent with her family at St Ives and, in August 1905, when she returned to St Ives after the death of her father, she records the event in her journal with a particular sense of ghostliness:

Ah, how strange it was, then, to watch the familiar shapes of land & sea unroll themselves once more, as though a magicians hand had raised the curtain that hung between us, & to see once more the silent but palpable forms, which for more than ten years we had seen only in dreams, or in the visions of waking hours. It was dusk when we came, so that there still seemed to be a film between us & the reality... We hung there like ghosts in the shade of the hedge, & at the sound of footsteps we turned away (*Passionate Apprentice*: 281-82).

The nearness of “us” and ghosts in this passage conveys the very narrow and transparent “film” between life and death; as though the body were suspended in an unresolved procrastination between these two states. Woolf also suggests that they are clinging onto something, a memory. “A Walk By Night”, written a month after the journal entry, is a quasi-fictional account of this return and is full of “phantoms and spirits” (82) which might be the emanation of Woolf’s dead parents.

But rather than evoking death graphically, “A Walk By Night” hides from it by seeking refuge in memory, using the indeterminate boundaries and transient frame of the short story to facilitate anachronicity. Woolf puts into question whether the present moment truly exists by evoking memory to suggest the ghostliness of the past. An idea that dominated her writing was that of memory and its way of reclaiming the past which she outlines in “A Sketch of the Past”:

The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present (98).

The past is an intimation of a world beyond the veil of appearance and creates an ambiguity in what we see as real and lasting.<sup>77</sup> "A Walk By Night" is an early exploration of this concept and in it Woolf brings the ghosts within her, in the form of memories, to life.

The story has a special relationship to the elusiveness of memory and in the opening paragraph uses the image of the lighthouse as a guiding light into the past:

the view, still solid in the twilight, was such as to draw one's silent and steadfast attention. There stood out into the sea a solemn procession of great cliffs fronting the night and the Atlantic waves with what seemed an almost conscious nobility of purpose, as though yet once more they must obey some immemorial command.

Now and again a far lighthouse flashed its golden pathway through the mist and suddenly recalled the harsh shapes of the rocks (80).

Mountains, sea, lighthouse are all emblems of the human condition. The substantial physicality and monolithic form of the cliffs alongside the towering eminence of the waves marks out the frontier of our vision. Parallel to this material world is the "vague" surrounding country which sets out a deliberate contrast between the material and the immaterial world. Yet the re-location to the immaterial world is such a smooth, seamless transition that it is hard to tell where the limits of one world end and another begins. The solid road dissolves under them, "the white surface beneath us swam like mist, and our feet struck somewhat tentatively as though they questioned the ground" (80). The overall effect is one of standing vertiginously on the interface between two worlds, as the road is "left behind" for the "trackless ocean of the night" (81). "A Walk By Night" is a deliberately vague, vacant and physically disorientating narrative which, quite literally, leaves us stranded, as stranded as Woolf no doubt felt when her mother and father, the two pillars of her young life, disappeared from view.

---

<sup>77</sup> This idea is crystallised in Mrs Dalloway's "transcendental theory" which states that "the unseen part of us... might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death" in memory (*Mrs Dalloway*: 167).

The story explores a sense of physical and bodily displacement. People lack material form: "A figure withdrawing itself some yards wavered for a moment and was then engulfed as though the dark waters of the night had closed over it, and the voice sounded like one reaching across great depths" (80). People are intangible and their presence is transitory. Woolf uses the ghostly as a metaphor for human desolation: "the identity of the figure walking beside one seemed to merge in the night; one strode on alone, conscious of the pressure of the dark all around, conscious, too, that by degrees resistance to it grew less and less". Identity merges into blackness as "the body carried forward over the ground was some thing separate from the mind which floated away as though in a swoon" (81). But, instead of provoking fear, the idea of willing submission to the "pressure of the dark" implies an openness to it.

In the traditional ghost story the boundaries of the ghostly are usually well-defined, but in "A Walk By Night", as the above excerpt illustrates, Woolf eradicates the dividing line between the rational and the uncanny so that they merge almost imperceptibly. Later, there is a slow overlap of the two worlds as the "harsh outline of reality" is gradually "dissolved into ambiguous space" (82). The story plays illusionistic tricks with space and there is a constant dialectic between appearance and disappearance, a shifting movement between presence and absence, wholeness and disintegration. In this whirling, unstable and changing atmosphere of dematerialisation and evanescence, life literally evaporates. Such disappearances provide obvious material for the short story which is particularly suited to represent ephemera. At the end of the traditional ghost story we are relieved to return to the realm of the familiar, but in "A Walk By Night" Woolf reverses this traditional need and makes the alienated and anonymous realm of ghosts alluring. The "great peace and beauty" of "the strange element" is stressed as she looks on with blank and unfocused eyes that seem to eclipse reality:



It seemed as though only the phantoms and spirits of substantial things were now abroad; clouds floated where the hills had been, and the houses were sparks of fire. The eye might bathe and refresh itself in the depths of the night, without grating upon any harsh outline of reality; the earth with its infinity of detail was dissolved into ambiguous space. The walls of the house were too narrow, the glare of the lamps too fierce for those thus refreshed and made sensitive; we were as birds lately winged that have been caught and caged (82).

“A Walk By Night” is an example of the type of “inviting” ghostly fiction Woolf mentions in “Across the Border” (*Collected Essays II*: 220), for in this realm of fluid forms, where amorphous clouds take the place of solid hills and bodies disintegrate into vapour, Woolf finds peace and release. She feels at home with “phantoms and spirits” and describes the world of mundane reality in terms suggestive of threat and claustrophobia. With the narrow walls of the house, the fierce glare of the lamps, it is as though the real world is more threatening than the ghostly one. This is an interesting transposition. With no fear of the ghostly, Woolf welcomes the intangible and indefinable and finally resents the return to reality. The story is an early affirmation of Woolf’s intuition that obscurity, darkness, treacherousness and unpredictability are the stuff of life itself. It expresses an anxiety that can only be understood in terms of the cryptic, vague and the uncanny. Instead of evoking St Ives as a beautiful place of special associations, Woolf taps into a strange world, made uncanny by the ghost images of memory.<sup>78</sup> The permeable, fluid and ghostly structure of the short story, which never reaches a final shape, facilitates this evocation of intangibilities.

---

<sup>78</sup> Memories of St Ives would always remain with Woolf. In December 1922 she wrote in her diary: “Half past ten just struck on one of these fine December nights, which come after sunny days, & I don’t know why, keep sending through me such shocks from my childhood. Am I growing old & sentimental? I keep thinking of sounds I heard as a child - at St Ives mostly” (*Diary 2*: 217). Contemplating *To the Lighthouse* (1927) she wrote: “This is going to be fairly short: to have father’s character done complete in it; & mothers; & St Ives; & childhood; & all the usual things I try to put in - life, death &c.” (*Diary 3*: 18).

Like “A Walk By Night”, Woolf’s unpublished sketch “Sunday up the River” (c. 1906) (see Appendix B), does not assert adherence or connection to the real world, but an uncanny disassociation and withdrawal. As with “The Manchester Zoo” (1906) examined in the previous chapter, Woolf uses the voice of the male first-person narrator to establish a superficial authenticity - presenting herself as “showman”: “I must expatiate upon the different features of our adventure - in order to do justice to the [event]” she states. The story takes us on a sepulchral journey into a silent and aimless world and might be based on a trip Woolf had taken. The sketch begins with a childish incantation of a magician’s spell: “Railways might be counted among the finest of magicians” she notes and a conjuring trick is performed as: “A wand is waved” and the whole of London “fades and evaporates”. Without experiencing any sense of abrupt dislocation we are gently moved into a dream-like realm; it is as though we had been there already and only needed a gentle nudge to realise it. The transition between the two worlds is an easy one, marked by the smooth movement of the wand which results in the city’s dissolution:

Invoke this spell on a hot day in July, and you will find yourself lifted from the roar of the pavements and the multitudinous stir of life into some grassy meadow, with running streams, and dragon flies poised on brilliant wings. You are on the banks of a great river and the only sounds you hear are the soft wash of its waters and the laughter of voices on the boats as they float down the stream. For the stream is flocked with boats like faint white flowers which drift over the surface and circle in the eddies of the stream.

We are seduced by the calmness of the scene, as if being hypnotised into believing that London has really vanished and we are sitting on a river bed with the narrator. This runaway, mercurial quality belongs to the dream. It is a most welcome drift from the mainstream.

We do not feel that the people in the boats are living, but dead - ghostly reminders of a more full-bodied past:

Whence are they floating - whence do they come? It is pleasant to detach them for the moment from the common facts of life; to believe that when they have turned the bend, past out of sight, they reach no harsher shore: but for ever glide beneath trees on smooth waters.

The “graceful procession” has connotations of a funeral march and “beneath trees” suggests burial grounds. The atmosphere is incantatory and mesmerising. Nothing happens conclusively but repeats and reverberates, from the “gentle undulation of the stream” and its flux and reflux, to the strange echo of laughter. The emphasis is on the intangible and on incomplete metamorphosis.

But what are we really seeing? As in “Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906), Woolf evokes the frame of the stage which John Frow describes as “a privileged space of illusion” (25) to imply that what we are witnessing is not really happening. The narrator takes the oblique position of voyeur:

Behind lies a great screen of trees, which looks like the draped curtain in a play: you feel that the whole of this graceful procession is passing over a stage, and that you, lying deep in the rushes on the bank, are acting the part of audience.

As we wait for the curtain to be pulled back, we are made aware of the fact that the uncanny is being portrayed as a construction. One might imagine this set up as that of an old movie theatre presenting a series of sepia-toned images on a massive screen. By being placed in this self-consciously artistic context, “Sunday up the River” creates a simulacrum of an elaborate drama being played out and evokes the comfort and grounding reassurance gained from the knowledge that the work is describing something which is possible only on stage or in pictures. It seems that the traditional “distinction between imagination and reality” (Freud: 244) which deconstructs the veracity of the uncanny is active in this work. This is echoed in the position of the narrator who - “lying deep in the rushes” - acts the part

of an audience and whose voyeurism incites reflection on the critical distance between the real world and the ghostly.

With nightfall a sinister, nightmarish element enters the scene. It is a bewildering transition from the scene set before which was so inviting. All happiness disappears as “the gay creatures, who bask in the warmth fold their wings, and disappear”. A supernatural mood now prevails:

then is the time for more sombre and melancholic spirits to unmoor their boats and slide across the lonely waters. Some belated reveller, caught by sight, sped past us, the lights hung like low stars on the horizon and their voices return as phantoms.

There is something depressive about the words “sombre”, “melancholic” and “lonely” as in the description of the trees which stand “ponderous and sombre, as though all night through they slumbered with bowed head”. The appearance of the “belated reveller” suggests somebody who has lost out on happiness and enjoyment. Perhaps Woolf was inspired to write “Sunday up the River” by her experience of insanity? Does she count herself among the “mad and sad”? Parenthetic references to the “mad” and the “sane” in the story may allude to the years 1904-05 in which Woolf experienced her first severe mental breakdown. After it she had to live with the fact that her insanity might return at any time and, certainly, the conclusion of “Sunday up the River” hints at the arbitrary nature of madness in its unanswered question: “What if the sun should never rise again?” This leaves us stranded on the shore, questioning why some of us are left behind, while others leave so suddenly. In the diplomatic transcript it can be seen that Woolf deletes the sentence: “Supposing that the sun were never to rise upon this scene?” at line 25 and places a variant of it “What if the sun should never rise again?” at the end of the story at line 27. Perhaps she does this to give a more conclusive sense of finality and the inevitability of death. At the end Woolf is left stranded on the shore watching the dead depart to go haunting in their boats, whilst we are left with a poignant sense that she has missed the boat.

The barrier between the ghostly and the real world which weakens the potency of the uncanny in "Sunday up the River" is removed in "Kew Gardens" (1918) which seems to acknowledge, as a part of the here and now, everything that "Sunday up the River" strives to frame-off from everyday life. What emerges in this much later story (which, perhaps non-coincidentally, was published in the same year as Woolf's essay on the uncanny "Across the Border") is the instability of that superficial screen erected in "Sunday up the River" between reality and the other-worldly. What in "Sunday up the River" is a pure, highly concentrated visual experience finds fragmented and diffuse articulation through an indeterminate language in "Kew Gardens" in which the uncanny is characterised by a refusal to be describable. The absence of this barrier also suggests a conflation between the uncanny and the corporeal. Where the narrator is safely posited "on the banks" away from the ghosts in "Sunday up the River", and where our relationship with the ghostly realm does not extend much beyond voyeurism, Woolf questions this distance in "Kew Gardens" by revealing our ordinary, corporeal relationship with the uncanny. Here the uncanny is a physical presence, of equal significance to the real world.

This physical intimacy with the uncanny is primarily attributable to the central role of memory in "Kew Gardens". The story deals with a vanished world, peopled by ghosts who represent lost loves and hopes and it can be said that Woolf uses the ghostly distortions of memory as a metaphor for the uncanny. Added to this, and of equal significance, Woolf might be said to go even further than Freud in exploring the uncanny as both medium and subject by demonstrating a concern with the possibility of a language of the uncanny. In this story ghostliness becomes a feature of the language itself.

Critics stress the story's ghostliness. Bernard Blackstone claims that in "Kew Gardens", Woolf is "feeling her way across the border of normal consciousness" (52).<sup>79</sup> Harold Child points to the story's ghostly absence of substance, for it stands as "new proof of the complete unimportance in art of...the subject-matter" (Majumdar: 67). George Johnson surmises that "Kew Gardens" not only demonstrates "the ghostliness and insubstantiality of human beings but the ghostliness of reality altogether" (245) and points out Nicholas Royle's claim in *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (1990) that it "is certainly a ghost story" (245).<sup>80</sup> Visually compelling, atmospheric and narratively inventive, the structure of "Kew Gardens" is modelled upon the traditional ghost story which, according to Sullivan, tends to:

sabotage the relationship between cause and effect. The parts are self-consistent, but they relate to an inexplicable, irrational whole. Instead of lighting up, the stories darken into shadowy ambiguity; instead of depending on logic, they depend on suggestion and connotation (134).

Woolf conceived of the story primarily in terms of suggestion, not exposition, stating that it was supremely "a case of atmosphere" (*Letters II*: 257) which she considered "vague" (*Diary I*: 271). The thinking behind the story is to create a mood and not a plot. "Kew Gardens" is not a single story, but is several, many of which come in the form of digressions, fragments or interruptions to the main narrative. It is not a narrative in the traditional sense, but rather a collection of memories and brief instances of time. The story's vagueness is compounded by the pointless journey of the snail which is charted in the opening and concluding paragraphs and forms an envelope to the story, although it is a

---

<sup>79</sup> For a lengthy discussion of the two types of reality in "Kew Gardens" see Gertrude Jackson "Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House*: Reality and 'moment of being' in her *Kew Gardens*", *Festschrift Prof. Dr. Herbert Koziol Zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag*. Eds. Gero Bauer, Franz K. Stanzel and Franz Zaic. (Vienna: Braumuller, 1973), 116-23.

<sup>80</sup> "Kew Gardens" has deluded critics into thinking that the story is about life. According to Edward Bishop, in the story Woolf wants to capture "the essence of the natural and the human world of the garden" in order to present "human beings integrated not just with each other but with the phenomenal world" (32, 126). John Oakland speaks of its "harmonious, organic optimism" and "vitalism" (264). Furthermore, its tone is "joyful rather than despairing" and "does not show the meaninglessness and horror of life, but a progress towards meaning, in much the same way as the snail, far from being victimised, demonstrates purpose and achievement" (268). But, far from asserting a positive connection between the natural and human worlds, "Kew Gardens" seems to foreground a negative one of decay and disintegration.

very tenuous one, surrounding an absent climax. The seeming arbitrariness of the narrative scheme implies a ghostly dream world in which things do not make sense.

But the garden is a very unlikely setting for a ghost story and, unlike the chilly atmosphere of the traditional ghost story, “Kew Gardens” is warmly sensual. For Woolf, the ghost story setting should be as realistic as possible since “some degree of reality is necessary in order to produce fear” (*Collected Essays II*: 218). In “Kew Gardens” she uses the very familiar setting of a garden to suggest the haunting as a phenomenon rooted in everyday experience. The garden is a hauntingly blissful dream-world in which evocations of the past creep up on the characters, furtively and stealthily like ghosts. The couple in “Kew Gardens” live more in the past than in the present. The man is thinking of the woman he might have married: “‘Fifteen years ago I came here with Lily,’ he thought. ‘We sat somewhere over there by a lake, and I begged her to marry me all through the hot afternoon.’” (84). The woman remembers a kiss: “the mother of all my kisses all my life” (85). Memories are relics of a ghostly, other self, making us cryptic, inscrutable and inviolable to others. Eleanor’s husband does not suspect that his wife also hankers after the past. To his question: “‘Do you mind my thinking of the past?’”, she replies: “‘Doesn’t one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees?. Aren’t they one’s past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts lying under the trees’” (85). There is almost a suggestion that the men and women lying under the trees are dead and buried. The pun on “remains” suggests decaying corpses. Indeed, living people have become corpses. The woman’s repeated references to what is “down there” is an allusion to what is buried beneath the flowers. The flower-bed in “Kew Gardens” seems to assert the omnipresence of death, although the ghostly decay and disintegration is overlaid with flowers. In that very sentence, “those ghosts lying under the trees”, Woolf crosses the line between the living and the dead. Clearly, here, and in Woolf’s mind, is a notion of ghosts as a part of nature.

In “Kew Gardens” ghostliness is part of the sheer ambiguity of language. This evasive and indeterminate use of language is intrinsic to Woolf’s sense of the uncanny. In “Kew Gardens”, and as we shall see in “A Haunted House” also, she foregrounds the uncanniness of language by stressing the amorphous and inconsequential boundaries of words. Woolf plays with the parameters of words, using their ephemeral frontiers to suggest the passage from one thing to another. In these stories ghostliness is not there to frighten the reader, but is part of the sheer ambiguity of life in general and the fluidity and variable effects of consciousness and memory in particular. “Kew Gardens” illustrates the idea that words can be an impediment to fixing meaning. The words of the shell-shock victim mean nothing:

He talked almost incessantly; he smiled to himself and again began to talk, as if the smile had been an answer. He was talking about spirits - the spirits of the dead, who, according to him, were even now telling him all sorts of odd things about their experiences in Heaven (86).

Communication between the living seems to have broken down: the boundaries between words are inconsequential: “- isolate? - insulate? - well, we’ll skip the details, no good going into details that wouldn’t be understood” (86). Like the shell-shock victim, the working-class women who talk together do not make much sense and, “energetically piecing together their very complicated conversation”, produce nothing more than a “pattern of falling words” (87). The struggle that the fourth couple have in understanding each other typifies the problematic and perplexing nature of language - the woman is unable to express her feelings in words:

‘What’s sixpence anyway? Isn’t it worth sixpence?’

‘What’s ‘it’ - what do you mean by ‘it’?’

‘O anything - I mean - you know what I mean’ (88).

The man urges her to be more accurate, yet she is evasive and opts for the metaphorical and indefinite substitute “it”. The meaning of “it” is uncertain and does not hinge on anything in particular. Meaning is abstract and not transferable from person to person, for words



have “short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far” (88). The story is filled with “wordless voices” (89) that signify nothing and are attached to nothing living. There is no explanation or certainty. Words haunt the page like ghosts and cannot be affixed to one thing in particular.

The story’s very structure is ghostly and returns upon itself at the end. Reluctant to forget and reluctant to progress, it is reticent about resolution and seems instead to haunt itself. Its envelope structure hems us in. It is pregnant with an atmosphere of frustration, disappointment and sadness. The fluvial precipitation of light, “falling into a raindrop” (84) stands for time itself hanging in the balance. The whole story seems held in deliquescent solution, enclosed by a permeable envelope like the raindrop or a sadly resigned teardrop. The short story’s ductile form enables Woolf to sustain this variable, unpredictable and phantasmagoric movement without fracture, however. At its close, Woolf describes this dissolution in terms of “one couple after another” being “enveloped in layer after layer of green-blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere” (89). The boundaries of the self are fluid and unstable and merge with the air. The subtle transposition of the real and the uncanny is achieved through a cinematic technique of slow dissolve: the family become ghosts, “half-transparent” and tremble in “large irregular patches” (85). The story suggests that even as we stand as flesh and blood we are imponderable. The fade-out at the end of “Kew Gardens” is similar to the evanescent conclusion of “A Walk By Night”. Such an ending prompts the question: what constitutes reality when it literally dissolves around us? Can we ever be assured of the solidity of anything?

Woolf explores the extreme of that experience in "A Haunted House" (1921) where the unseen inhabitants of the house leave no trace of their presence. Like "Kew Gardens", the story is pervaded by a sense of hushed revelation. As in "Kew Gardens", a couple return to sift through their lost memories.<sup>81</sup> The title prepares one to read a traditional ghost story, for it promises to be a story in the old fashion of an apparition in a haunted house.<sup>82</sup> We expect to experience fear, for we assume that Woolf will be dealing with the return of the dead. Indeed, the first sentence of the story hints at an invisible, uncanny presence: "Whatever hour you woke there was a door shutting. From room to room they went, hand in hand, lifting here, opening there, making sure - a ghostly couple" (116). The ghosts in "A Haunted House" are moved by traditional motives. They share the motive of the old-fashioned ghost whose most common reason for reappearance was to show the hiding-place of treasure. The ghosts re-visit the house in search of past happiness for which the "buried treasure" (116) might be the metaphor. As a link between the houses' past and its present they also have the traditional function of maintaining continuity. As Briggs asserts:

Ghosts were a traditional medium of communication between the past and the present, the dead and the living, and thus the ghost story might be used to assert continuity at a time when it seemed threatened on many fronts (111).

---

<sup>81</sup> The house in Woolf's story is based on Asham House in Sussex which she bought several months before her marriage to Leonard Woolf. On 13 September 1919, after the move to Monks House, Virginia recorded in her diary that she had stopped "to look at Asham, which had its windows open as if lived in" whilst experiencing a "queer spiritual" state (*Diary I*: 298). Two weeks later, Virginia and Leonard sneaked into Asham through the drawing-room window. The house looked "dim & mysterious... shut in & dismal" (*Diary I*: 302). "A Haunted House" is perhaps the fictional account of these two visits. In *Beginning Again* (1964), Leonard Woolf makes a direct link between "A Haunted House" and Asham: "Asham was a strange house. The country people on the farm were convinced that it was haunted, that there was treasure buried in the cellar, and no one would stay the night in it. It is true that at night one often heard extraordinary noises both in the cellars and in the attic. It sounded as if two people were walking from room to room, opening and shutting doors, sighing, whispering. It was, no doubt, the wind sighing in the chimneys, and, when there was no wind, probably rats in the cellar or the attic. I have never known a house which had such a strong character, personality of its own - romantic, gentle, melancholy, lovely. It was Asham and its ghostly footsteps and whisperings which gave Virginia the idea for "A Haunted House", and I can immediately see, hear, and smell the house when I read the opening words" (57).

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of "A Haunted House" in relation to the Japanese Noh plays popularised by Ezra Pound about the time that Woolf was producing her *Monday or Tuesday* stories (1917-21) see Elizabeth Steele "'A Haunted House': Virginia Woolf's Noh Story", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring 1989), 151-61.

The ghosts in "A Haunted House" are comforting messengers of endurance, constancy and dependability - values missing in a post-war world. As De Araujo writes, "A Haunted House" presents a directly active interface between past and present, treating "life and death as one fluid continuum of time and space, with memory and imagination as the links" (164). The house is a treasure-chest of memories which are indelible and permeate everything. The dead are, according to De Araujo, "holders of the truth" (162) which persistently escapes the living. The story, like all of Woolf's ghostly stories, is about keeping things alive, as Reynier maintains "the continuity between past and present, are, in a way, synonymous with the suppression of death" (71).

We are not prepared however for the benign, human-like ghosts we encounter. Playfully, and almost insouciantly, overturning the reader's subliminal fears, Woolf exposes the tender side of ghosts. These are not actively vicious or evil ghosts in the traditional manner. They are gentle and take care not to wake the house's occupants: "Quietly,' they said, 'or we shall wake them.'" (116). The inhabitants of the house are neither irritated by the ghosts' presence, nor afraid or tormented: "it wasn't that you woke us. Oh, no" (116) they reply. On the contrary, there is a feeling of intimacy and comradeship between the living and the dead. The living couple actively seek out the ghosts, rather than the other way around. And, whereas the traditional ghost story evokes the separate realms of ghosts and humans, in "A Haunted House" Woolf suggests the closeness of the two worlds - they are so close, in fact, that they peacefully inhabit the same house.

"A Haunted House" also uses various traditional ghostly effects. For example, the wind "roars" (117) and "drives" (117) menacingly; the trees seem to have supernatural power and "stoop and bend this way and that" (117) and the moonbeams "splash and spill wildly in the rain" (117). But Woolf deliberately contrasts the gentle behaviour of the ghosts, which is constantly referred to, to this threatening scenery: "whispering not to wake us, the ghostly couple seek their joy" (117).

Like "Kew Gardens", "A Haunted House" is a lyrical description of the uncanny. In "A Haunted House", Woolf is not interested in arousing what she terms: "Crude fear, with its anticipation of physical pain or of terrifying uproar" (*Collected Essays II*: 217). She is not interested in the uproarious, but in the poetic. "A Haunted House" is in danger of being mournful and melancholic, but is relieved from it by the poetic beauty of the language. Richly-textured with obsessive repetition that weaves an hypnotic pattern, the story is subtle, enthralling and musical. The ever-increasing pulse of the house, like a repetitive beat, punctuates the narrative: "the pulse of the house beat softly...beat gladly...beats proudly...beats wildly". The racing pulse hints at life wildly beating (as well as the quickening pulse of romantic love). This sense of life pounding is the dynamic underlying impulse of the story and runs concurrent to the idea of death which is evoked in the pulse stopping. But, the pulse stopping does not necessarily imply death, but excitement as the treasure is approached. An ambiguity between the literal meaning of the pulse stopping - death - and the metaphorical meaning - excitement - is therefore created. The climax of "A Haunted House" does not come, as in the traditional structure of the ghost story, with the revelation of a ghost. The heart beats faster and faster, not with fear at the imminent revelation of an apparition, but with the revelation of the buried treasure: "Waking, I cry 'Oh is this your - buried treasure?'" "Buried" hints at death. "Treasure" hints at something precious. Perhaps the buried treasure is beauty or the "hidden joy" of the sleeping couple? A similar ambiguity is created in the phrase: "The light in the heart" to perhaps suggest lightheartedness. Light is a constant presence in the story that promises illumination. The light might be a "wandering beam of sun" (116); the beam of the lamp which "falls straight" and steadily from the window; or the candle that burns "stiff and still", almost corpse-like (117). If the light is intellectual discovery, then it is frustrated by ignorance. Woolf's use of language is unfinished, ambiguous and ghostly. An idea that Woolf comes back to again and again is the light that shows things but is not in itself anything. The focus is on suspended illumination, which might reveal meaning, but never does.

Like the anonymous Miss V or the indeterminate atmosphere of “Kew Gardens”, “A Haunted House” also tries to define an elusive “it”:

‘Here we left it,’ she said. And he added, ‘Oh but here too!’ ‘It’s upstairs,’ she murmured, ‘And in the garden,’ he whispered... ‘They’re looking for it... Now they’ve found it,’ one would be certain... ‘Perhaps it’s upstairs then?’... But they had found it in the drawing-room (116).

What this “it” is, is never made clear.<sup>83</sup> At times the syntax is incomplete and elliptical. For example, each time we get closer to the treasure the syntax eludes us: “‘The treasure buried; the room...’ the pulse stopped short. Oh, was that the buried treasure?” (116). The story’s questioning style is controlled and spontaneous: “‘What did I come in here for? What did I want to find?’ My hands were empty. ‘Perhaps it’s upstairs then?’”. The word inversions in the following sentences: “‘The treasure buried... the buried treasure?’” (116) and the intense repetition in “‘Safe, safe, safe...’” (116-17) and “‘He left it, left her, went North, went East’” (116) are an attempt at order and coherence. But all in all the emphasis throughout is on a ghostly, unfixed meaning which is conveyed in parenthetical, disjunctive and incomplete sentences:

‘Here we slept,’ she says. And he adds, ‘Kisses without number.’ ‘Waking in the morning -’ ‘Silver between the trees -’ ‘Upstairs -’ ‘In the garden -’ ‘When summer came -’ ‘In winter snowtime -’... ‘Long years -’ he sighs. ‘Again you found me.’ ‘Here,’ she murmurs, ‘sleeping; in the garden reading; laughing, rolling apples in the loft. Here we left our treasure -’ (117).

In the above excerpt the treasure never materialises, but stays intangible in amorphous sentences which have no final shape or form, like ghosts. In the above quote we see that language depends on the arbitrary associations of memory. Language is ghostly because it refers to something that is gone; in a sense, it is all that remains of the past and lives on like a ghost. The word is a ghost event. “It” seems to be something but we never find out what

---

<sup>83</sup> As Christine Reynier points out: “The object, ‘it’, is a recurring, mysterious and obsessive element... ‘It’ is the unknown element of the story; it helps to create suspense as well as the interest of the short story” (70).

it is. Language does not describe anything; it is vague, elusive and repetitive. There are hardly any sentence connectives, no transition words or linkages. This is an abrupt paratactic style which creates the illusion of spontaneity. Sentences are embryonic and there is an absence of causality. The emphasis in "A Haunted House" is not on a visible apparition, for "we see no lady spread her ghostly cloak", but on something unseen and indefinable in language. Unfinished sentences, unanswered questions, pencils poised on the margin, books fallen into the grass unread, the emphasis is on the ghostliness of meaning. In the end, in both "Kew Gardens" and "A Haunted House", "it" is the ghost of the story. The text is pursued by the spectre of non-meaning and haunts itself. What is achieved in "A Haunted House" is a poetic interweaving of the voices of the living and the ghostly couple. Meaning never materialises, but stays intangible in amorphous sentences which have no final physical shape or form. Woolf plays with the parameters of words, using their ephemeral frontiers to turn the reduced dimensions of the short story into an infinitely expansive structure. Language depends on the arbitrary associations of memory; it is ghostly because it refers to something that is gone.

In her ghost stories, Woolf uses language to cross the borderline between reality and dream, the visible and the unseen. The mobile and fluctuant structure of the short story released her to explore this threshold. Embarking on strange excursions into unrecognisable worlds, making real places seem unreal, pursuing illusions, but never seeing through them, Woolf's ghost stories are wraiths - never fully embodied. Inconclusive, vague and enigmatic, they reformulate the definition of ghostliness to encompass language itself, and this is conveyed by the shifting, protean nature of words which constantly re-shape their meaning. These ghost stories assert that, where we seek answers, there is only a ghostly "it" - anonymous and indefinite, even if treasured.

## Chapter 5

“Reflecting what passes”: Reflections and Mirrors in “The New Dress” (1925),  
“The Lady in the Looking-Glass” (1929) and “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929)

Anonymity and obscurity were vital to Woolf and she often expressed a desire to escape “the looking-glass of fiction” (*Collected Essays IV*: 560). Woolf equated the looking-glass with the public eye; forcing her to have a public face. The looking-glass stood for the control and limitation of public censorship. At the same time, however, she was highly sensitive to public opinion and needed recognition, as she expresses in a diary entry of August 1929 when she asks herself: “How often don’t I vaguely feel blessing my sentence, the face of my own vanity” (*Diary 3*: 239). In May 1935 she states of a German review of her work: “some good German woman sends me a pamphlet on me, into which I couldnt resist looking, though nothing so upsets & demoralises as this looking at ones face in the glass” (*Diary 4*: 316-17). The thought of who her readers were troubled her: “Do I ever write... for my own eye? If not, for whose eye?” (*Diary 5*: 107) she wrote in 1937. On 23 April 1925, *The Common Reader* was due to come out, but Woolf claimed that she was not nervous for she immersed herself in writing the “Mrs Dalloway” stories: “I want as usual to dig deep down into my new stories, without having a looking glass flashed in my eyes” (*Diary 3*: 9). In her short fiction she escapes the censors and is out of the spotlight.

In each of the stories examined in this chapter: “The New Dress” (1925), “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” (1929) and “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929) the central character is driven by a need to escape the censorial looking-glass. In them, the official eye of the censor has its counterpart in the mirror’s intrusive and penetrative glare. As C. Ruth Miller notes, in her fiction Woolf inverted the notion that “the eyes are mirrors in which the emotions are reflected - and portrayed the mirror itself as an

eye” (94), using it as a powerful instrument of disclosure and medium of revelation.<sup>84</sup> The reciprocal interplay of the masculine ‘I’ and the ‘eye’ of the mirror occurs particularly in “The New Dress” in which the mirror functions as a gendered masculine ‘eye’ and is a device of self-objectification. Exhibited and displayed for all to see in Mrs Dalloway’s drawing-room, Mabel Waring is put under public scrutiny. In “The Lady in the Looking-Glass”, the ubiquitous narratorial ‘I’/‘eye’ is a foil to the penetrative scrutiny of the mirror. Peering unrelentingly into the mind of Isabella, there is something voyeuristic about the cold, lens-like manner in which the narrator of this story observes her. But here Woolf is interested in something more than the gender construction of the mirror. Rather, the mirror’s delimitating frame figures as an image of the short story itself. In “The Fascination of the Pool”, this correlation between the short story form and the boundary of the mirror is taken further and the short story itself seems to be a pool that catches things in its small frame. But the story also explores the consequences of eluding the mirror’s frame, exploring the non-physical life of the mind that lies outside of it and confronting the dangers of avoiding the looking-glass altogether. The idea behind the story seems to be that, if you do not hold things in the frame of the mirror, if you do not have a public face and instead live excessively in the imagination, you end up committing suicide.

In “Modern Fiction” (1925) Woolf appeals for a fictional form capable of rendering what ‘life’ is like. This ‘life’ is determined by the impressions received by “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day”, and is described as “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” (*Collected Essays IV*: 160). In her reflection stories Woolf articulates and gives form to the question of whether literature can provide an accurate reflection of life itself in the image of the envelope. The image of the “semi-transparent” envelope is not normally emphasised with reference to Woolf’s short fiction, but in these stories Woolf appears to use it as a

---

<sup>84</sup> For a discussion of the role of the reflection as a metaphor for the mind in Woolf’s writing, see Hermione Lee, “A Burning Glass: Reflection in Virginia Woolf”. *Virginia Woolf: A Centenary Perspective*. Ed. Eric Warner. (London: Macmillan, 1984). 12-27.



metaphor for the short story itself and as an alternative framing device for fiction. This image of a semi-transparent, nebulous envelope that is both liberating and protective is set in opposition to the solid integument of the male looking-glass. Each of the stories share a preoccupation with centralising the marginal, giving individual space to the peripheral, transitional space of the imagination which the envelope connotes. Moreover, the word “envelope” suggests a zone of comfortable certainty. With its womb-like associations it is an emblem of life itself.

A theme running parallel to the idea of the looking-glass reflection in these stories is that of concealment and privacy. The desire to hide from the mirror in “The New Dress” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” is figured in the image of the envelope which emerges as a metaphor for and a safeguarder of human identity. A compulsory aspect of the mirror is thus its segregation of mind from body, as Woolf dwells, in “The New Dress” particularly, on how the mirror strips away the envelope, severing our perceptions of ourselves, our feelings, emotions, fantasies and memories, from our reflections. What we see is not what we had imagined.

These feelings of nakedness and violation associated with the mirror find their source in Woolf’s autobiographical experiences. Woolf had an ambiguous relationship with mirrors. She very rarely looked in the mirror and in a letter to Ethel Smyth stated: “I hate my own face in the looking glass” (*Letters V*: 38). She always attached feelings of shame to looking in the mirror and emphasised the solitary, private and almost unauthorised nature of the act: “When I was six or seven perhaps, I got into the habit of looking at my face in the glass. But I only did this if I was sure that I was alone. I was ashamed of it. A strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it” (67-68). The source of this guilt is explained in “A Sketch of the Past” in which she isolates the reason behind her looking-glass “shame”, disclosing the sexual abuse perpetrated by her half-brother Gerald Duckworth:

There was a slab outside the dining room door for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand explored my private parts too (*Moments of Being*: 69).

Louise De Salvo argues that Woolf was able to witness George Duckworth's abuse in the mirror on the opposite wall.<sup>85</sup> Woolf's dream of the animal face in the looking-glass, pointing out the dehumanisation of the experience, would suggest that the "other face" she saw in the glass might be Gerald's: "I dreamt that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face - the face of an animal - suddenly showed over my shoulder...I have always remembered the other face in the glass...and that it frightened me" (69). Animals feature persistently in "The New Dress" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" in which Woolf uses the juxtaposition of what lies inside the mirror's frame and outside of it to confront the duality that exists between the "veneer" of civilised society and its "tragic" (*Complete Shorter Fiction*: 167), bestial interior.

The bodily violation Woolf suffered goes some way, perhaps, to explaining the oblique and furtive perspective of the narrators in "The New Dress" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass". The women in them, similarly, have very little power to stop the violation implicit in their objectification and are physical objects to be looked at, examined and 'explored'. The fact that Gerald Duckworth's hands went "under" Virginia's clothes is also significant in these stories. In "The New Dress" Mabel Waring's cloak acts as a discreet and protective covering. Also, at the end of "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", when Isabella confronts the mirror whose resolve to "penetrate" her is described as "pitiless", she is "naked". This coupling of the looking-glass with nakedness was made unequivocal by Woolf in 1937 when she wrote in her diary: "the exposed moments are terrifying. I looked

---

<sup>85</sup> For details of De Salvo's theory see her book, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (London: The Women's Press: 1989; repr. 1991), 104-05.

at my eyes in the glass once & saw them positively terrified" (*Diary 5*: 63). This anxiety about being "exposed" and displayed for viewing is linked to her "clothes complex" (*Diary 3*: 81) and her conviction that she lacked femininity, so that: "Everything to do with dress - to be fitted, to come into a new room wearing a new dress - still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable" (*Moments of Being*: 68).<sup>86</sup>

Throughout her life Woolf felt that she was made an outsider because of her appearance. In "A Sketch of the Past", she recalls standing "unclaimed" at parties (*Moments of Being*: 155) which she describes as "tests, for which one had to prepare so carefully" and as "ordeals" during which she "would fall into the depths...of eccentricity" (156). In *Moments of Being* she recalls the long Chippendale looking-glass given to her by George Duckworth "in the hope that I should look into it and...take general care for my appearance" (122). She outlines the incident of the green party dress she made herself out of material used for chair coverings and George's harsh disapproval of it:

He looked me up and down for a moment as if I were a horse brought into the show ring. Then the sullen look came into his eyes... It was the look of moral, of social, disapproval, as if he scented some kind of insurrection, of defiance of his accepted standards... He said at last: "Go and tear it up" (151).

Quentin Bell describes George Duckworth as Virginia and Vanessa's "censor" who judged the sisters with "ruthless severity" (*I*: 76). The incident recorded above is Woolf's primary example of the censorial masculine 'eye' which cruelly deciphers and judges women's conformity to male standards of female beauty and permissible behaviour. Woolf is the

---

<sup>86</sup> Woolf records countless moments of apprehension about her appearance in her diaries. She was frequently depressed about her "lack of beauty" (*Diary 3*: 64) and the idea of buying a dress filled her with acute anxiety: "I am involved in dress buying with Todd; I tremble & shiver all over at the appalling magnitude of the task I have undertaken - to go to a dress-maker recommended by Todd, even, she suggested, but here my blood ran cold, with Todd" (*Diary 3*: 78). Her dread of dressing up ruled her life: "I have my clothes complex to deal with. When I am asked out my first thought is, but I have no clothes to go in" (*Diary 3*: 81). In June 1926 she describes herself as being "in black despair because Clive laughed at my new hat" (*Diary 3*: 90). At the Femina prize-giving "there was the horror of having looked ugly in cheap black clothes. I cannot control this complex. I wake at dawn with a start" (*Diary 3*: 183). In June 1932 an entry in her diary reads: "(Derby day.) Oh dear, oh dear, I dont like dining with Clive - not altogether. It is true I conquered, at 8. my profound trepidation about my clothes. "I wont wear my new dress I said, in case I should be laughed at". This philosophy shivered on the doorstep, when I saw two 20 horse power cars drawn up, apparently, at his door" (*Diary 4*: 104).

focal point of George's overcritical and scrupulous gaze. His eyes, like a mirror, are a framing device that constrains, represses and violates. But there is also a feeling of powerlessness in the face of this enraged, quite terrifying response to any transgression of social and moral codes. His injunction to "tear" the dress up, to cut the envelope to pieces, is deeply threatening to self-identity.

Woolf's description of this encounter connects with the dissenting sensibility behind "The New Dress" (1925). In it she confronts the danger of being "outside the envelope" (*Diary* 3: 13) and uses clothes as a means of empowerment and a physical extension of the self. Here the looking-glass (both in the literal sense and in the shape of the eyes of others) is the force of authority which controls and suppresses any expression of individuality. The party situation is encountered in this story where Woolf exposes the violence and humiliation under the veneer of social relationships, holding up an unforgiving mirror to society's polite hypocrisy.

The story is a combination of fiction and self-documentation where Woolf's own unhappy experiences of parties makes her an expert on her own character's vulnerabilities. Written in May 1925 and published in *Forum* two years later, the mirror functions as the public eye that watches women and makes them self-conscious, particularly at crowded social gatherings.<sup>87</sup> As in "Phyllis and Rosamond" (1906), "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" (1906) and "Memoirs of a Novelist" (1909) Woolf homes in on an isolated female figure whose obsession with selfhood and identity is made the focal point of the story. She seems to have been contemplating "The New Dress" when she wrote in her diary on 27 April 1925:

---

<sup>87</sup> As in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) where the mirror forces Clarissa to adopt a definite self-image: "She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self - pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps" (40). In *The Waves* (1931) Rhoda contemplates the unity that is provided by other faces that act as reflectors, but the notion of the self as transparent and envelope like, transitional and transformational is nearer to the truth: "'That is my face,' said Rhoda, 'in the looking-glass behind Susan's shoulder - that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces: they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No: whereas I shift and change and am seen through in a second... Therefore I hate looking-glasses which show me my real face'" (30-31).

I should like to investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness & c. The fashion world at the Becks...is certainly one; where people secrete an envelope which connects them & protects them from others, like myself, who am outside the envelope, foreign bodies (*Diary 3*: 12-13).

In "The New Dress" Woolf faces the cruel and hostile fashion world "outside the envelope" and explores how people use clothes to cover and adorn themselves, but also as armour, as a defence to disguise underlying weaknesses. The act of looking in the mirror is accompanied by a desire to protect oneself from its glare, to envelope oneself in anonymity. In "The New Dress" the envelope is Mabel's cloak which she takes off upon entering Mrs Dalloway's party.<sup>88</sup>

Woolf's sense of shame and anxiety about the body comes out in "The New Dress" where the overt narcissism of fashion, physicality and body consciousness is satirised. Mrs Dalloway's drawing room is an intimidating public space where Mabel is isolated because of her incongruity of dress and superficial difference from the others.<sup>89</sup> She is an outsider and does not belong to this world.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> The same opposition is active in *Night and Day* (1919). As Cassandra scrutinises Katherine's reflection, her illusions about her surface. Almost as if she feels Cassandra's gaze upon her, Katherine envelopes herself in her dress which acts as a protective sheath: "Cassandra, sitting on the bed behind her, saw the reflection of her cousin's face in the looking-glass...as she enveloped herself in the blue dress which filled almost the whole of the long looking-glass with blue light and made it the frame of a picture, holding not only the slightly moving effigy of the beautiful woman, but shapes and colours of objects reflected from the background, Cassandra thought that no sight had ever been quite so romantic" (292-93).

<sup>89</sup> In "Clothing and the Body: Motifs of Female Distress in Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield" (2000) Rachel Holmes compares Woolf's "The New Dress" (1925) with Katherine Mansfield's "New Dresses" (1912), concentrating on their use of clothing as iconography of "societal and familial displacement" (9).

<sup>90</sup> Woolf's sketches in her early journals explore these feelings of being an outsider. In "A Garden Dance" (1903) she writes: "A fine dress makes you artificial - ready for lights & music - ready to accept that artificial view of life which is presented to one in a ballroom" and she uses a bestial image that she returns to in "The New Dress": "from a little distance the dancers looked painfully like flies struggling in a dish of sticky liquid" (*Passionate Apprentice*: 170). She is always positioned in a voyeuristic and peripheral stance. In "A Dance in Queen's Gate" (1903) she writes: "I am sitting out my dances - & I enjoy it" (165). In "Thoughts Upon Social Success" (1903) she can satisfactorily "sit by & watch with pure delight those who are adepts at the game" (168). In "A Garden Dance" (1903) she records "feeling pleasantly detached, & able to criticize the antics of my fellows from a cool distance" (170). In "An Artistic Party" (1903) she writes: "I could have been well content to take my evening's pleasure in observation merely" (176).

Mabel had her first serious suspicion that something was wrong as she took her cloak off and Mrs Barnet, while handing her the mirror and touching the brushes and thus drawing her attention, perhaps rather markedly, to all the appliances for tidying and improving hair, complexion, clothes, which existed on the dressing-table, confirmed the suspicion - that it was not right, not quite right, which growing stronger as she went upstairs and springing at her with conviction as she greeted Clarissa Dalloway, she went straight to the far end of the room, to a shaded corner where a looking-glass hung and looked (164).

Self-doubt and an uncomfortable self-awareness set in as soon as Mabel takes her cloak off. The cloak is an envelope, a membrane between the public and the private. It is as though, in the act of unwrapping her cloak and uncovering her body, she gives up her personal freedom. This exposure manifests itself in physical vulnerability whereby Mabel's entry into Mrs Dalloway's drawing room has all the manner of a dramatic and brave entrance onto a battlefield: "she issued out into the room, as if spears were thrown at her yellow dress from all sides" (167).<sup>91</sup> Tense, conscious and oppressed by thoughts of her "wretched self" she seeks social invisibility and hides her body by fleeing to a dark corner like a frightened animal.

Cruelly accenting the division between fantasy and reality, between the contemporary, smart sophistication of the partygoers and Mabel's own unwise, garish choice, the mirror functions as a powerful, disciplinary eye that reflects her "pain" and "agony" (165) and exposes her inmost fears. Deep anxieties about the body and self are reflected in the mirror and gaze back at her:

---

<sup>91</sup> The idea of clothes as armour is foregrounded in "The Introduction" (1925), as Lily Everit walks with Mrs Dalloway through the room "she accepted the part which was now laid on her and, naturally, overdid it a little as a soldier, proud of the traditions of an old and famous uniform might overdo it, feeling conscious as she walked, of her finery" (180-81). Each story in *Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence* (1973): "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" (1923), "The Man Who Loved His Kind" (1925), "The Introduction" (1925), "Ancestors" (1925), "Together and Apart" (1925), "The New Dress" (1925), "A Summing Up" (1925), probes a separate aspect of social exclusion and, with the exception of "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street", use the topography of the party to create a sense of enforced intimacy.

the misery which she always tried to hide, the profound dissatisfaction - the sense she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people - set upon her, relentlessly, remorselessly, with an intensity which she could not beat off (164).<sup>92</sup>

The looking-glass inspires fear of violence, intimidation and terror, and Mabel equates the vulnerability that the gaze of others exposes her to with attacks on her body which she is powerless to resist: "She felt like a dressmaker's dummy standing there, for young people to stick pins into" (165); she suffers "tortures" (166). The experience is so agonising that she wants to die, to become "numb, chill, frozen, dumb" (165). What is clear is that Mabel is engaged in a remorseless, perhaps unwinnable, war with her own body. This self-hatred is conveyed in bestial imagery, particularly in the fact that she feels hunted. This animal world of the looking-glass might fully signify the dehumanisation of Woolf's rape experience. Woolf characterises her as a terrorised animal, a "beaten mongrel" (167) or a "little lamb laid on the altar" (169). She displays a hunted animal's sharp hearing, listening intently to the partygoers who are, alternatively, "cormorants, barking and flapping their wings for sympathy" (167) or chatter "like magpies" (169). But her loathing for the others is mixed with admiration and envy. So, whilst she is a "dowdy, decrepit, horribly dingy old fly", the others are "dragonflies, butterflies, beautiful insects, dancing, fluttering, skimming" (165). Rose Shaw, the epitome of sophisticated femininity and style, adorned with a "ruffle of swansdown" (169), is elegant and gracious whereas Mabel, like a carcass being picked clean, "pecked at her left shoulder" (166). Their faces are an anonymous facade: "their eyelids flickering as they came up and then their lids shutting rather tight" (164) and only their brutality and self-absorption is highlighted. In contrast to the beatific vision Mabel had in Miss Milan's workroom, everybody at the party seems "ordinary", "meagre" and "insignificant" (165). Observing everyone with paranoid distrust, she

---

<sup>92</sup> In *Between the Acts* (1941) Woolf will return to the function of the mirror as a tool of exposure. Miss LaTrobe uses mirrors to "expose" her audience to "present-time reality". Reverend Streatfield feels himself "laughed at by looking-glasses". The mirrors cause embarrassment: "'One feels such a fool, caught unprotected'" (107, 113, 123).

experiences “shame” and “humiliation” and her feelings of self-loathing are acute. She describes herself as “odious” and “weak” (167).

Deception and self-delusion come to the fore in Mabel’s reflection, which reveals an intriguing chasm between the everyday persona and the idealised version of the self. This schizophrenic doubling is shown up in the following passage where, marooned in the past and trapped in the dreamy aloofness of childhood, Mabel frames-up a picture of her fantasy self:

Suffused with light, she sprang into existence. Rid of cares and wrinkles, what she had dreamed of herself was there - a beautiful woman. Just for a second...there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a grey-white, mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself, and it was not vanity only, not only self-love that made her think it good, tender, and true (166).

Notably, Mabel seems to draw strength from her image, as though she is worshipping herself at a shrine, although she is quick to dismiss the idea of simple narcissism. Rather, the dominant, indeed the essential aspect of the experience, is the confrontation of mind and body which “[j]ust for a second” gaze directly at each other. Stepping outside the body, as though shedding her wrinkled skin, Mabel’s make-believe, imaginary self, “what she had dreamed of herself” takes physical form. Disembodied, only the “core” or “soul” of herself survives. Ornately framed off from the surrounding context, she seems to have died in the present as she muses upon the beauty and innocence of her long-lost youth. Lacking a clear sense of herself as an adult, Mabel is a child trapped in the cumbersome body of an older woman who only survives by constructing a debilitating fantasy world for herself. She lives for the transformative moment that will turn what seems perilously temporary - her dress fitting for example - into the unflawed and timeless beauty of a perfect work of art.



But this line of thinking peters out into a sad realisation that the veneer on this imaginary portrait is thinly spread. As the inspiration and the sense of exhilaration fades, the gear shifts. In the following excerpt the transparency of the soul - "Suffused with light" - is brutally extinguished in the dark corner of Mrs Dalloway's drawing-room:

And now the whole thing had vanished. The dress, the room, the love, the pity, the scrolloping looking-glass, and the canary's cage - all had vanished, and here she was in a corner of Mrs Dalloway's drawing-room, suffering tortures, woken wide awake to reality (166).

Although Woolf seems to acknowledge the seductive power of the mirror here she satirises its "character-creating"<sup>93</sup> illusiveness, seeing it as a trap. As a consequence, we are left with an echo of Mrs Brown "thrown into the corner" (*Collected Essays III*: 421, 428), since the recognisable artistic parameters for describing her have shifted. Deconstructing Mabel's ideal image of herself, Woolf reveals a tragic, unromantic and sadly undignified picture. This is not the seamless whole of the reflection, rather, the insistent repetition of the determinate "the" - in "The dress, the room, the love, the pity, the scrolloping looking-glass, and the canary's cage" - deliberately induces a sharp sense of separation as each of the individual elements of Mabel's reflection are taken separately, torn into strips, clause by clause. As the narrative systematically unfolds, the coherent whole slowly falls apart piece by piece. The repetition gives the paragraph a solemn momentum, like a long lament.

In an earlier story, "A Woman's College From Outside" (1920), Angela scrutinises her reflection in much the same way that Mabel gazes on her own in "The New Dress":

The whole of her was perfectly delineated - perhaps the soul. For the glass held up an untrembling image - white and gold, red slippers, pale hair with blue stones in it, and never a ripple or shadow to break the smooth kiss of Angela and her

---

<sup>93</sup> This is taken from Arnold Bennett's quote that "The foundation of a good novel is character-creating and nothing else. To render secure the importance of the novel" to which Woolf's essay "Character in Fiction" (1924) is a response (Cf. Arnold Bennett "Is the Novel Decaying?", *Cassell's Weekly* (28 March 1923), cited in *Collected Essays III*: 437, n2).

reflection in the glass, as if she were glad to be Angela. Anyhow the moment was glad - the bright picture hung in the heart of the night (139).

The word “delineated” indicates portraiture and the permanence of a great and lasting art work. The mirror image is a corollary to the formal portrait that blazes with colour and authenticity. The kiss conveys Angela’s sheer delight in her reflection. But more than that, it consolidates mind and body to create a physical link between the ‘real’ Angela and her beautifully pictorial double. The mirror provides a moment’s unity. The reflected image emerges like a mysteriously beneficent visitation: it is “untrembling” and flawless, “without a ripple or shadow”. But the mirror plays a trick on Angela since outside its frame it holds “nothing at all, or only the brass bedstead”. Necessarily, this is accompanied by a concomitant shift from wishful imaginings to tangible reality. The imaginary self is shattered. Angela “has a name on a card like another” (139), a sober printed card, like a picture title. In their reflections, Mabel and Angela’s superficial seeming and artful, simulated appearance is revealed.

One of the more general, but intrinsic, points arising from this fragmentation of character is the larger question of “character-reading”, which Woolf addresses in “Character in Fiction” (1924) (*Collected Essays III*: 421); how do people ‘read’ each other? Woolf confronts this question in the following scene where the mirror reveals a poignant level of distance between the characters by acting as “an obstacle and an impediment” (*Collected Essays III*: 434) to human interaction:

And what was still odder, this thing, this Mabel Waring, was separate, quite disconnected; and though Miss Holman (the black button) was leaning forward and telling her how her eldest boy had strained his heart running, she could see her, too, quite detached in the looking-glass, and it was impossible that the black dot, leaning forward, gesticulating, should make the yellow dot, sitting solitary, self-centred, feel what the black dot was feeling, yet they pretended (168).

In this scene, the mirror acts as a silent censor to Mabel's thoughts, functioning as an obstacle to meaningful human interaction. Mabel - too conscious of the mirror's censure - stays resolutely silent, "solitary" and "self-centred", while Miss Holman seems completely obsessed with telling her own story. For both characters storytelling is not a means of connecting with others, but is linked to identity and vanity - the deep, inherent human need to tell our own story to any one who will listen. Nora Lynne Bicki refers to this method as "silent storytelling", whereby Woolf's characters tell stories to themselves as a means of personal "self-definition" (38). It is a specifically solitary experience:

The only intended audience for the silent storytelling event is the storyteller herself which seems to imply some sense of self-preservation... The storyteller's thoughts, fantasies, and dreams are her own. When the character slips into her own mind to engage in her private silent narrative, the reader becomes privileged in his or her ability to share in the event (39).

Clearly, in "The New Dress", by engaging us with Mabel's personal storyworld, Woolf is trying to bring character in closer relation with the reader. This is a desire expressed in "Character in Fiction" (1924):

At the present moment we are suffering, not from decay, but from having no code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship (*Collected Essays III*: 434).

Engaging us with Mabel's fantasies, her romantic myth of the perfect love affair, "her dreams about living in India, married to some hero like Sir Henry Lawrence" (169), Woolf introduces us to her exotic fantasy world. But the mirror - as exemplified in the above scene between Mabel and Mrs Holman - jeopardises this interplay and interaction by scrupulously withholding the characters' thoughts. The presentation of Mabel and Miss Holman is rigidly external. The mirror withholds identity and cannot offer a clear definition of personality; they might be boot-buttons or three-penny bits for all you see of their thoughts. The fact that Miss Holman leans towards Mabel is a visual cue that gives an illusion of human contact. But the mirror shows a reversed world of deception and

ambiguity and, even though she is leaning towards Mabel, Mrs Holman is “quite detached in the looking-glass”. Human relationships seem to be reduced to a form of overt and energetic role-playing, as Miss Holman communicates through a sort of mime artistry, “gesticulating” as if her body is working independently from her mind. Significantly, Mabel and Mrs Holman might be figures in a static oil painting, for they are described as coloured dots: perhaps these are the dots that appear as you move closer to a canvas or photograph. Crucially, their faces are kept out of focus.

There is a buoyant feel to the ending of the story as Mabel takes the instinctive decision to leave:

Then in the midst of this creeping, crawling life, suddenly she was on the crest of a wave... So she got up from the blue sofa, and the yellow button in the looking-glass got up too, and she waved her hand to Charles and Rose to show them she did not depend on them one scrap, and the yellow button moved out of the looking-glass, and all the spears were gathered into her breast as she walked towards Mrs Dalloway and said, ‘Good night’ (170).

At the end of the story, Mabel seems to take control of the situation and escapes the looking-glass. The positiveness is reflected in the urgently paced syntax which creates an unstoppable, breathy momentum in one long paragraph punctuated only by a series of ‘ands’. This sense of inevitability is reinforced by the act of Mabel wrapping herself “round and round and round, in the Chinese cloak she had worn these twenty years” (171). The cloak which forms layer after layer of protection around her acts as a maternal envelope - a protective outer covering which deflects and shields her from the sharp gaze of others - and is a stark counter-image to the vulnerability she had experienced at the party.<sup>94</sup> The image of the womb-like envelope is here used as a figure for the way that women protect themselves and is related to the amniotic fluid that “connects” one to the mother and

---

<sup>94</sup> Clothes also function as an envelope in *To the Lighthouse* (1927): “Her hand cut a trail in the sea, as her mind made the green swirls and streaks into patterns and, numbed and shrouded, wandered in imagination in that underworld of waters where the pearls stuck in clusters to white sprays, where in the green light a change came over one’s entire mind and one’s body shone half transparent enveloped in a green cloak” (198).

“protects” one from danger.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, it is not coincidental that, before returning to the warmth, comfort and intimacy of her cloak, Mabel dreams of re-birth, of assuming a radical new identity and being “absolutely transformed” (170). Returning to her comfort zone, she returns to herself at the end of the story, breaking free from the mirror. Altogether, her exit feels right. Trudi Tate claims that Woolf is “by no means sympathetic” (xvi) to Mabel Waring, which is, I believe, a mistaken assumption. Rather, Woolf sees herself in Mabel and gets us emotionally involved in her character’s life, revealing the private stories behind the public face. There is a positive tone to the end when she retreats and we feel that, along with Mabel, Woolf herself heaves a huge sigh of relief.

This gesture of defiance is repeated in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection” (1929) but is introduced from the very start in the story’s title with its pun on the word “reflection”, which sets up an opposition between material reflection (the mirror) and the immaterial realm of “an ordinary mind” thinking. As in “The New Dress”, the idea of objectified femininity is foregrounded. But, unlike Mabel Waring who actively seeks and is dependent upon her reflection, Isabella actively abjures it.

“The Lady in the Looking-Glass” is an attempt to “catch and turn into words” Isabella’s “profounder state of being” (218). The work can be seen as a documentation of Woolf’s ideas in “Character in Fiction” (1924). What emerges in this essay is that the established methods for representing character have broken down and, in large part, it examines the structural implications of this for literature. Commenting on Mrs Brown - a symbol of life itself - Woolf notes that we should not “expect just at present a complete and satisfactory presentment of her”; rather, she advises the reader to “Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure”. Challenging the concept of a “complete and satisfactory” (*Collected Essays IV*: 436) representation of character, Woolf foregrounds the broken narratives that the search for truth and the quest for a coherent and organised way

---

<sup>95</sup> This image has its origin in Woolf’s childhood vision of the grape-skin which she records in “A Sketch of the Past” as “the feeling... of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow” (*Moments of Being*: 65).

of conveying life itself produces. In this sense, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" makes a point about the nature of the short story as a medium suited to explore the fragmentation of human character.

It begins with a preparatory positioning of an overseeing narrator. Hidden inside the house, unseen, he or she is in a position of ascendancy, transgressing assignable boundaries:

People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms any more than they should leave open cheque books or letters confessing some hideous crime. One could not help looking, that summer afternoon, in the long glass that hung outside in the hall. Chance had so arranged it (215).

Nestling in the corner of the room, for over half an hour, the narrator seems in silent communication with the mirror and is almost a foil enhancing its violating power. He or she reads Isabella's movements, as though breaking open a sealed envelope and reading its private contents. The phrase: "One could not help looking" suggests that the narrator is disclaiming his or her voyeuristic pleasures, compelled, but embarrassed, by an urge to see. A power game of looking ensues, as Woolf follows the narrator's gaze, so that the story becomes multi-reflective, reflecting the view of the mirror, the voyeur and Woolf herself. What makes this game intriguing is the way in which the reader is implicated in this voyeurism, so that he or she, possibly also ensconced in the depths of their armchair whilst reading the story, mimics the relaxed, laid-back voyeurism of the narrator. It is a calculated beginning that teases the reader into solidarity with the observer.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Voyeurism means violence, mastery and control and necessitates "the exclusion of the conscious subject...for being a subject is not being something that is being looked at, it is being the one who is looking" (Lonergan: 121-22). In Portrait 3 of Woolf's "Portraits" (1937) the narrator is also positioned as voyeur of a female subject. In the story, the narrative gaze is omnipotent and unembarrassed stating unequivocally: "I watched her" (237). But here, the woman is positioned in the classic role of exhibitionist. She is there to be looked at and displayed as a sexual object. For example, the narrator draws attention to her breasts "formed apple-hard under the blouse on her body" (237). For a study of the voyeuristic gaze see Norman K. Denzin *The Cinematic Society: The Voyeur's Gaze* (1995).

Woolf uses the device of the looking-glass to 'arrange' the story and control what the reader sees. Sorting through the narrative elements, the mirror - like a director behind a camera - decides what goes where in the story. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" was inspired by a scene Woolf imagined of "Ethel Sands not looking at her letters. What this implies. One might write a book of short significant separate scenes. She did not open her letters" (*Diary 3*: 157). Indeed, this is a good description of how "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" works for in the story the mirror acts as a curtain or cinematic cut dividing the story into scenes and presenting only small sections of a larger whole. The mirror organises the disposition of the story's scenes by deciding what to include or exclude from its frame. As a device which eliminates and excludes "the unessential and superficial" (219), the mirror is a tool that is particularly suited to the circumscribed borders and delimiting frame of the short story, since what the mirror does not reflect, the story excludes. Mary Caws in *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction* (1989) states that this delimitation is one of the mirror's main functions:

The selective or framing look cuts out, concentrates upon, and centers on whatever is to be emphasised, by a decoupage or circumscription - writing around and about, cutting and cropping - all of which exemplify a technique of limiting with positive aims (5).

Like the mirror, the short story presents a brief moment caught, although we are not quite sure why it has been caught. Fittingly, the short story is a genre which is content to work collusively with the looking-glass to capture the chance encounter. Its brevity and tendency towards strict decontextualisation make it an ideal form to record the sudden, temporary and unforeseeable. The story is deeply seductive in the way it avoids a pre-designed narrative line in deference to coincidence, good timing and whatever fortuitously happens to step into the frame of the looking-glass. This is not a recognisable way of telling a story, but, bravely, Woolf takes a "chance" on something happening. The success or failure of the story depends, in large part, on luck which collapses the notion of authorial 'arrangement'.

From the opening of the story, our view is circumscribed by the view of the looking-glass and, to a large extent, Woolf relinquishes control of the story to this narrative device:

one could see reflected in the Italian glass not only the marble-topped table opposite, but a stretch of the garden beyond. One could see a long grass path leading between banks of tall flowers until, slicing off an angle, the gold rim cut it off (215).

Here the mirror's frame is a cut-off point and a sense of what the story excludes is dominant. There is a feeling that we are being denied a full-on experience for most of what the reader sees is what occurs within the parameters of the mirror leaving the larger picture tantalisingly oblique. There is a violence associated with the mirror's discriminating and selective eye on the world and the story is suffused with a sense of menace, as though the narrator has set up a carefully sprung trap which he or she is waiting for Isabella to fall into. The pun on the words "cut" and slice imply a number of meanings that are active in the story. The idea of the cut has a sense of editorial concision; "slicing" might imply slitting a sealed envelope. Primarily, however, both words suggests penetration or painful incision, usually by glass, which is consonant with how the mirror's frame cuts and slices off the rest of the view, forcibly limiting what the story can record.<sup>97</sup> The mirror violently divides the story into two highly contrasted and strictly differentiated spaces: the static, violently circumscribed space of the looking-glass and the animated, free space of the garden beyond the looking-glass which envelops the house and makes a lush, captivating and safe backdrop to the story. As Rachael Holmes observes, outside the disciplined confinement of its frame is the imagination: "The facts, the reality of the story, remain fixed in the reflection of the mirror, and the truths of time and space are ignored by the imaginative assumptions of the narrative" (25).

---

<sup>97</sup> Françoise Defromont discusses Woolf's technique of 'cutting' in her novels in relation to the broken looking-glass and the fragmentation of the self. Cf. Defromont: 71-75. Tracy Seeley makes the connection between Woolf's experience of sexual abuse and the violent rhetoric of "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", observing that: "The almost voyeuristic observations of the story's narrator and the repeated violence of the



Outside the mirror, the story casts a different eye on the world. It is a vivid and dynamic contrast:

The house was empty, and one felt, since one was the only person in the drawing-room, like one of those naturalists who, covered with grass and leaves, lie watching the shyest animals - badgers, otters, kingfishers - moving about freely, themselves unseen. The room that afternoon was full of such shy creatures, lights and shadows, curtains blowing, petals falling - things that never happen, so it seems, if someone is looking... the room had its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being. Nothing stayed the same for two seconds together (215).

Mocking the mirror's slick arrangement, the world outside the mirror is a seedbed of illicit, chaotic and rebellious activity. There is a sense of childish mischief and, with the absence of any controlling intelligence, it feels as if a weight of responsibility and anxiety has been lifted; no-one is looking and the elements have room to roam "themselves unseen". This sense of weightlessness is conveyed in the life brought to inanimate objects: the lights, shadows, curtains and flowers. Outside the four-square, solidly constructed frame of the looking-glass, things metamorphose suddenly. It is a world of variety and variables, where "Nothing stayed the same for two seconds together". Casually reckless "nocturnal creatures" come "pirouetting across the floor, stepping delicately with high-lifted feet and spread tails and pecking allusive beaks" surging with uninhibited life, joy, spontaneity and zest. This rough-and-tumble, un-choreographed playfulness is in stark contrast to the ordered and organised world in the looking-glass. The abiding impression is of a mind thinking, of light, fleeting and "allusive" thoughts taking place inside a human mind. Woolf sets the stage economically, using the room (as she will use the garden) both as a character in itself, full of "passions and rages and envies and sorrows", and as an atmospheric setting.

---

looking-glass as Isabella is "penetrated" and "exposed" seems too uncannily connected to Woolf's early violation to be dismissed" (99-100).

But we are not allowed to dwell here for it is dangerously off-limits. The momentum jolts to a halt as the looking-glass asserts its presence.

The looking-glass produces a radically different view. As though all this upheaval is unseemly, it makes the transition from lawlessness and expressive freedom to civilisation:

But, outside, the looking-glass reflected the hall table, the sunflowers, the garden path so accurately and so fixedly that they seemed held there in their reality unescapably. It was a strange contrast - all changing here, all stillness there. One could not help looking from one to the other. Meanwhile, since all the doors and windows were open in the heat, there was a perpetual sighing and ceasing sound, the voice of the transient and the perishing, it seemed, coming and going like human breath, while in the looking-glass things had ceased to breathe and lay still in the trance of immortality (215-16).

The main distinction between the looking-glass and the world outside its boundary is the antithetic time-frame. The mirror is distinguished by permanence, solidity and “stillness” as contrasted with the transitory and “changing” events beyond its frame. The “stillness” conveys an air of expectant mystery: a sense of time standing still. The garden provides a living connection to the moment. Emphasis is placed upon the ductile and exhilarating nature of life outside the looking-glass. It is countered by the elusiveness and unrestrained movement of the images outside its restrictive frame:

Suddenly these reflections were ended violently and yet without a sound. A large black form loomed into the looking-glass; blotted out everything, strewed the table with a packet of marble tablets veined with pink and grey, and was gone. But the picture was entirely altered. For the moment it was unrecognisable and irrational and entirely out of focus. One could not relate these tablets to any human purpose... There they lay on the marble-topped table, all dripping with light and colour at first crude and unabsorbed. And then it was strange to see how they were drawn in and arranged and composed and made part of the picture and granted that

stillness and immortality which the looking-glass conferred. They lay there invested with a new reality and significance and with a greater heaviness, too, as if it would have needed a chisel to dislodge them from the table (217).

As this passage suggests, there is a certain fatalism connected with stepping into the mirror's frame. As the postman looms, then recedes from view, his "large black form" might be an image of death itself; the "marble tablets" suggest gravestones, the chisel the gravestone maker's tool. In fact, the postman's entrance feels accidental like the unheralded arrival of death itself. (At the same time, however, the envelopes are "veined with pink" and hint at the womb or life newly formed.) The mirror deadens what it reflects by counterfeiting reality like a timeless work of art. The pun on the words "drawn in" suggest that the letters are both pulled unwillingly into the mirror's frame and physically pencilled in to the picture. Layer upon layer, with the dexterity of an artist's hand, a picture is built up before us. The disorder of the letters "strewed" across the table gives way to homogenised, well-integrated arrangement. Like colours in a palette, the letters are blended into one another and "made part of the picture". Whilst the colours run freely, the pink veined envelopes have the life drained out of them, as the secrets they contain become the mirror's own. Woolf enjoys puzzling us with the paradox that the reflection is more solid than the real thing which stands "unrecognisable" and unrelated to any human context. If anything, the reflection, with its "greater heaviness", has more authenticity. She reverses the opposition between substantial form and the wayward reflection, giving a "new", more incontrovertible, though fateful, "reality and significance" to the reflection itself.

It is telling therefore that Woolf makes Isabella part of the world outside the mirror:

She suggested the fantastic and the tremulous convolvulus rather than the upright aster, the starched zinnia, or her own burning roses alight like lamps on the straight posts of their rose trees. The comparison showed how very little, after all these years, one knew about her (216).

The flowers provide subtle visual analogues of Isabella's character and more especially hint at her unknowability. She suggests what is "fantastic and tremulous" (216), evading scrutiny like an elusive ghost. The word "tremulous" indicates fear and anxiety or the quavering form of a ghost. Her ghostly lack of identity is later represented in "the mask-like indifference" and "indeterminate outline of her rather faded" face (217, 218) which is veiled by the clouds. Yet, ghostliness aside, Isabella exudes life. Alive, ungovernable and untamed, she suggests the "light and fantastic and leafy and trailing" and the singular beauty of the "elegant sprays of convolvulus that twine round ugly walls and burst here and there into white and violet blossoms". Touching, overlapping, the flowers mirror Isabella's uninhibited and expressive movement. The garden dramatises a state of mind. In it Isabella demonstrates a self-reliance instead of a dependency upon an image; comfortable with herself, comfortable with her body, in it she is free of social mores. By contrast, the stiff and pompous formality of the aster seems very turgid and male; the proud stance of the rose trees is majestic and austere; whilst the unwavering control of the "starched" zinnia suggests gravitas, dignity and poise. It is a moment of clear contrast between numb, civilised sensibility and life itself.

The running commentary as Isabella reluctantly approaches the mirror is a sensual, though slightly eerie climax to the narrator's long wait.

She came lingering and pausing, here straightening a rose, there lifting a pink to smell it, but she never stopped; and all the time she became larger and larger in the looking-glass, more and more completely the person into whose mind one had been trying to penetrate. One verified her by degrees - fitted the qualities one had discovered into this visible body. There were her grey-green dress, and her long shoes, her basket, and something sparkling at her throat. She came so gradually that she did not seem to derange the pattern in the glass, but only to bring in some new element which gently moved and altered the other objects as if asking them, courteously, to make room for her (219).

Isabella resembles a screen idol - delicate, sophisticated and impeccably groomed, with shining jewels - making her sedate and stylish entrance on set. But her acting is entirely physical and she does not have a single line of dialogue. Woolf does not need words, she conveys physical emotion by much subtler means, through touch, gesture and half mime. Isabella's small leisurely steps in her pointed soft shoes are almost balletic as Woolf lets her movements do the storytelling. Woolf teases us, making the moment last for as long as possible: "lingering" and "pausing", gently caressing and smelling the flowers, Isabella tantalisingly holds out the prospect of exposure but is reluctant to leave the warm protective envelope of the garden and reveal all. Woolf dramatises the story and creates a powerful visual impact as though filming the scene with precise camera placing and movement. The camera slowly pans up past the long shoes, over the thin grey-green dress, around the basket, soaring to the jewels delicately glistening at her throat. But there is a pause, a delay before the camera finally comes to rest on her face. 'Linger' is an important word here because it is suggestive of the body's final moments before death. Indeed, Woolf goes further still and likens the moment to a secret initiation ceremony, as "the letters and the table and the grass walk and the sunflowers which had been waiting in the looking-glass separated and opened out so that she might be received among them".

After all her dispersed movements, Isabella suddenly converges centrestage in front of the mirror and freezes in front of it like a corpse. Her actions are mechanical and robotic not emotional. This is mirrored in the sentence structure which, in contrast to the almost lyrical clarity of the earlier passages, when Isabella dallied sumptuously though her garden, is now tight-breathed and anxiously abrupt, heavily punctuated by full stops, as Isabella clings hard to her identity:

At last there she was, in the hall. She stopped dead. She stood by the table. She stood perfectly still. At once the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth... Everything dropped from her - clouds, dress, basket, diamond - all that one had called the creeper and convolvulus. Here

was the hard wall beneath. Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in that pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills. Look, as she stood there, old and angular, veined and lined, with her high nose and her wrinkled neck, she did not even trouble to open them (219).

Critics are united in affording the most significance to the end of the story. For R.T. Chapman, the story climaxes with “an epiphanous insight into the heart of things” (333). Similarly, for Susan Squier the story ends with a moment of “unexpected vision” and a “demystification of Isabella” (285). Up until the end of the story, we have been given “a highly sentimental and romantical picture” (Beja: 138). However, when she enters into the mirror’s frame the harsh light of its silver surface represents the disintegration of the romantic image, reducing Isabella to a single image, to a “visible body” or skeletal framework. Violence and vicious animality is suggested in the word “bite”, recalling the image of the hunt that is so central to “The New Dress” which has its central character lead a frightened animal’s existence trying to avoid the public eye. It is as though the narrator has been waiting for this moment to illuminate the story: as though a trap had been sprung for Isabella to fall into. As in “The New Dress”, where the mirror exposes Mabel’s impractical fantasy, in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” the mirror is a treacherous and cruel usurper of illusion. Nothing could be less romantic or beatific than this solemnly direct image of Isabella’s worn and aged countenance in which her high nose, creased features and wrinkled neck are all registered with frankness. The end of the story works on two visual levels: the use of the looking-glass allows the reader to scrutinise Isabella at the same time as she scrutinises herself. This ensures that, before the mirror, both the narrator’s, reader’s and Isabella’s illusions simultaneously fall one by one, leaving us all slightly frustrated.

The story holds out the hope of finding out the “truth” about Isabella but leaves us with “nothing” and finishes as it had begun, with the refrain: “People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms” (219).<sup>98</sup> But, although the enveloping of the narrative with this refrain gives the illusion of conclusiveness, the story asserts no such thing and ends by asserting “nothing at all”. The story ends on the opposition between the envelope and the framing device of the mirror: the unopened letters symbolise the secure and sealed envelope - the truth remains intact, unpenetrated, unpenetrable. In both “The New Dress” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass”, envelopes appear to remain secure from public scrutiny at the end of the story. Mabel wraps her cloak tightly around her and Isabella does not break the seal of her letters which “conceal what she did not wish to be known” (217).

The story ends with human character ultimately remaining undefined. As Helen Clare Taylor writes: “The wall divides Isabella forever from the observer; behind it she, like all of us, is unknowable” (4). The resulting narrative shows a character that is not allowed to present itself coherently; denied the opportunity to speak for itself, it is rendered mute by Woolf’s steadfast refusal to yield Isabella to the mirror. Woolf disarms the mirror of its penetrative scrutiny and escapes with Mrs Brown intact. Both “The New Dress” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” might be regarded as exercises in saving Mrs Brown from certain death. The fundamentally subversive nature of the endings of both of these stories bear a frustrating message that cannot be reconciled with any recognisable way of constructing truth and reality.

---

<sup>98</sup> Shuli Barzilai confronts the central question of the story when she asks: “How are we to interpret this resolution to the riddle of Isabella Tyson after so many varied readings of her character, all quite different from the final version? Are we to accept the authority of the looking-glass as the sole arbiter of truth?” (207). For Susan Dick, to interpret the end of the story as in some way a revelation of the truth is to “forget that the “enthraling spectacle” so vividly described is itself yet another reading of the reflected scene” (1989b: 168).

In the case of one of Woolf's most forgotten stories, "The Fascination of the Pool" (1929), we can see this process clearly. While still motivated by her resistance to framing character, the story constitutes a more provocative exploration of human character by making its 'studies' corporeally intangible - frustrating our attempts to fix them from the start. In "The Fascination of the Pool" (begun on 29 May 1929, the day after the completion of "The Lady in the Looking-Glass") Woolf turns to confronting the consequences of avoiding the looking-glass. The ending of "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", when Isabella looks in the mirror and sees that "there was nothing" (219), asks the question: what if there is no reflection in the mirror? "The Fascination of the Pool" confronts this "what if?" and examines the reality of not having a face to present to the public. Without a reflection, without a public face, there is a danger of complete self-annihilation.<sup>99</sup>

"The Fascination of the Pool" neatly juxtaposes non-complementary aspects of private and public life using two central images: the reflection and the envelope. Beneath the water-borne reflection is the free, internalised space of the mind.<sup>100</sup> The envelope - the pool's diaphanous skin - emblematises privacy, anonymity and personal identity. However, in "The Fascination of the Pool" the mirror is absent and the story reveals the dangers of not keeping within prescribed limits, of destabilising the frame, and of toying too freely with the radical edges of the imagination. In this story, the mirror's static attempts to represent a fixed version of reality in "The New Dress" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" give way to a multilayered experience between stability and catastrophic failure.

---

<sup>99</sup> Mary Ann Caws provides an intriguing comparison between Mallarmé's use of reflections in his brief work "The White Waterlily" and Woolf's use of the same in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" and "The Fascination of the Pool" in "Mallarmé and Woolf", *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, No. 49 (Spring 1997), 5.

<sup>100</sup> For Woolf the mind resembled a deep pool. In a letter to Ethel Smyth she wrote: "My mind, this floating glove, or lily... wants to drift off into some obscure pool, and be shaded by weeds" (*Letters IV*: 196). This image of the mind as a pool occurs throughout her work. In *To the Lighthouse*: "In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds for ever turn and shadows form, dreams persisted" (144). And later: "the whole world seemed to have dissolved in this early morning hour into a pool of thought, a deep basin of reality, and one could almost fancy that had Mr. Carmichael spoken, a little tear would have rent the surface of the pool" (194). In *Orlando* (1928) the back of the brain "(which is the part furthest from sight)" is "a pool where things dwell in darkness so deep that what they are we scarcely know. She now looked down into this pool or sea in which everything is reflected - and, indeed, some say that all our most violent passions, and art and religion, are the reflections which we see in the dark hollow at the back of the head when the visible world is obscured for the time" (224).



With its underlying substructure of voices, "The Fascination of the Pool" shows the fracturing and disruption beneath the surface skin of society. Avoidance of the reflection is now usurped by sheer fascination.

A crucial element, so far overlooked in the few discussions of the story, is its origin in one of Woolf's childhood moments of being when she found herself unable to step across a puddle. This incident affected her profoundly and not only provided her with a metaphor for her writing, but also, more specifically, provides us with a definitive metaphor for her short fiction:

Life is, soberly & accurately, the oddest affair; has in it the essence of reality. I used to feel this as a child - couldn't step across a puddle once I remember, for thinking, how strange - what am I? &c. But by writing I don't reach anything. All I mean to make is a note of a curious state of mind (*Diary 3*: 113).<sup>101</sup>

As this comment indicates, Woolf's writing is primarily an attempt to "note... a curious state of mind" as a consequence of a failure to reach "the essence of reality". Complete statements are superfluous, for essential perception is untenable. To "reach" the "essential" reality of things is to bridge the gap between self and reality. The consequence of this failure triggers anxieties about consciousness, perception, awareness of the self and reality. What seems significant is how identity is dependent upon delivering the message - upon having a reflection. This is made explicit in Rhoda's inability to cross the puddle in *The Waves* (1931).<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> The moment is recalled in a "A Sketch of the Past": "for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something... the whole world became unreal" (*Moments of Being*: 78 - ellipsis in original); and is imported into a wider discussion about death in "The Evening Party" (1918): "'Don't you remember in early childhood, when, in play or talk, as one stepped across the puddle or reached the window on the landing, some imperceptible shock froze the universe to a solid ball of crystal which one held for a moment...'" (*Complete Shorter Fiction*: 92).

<sup>102</sup> For a close discussion of the relationship between "The Fascination of the Pool" and *The Waves* which Woolf was planning as she wrote "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" and "The Fascination of the Pool" see Dick 1989b: 171-72.

in the middle, cadaverous, awful, lay the grey puddle in the courtyard, when, holding an envelope in my hand, I carried a message. I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me (47).

The non-deliverance of the message is here equated with a failure of identity, but also with death because Rhoda is scared of falling into the pool. The dual pun on the word “cadaverous” - which is derived from the Latin *cadere* meaning both ‘to fall’; and, second, a dead body - hints at this.

Woolf relives this moment in “The Fascination of the Pool” which makes a comparison between the death of the framed image and the non-deliverance of the message explicit. It is perhaps not surprising that she chose to embody this experience in the short story form, a form that with its brief, short, summarised format is itself like a “note”. The association emphasises the characteristics of the Woolfian short story as a whole: its inconclusiveness; its fascination with the unrepresentable; and its use of the envelope that encloses a secret message as a metaphor for “the dark places of psychology” (*Collected Essays IV*: 162). In her short fiction Woolf sets up a similar gap between the moment of being and the deliverance of the message, between experience and interpretation: a strategy which goes against the grain of Poe’s idea of short story as creating a “unity of effect or impression” (571). Her short fiction is all about not reaching anything at all.

As in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass”, the parameters of the story are defined at the start of the story by the narrator: “Round the edge was so thick a fringe of rushes that their reflections made a darkness like the darkness of very deep water” (220). However, unlike the heavy “gold rim” (215) of the mirror’s frame in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass”, which determinedly slices the envelope from the looking-glass, the “fringe of rushes” is a perilous border and this effect of instability and precariousness is reinforced by the pool’s unstable centre:

However in the middle was something white. The big farm a mile off was to be sold and some zealous person, or it may have been a joke on the part of a boy, had stuck one of the posters advertising the sale, with farm horses, agricultural implements, and young heifers, on a tree stump by the side of the pool. The centre of the water reflected the white placard and when the wind blew the centre of the pool seemed to flow and ripple like a piece of washing. One could trace the big red letters in which Romford Mill was printed in the water...the red and black letters and the white paper seemed to lie very thinly on the surface, while beneath went on some profound under-water life like the brooding, the ruminating of a mind (220).

When Woolf talks about “the centre” at the beginning of “The Fascination of the Pool” she is referring to her “theory” about “the centre of things” which she outlines in her diary:

My theory is that for some reason the human mind is always seeking what it conceives to be the centre of things: sometimes one may call it reality, again truth, again life (*Diary 1*: 205).

In each of her reflection stories Woolf is seeking the “truth” of a fixed, unitary and stable centre - what she terms in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” “the hard wall beneath” (219) - but in each she is disappointed since the surface reflection actually conceals the truth or centre of things. It freezes things and gives the illusion of stability and is a barrier between perception and the truth. As a consequence the centre is precarious and ephemeral. In “The Fascination of the Pool” the centre appears “to flow and ripple like a piece of washing”.

Woolf suggests that the reason behind the pool’s fascination is that “it held in its waters all kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences, not printed or spoken aloud” (220). The words “not printed or spoken aloud” are significant in the context of the story’s striving for the truth. It sets up a juxtaposition between the unreadable life of the mind that is “not printed or spoken aloud” - which Woolf seeks - with the text-covered pool (making manifest the metaphorical sense in which the pool functions as an envelope) which conceals the truth with the superficial reflection “printed in the water”. This emphasis on what is unwritten and unreadable constitutes an intensely personal quest for interior self-

articulation, prior to any subsequent exterior dialogue - an unmanipulated immediacy - which is surely what Woolf means by the “essence of reality” (*Diary 3*: 113). This is indicative of how Woolf’s stories attempt to carry readings beyond literal interpretation - beyond the printed text which demands a linear approach - to the unreadable life of the mind which constitutes the essence of perception.

As a consequence of the story’s perilous hold on the central truth, the story is not unified - it is not centred around anything - and this is conveyed in the multiplicity of voices which give it its multilayered structure. Whereas in “The New Dress” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” the disciplined world of the looking-glass has a controlling presence, “The Fascination of the Pool” takes on its own dynamic. The absence of the looking-glass allows for an unmanipulated immediacy with and an unimpeded channelling into “the dark places of psychology” (*Collected Essays IV*: 162). Occupying the thin line between stability and collapse, the structure is intentionally discordant - the relationship between the layers is unstable and incompatible without a unifying principle that would bring them all together:

through the reflections, through the faces, through the voices to the bottom... there was always something else. There was always another face, another voice. One thought came and covered another (221).

“The Fascination of the Pool” is on the other side of the mirror, of physical existence and materiality. This is not the delicate cocoon of Mabel’s cloak or the subtle movement through the garden in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” - here we are more insistently pushing “through” the looking-glass - “through the reflections, through the faces” - more determinedly looking for a way to be inside the envelope. Experience of the objective world has ceased to exist in this story and we are going beyond surface identity altogether.

Being composed of voices (reminders of the “wordless voices” (89) in “Kew Gardens” (1919)), the work suggests narration, but without actually constructing a narrative. There is no controlling narrative presence, rather, the narrative is chopped up in a cumulative series of voices. This polyvocal aspect hints at a number of possible narratives and makes for an interesting use of the reader. The voices seem to be talking to themselves, they “adumbrate stories which the narrator makes no attempt to tell” (Dick 1989b: 171), yet the listener is drawn in and tries to select, define and edit the speech to give it some sort of meaning.

The relationship between the substructure and the superstructure is in a constant, and unpredictable, state of flux. The story’s multi-layered format creates a highly visual juxtaposition of past and present with the historical strand running parallel, underneath the contemporary one on the page. It is a very visual thing, because the narrator sees the past literally under the present and, lowering overall, like some starkly premonitory reminder of transience, is the ‘For Sale’ placard. Whether Woolf envisaged “The Fascination of the Pool” as a two-tiered story is material for conjecture, but this is what the story becomes, with past and present being played out at the same level.

Each voice brings a new layer to the story’s texture: these modulated rhythms range from brisk urgency (the thought which “glances briskly over the girl’s despair”) to sad gravitas (the voice which emerges from the bottom of the pool). The narrator’s voice is the immediate one, however, fixed as it is by the present. But confusion sometimes arises particularly when the narrative is interrupted by a third-person description, still in the present tense. For example, the switch from “we” to “she” in the following paragraph:

The soldiers never saw us from the road. It was very hot. We lay here. She was lying hidden in the rushes with her lover, laughing into the pool and slipping into it, thoughts of eternal love, of fiery kisses and despair (221).

On the whole, though, Woolf creates a very smooth transition from past to present - almost a merging of the two. The thoughts move with smooth and sweeping liquidity: “sliding over the other silently and orderly as fish not impeding each other”; “glancing briskly over the

girl's despair"; "slipping over"; "All the voices slipped gently away to the side of the pool" (221). With an easy flexing tension they move "easily", "swaying among the reeds". The narrative is not held together, rather, it resembles a collection of loose leaves or slips of paper - as though the reader, voyeur-like, is reading a letter, sifting through irresistible private revelations.

With this non-committal movement of fractured voices progressively entering, moving, and slicing through the story, it is as if Woolf is continually switching characters and adopting new fictions. This implicit transience is founded in the "liquid thoughts" which "seemed to stick together and to form recognisable people - just for a moment". Just for a "moment" identity seems complete. Like a true mirage, a concrete image of identity keeps appearing and then disappearing before our eyes, leaving us with a strong sense of the unseen and unrecorded. The final voice promises to deliver the story's message and reveal the pool's fascination:

All the voices slipped gently away to the side of the pool to listen to the voice which so sad it seemed - it must surely know the reason of all this. For they all wished to know (221).

In a final effort to get closer to the "centre of things" (*Diary I*: 205) the narrator, foregoing the relative safety of the edge, creates a physical opening in the frame: "One drew closer to the pool and parted the reeds so that one could see deeper" (221). This movement through the frame precipitates us into suicide and death. We get an uneasy feeling that death is appealing to the narrator and this is compounded by the fact that the society of these "friendly and communicative" (220) dead people seems seductive. Running very close to the edge, the narrator is not scared of falling in. We get the sense that he or she might be contemplating a certain pleasure in tipping him or herself over and joining them.

Although in each of the stories analysed in this chapter Woolf is alert to the fact that there is a certain security to be had by staying within the well ordered, disciplined and controlled boundaries of the mirror - of having a secure identity and face to present to the world - a common denominator in each of the stories is a certain dissenting sensibility. Each story pivots on and is shaped, not by dialogue or positive human interaction, but, more suggestively, by a retreat into the self and a disappearance into the envelope. The prospect of death and suicide is never far from the surface in each of the stories. No sense of a unified self can be glimpsed, only a fathomless, darkly enigmatic blackness. The result is a tranquil, strangely satisfying, drowning into the unknown.

## Chapter 6

“Wild outbursts of freedom”: “Monday or Tuesday” (1921)

and “Blue and Green” (1921)

The pleasure of reading a short story, Virginia Woolf observed, comes from “concentration, penetration” and, finally, a sense of “form” (*Collected Essays II*: 87). Her insistence upon the importance of form is a central aspect of her own short fiction, particularly her sketches “Monday or Tuesday” (1921) and “Blue and Green” (1921). In these sketches Woolf reveals a Post-Impressionist concern with investigating the possibilities of a “pictorial language” (Fry 1925: 238). In them she uses poetic effects to suggest the rhythms of a mind thinking. In the same way that the Post-Impressionists did not expect paintings to carry specific storytelling narratives, Woolf’s non-representational sketches eschew a point or event. Drawn to the conceptualisation of reality in terms of our simplest, barest perception of it, “Blue and Green” and “Monday or Tuesday” are testimony to the fact that the existence of a “pre-established design” (Poe: 572) is not the main or final arbiter of how the short story may function. In this way, as Valerie Shaw observes, they transcend the traditional short story genre:

Dissatisfaction with the medium in which stories are told, made Virginia Woolf cultivate a lyrical style in an attempt to bring words closer to the effects of line and colour which she admired in painting. The result was to dislodge the narrative element of prose fiction so radically in favour of sensations and atmospheres that in Woolf’s case it becomes more appropriate to talk of “sketches” than of “stories” (16).



Initially, the term Post-Impressionism was applied to the styles developed during the last two decades of the nineteenth century by the French painters Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Georges Seurat. The term is now used as a blanket term covering the pictorial art movements of surrealism; futurism; cubism; expressionism and fauvism that succeeded Impressionism. The term Post-Impressionism was originally conceived of by Roger Fry and first used in connection with an exhibition of paintings by Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh organised by him, which opened on 8 November 1910. The Post-Impressionists rejected the idea that art should depend upon moral or didactic subjects. They also rejected the idea that the artwork should contain a story. Subject matter is tangential and emphasis is instead placed upon the artwork as a thing-in-itself. The opening of the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” was, in the words of Clive Bell, greeted with “howls of rage and shrieks of venomous laughter... Eminent painters and critics, connoisseurs and collectors, to say nothing of novelists, politicians, judges, bishops and ladies of fashion, cried aloud and made themselves heard and absurd” (1950: 24). The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition which followed two years later was also received with “howls of execration”.

Post-Impressionism expressed a subjective view of the visual world and reacted against the naturalistic accuracy of Impressionism. More specifically, the movement can be seen as a synthesis of visual art and language. In a talk delivered in the last week of the first Post-Impressionist exhibition, on 9 January 1911, Fry discussed the role of language in relation to visual experience in the Post-Impressionist artwork, the aim of which:

is to discover the visual language of the imagination. To discover, that is, what arrangements of form and colour are calculated to stir the imagination most deeply through the stimulus given to the sense of sight (1911: 857).

Fry’s premise concerning the creation of a “visual language of the imagination” may be understood as an attempt to realise a form of visual vocabulary or painted fiction. Essentially, the Post-Impressionist might be said to stimulate the imagination through eloquent visual “arrangements”. The word ‘arrangement’ is resonant of the formal process

of poetry, or is consonant with the suggestive power of music (a sentiment later reprised when Fry states that art addresses itself directly to the imagination through “a music of line and colour” (862)). In this way, “form and colour” have a narrative function. Fry advances on this concept of a visual vocabulary by claiming that the aim of Post-Impressionism is to generate a condition in which visual readings are possible:

these artists, however unconsciously they may work, are gaining for future imaginations, the right to speak directly to the imagination through images created, not because of their likeness to external nature, but because of their fitness to appeal to the imaginative and contemplative life (862).

Post-Impressionism embodies the complex truth that “external nature” is alive with metaphorical possibilities that “speak directly” to the imagination. In this sense, words and visual images have the same function. But this is not a literal connection or “likeness” to experience, for at the centre of Post-Impressionism is an acute awareness of the disparity between looking at the real thing and recreating something like it in words. The Post-Impressionists’ rejection of a “literal exactitude to actual appearance” (861) works in the service of “the imaginative and contemplative life”, of subjective response rather than objectivity. Commenting on “the outlines” of the figures in a Post-Impressionist painting Fry writes:

The line itself, its qualities as handwriting, its immediate communication to the mind of gesture, becomes immensely enhanced, and I do not think it is possible to deny to these artists the practice of a particularly vigorous and expressive style of handwriting (865).

Here we are presented with the idea of drawing as “handwriting”, where language is very much part of the material of art - a line can equally be made by a pen or a brush. The word “gesture” perhaps alludes to the clean-lined fluency and poetic eloquence of balletic movement whilst at the same time the words “vigorous and expressive” suggest an automatic writing that is unreliant on a prewritten formula. This turning of art into poetry - the conveyance of emotion through the gesture of a brush or the flourish of a pen - shapes

up to a seduction of the sense of sight, not least because the canvas is lifted onto a purely expressive plane.<sup>103</sup>

Roger Fry's observations on a "visual language of the imagination" (1911: 857) reappear in Clive Bell's *Art* (1914) under the term "significant form" (8). Bell's theory emphasises the contrast between representational content and a reliance on pure form to evoke 'aesthetic emotion' in the spectator. The real interest of the artwork resides not in the message it has to convey or the story it has to tell, but in the questions it raises about the fundamental format of art, how "lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms" can "stir our aesthetic emotions". It is an idea which rests on a concept of art as a sort of visual vocabulary, as "relations and combinations of lines and colours" (8) are unified into a coherent, narrative-like arrangement. The Post-Impressionist canvas, then, can be said to function as a sort of visually encoded language with no guiding principle but the spectator's own sensibilities. Accordingly, Post-Impressionism challenges the idea that art should have a 'story' and, on many levels, represented the future direction that literature would take. As Bell observes:

Portraits of psychological and historical value, topographical works, pictures that tell stories and suggest situations, illustrations of all sorts...According to my hypothesis they are not works of art. They leave untouched our aesthetic emotions because it is not their forms but the ideas or information suggested or conveyed by their forms that affect us (17).

Abandoning "stories", standard histories and "situations" for a world of colour and form, Post-Impressionist artworks work by their formal rather than their anecdotal qualities.

---

<sup>103</sup> In his Preface to the Catalogue for the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition Fry observes that Post-Impressionism is an attempt to find a direct route to the imagination, "to find a pictorial language appropriate to the sensibilities of the modern outlook" (1925: 238).

All in all, Post-Impressionism altered human perception, introducing a radically different way of seeing that relied on the subversion of the real world. In his Preface to the Catalogue of the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition Fry raises issues of subjectivity, set off against the legacy of an aesthetics based on concepts of faithful imitation and precise observations of the outside world:

Now, these artists do not seek to give what can, after all, be but a pale reflex of actual appearance, but to arouse the conviction of a new and definite reality. They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life (Fry 1925: 239).

Woolf identified with the Post-Impressionists' concerns about the role of representation in art.<sup>104</sup> As she observes in "Is Fiction an Art?" (1927) "Why... should the final test of plot, character, story and the other ingredients of a novel lie in their power to imitate life? Why should a real chair be better than an imaginary elephant?" (*Collected Essays IV*: 461). In "Character in Fiction" (1924) she compares the de-emphasis in the modern novel on "character-making" with the birth of Post-Impressionism (although the fact that this date coincides, approximately, with the date of the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition is not made explicit) stating that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (*Collected Essays III*: 421).<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Woolf felt exhilarated by what she termed - in *Roger Fry: A Series of Impressions* (1994) - as the "complex...disturbing...many sided" (10) nature of the movement. In her article entitled "The Post-Impressionists" (1911), she embarks upon a forthright attack upon the "lay opponents" of Post-Impressionism, stating "the reconcilability of a taste for Post-Impressionism with that for more conventional forms of artistic expression" and that an understanding of the merits of the movement can only be achieved by altering one's point of view (*Collected Essays I*: 380). In July 1917 in an anonymous review of Arnold Bennett's *Books and Persons* (1917) Woolf asked whether or not it was possible "that some writer will come along and do in words" (*Collected Essays II*: 130) what the Post-Impressionists had done in paint. For a discussion of the influence of Roger Fry in Woolf's fiction see Roberts. John Hawley. "Vision and Design in Virginia Woolf", *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 61, 835-47, although he confines his discussion to the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). See also Marler. Regina "A Note on Virginia Woolf and the Visual Arts", *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, No. 42 (Spring 1994), 7-8.

<sup>105</sup> In *Roger Fry: A Biography* (1940), Woolf stated in connection with the period: "Literature was suffering from a plethora of old clothes. Cézanne and Picasso had shown the way; writers should fling representation to the winds and follow suit" (172).

The critical discourse to which Post-Impressionism is wedded is useful in exemplifying many of the structural and expressive concerns of Woolf's "Monday or Tuesday" (1921) and "Blue and Green" (1921). Inspired formally by the Post-Impressionists, these stories are linked to a view of art as 'subjectless' and might be said to use a "language of form and colour" (1911: 867) to bring form in closer alliance with the chaos of sense perception. As Adrian Velicu writes, the language of "Monday or Tuesday" and "Blue and Green" "is aimed at finding out the possibilities of creating images by means of words by following the suggestions of the Post-Impressionists" (23). Indeed, "Blue and Green" bears an intriguing similarity to two paintings by Umberto Boccioni entitled *States of Mind II: Those who Go* (1911) and *States of Mind II: Those who Stay* (1911), which are blue and green respectively (see Appendices G and H). It is intriguing that Woolf may have seen these paintings at the First Post-Impressionist Exhibition in 1911 where they were possibly exhibited. "Monday or Tuesday" and "Blue and Green" mean to be visual and sensual - appealing to our "aesthetic emotions" - and are pure in the aesthetic pleasure they offer. Everything is implied in the elimination of "the alien and external" (*Collected Essays III*: 33). Placeless and with no human characters to engage with, they are not in any sense representational and in their palpable degree of detachment and geographic non-specificity they recognise and affirm Woolf's feeling that literature is not about imitating life, but about "emotion put in the right relations" (*Letters III*: 133).

Most obviously, there is a plasticity to these stories which provides an opportunity to think about the possibility of a "pictorial language" (Fry 1925: 238). Printed in prose paragraphs, yet containing the striking imagery and calculated rhythmic effects of poetry, "Monday or Tuesday" and "Blue and Green" take the form of prose poems. According to Stephen Fredman, prose poems:

evidence a fascination with language (through puns, rhyme, repetition, elision, disjunction, excessive troping, and subtle foregrounding of diction) that interferes with the progression of story or idea.<sup>106</sup>

Both sketches eliminate 'story' and narrative progression to rely on pure 'significant form' instead. In "Blue and Green", the volume and movement of colour shapes, defines and amplifies the narrative, as line patterns, word-groupings and line forms mimic the emergence and fading away of colour in a direct exposition of Roger Fry's notion of colour expressed in *L'Amour de l'Art* (1926), "not as an adjunct to form, as something imposed upon form, but as itself the direct exponent of form".<sup>107</sup> In this way, form and content combine to build a unique visual language in which visual metaphors and emotive arrangements of syntax strike the kind of significant relationships that are more usually the preserve of poetry. "Blue and Green", for example, does not belong to any specific geography: is "Green" a desert?; is "Blue" a coastal landscape? A point or significant event is missing in both sketches. For instance, the wrecked rowing boat in "Blue" is the residue of an event, but nothing actually occurs in the sketch. Both stories are totally character- and dialogue-free.

Perhaps the most obvious similarity between the two stories is that both are imperilled by time. Both "Blue and Green" and "Monday or Tuesday" are motivated by the desire to still time and to "give ordinary waking Arnold Bennett life the form of art" (*Diary 4*: 161). Exploring the relationship of time to narrative space - aware of time passing when we want to halt it - these sketches try to still narrative time through repetitive word formations and rhythmic and spatial effects in the manner of prose poems. What the prose poem does not do, according to Gerlach, "is to encourage us to extend our imagination along the lines of characters and conflict, space and time" (83).

---

<sup>106</sup> Fredman, Stephen. *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* (New York, 1976) cited in Gerlach: 80.

<sup>107</sup> No page number.

The key concept in “Blue and Green” is whether language can accurately assess what we see, even though it is bound by time. In “Walter Sickert: A Conversation” (1934), Woolf discusses Sickert’s representation of colour:

How is he to convey in words the mixture of innocence and sordidity, pity and squalor? Sickert merely takes his brush and paints a tender green light on the faded wallpaper. Light is beautiful falling through green leaves. He has no need to explain it; green is enough (1934: 58).

Unlike the painter, however, the writer does need to explain colour and in “Blue and Green” Woolf attempts to do so.<sup>108</sup> Throughout the sketch, the realisation of the perpetually fluctuating rhythms of colour in words presents a specific problem. The struggle to give colour physical form - which in “Green” seems desperate and in “Blue” is measured and reflective - is rendered in a “plastic” (*Diary 1*: 168), rhythmically free language which approximates poetry.<sup>109</sup> The confrontation between colour and words is addressed by Woolf in *Orlando* (1928) where Woolf writes that “Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another... The shade of green Orlando now saw spoilt his rhyme and split his metre” (13). In *Between the Acts* (1941) Woolf writes that colour is unrepresentable in verbal terms: “Beyond that was blue, pure blue, black blue, blue that had never filtered down; that had escaped registration”. The words “never filtered down” and “escaped

---

<sup>108</sup> The confrontation between colour and words comes through clearly in the following quotation from *The Waves* (1931) in which Woolf stresses the inadequacy of words: “There are no words. Blue, red - even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through” (220).

<sup>109</sup> “Blue and Green” may indeed have been inspired by three poems in particular. One is the Imagist poem by the American poet H.D. entitled “Oread” (1915) which projects the vibrant energy of “Green” and echoes the imagery of pines and pools in the sketch: “Whirl up, sea -/Whirl your pointed pines,/Splash your great pines/On our rocks,/Hurl your green over us,/Cover us with your pools of fir” (62). The concern with visual clarity in D.H. Lawrence’s “Green” (1915) - another Imagist poem - conveyed in pared-down, weightless images of golden petals and flowers resonates in Woolf’s sketch also: “The sky was apple-green./The sky was green wine held up in the sun./The moon was a golden petal between./She opened her eyes, and green/They shone, clear like flowers undone,/For the first time, now for the first time seen” (216); and Lawrence’s “Blueness” (c. 1918) calls up the same atmosphere as Woolf’s “Blue”, particularly the first stanza with its dreamy, free-ambient tones: “Out of the darkness, fretted sometimes in its sleeping,/Jets of sparks in fountains of blue come leaping/To sight, revealing a secret, numberless secrets keeping”; and the last: “All these pure things come foam and spray of the sea/Of Darkness abundant, which shaken mysteriously/Breaks into dazzle of living, as dolphins leap from the sea/Of midnight and shake it to fire, till the flame of the/shadow we see” (136). “Blue and Green” exerts its grip rather like an Imagist poem does and in the sketch Woolf is not entirely uninfluenced by the Imagist method of recording a specific moment in minutely observant, pure and very immediate language. The effect is to clarify, explain and simplify what is seen as much as possible.

registration” indicate that colour somehow escapes representation and that words are too impure to describe colour. (Woolf will return to the idea of “distilling” (*Complete Shorter Fiction*: 131) words in “Monday or Tuesday”.) The disruptive syntax in “Green” reflects the complexities of describing colour, a battle which does actually “split” the narrative and break down sentences:

The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble. The feathers of parakeets - their harsh cries - sharp blades of palm trees - green, too; green needles glittering in the sun. But the hard glass drips on to the marble; the pools hover above the desert sand; the camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble; rushes edge them; weeds clog them; here and there a white blossom; the frog flops over; at night the stars are set there unbroken. Evening comes, and the shadow sweeps the green over the mantelpiece; the ruffled surface of ocean. No ships come; the aimless waves sway beneath the empty sky. It's night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green's out (136).

“Green” begins graphically with a close-up of a light fitting - described as having “pointed fingers” - looming like a giant hand. It is an opening which appears to be built around the metaphor of an artist or writer facelessly wielding a painting brush or a pen. It is significant that the hand is immobilised. This hovering image exerts a profound hold on the imagination as we engage with the artist's dilemma: how to describe the play of light? how to turn this restive visual energy into words? As if to tease the artist, the light indulges in mischievously childlike antics, as it roguishly “slides” down the glass and “drops” colour with a disruptive, yet playful, nonchalance. In the meantime, as the paint “drops” ineffectually from the artist's brush onto the marble floor, the artist's seemingly short-tempered aggression over how to control this chaotic element is perfectly realised in the abrupt sentences - “The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green



upon the marble” - which convey a powerful impression of both exasperation and the sense of time being wasted.

As the sketch progresses it becomes increasingly apparent how great a challenge Woolf has set herself. Seeking the purest possible translation from eye to page she indulges in literalistic word-painting through high-precision similes. The feathers of parakeets are like the “sharp blades of palm trees” which resemble, in turn, “green needles glittering in the sun”. The sense of struggle comes through most clearly in the following line where the pen is quite literally disabled and unable to fill the gaps in the narrative: “The feathers of parakeets - their harsh cries - sharp blades of palm trees - green, too”. Here Woolf realises, through a mimetic use of line form, Bell’s idea of significant form. As if to underline the direct confrontation between the literal and the visual, the “harsh cries” of the parakeets and the “sharp blades” actually slice through the narrative; this is done through the parenthetical dashes which cut into the text. In this way, the visual cuts into language, quite literally “cutting away the merely representative element” (Fry November 1919).<sup>110</sup> At the same time, the tapered phrasing and staccato quality of the narrative reflect language and syntax desperately trying to keep up with the highly energised play of light. The syntax gradually becomes breathless in its pursuit of its subject:

But the hard glass drips on to the marble; the pools hover above the desert sand;  
the camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble; rushes edge them;  
weeds clog them; here and there a white blossom; the frog flops over; at night the  
stars are set there unbroken.

In her struggle to capture something of the individual character of the scene, Woolf makes minute observations without actually constructing a narrative. With no end-stops - just a succession of semi-colons which hold the words together - the narrative is stretched thin and sentences fragment. It is almost as if the prose is hijacked by the joyous and involuntary movements of the animals who “lurch” and flop their way through it. However,

---

<sup>110</sup> Source unlocated.

at the same time, there is a compulsive, highly energised thrust to the rhythms that gives the narrative a self-sustaining momentum. In the process of all this dynamic movement, the narrative grows organically, allowing the work to achieve its own significant form through poetic coherence. Ruth Ronen in her essay, "Poetical Coherence in Literary Prose" (1986), suggests that poetic coherence can be achieved in narrative prose through an arrangement of equivalent syntactic elements: "equivalent positioning reinforces potential relatedness between forms: the reader is inclined to look for similarities or oppositions between rhyming expressions or between expressions inserted in the same metrical slots" (68).<sup>111</sup>

Woolf achieves such coherence through a sort of additive syntax, an arrangement of shortened, almost identically sized, syntactic units divided by a series of semi-colons. The avoidance of subordination implicit in this arrangement forces the reader to make his or her own connections. The parallelism in "the camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble; rushes edge them; weeds clog them" has a cohesive effect that is achieved through a rhythm of recurrence. The repetition of "them" forces the reader to read retroactively, to "look for similarities", producing an experience which is almost the antithesis of reading. Added to this, the series of semi-colons act as a sort of visual tagline forcing the reader to break up the reading experience into a series of visual frames. In this way, Woolf makes a coherent visual picture without actually constructing a narrative. Quite as significant as any of this, though, is the way in which light and colour actively manipulate the syntax. As the pools of coloured light "hover" then "settle", the narrative undergoes a similar dissolution. Descriptive phrases shrink in length as colour and light fades and a steadily squeezed syntax suggests the pressure of diminishing time: "It's night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green's out".

---

<sup>111</sup> The foregrounding of language in the modern short story takes the short story further away from the conditions of narrative prose to the realms of poetry. Elizabeth Bowen stresses the poeticism of the modern short story and its uniquely suggestive power: "The writer must so strip fact of neutralizing elements as to return to it, and prolong for it, its first power: what was in life a half-second of apprehension must be perpetuated. The extraverted short story - bare of analysis, sparse in emotional statement - is the formula for, never the transcript of, that amazement with which poetry deals. The particular must be given general significance" (1994: 258-59).

After all this enervating movement, “Blue” begins lazily with a measure of exhaustion and saturation; big, loose-limbed phrases unfold as the narrative wearily concedes to nightfall. The nervous energy of “Green” has settled to a deep imaginative reverie; colour has been cooled and controlled and, as if to give form to this sense of calm, the jolting rhythms of “Green” have been replaced by a smooth easiness and inspired stillness that is palpable in the limpid and beautifully controlled prose:

The snub-nosed monster rises to the surface and spouts through his blunt nostrils two columns of water, which, fiery-white in the centre, spray off into a fringe of blue beads. Strokes of blue line the black tarpaulin of his hide. Slushing the water through mouth and nostrils he sinks, heavy with water, and the blue closes over him dowsing the polished pebbles of his eyes. Thrown upon the beach he lies, blunt, obtuse, shedding dry blue scales. Their metallic blue stains the rusty iron on the beach. Blue are the ribs of the wrecked rowing boat. A wave rolls beneath the blue bells. But the cathedral’s different, cold, incense laden, faint blue with the veils of madonnas (136).

One thing that emerges clearly in “Blue”, in contrast to the crowded world of “Green”, is its sense of desolation and abandonment. This time, the impression is one of a vast, bleak landscape and the dominant feeling is isolation. This loneliness is conveyed through isolated, yet strong, visual images - the sea creature, the shipwrecked rowing boat and the cathedral - that are static but have a poetic and symbolic resonance and elicit a sort of narrative. The skeletal frame of the boat gives off an almost human aura, its derelict condition showing it has ‘lived’. The rust on the boat acts as a powerful representation of the flux of time. The boat functions as a still life, seducing the reader but withholding the details of the narrative and referencing an unknown story. The cathedral gives off the commanding atmosphere of a silent prayer and conveys the feeling of ardent devotion (although this is subtly ironised by Woolf in the image of the shipwreck). “Blue” is far from reassuring, however, and there is a feeling of overwhelming, almost frightening immensity. The coastal setting has universal associations; the boat could easily be seen as an

uninhabited building left to rot in a derelict urban setting. No protection is offered by a structure stripped bare and exposed to the elements. No trace of sunlight is visible now. Instead, the predominant colour of nocturnal gloom adds to the feeling of incipient cold.

In “Blue”, the mood appears radically changed and is substantially more reflective. An immediate indication of its more even-tempered tenor are the uncluttered narrative lines. Less frenetic than “Green”, which proceeds by syntactic constriction, in “Blue” images and words expand to fit the space. Here the passage of time is more ethereally rendered and a torpor prevails. As a result, the narrative loses much of its momentum. Long, integrated sentences reflect a slowing down of time and sequence as convulsion is replaced by stillness. This is conveyed in verbs such as “sinks” “rolls” “closes” and “dowsing” and in adjectives such as “heavy” and “laden” which replace the quivering, springing verbs such as “glittering”, “sweep”, “drips” and “slides” in “Green”.

The sense of emotional desolation and arrested motion in “Blue” is captured in enduring rhythms. For the most part the prose is not spare or taut, but has a certain gravity. The etiolated texture of “Green” has been fleshed out. More coherent, less repetitive, the prose carries greater emotional weight:

The snub-nosed monster rises to the surface and spouts through his blunt nostrils two columns of water, which, fiery-white in the centre, spray off into a fringe of blue beads... Thrown upon the beach he lies, blunt, obtuse, shedding dry blue scales. Their metallic blue stains the rusty iron on the beach.

In these longer, more closely-textured sentences there are no prolonged pauses, no semi-colons or dashes. The alliterative patterns in “snub”, “surface”, “spouts” and “spray”; “fiery”, “fringe”; “blunt”, “blue” and “beads” and the repetition of the words “blunt” and “blue” create an intensely worked spatial effect - colour seems eternalised in this slow-motion prose. As a consequence, colour is saturated. This is not the light-fingered, splashed approach of “Green”. In “Blue”, Woolf displays a firmer artist’s hand and exhibits more circumspect paint-handling, using fewer, more expansive brush strokes, determined “[s]trokes” of colour that “stain[s]” things rather than coming in drips and drops.

In “Blue and Green” Woolf aims to stimulate the reader’s sense of significant form. Cleaving into two spaces, the sketch is evenly balanced in length, but not in tone. Beginning in spirited heights, ending in gloomy depths, “Blue and Green” is a journey through different moods; addressing itself directly to the imagination through “a music of line and colour” (Fry 1911: 862). Like a song without any lyrics the effect is of mere, visual sensibility.<sup>112</sup>

“Monday or Tuesday” (1921) is characterised by a similar tension between chaos and order. Here the random outpourings of consciousness function rather like colour does in “Blue and Green”, although, contrarily, the narrative is intentionally discordant. In “Monday or Tuesday” she goes much further than in “Blue and Green” in illustrating how words obstruct the truth. Where “Blue and Green” strives for a measure of coherence through poetic effects, this same feeling for significant form produces a very different, less ‘readable’, result in “Monday or Tuesday”. This is partly a consequence of their different formats: where “Blue and Green” is visually even, the free-form nature of “Monday or Tuesday” allows for a more expressive flexibility. Tonally, also, the sketches are dissimilar. This is neither the rebellion of “Green”, nor the calm objectivity of “Blue”; rather, this story is distinguished by its halting inarticulacy. This time, the ellipses do not just feature in individual sentences but constitute the entire body of the narrative. The story’s title appears in Woolf’s “Modern Fiction” (1925) as a description of life itself:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there (*Collected Essays IV*: 160).

---

<sup>112</sup> Jean Guiguet classes “Blue and Green” as “the most extreme example” of Woolf’s *Monday or Tuesday* sketches which “delight the eye and ear without satisfying the mind”. It “goes outside the realm of reality to lose itself in the world of dream, where images are connected only by a slender thread. This arbitrary universe was not the one Virginia Woolf sought to explore, and that is doubtless why she proposed leaving it out of the later editions which she envisaged” (332).

“Monday or Tuesday” attempts to establish a relationship between form and the uninterrupted continuum of an “ordinary mind” thinking through a reconfiguration of the emphases of traditional narrative. In “Modern Novels” (1919), Woolf considers how the writer may represent the stream of consciousness and states that his or her task is to “convey this incessantly varying spirit with whatever stress or sudden deviation it may display” (*Collected Essays III*: 33). In “Monday or Tuesday”, in an attempt to approximate Fry’s “visual language of the imagination”, the text spells unequivocal conflict between vision and design. Searching, picking up impressions as it goes along, it seems disjointed and unsure of itself. Clive Bell emphasised the significance of the sequence of Woolf’s prose, characterising her writing as “a technique which juxtaposes active tones, and omits...transitions” (1924: 145-46). In “Monday or Tuesday” she conveys the workings of consciousness in this very manner. Whereas “Blue and Green” strives for some sort of poetic coherence, “Monday or Tuesday” operates through “disunifying” devices such as “ellipsis, ambiguity and resonance” (Head: 2).<sup>113</sup> Struggling to find the definition of truth, these disunifying devices defy reduction to a simple message. The “indifferent” (131) movement of the heron - a symbol of the ordinary mind - can be said to “shape” the sketch, its non-linear swoop through the story mapping the free-moving trajectory of the imagination. Impetuous, ejaculatory - the story proceeds with an anguished neediness that the persistent refrain only deepens.

---

<sup>113</sup> Head challenges Poe’s “single effect” doctrine which, he argues, “invites a reunifying approach to familiar short story characteristics such as ellipsis, ambiguity and resonance”. The short story has, Head argues “an enduring ability to capture the episodic nature of twentieth-century experience” (2). He critiques the predominant formalist approach to modern short fiction and constructs his own theoretical frame, drawing from the work of Althusser and his concept of “relative autonomy” and Bakhtin’s concept of dialogised narrative to account for “the formal and narrative disruptions discoverable in the short story” and to reveal the link between literary form and social context as an “integral part of their formal experimentation” (26).

Fundamentally, "Monday or Tuesday" cannot be said to have a "moment of importance", for its very form illustrates Woolf's statement that in modern fiction: "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on" (*Collected Essays IV*: 160). This notion that truth is elusive finds articulation through "disconnected" and "incoherent" (161) arrangements that suggest a mind fraught with a sense of anticipation, though nothing actually occurs. Gerald Prince defines the point of a narrative thus:

The narrative should be non-obvious and worth telling. It should represent, or illustrate, or explain, something which is unusual and problematic, something which is (made) relevant for and matters to its receiver... Without desire on the part of the receiver and without the fulfillment of this desire, there can be no point to a narrative (159).

In "Monday or Tuesday" the frustration of the desire for truth constitutes the story's very point. Rather than working its way towards a single truth, the sketch skirts around it. The phrase "desiring truth" is a constant refrain throughout the story; and the repeated question "and truth?" is densely woven into the story's texture but is ultimately unanswered. If the "moment of truth" is widely regarded as "the canonic form of the modern short story" (Pratt: 182), then "Monday or Tuesday" is an example of the missing epiphany.<sup>114</sup>

Essential to this discussion of "disunifying" devices and the absent point in "Monday or Tuesday" is the issue of how the story challenges the notion of narrative time. A crucial element, which is implied in its confrontational title, is its questioning of the value of time. On 10 November 1920 Woolf wrote in her diary: "days fly as usual; and I'm writing a story to ask why -" (*Diary 2*: 74). "Monday or Tuesday" is perhaps the result of this question. Fundamentally, it suggests how narrative might escape time through a questioning of how the parts of narrative work together in time. Specifically, it attempts to escape time in the same way that a prose poem does, that is, through repetitious narrative

---

<sup>114</sup> Joseph Collins notes that, in *Monday or Tuesday* truth is a "tantalising wraith - always present but never attainable or definable" (188). R. Brimley Johnson writes in *Some Contemporary Novelists (Women)* (1920), Woolf "is seeking, with passionate determination, for that reality which is behind the material, the things that matter, spiritual things, ultimate Truth. And here she finds man an outsider, wilfully blind, purposely indifferent" (18-19).

arrangements and word formations. Through such rhythmic and spatial effects the story, like the prose poem, “establishes space” (Gerlach: 82). The main challenge is finding a way out of the linearity of narrative into the unconscious mind. The opening paragraph of “Monday or Tuesday” creates a sense of wide-open space through the symbol of the heron. The story is initially characterised by abstraction and disengagement from the real world, as the unimpeded, fluid continuum of consciousness is figured in the free movement of the heron and the ever-changing sky:

Lazy and indifferent, shaking space easily from his wings, knowing his way, the heron passes over the church beneath the sky. White and distant, absorbed in itself, endlessly the sky covers and uncovers, moves and remains. A lake? Blot the shores of it out! A mountain? Oh, perfect - the sun gold on its slopes. Down that falls. Ferns then, or white feathers, for ever and ever -

Desiring truth, awaiting it, laboriously distilling a few words, for ever desiring - (a cry starts to the left, another to the right. Wheels strike divergently. Omnibuses conglomerate in conflict) - for ever desiring - (the clock asseverates with twelve distinct strokes that it is midday; light sheds gold scales; children swarm) - for ever desiring truth. Red is the dome; coins hang on the trees; smoke trails from the chimneys; bark, shout, cry ‘Iron for sale’ - and truth? (131).<sup>115</sup>

Unfortunately, the abstract becomes concrete very quickly. The phrase “Down that falls” conveys a sense of spinning out of control and is complemented on the structural level by the paragraph break between “for ever and ever -” and “Desiring truth” which produces a slightly unbalancing sensation. Although Woolf tentatively tries to avoid this by segueing the phrase “for ever and ever -” into the words “Desiring truth”, it is a half-hearted attempt and, rather than providing the hoped-for experience of total sensory immersion “for ever and ever”, the next section introduces more distraction than it eliminates. The external

---

<sup>115</sup> Hereafter, all citations from “Monday or Tuesday” are from *Complete Shorter Fiction*: 131.



world intrudes loudly drowning out the truth as the private realm comes into discordant conflict with the competing, parallel public world:

Here, we are faced with a situation in which the narrator's lofty intentions, conveyed in the elevated vantage-point of the beginning, are brought down to earth by an inability to measure up to them. In this paragraph we are transported from the closed realm of the mind, mirroring only itself and "absorbed in itself", to the external world.

The question of form's relation to content is especially pronounced here, for this is no easy or fluent communication. The sudden shift in point of view, as the reader is joltingly violated from the mind to the frenetic activity of the city, is a disorientating shift - a stark reminder of art's literal connection to the realm of experience. Added to this, the parentheses keep cutting in, purposefully destroying all sense of unity and repeatedly highlighting the materiality and context of the situation. This movement conveys a blurring of the boundaries between the public and the private which are inextricably linked. The idyllic mental landscape is countered by the incongruously prosaic omnibuses and smoking chimneys. As a result, the fluency of the opening paragraph is now made discordant as the record sticks and the refrain repeats itself: "for ever desiring - ... - for ever desiring - ... - for ever desiring truth" (my ellipses) imbuing the narrative with the frustration of staying in the same place.

Woolf's use of the refrain foregrounds the importance of the sentence in the short story. As Susan Lohafer points out "the fact that the end is pushed close in a short story does impart a really quite practical urgency, a quite necessary efficiency, to each sentence that takes up time, that both delays and brings close the terminal point" (1983: 50). In "Monday or Tuesday" Woolf manipulates this sense of urgency, teasing the reader by stalling the progression to a terminal point and deferring closure. At the same time, the dashes act as a counterlanguage: on their cusp lies hesitation, doubt, truth, emptiness and silence. Also, appearing as they do before each refrain, they act as a jumping-off point and suggest the action of holding one's breath. These short intakes of air are followed by deep

exhalations as each refrain conveys a perilous fall into nothingness. Words have quite literally become stumbling blocks.

Woolf sets up the whole question of significant form in the phrase “laboriously distilling a few words”. If words are to be able to “speak directly to the imagination” (Fry 1911: 862), if an eloquent evocation of an “ordinary mind” thinking is to be formulated, words have to be made pure and filtered from a context. This is not least a matter of “distilling” language. Pertinent here is Woolf’s argument in her essay “Craftsmanship” (broadcast on 20 April 1937 and published in *The Death of the Moth*) where she speculates about the power of words to “tell the truth” (1942: 126):

It is only a question of finding the right words and putting them in the right order.

But we cannot do it because they do not live in dictionaries; they live in the mind.

And how do they live in the mind? Various and strangely, much as human beings live, by ranging hither and thither, by falling in love, and mating together (131).

What Woolf’s statement illuminates is the crucial difference between language and the non- or pre-verbal, between representation and the unrepresentable. Clearly, here, is a notion of “significant form” (8) and Bell’s idea of how “lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms” can “stir our aesthetic emotions”.

These concerns are all-too-evident in “Monday or Tuesday” which confronts the same questions: what is the relationship between words and truth?; and, crucially, why is it so difficult to merge the two? “Monday or Tuesday” illustrates that truth is not only a question of “finding the right words and putting them in the right order” with regard to their temporal logic; rather, words function spatially “ranging hither and thither” (131) and cutting through temporal sequence. There seems to be a considerable degree of infighting rather than “mating” going on in the story, as Woolf confronts the difficulties of finding the right combinations of words to represent the vision in the mind. In consequence, the story is full of inarticulate sounds rather than words. The cacophony of malevolent, discordant noise conveys a sense of raw, unmediated reality: “(a cry starts to the left, another to the right...)”. This lack of harmony is evident in the noises - the “bark, shout” and “cry” - that

are audible, and in the noise that the omnibuses which “conglomerate in conflict” make. The emphatic declaration of the clock (a reminder of remorseless continuity and order in the midst of chaos) rudely punctuates the narrative as it “asseverates with twelve distinct strokes that it is midday”.

As time rushes on, the narrative tries to still it. This is illustrated in the following except where Woolf concentrates on visual images frozen in time rather than on narrative events.

Radiating to a point men’s feet and women’s feet, black or gold-encrusted - (This foggy weather - Sugar? No, thank you - The commonwealth of the future) - the firelight darting and making the room red, save for the black figures and their bright eyes, while outside a van discharges, Miss Thingummy drinks tea at her desk, and plate-glass preserves fur coats -

Proceeding not by way of a clear explication of ideas, but through the “sudden deviation[s]” of a mind thinking (*Collected Essays III*: 33), this is an abortive narrative structure. Images are not cohesive or fully realised or embedded in some explicatory narrative. Rather, the moving images of “men’s feet and women’s feet”, the snippet of dialogue, the movement of traffic and the unknown woman drinking tea are freeze-framed, giving the illusion of a moment of time caught in passing. These isolated images, cut off from a larger context in time, cumulatively give the story a spatial sense.

Woolf attempts to ‘distill’ language later as words are thrown out of context to lie side by side in disparate order.

Flaunted, leaf-light, drifting at corners, blown across the wheels, silver-splashed, home or not home, gathered, scattered, squandered in separate scales, swept up, down, torn, sunk, assembled - and truth?

All this suggests that the very seams of the story are being unpicked in the search for a deeper narrative truth. The word “torn” connotes this rupture. Bound for an indeterminate location, people are “home or not home”, “scattered” and bound on separate journeys; “blown across the wheels” suggests violent death. But the statement is incomplete; the

subject undefined. Adding to the confusion, are the words “squandered in separate scales” which are troublesome and throw the initial interpretation into a variety of meanings that cannot be resolved. In one sense, there is the idea of time being “squandered” because we can relate the word “scales” to the earlier phrase “light sheds gold scales”. More probably, since scales are used to weigh things and therefore find value, it seems to apply to the idea of the distillation of words evoked earlier on. Though words seem to be valorised in “Blue and Green”, where Woolf is at pains to find the right words to describe the play of colour, in “Monday or Tuesday” they are “squandered” and the ambiguities inherent in words frustrate our attempts to pin the story down.

This sense of words being “squandered” is for the most part a product of the story’s more insistent awareness of time passing as “space rushes blue”:

Now to recollect by the fireside on the white square of marble. From ivory depths words rising shed their blackness, blossom and penetrate. Fallen the book; in the flame, in the smoke, in the momentary sparks - or now voyaging, the marble square pendant, minarets beneath and the Indian seas, while space rushes blue and stars glint - truth? or now, content with closeness?

As the day closes, we get the sense of words majestically rising from the fire of the mind: “From ivory depths words rising shed their blackness, blossom and penetrate”; (the “momentary sparks” might be the “evanescent impressions” that Woolf mentions in “Modern Fiction” (1925)). But, where words promise to “penetrate”, the narrative structure is firmly rooted in a moment which does not develop. This is manifest in parallelism: “in the flame, in the smoke, in the momentary sparks”; and “- or now... or now” (my ellipsis) in which the abiding impression is not of time passing but of a series of visual images frozen in time.

At the end of "Monday or Tuesday", the question of truth remains, for the sketch offers no solution, no resolution and no climax. The story ends in the same way that it began, with the return of the heron: "Lazy and indifferent the heron returns; the sky veils her stars; then bares them" (131). This abandonment of a resolution for an envelope structure (as in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass") creates a sense of no time having passed - a sense that we are still "awaiting" enlightenment rather than experiencing it.

Superficially, the device of the envelope appears to accommodate the random outpourings of consciousness and the disruptions in narrative structure and unity. The "equivalent positioning" (Ronen: 68) of the refrain at the beginning and the end of the sketch seems to achieve a cohesive framework for it appears to be holding the discordant narrative elements together. In this way, we get a comfortable sense of enclosure and circularity, of "closeness". However, the sense of unity that the envelope provides is illusive. As Head notes: "the modernist circular, or spiral story, is usually an exploration of disunity rather than of the simple unity that the visual metaphor suggests" (11) and what comes across most strongly with this ending is the sense of unresolved contradiction between the disconnected and incoherent nature of life itself and the desire for order and incontrovertible truth. The two strands of the story are left hanging. As Clare Hanson notes:

The closing lines of the story mime the final truth without directly stating it. We must not be 'content with closeness' (closure); the text refuses to seal itself up and we are left with a sense of endless dialectic between two aspects of human experience" (1985: 65-66).

This idea that the eloquence of the work finally depends upon its irresolute ending - that the very structure participates in the story's questioning - foregrounds the story's 'significant form'. According to Clive Bell, through significant form "we catch a sense of ultimate reality", for it "lies behind the appearance of all things" (54, 69). Seen in this light, "Monday or Tuesday" comprises a microcosm of life itself, of "ultimate reality". In its structural ambivalence, in its denial of a single explanation, we see the slipperiness of truth, the ambivalent nature of storytelling, and the authenticity of our own experience. To a great

extent, the story form can be seen as being the content itself, simultaneously blocking out the truth whilst seeking it out. Always on the point of revealing truth - words promise to “shed their blackness, blossom and penetrate” - the narrative also covers it all up. As in “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” when Isabella faces the mirror at the end of the story, the result is both illumination and deconstruction. As Woolf writes in connection with the Russian short story, such “inconclusiveness” has an uncomfortable resonance:

It is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair (*Collected Essays IV*: 163).

Woolf’s desire to transcend literal reference and distill the eternal from the transitory in “Blue and Green” and “Monday or Tuesday” is intimately related to her concern for “the essence of reality” and her search for the “centre of things” (*Diary I*: 113, 205). But “Blue and Green” with its second despairing movement and “Monday or Tuesday” with the return to the envelope at the end convey a feeling of reality and truth thwarted. Like her reflection stories, which leave the envelope unopened, “Monday or Tuesday” does not achieve a satisfying resolution and questions remain unanswered “after the story is over”. But it is in this very honest inconclusiveness that the freedom of its form lies. It is perhaps not inappropriate, therefore, that Woolf should have named her only collection of short stories<sup>116</sup> - a work in which she won her freedom - after it.

---

<sup>116</sup> Tony Davenport goes as far as to claim that “Monday or Tuesday” is “an enigmatic, even in a sense an allegorical, statement of her own endeavour and uncertainty as a writer” (172).

## Conclusion

The short story was a form that enabled and liberated Virginia Woolf rather than imprisoned her within an institutionalised frame. Throughout her life she demonstrated a sustained commitment to and enthusiasm for exploring the genre's potential and possibilities. She brought an uncompromising experimentation to her short story writing, championing new and innovative styles of construction. But more than this, her stories seem most compelling because of the way in which they question the very idea of telling a story at all. Woolf was amongst the very few writers of her generation to face the creative challenge of writing 'stories' with no direct action, human content or dialogue.

In much of her short fiction Woolf looks at the phenomena of the margins - that which has been denoted by the mainstream as 'uncanny', liminal or irrational (the errant ghosts of memory, automatism, the surreal). By foregrounding what has been marginalised, silenced and rendered invisible, she returns us not only to lost stories but also to the denied, hidden and most essential parts of life itself. Her choice of the liminal short story genre as a medium in which to explore the marginal emphasises this nuance.

In "Character in Fiction" (1924) Woolf writes that "we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English Literature" (*Collected Essays III*: 436). The Woolfian short story catches us at that very moment between standing straight and falling. It finds us on the threshold of tradition and modernity, past and present, at that very point when the conditions of stability have begun to waver, when truth has taken off, when language has broken down. The Woolfian short story temporarily moves the artist from the centre to the margins so that the writer appears to be no more than a voyeur. It also destabilises the reader's position, as Woolf cryptically writes in "Modern Fiction" (1925), "we are now beginning or ending or standing in the middle of a great period of prose fiction" (*Collected Essays IV*: 158). This sense of dislocation conditions the position of her short fiction. We teeter on the brink of a pool - on the gap between experience and interpretation and between stability and "failure" (*Collected Essays III*: 436); or we stare at a mark on a wall

and question the very process of telling a complete story. In this way, her stories all ask variants of the abiding question posed in "Monday or Tuesday" (1921): " - and truth?" (131).

The investigation of language, the retrieval of what has apparently been discarded and pushed to the margins, the sifting through lost histories, are all dealt with in a manner which mirrors the fragmented nature of modern fiction itself. In this way, Woolf's stories are literary touchstones for the modern sensibility. Through their enveloping structures they are orchestrations of that sensibility. By focusing on the unrepresentable, by cultivating techniques of ellipsis, ambiguity and open-endedness, they draw attention to structures rather than outcomes, processes rather than events. They chart that area between ends and beginnings, with a circular, enveloping momentum that produces a sense of emotional freedom and displaced release. In Woolf's short fiction, the status quo is disrupted just enough to unnerve, to suggest that all is not well, to produce an unsettling feeling that nothing more than a note or an incomplete statement can be made. Her stories document the feeling voiced in "How It Strikes a Contemporary" (1923) - two years after the publication of *Monday or Tuesday* (1921) - that: "Much of what is best in contemporary work has the appearance of being noted under pressure, taken down in a bleak shorthand". In a way, Woolf can be said to deploy the short story as "shorthand" for the "transitory splendours, which may perhaps compose nothing whatever" (*Collected Essays III*: 359), or else to be only a way of leaving the same question hanging: " - and truth?".



## *Appendices*

1. **Facsimile Transcript**

This transcript reproduces the text as it stands in manuscript, line for line, with all revisions presented spatially as in manuscript. The left-hand margin is not justified, but reproduces the author's variation. The author left a space between a fullstop and the next sentence that varied between one and four centimetres: this variation in spacing is reproduced in the facsimile. In manuscript, horizontal deletion lines are used to cancel series of one to four words, while slanted vertical lines cancel complete sentences: in these instances the author's cancellation lines are not reproduced in the facsimile, but all such deletions are enclosed in angled brackets. The titles for the stories that are originally untitled are enclosed in square brackets. Other titles are those used by Virginia Woolf.

The following symbols are used editorially:

- ◊ = deleted word(s)
- { } = interlined revision
- ↑ = caret mark indicating phrase insertion above the line
- ^ = caret mark indicating one-word insertion above the line

2. **Diplomatic Transcript**

This transcript reproduces all the readings present in the manuscript in linear form. Deleted readings are placed in angled brackets, and revisions interlined above the line are presented in curled brackets. No attempt is made to reproduce the lines-lengths, margins, spacing of words and phrases. Paragraphs are retained as in manuscript. Where there are revisions and undeleted alternative wording, the text written first is given first, followed by the revision. This provides a sequential reading of the manuscript words without editorial selection or rejection of incomplete or deleted words.

The following symbols are used:

- ◊ = deleted word(s)
- { } = interlined revision
- [word] = a conjectured reading of a word(s)
- [ ] = stands in place of an unintelligible word

3. **Edited Final Text**

This transcript reproduces only those words which can be argued to be the final versions of each alternative visible in the manuscript. All deleted readings are removed, and all readings which remain undeleted, but which were followed by alternative phrases, are also removed. Punctuation errors are corrected. The paragraphing is accentuated. This version is accompanied by a Textual Apparatus which records all editorial decisions.

## Editorial Procedures

The manuscripts of “Sunday up the River” (c. 1906), “The Penny Steamer” (c. 1906) and “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908) are near-complete. This is borne out by the following factors:

The stories are handwritten. Transcription of these manuscripts is therefore a painstaking process because it is hampered by the necessity of deciphering Woolf’s handwriting which is sometimes illegible. This occasionally leads to conjectured readings. This is particularly demonstrated in “Sunday up the River” where the editorial decision has been to use a word that most closely resembles the conjectured word or is the most viable reading. For example, the word “sight” in line 18; “children” in line 2; and the words “bends over” in line 25.

Often, a large number of words have been crossed out, as are whole paragraphs. For example, in lines 8 and 18 in “Down the river to Greenwich”. The mix of structured and improvised narrative in “Down the river to Greenwich”, the hasty crossings out, rewritings and impulsive additions suggest that it is intensely worked.

The number of emendations between the lines. Many words have been scored-out and replaced above the line. But, to assume that secondary readings are a preferred reading is an arbitrary assumption. The number of tentative substitutions which are never decided upon leads to multiple and unfixed meanings so that so much of the text is ambiguous. In this instance, the interlined revision is taken to be the second version and is editorially preferred. This tendency to leave alternatives open is a salient feature of “Down the river to Greenwich”. For example, “would be in a good temper” in line 14; and “to these places” in line 16.

Spaces on the page are frequent. These have been kept because they often indicate afterthoughts. This is particularly obvious in the manuscript of “Down the river to Greenwich” which has a large blank space in line 11 between “finally” and “Still”.

## Appendix A

### Edited Final Text

[*The Manchester Zoo*. Apr. 1906]. 3 pp ts. With VS ms corrections (A 24 a.)

Six o'clock in the morning it seems is a dark hour in the north; although it is true that I cannot pretend to be an authority upon the complexion of that hour in other climates. Perhaps indeed I was rather astonished to see how much light nature is apparently in the habit of bestowing without my sanction or co-operation. It seems that many people are awake at that hour and have enough light at their disposal to read by.

But without troubling to enumerate the different stages of our journey - a wearisome proceeding - I will only state that by half past eleven we were in the Zoological Gardens at Manchester; and perhaps that statement is better left for the present unsupported. To the reflective mind it will seem a more remarkable fact than if I had said that we stood at that hour upon the topmost peak of Kilimanjaro, or moored our boat in the rushes of the Euphrates, or peeped in to the boiling crater of Vesuvius, for while the number of those who have circumnavigated the world is few, there are but few I may confidently assert, who have ever been or ever will be in the Zoological Gardens at Manchester.

It is with all the eagerness and exultation of an explorer then that I will recount this memorable day; and dedicate myself to follow up this initiatory success with other explorations, haply no less prosperous, in to the Zoological Gardens of our provinces. There is an electric tram which carries you, for miles perhaps and centuries, for you soon lose count of time upon these expeditions, through an immensely broad and pallid avenue. You come occasionally to spaces of dusty grass where small boys are playing cricket, or you meet funeral processions or pleasure parties in brakes. There are no living houses apparently, but great numbers of shops where umbrellas may be mended, or shoes repaired, or hams and candles bought. The climate is very cold and the sky is white rather than luminous. The electric trams evidently are the creatures of the atmosphere. They follow each other swiftly and with perfect smoothness although the traveller neither knows whence they come or whither they go, or upon what stealthy errand they are bound. The organisation however is elaborate and complete, and in the course of time you are made to

descend precisely at the door of your destination, which in our case, I must repeat for the glory of the sound, was the Zoological Gardens of Manchester.

It is in no mere spirit of arrogance that I remark that it was some time before we could find anyone to unlock the door of the establishment, and that when she came she had her hair in curling tongs, and suggested somehow that we were unwonted and probably unwelcome intruders.

But the real greatness of our achievement only dawned upon us when we were free to wander in the grounds of this remarkable ---, but I hesitate to supply a name. For although there were certain conservatories in which parrots might be housed, they were of a far too modest and retiring disposition I feel sure to to be called a Zoo; and although there were earthen beds in the asphalt I do not think that the trees which grew there would have claimed the title of garden. Places indeed where the pavement is of asphalt, where grottoes made of cinders spring up in grotesque and superfluous arches and alleys, where things called pagodas offer you refreshment at every turn, where there are empty bandstands and tiers of vacant seats, considering a lake with a steamer wrapped in oil cloth, yet these places certainly deserve a name which shall distinguish them from any other place of the dead or the living on the face of the globe.

The district in which this particular specimen is placed is called Belle Vue, and perhaps that name is more appropriate and suggestive than any other which the explorer can suggest. And then in order, for as showman I must expatiate upon the different features of our adventure, in order to do justice to the feat, you must consider that the fairy lamps which are the natural illumination of such places had all gone out; that the air was still and silent, instead of beaten into waves of strenuous melody by a military band, as is wont that in short a certain look and smell and even taste of last nights dissipation clung to everybody and everything. Never was a place more hopelessly out of season. The animals for there were animals in the pagodas, were as bored as though they had been making small talk till three a.m. The tiger had a headache and the hippopotamus could not make up his mind to get into his bath. And we had come with our homely nuts and unsophisticated buns, our humorous umbrellas and our familiar jests, to tempt the palates of these debauchees who had been feasting as likely as not on plovers eggs and champagne, and persuade them to take a fresh interest in our appearance. One Squirrel alone had kept his healthy appetite unspoiled, and showed an ingenuous pleasure at seeing us.

But on the whole it seemed kinder to leave the beasts to sleep off their dissipation. Belle Vue itself was clearly sleeping off its dissipation too; the one token we had of its nocturnal splendour was perhaps the most remarkable sight - at any rate in Manchester. You must conceive two elderly workmen in their shirt-sleeves, issuing from a Pagoda at twelve thirty, and fumbling with an iron rod by a grotto. Then there was a melancholy whizz and a rocket shot up in to the air; but evaporated beneath the cold and cynical eye of that April morning. No pleasantries indeed could have been more ill-timed.

Textual notes to “[The Manchester Zoo]”

In the edited text, contractions (e.g. &) have been silently expanded. The numerous typographical errors are silently corrected. Hyphenations are silently corrected also. The story is originally typed on two separate sheets but this arrangement has not been reproduced.

In the notes below, the following symbols and abbreviations are used:

*VW* = Virginia Woolf  
] = follows reading in edited text  
{ } = word(s) added above the line

- 219:1 *VW does not give this story a title. It can be traced to Woolf's record of the outing she took to The Manchester Zoo on 19 April 1906 recorded in her journal:*  
“A very dark morning Miss” said Mrs Turner; but I confess that I am no judge of the morning's complexion at 6.am - from lack of material. Indeed, now I think of it, I was surprised to see how much light contrives to shed itself while I am asleep; I thought that the day blossomed as my eyes opened. I will not attempt here the most dreary catalogue that exists: that of a day's expedition. I shall say only that we found ourselves at the Manchester Zoo at 11.30: or thereabouts: & if that fact does not write its own history in more pertinent figures than I can come by, imagination is a broken winded jade. The Manchester Zoo! How grotesque are these strange little side shows in to which life eddies one on occasion. Had anyone predicted that I should visit Calcutta in the course of the year I should have agreed more readily than to the suggestion that this should be an expedition. You can imagine Cremorne after Pendennis had spent a night there, in the daylight, with the fireworks gone out. You can imagine the ghastly pale grottoes, & exhausted lamps, the gimcrack temples & Pagaodas, in which one might still buy a bun; though one passed with horror. And occasionally, more grotesque still, one came on a cage of real lions, & a live Zebra; & a great house full of melancholy monkeys, sick & peevish after their nights debauch. It was almost unkind to visit them at this hour of deshabelle; But perhaps the most ghastly touch of all was when a man fired a rocket from the edge of a chilly pond, & the light shot into a pale April morning which seemed to extinguish it instantly by the force of cold common sense. A rocket at 12 midday in the Manchester Zoo! No wonder the hyenas howled; & the hippotamus [*sic*] wondered if he had sufficient energy to yawn (*Passionate Apprentice*: 307-08).
- 219:13 few, there are *Ed.*] few, , any, there are *MS*
- 219:18 lose *Ed.*] loose. *MS*
- 220:55 pleasure] pleasure at our appearance. {at seeing us} *An editorial decision has been made here because VW left both readings undeleted. The reading interlined above is presumed to be the second version and has been editorially preferred.*
- 221:59 shirt-sleeves *Ed.*] short-sleeves. *MS*
- 221:63 <that in short has some if not> *Added by hand at the end of the story 2cm below the final line, 'not' is deleted by a vertical slanting line.*

## Appendix B

*Sunday up the River.* 1 p ms (A.23 a)

### Diplomatic Transcript

#### Sunday up the River.

Railways might be counted among the finest of magicians. A wand is waved, & the whole scene fades & evaporates; the great city of London is built but of mist, wh. goes down before the sun

Invoke this spell on a hot day in July, & you will find yourself lifted from the roar of the pavements & the multitudinous stir of life into some grassy meadow, with running streams, & dragon flies poised on brilliant wings. You are on the banks of a great river & the only sounds you hear are the soft wash of its waters & the laughter of voices on the boats as they float down the stream. For the stream is flocked with boats like faint white flowers. which [lazily] drift over the [ ] surface & circle in the eddies of the stream.

Behind lies a great screen of trees, which looks like the draped curtain in a play: you feel that the whole of this graceful procession is passing over a stage, & that you, lying deep in the rushes on the bank, are acting the part of audience.

Where are they floating - whence do they come? It is pleasant to detach them for the moment from the common facts of life; to believe that when they have turned the bend & past out of sight, they reach no harsher shore: but for ever glide beneath trees on smooth waters.

All the day long processions wind down the stream, till the sun falls, & the gay creatures, who bask in the warmth fold their wings, and disappear. Then is the time for more sombre & melancholic spirits to unmoor their boat & slide across the lonely waters.

Some belated reveller, caught by [sight], sped past us, the [ ] lights hung like low stars on the horizon & their voices return as phantoms. At this time only the mad & the sad love to drift with lazy oar, where ever the gentle undulation of the stream bear them, {while} the white moon sails up the sky. You fancy some intimate communion between the river & the moon, as though they two alone of all the [children] of earth, were awake. & held speech together.

You watch the river laced in water ripples, & the moon sparkles them with silver. Meanwhile the trees stand ponderous & sombre, as though all night through they slumbered with bowed head.

It [bends] [over] on the wing, they are the birds which fly low, crooning some [ ] incantation over the earth. with wide sweeping wings. <Supposing that the sun were never to rise upon this scene?> It is no time for happy people or sane people: this strange reign of darkness.

What if the sun should never rise again?



Sunday up the River.

Railways might be counted among the finest of magicians. A wand is waved, and the whole scene fades and evaporates; the great city of London is built but of mist, which goes down before the sun.

Invoke this spell on a hot day in July, and you will find yourself lifted from the roar of the pavements and the multitudinous stir of life into some grassy meadow, with running streams, and dragon flies poised on brilliant wings. You are on the banks of a great river and the only sounds you hear are the soft wash of its waters and the laughter of voices on the boats as they float down the stream. For the stream is flocked with boats like faint white flowers which drift over the surface and circle in the eddies of the stream.

Behind lies a great screen of trees, which looks like the draped curtain in a play: you feel that the whole of this graceful procession is passing over a stage, and that you, lying deep in the rushes on the bank, are acting the part of audience.

Where are they floating - whence do they come? It is pleasant to detach them for the moment from the common facts of life; to believe that when they have turned the bend and passed out of sight, they reach no harsher shore: but for ever glide beneath trees on smooth waters.

All the day long processions wind down the stream, till the sun falls, and the gay creatures, who bask in the warmth fold their wings, and disappear. Then is the time for more sombre and melancholic spirits to unmoor their boats and slide across the lonely waters.

Some belated reveller, caught by sight, sped past us, the lights hung like low stars on the horizon and their voices return as phantoms. At this time only the mad and the sad love to drift with lazy oar, where ever the gentle undulation of the stream bear them, while the white moon sails up the sky. You fancy some intimate communion between the river and the moon, as though they two alone of all the children of earth, were awake, and held speech together.

You watch the river laced in water ripples, and the moon sparkles them with silver. Meanwhile the trees stand ponderous and sombre, as though all night through they slumbered with bowed head.

It bends over on the wing, they are the birds which fly low, crooning some incantation over the earth, with wide sweeping wings. It is no time for happy people or sane people: this strange reign of darkness.

What if the sun should never rise again?

## Textual notes to “Sunday up the River”

In the edited text, contractions (e.g. &) have been silently expanded, and revisions entered above the line have been silently incorporated. Variation in MS spacing between sentences has not been reproduced.

In the notes below, the following symbols and abbreviations are used:

<i>MS</i>	= Manuscript
<i>Ed.</i>	= Editor's alteration
<i>VW</i>	= Virginia Woolf
< >	= deleted word(s)
{ }	= word(s) added above the line
]	= follows reading in edited text
[word]	= conjectured reading of a word
[ ]	= unintelligible word

- 224:3 which *Ed.*] wh. *MS*  
224:3 sun. *Ed.*] sun *MS*  
224:8 flowers which *Ed.*] flowers. which *MS*  
224:8 which drift] which [ ] drift *MS* *This word has proved impossible to decipher.*  
2248 the surface] the [ ] surface *MS* *This word has proved impossible to decipher.*  
224:13 passed *Ed.*] past. *MS*  
224:17 boats *Ed.*] boat. *MS*  
224:18 by sight] by [sight] *MS* *The word is difficult to decipher, but closely resembles the word 'sight'.*  
224:18 the lights] the [ ] lights *MS* *The word has proved impossible to decipher.*  
224:20 while] *Added above the line in MS* before 'the white moon'.  
224:21 the children of] the [children] of *MS* *The word is difficult to decipher, but most closely resembles 'children'.*  
224:25 It bends over on] It [bends] [over] on *MS* *These two words are difficult to decipher, but closely resemble 'bends over'.*  
224:25 some incantation] some [ ] incantation *MS* *this word has proved impossible to decipher.*  
224:26 wings. It] wings. <Supposing that the sun were never to rise upon this scene?> It *MS* *VW* *deleted this entire sentence and placed a variant of it: 'What if the sun should never rise again?' at 224: 27.*

## Appendix C

### Edited Final Text

[*The Penny Steamer*]. 3 pp ms (A.23 b)

Did one wish to impress a stranger with the majesty and, I will venture the word, the beauty, of London one might do worse than take him on some mellow autumn afternoon up the river by the penny steamer. To begin with one would pilot him across the uproarious Strand, and down one of those narrow and silent channels which lead like a peaceful backwater off the main stream. One might halt a moment in a court of ruddy old brick with a flagged pavement and watch the autumn leaves eddy and sink, while the barristers lounge arm in arm like boys out of school. Here is one of the sudden and puzzling transitions in which our great incoherent city delights; a few acres of the 18<sup>th</sup> century have somehow lived on in to the 20<sup>th</sup>, preserving that air of spacious leisure which the old age breathed, unvexed by any modern tumult. A city which grows like ours has no system in its growth; it discards or neglects as chance dictates: the fresh virginal white stone stands beside the brick that has been bleached and baked dry through centuries.

The river again seems always another incongruity: what has a city of stable houses, deep rooted in the ground to do with mutable waters, which even beneath London Bridge, obey the far impulse of the sea. The discrepancy is felt the moment one ceases to tap the pavement and takes ones place upon the swaying deck of the little steamer.

The difference can be described perhaps as that between speech and music; on the street the footsteps, and the clatter of hoofs are like the separate words of some articulate language: but the sounds of the waters and the rush of boats playing as the undulations of the violin, always swelling and falling in pulsing curves of sound.

London even, seen from this swiftly moving platform takes on a transitory look as though it had not been chained there for centuries but had something of motion in it and might be broken up and sent sailing in like clouds in the wind. So do towns look when you see them from the window of an express; as though they had but settled there for a moment, and might take wing the next.

But this impression of detachment, of unreality in the whole prospect on the banks, lasts only so long as you are in view of those churches and solid London houses which seem earthy. Beyond Blackfriars Bridge the wharves black waters chaffing on the river are of an amphibious nature: the water laps against their bases and stains them with green weeds; houses they are not, but merely barges that have grown into the ground. You might imagine them inhabited by those sinister looking cranes, which are perpetually cramming them with sacks and barrels; no human being seems to have any interest in them. Here too are the ships' travellers who have been in the deep seas, all rusted and dented with voyages, lying like whales washed ashore against a perspective of smoke and chimneys.

Stranger indeed are the incongruities of a great city: within the same hour you may tread the pavement of Mayfair, and graze the side of a tramp steamer. Fancy has it that the air up the river grows salter and more boisterous; as the water beneath us answers the call of the sea, so we surely taste its breath. We are coming to the rigorous world of waves and fields leaving behind us the dead world of cities. This is the way out, down the river out on to the sea; here ships are passing from one land to the next; the earth is moving and growing nothing is stagnant, blushing under the sun, and beneath the breeze. One may notice how even the names have lost their London gloom; Cherry Garden survives valiantly; All Saints is not to be put to shame.

Textual notes to "The Penny Steamer"

In the edited text, contractions (e.g. &) have been silently expanded. The story is originally written on three separate sheets but this arrangement has not been reproduced.

In the notes below, the following symbols and abbreviations are used:

<i>MS</i>	= Manuscript
<i>Ed.</i>	= Editor's alteration
<i>VW</i>	= Virginia Woolf
<>	= deleted word(s)
]	= follows reading in edited text
[word]	= conjectured reading of a word
[ ]	= unintelligible word

- 226:1 *Woolf does not provide a title to this story.*
- 226:16 steamer.] New page in *MS*
- 226:19 as the undulations] as if [ ] as the undulations *MS*. *The word between 'if' and 'as' is illegible.*
- 227:26 seem earthy] seem by the [ ] of them earthy *MS*. *The word between 'the' and 'of them' is illegible.*
- 227:31 ships' travellers *Ed.*] ships travellers *MS*
- 227:32 smoke and chimneys.] New page in *MS*
- 227:34 a tramp steamer] a tramp steamer from [ ] *MS*
- 227:38 and beneath the] and [ ] beneath the breeze *MS*
- 227:39 Cherry Garden survives *Ed.*] Cherry Garden, is survives *MS*
- 227:40 All Saints *Ed.*] [ ] is not to be put shame *MS* 'All Saints' *is a conjectured, but most viable reading.*
- 227:40 to shame. *Ed.*] to shame; *MS*
- 227:40 to shame.] <Wapping> *MS* *The word 'Wapping' is deleted with a slanting vertical line and the manuscript finishes abruptly at this point.*

**VOLUME CONTAINS CLEAR OVERLAYS**







**Facsimile Transcript**

6th July. 908

Down the river to Greenwich.

There are some places <wher> which to an English, & particularly a Cockney<sup>to</sup>  
ear, have a half.comic, or extravagant sound, difficult to define for  
the benefit of the stranger. To <To speak quite seri> <It is not possible>  
Such a flavour for instance is to be tasted in the mere mention of  
Greenwich, Hampton Court, Richmond, or the Tower. When a Londoner  
says he <on> has visited one of these places it is as though he confessed to  
eating jam tarts in a pastry cooks: you may applaud the taste but you  
<You take him for a candid ingenuous  
person who is not ashamed of an unsophisticated  
cannot take it altogether seriously. palate.>

And yet I <am fa> do not insinuate that there is anything ludicrous or

infantine in these places themselves; & <if one> it is possible undoubtedly  
preserving  
that industrious people live there, earning their daily bread, & erecting  
family graves.

<tombstones finally.> Still, <I am convinced> I know I shall  
the citizens of  
never believe in them, as I believe in ↑Blackpool or Ramsgate or, Leeds.

Did an earthquake toss them, or a plague destroy them, or a fire immolate  
burlesque  
them, I confess it would still seem a slightly <fantastic> proceeding -  
there was blood in them or bones, or flesh  
<one> <I should not believe that such people could suffer much. which

which suffer.> <The> like <a> the storm in the pantomime. The  
would be in a good temper.  
elements themselves <wo> could not keep their faces.

And all this is for the small ridiculous reason that I was taken  
to these places  
there as a child, & that thousands of my fellows went with me as

children, & that we are all children again at what ever age we

go, good children on a holiday. <It is indeed this mixture  
invests  
of <t> childhood & a treat that paints all these venerable &  
&  
stately pictures with a benignant festival air:>

<And> .Half the delightful good temper & juvenility of the thing

of course is <carried> in one's own heart; you go to enjoy yourself

& the <old magic re> fact that you have never been in any other mood.

6th July. 908

Down the river to Greenwich.

There are some places <wher> which to an English, & particularly {to} a Cockney ear, have a half.comic, or extravagant sound, difficult to define for the benefit of the stranger. To <To speak quite seri> <It is not possible> Such a flavour for instance is to be tasted in the mere mention of Greenwich, Hampton Court, Richmond, or the Tower. When a Londoner says he <on> has visited one of these places it is as though he confessed to eating jam tarts in a pastry cooks: you may applaud the taste but you cannot take it altogether seriously. {<You take him for a candid ingenuous person who is not ashamed of an unsophisticated palate.>}

And yet I <am fa> do not insinuate that there is anything ludicrous or infantine in these places themselves; & <if one> it is possible undoubtedly that industrious people live there, earning their daily bread, & erecting <tombstones finally.> {preserving family graves.} Still, <I am convinced> I know I shall never believe in them, as I believe in {the citizens of} Blackpool or Ramsgate or, Leeds. Did an earthquake toss them, or a plague destroy them, or a fire immolate them, I confess it would still seem a slightly <fantastic> {burlesque} proceeding - <one> <I should not believe that such people could suffer much {there was blood in them or bones, or flesh} which which suffer.> <The> like <a> the storm in the pantomime. The elements themselves <wo> could not keep their faces. {would be in a good temper.}

And all this is for the small ridiculous reason that I was taken there {to these places} as a child, & that thousands of my fellows went with me as children, & that we are all children again at what ever age we go, good children on a holiday. <It is indeed this mixture of <t> childhood & a treat that paints {invests} all these venerable & stately pictures with a benignant {&} festival air:>

<And> .Half the delightful good temper & juvenility of the thing of course is <carried> in one's own heart; you go to enjoy yourself & the <old magic re> fact that you have never been in any other mood.

6th July 1908

Down the river to Greenwich.

There are some places which to an English, and particularly to a Cockney ear, have a half-comic, or extravagant sound, difficult to define for the benefit of the stranger. Such a flavour for instance is to be tasted in the mere mention of Greenwich, Hampton Court, 5 Richmond, or the Tower. When a Londoner says he has visited one of these places it is as though he confessed to eating jam tarts in a pastry cook's: you may applaud the taste but you cannot take it altogether seriously.

And yet I do not insinuate that there is anything ludicrous or infantine in these places themselves; and it is possible undoubtedly that industrious people live there, earning 10 their daily bread, and preserving family graves. Still, I know I shall never believe in them, as I believe in the citizens of Blackpool or Ramsgate or, Leeds. Did an earthquake toss them, or a plague destroy them, or a fire immolate them, I confess it would still seem a slightly burlesque proceeding - like the storm in the pantomime. The elements themselves would be in a good temper. 15

And all this is for the small ridiculous reason that I was taken to these places as a child, and that thousands of my fellows went with me as children, and that we are all children again at what ever age we go, good children on a holiday.

Half the delightful good temper and juvenility of the thing of course is in one's own heart; you go to enjoy yourself and the fact that you have never been in any other mood. 20

Textual notes to “Down the river to Greenwich”

In the edited text, contractions (e.g. &) have been silently expanded, and revisions entered above the line have been silently incorporated. Variation in MS spacing between sentences has not been reproduced.

In the notes below, the following symbols and abbreviations are used:

<i>MS</i>	= Manuscript
<i>Ed.</i>	= Editor's alteration
<i>VW</i>	= Virginia Woolf
< >	= deleted word(s)
{ }	= word(s) added above the line.
]	= follows reading in edited text

- 232:1 July 1908 *Ed.*] July. 908 *MS*
- 232:2 Down the river to Greenwich *Ed.*] Down the river to Greenwich *MS*
- 232:3 places] places <wher> *MS*
- 232:4 half-comic *Ed.*] half.comic *MS*
- 232:4 stranger. Such] stranger. To <To speak quite seri> <It is not possible> Such *MS*
- 232:6 he has] he <on> has *MS*. *Perhaps intended to be 'one' or 'once'.*
- 232:7 pastry-cooks *Ed.*] pastry cooks *MS*
- 232:8 seriously.] <You take him for a candid ingenuous person who is not ashamed of an unsophisticated palate.> *MS* *Added in cramped handwriting in the space at the end of the paragraph and deleted with a slanting vertical line.*
- 232:9 I] I <am fa> *MS*. *Perhaps intended to be 'I am far from insinuating'.*
- 232:10 and] & <if one> *MS*
- 232:11 preserving family graves.] erecting <tombstones finally.> *MS* *An editorial decision had to be made between 'preserving' and 'erecting' because VW did not delete 'erecting'. She first wrote 'erecting tombstones finally' on the line and then added 'preserving family graves' above. Although she only deleted 'tombstones finally', I judge that all three words of the revision replace the three original words as a sense unit.*
- 232:11 Still, I] Still, <I am convinced> I *MS*
- 232:12 the citizens of] *Added above the line in MS. VW first wrote 'believe in Blackpool...' and altered it to 'believe in the citizens of Blackpool...'*
- 232:14 burlesque] *Added above the line in MS to replace the deleted reading: 'fantastic'.*
- 232:14 proceeding -] <one> <I should not believe that such people could suffer much, {there was blood in them or bones, or flesh} which which suffer.> *I deduce that there were three stages of revision of the text at this point, all finally rejected: (1) one (2) I should not believe that such people could suffer much. (3) I should not believe that there was blood in them or bones, or flesh which which suffer.*
- 232:14 like the] <The> like <a> the *MS*
- 232:14 themselves] themselves <wo> could not keep their faces. {would be in a good temper.} *An editorial decision has been made here because VW left both readings undeleted. The reading interlined above is presumed to be the second version and has been editorially preferred.*
- 232:16 to these places] *Interlined above 'there' which was not deleted.*
- 232:18 holiday.] holiday. <It is indeed this mixture of <t> childhood & a treat that paints {invests} all these venerable & stately pictures with a benignant {&} festival air:> *MS* *VW deleted this entire portion of text without cancelling one of the alternative readings, 'paints' and 'invests' and without definitely inserting '&' by adding a caret mark, as she had done with 'to' at 1.1 and 'the citizens of' at 232:12.*
- 232:19 Half] <And> .Half *MS*
- 232:19 is in] is <carried> in *MS*. *The deleted word is difficult to decipher, but 'carried' seems the most viable reading.*
- 232:20 the fact] the <old magic re> fact *MS*. *It seems likely that VW was intending to write 'the old magic returns'.*

## Appendix E

*Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions of a private house into cash.* 2 pp ts. Typed by  
Virginia Woolf (?) (A.19)

Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions  
of a private house into cash.  
He wished to see, J.B., the lady of the house, did he?  
There he sat, in the morning, the precious morning,  
in the spring of the year, on a chair, J.B. 5  
Yes, I see; I see, the unbaked crumpet face;  
with a hole for a mouth; and a blob at the lips;  
the voluble half closed lips; gooseberry eyes;  
his lack of attraction; his self satisfaction;  
sitting there, in the chair in the spring of the year; 10  
taking time, air, light space; stopping the  
race of every thought; blocking out with his tweeds  
the branches; the pigeons; and half the sky.  
Monarch of the drab world; of the shifting shuffling  
uneasy, queasy, egotists journalists pobbing and 15  
boobling, like a stew asimmer, asking for sympathy  
dousing the clean the clear the bright the sharp in  
the stew of his greasy complacency; his self satisfaction  
his profound unhappy sense of his lack of attraction;  
his desire to be scratched cleansed, rubbed clean of 20  
the moss and the slime; demanding as a right,  
other people's time; sitting there on the chair;  
blocking out the light with his rubbed grease stained  
tweeds.  
Why did he want to be 'seen', What corkscrew 25  
urge from the surge of his stew, his gobbets and  
gibbets forced him out of the here, to this chair,  
to be seen? when the spring was there?  
to be seen sitting there, sprawling, self conscious,  
conscious only of of nothing, blear eyed. blubber 30  
lipped, thick thumbbed, squirming, to be seen,

Brown like a bug that slips out on a lodging house  
wall; J.B. John Bug; James Bug Bug bug bug, as he  
talked he slipped like a bug malodorous glistening 35  
but only semi transparent; as if while he talked he  
sipped blood, my blood; anybody's blood to make a  
bugs body blue black. There he sat on the chair,  
with his hair unbrushed; his mouth dribbling; his eyes  
streaming with the steam of some lodging house stew. 40  
A bug; Always on the wall. The bug of the house  
that comes. But if you kill bugs they leave marks  
on the wall. Just as the bugs body bleeds in pale  
ink recording his impressions of a private house  
in the newspapers for cash. 45

Explanatory notes to *Fantasy upon a gentleman*

- 234:1 Woolf refers to this story in B.16 e. Spiral-back notebook, covered by VW. Begins 'The inflated brown bug...'; Notes on Winifred Holtby; 'Letters to a friend'; notes for Three Guineas (?) 8 pp ms. On the first page of this notebook, Woolf writes: "The inflated brown bug: Inflated with blood. Mark on the Wall. Comes steals [ ] wants to be 'seen'. [ ] Suck of blood. Sets three slides off: making studies".
- 234:15 egotists journalists] *Quentin Bell has 'egotist's journalist's' (II: 253).*
- 234:15 pobbing] pobby [origin unknown] dial. Brit = puffed up: SWOLLEN
- 234:16 boobling] Eric Partridge *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English Vol.I* (London: Routledge, 1970). 7<sup>th</sup> edition has: boob. A booby, a fool, a 'soft' fellow; hence loosely, a fellow: US. (-1912), anglicised in 1918. booby-trap: a bomb left behind by the Germans to catch the unwary: military coll. : 1917-18.
- 234:30 blubber *Ed.*] blubbler *MS*

Appendix F



Victor Brauner *L'Étrange cas de Monsieur K (fragment)* (1934).





237a

Appendix G



Umberto Boccioni *States of Mind II: Those who Go* (1911).





238a

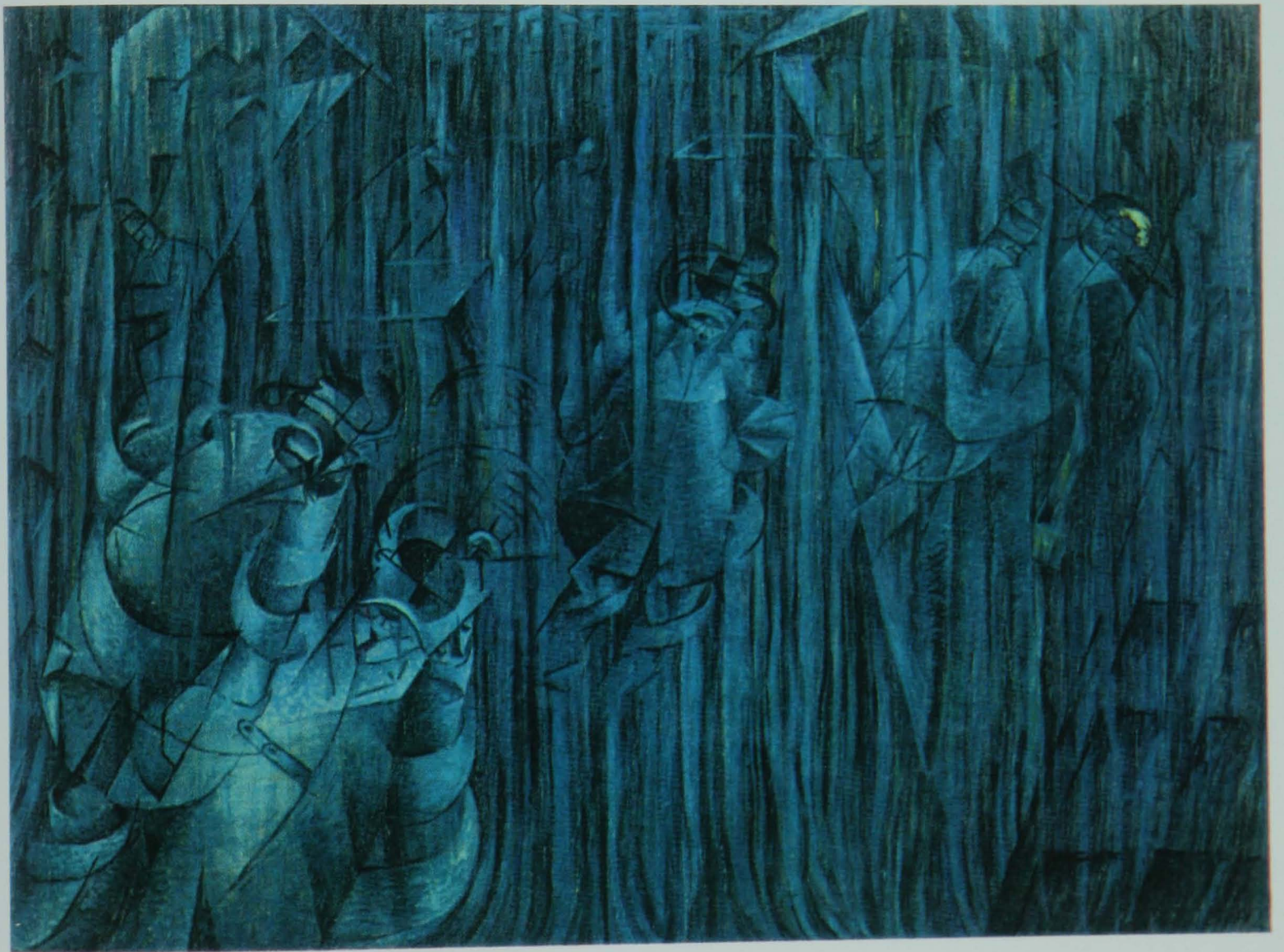


Appendix H



Umberto Boccioni *States of Mind II: Those who Stay* (1911).





239a

*Bibliography*

## Abbreviations

- B&P* *Books and Portraits*. Ed. Mary Lyon. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).
- CDB* *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1950).
- CDML* *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life: Selected Essays*, Vol. II. Ed. Rachel Bowlby. (London: Penguin, 1993).
- CEI-4* *Collected Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. 4 vols. (Vols. 1-2, London: Hogarth Press, 1966; Vols. 3-4, London: Hogarth Press, 1967).
- CEI-IV* *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. 4 vols. to date. (London: Hogarth Press, 1986- ).
- CRI-II* *The Common Reader*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (First Series, London: Hogarth Press, 1925; repr.1968; Second Series, London: Hogarth Press, 1932; repr.1965).
- CW* *Contemporary Writers*. Ed. Jean Guiguet. (London: Hogarth Press, 1965).
- DM* *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1942).
- G&R* *Granite and Rainbow*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1958).
- HH* *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1944).
- LI-VI* *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks. 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975-1980).
- M* *The Moment and Other Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1947; repr. 1964).
- MDP* *Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*. Ed. Stella McNichol. (London: Hogarth Press, 1973).

- MHP* The Monks House Papers at Sussex University Library, Brighton.
- MT* *Monday or Tuesday*. (London: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1921).
- TLS* *The Times Literary Supplement*.
- WE* *A Woman's Essays*. Ed. Rachel Bowlby. (London: Penguin, 1992).



## Works by Virginia Woolf

### *Long fiction, essays, biography* (in chronological order)

*The Voyage Out*. London: Duckworth, 1915, London: Penguin, 1992.

*Night and Day*. London: Duckworth, 1919, London: Penguin, 1992.

*Mrs Dalloway*. London: Hogarth Press, 1925, London: Penguin, 1992.

*To the Lighthouse*. London: Hogarth Press, 1927, London: Penguin, 1993.

*Orlando: A Biography*. London: Hogarth Press, 1928, London: Penguin, 1993.

*A Room of One's Own*. London: Hogarth Press, 1929, London: Penguin, 1993.

*The Waves*. London: Hogarth Press, 1931, London: Penguin, 1992.

*Roger Fry: A Biography*. London: Hogarth Press, 1940, 1991.

*Between the Acts*. London: Hogarth Press, 1941, London: Penguin, 1992.

### *Articles, essays, short fictions*

In chronological order of writing (unpublished) or publication.

“The Dramatic in Life and Art” (c.1902). (MHP, Sussex, A. 26.c).

“Street Music” (1905). Review in the *TLS*, 10 March 1905. Collected in *CEI*.

“A Walk By Night” (1905). Essay in the *Guardian*, 28 December 1905. Reprinted in  
Rosenbaum 1986.

“After His Kind” (1906). Review in the *Guardian*, 10 January 1906. Collected in *CEI*.

“Sunday up the River” (c. 1906). (MHP, Sussex, A.23 a).

“The Penny Steamer” (c. 1906). (MHP, Sussex, A.23 b).

“The Manchester Zoo” (1906). (MHP, Sussex, A 24 a.).

“Phyllis and Rosamond” (1906). Collected in Dick 1985.

“The Mysterious Case of Miss V” (1906). Collected in Dick 1985.

- “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906). Collected in Squier and De Salvo 1979 and Dick 1985. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Down the river to Greenwich” (1908). (MHP, Sussex, A.23 d).
- “Memoirs of a Novelist” (1909). Collected in Dick 1985.
- “Chinese Stories” (1913). Review in the *TLS*, 1 May 1913. Collected in *CEI*.
- “Tolstoy’s “The Cossacks”” (1917). Review in the *TLS*, 1 February 1917. Collected in *CEII*.
- “Before Midnight” (1917). Review in the *TLS*, 1 March 1917. Reprinted in *CW* and *CEII*.  
References in the text are to *CEII*.
- “The Mark on the Wall” (1917). First published in *Two Stories* (1917) by the Hogarth Press. Subsequently published with minor revisions in a separate edition in June, 1919 and with further revisions in *MT*, and reprinted in *HH*. Collected in Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Across the Border” (1918). Review in the *TLS*, 31 January 1918. Reprinted as “The Supernatural in English Fiction” in *G&R* and *CEI*. Collected in *CEII*. References in the text are to *CEII*.
- “The Evening Party” (1918). Collected in Dick 1985.
- “Modern Novels” (1919). An essay in the *TLS*, 10 April 1919. Collected in *CEIII*. It was intensively reworked and included, under the title “Modern Fiction”, in *CRI*.
- “Kew Gardens” (1919). Published by the Hogarth Press on 12 May 1919. A second edition was published in June 1919, and a third English (limited) edition appeared in November 1927. This was reprinted in 1980 by Richard West. The story was included in *MT* and *HH*. Collected in Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Is This Poetry?” (1919). Published anonymously in the *Athenaeum*, 20 June 1919. Collected in *CEIII*.
- “A Real American” (1919). Review in the *TLS*, 21 August 1919. Reprinted in *CW* and *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.

- “The Mills of the Gods” (1920). Review in the *TLS*, 17 June 1920. Collected in *CEIII*.
- “An Unwritten Novel” (1920). Published in the *London Mercury* in July 1920. Subsequently appeared (with slight revisions) in *MT* and reprinted in *HH*. Collected in Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “A Woman’s College From Outside” (1920). A draft of the story is located in the Holograph of *Jacob’s Room*, Part I; in accordance with this dating Dick 1985 claims that the story was probably written in July 1920. It was published in *Atalanta’s Garland: Being the Book of the Edinburgh University Women’s Union* in November 1926. Collected in *BP*, Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Blue and Green” (1921). Published in *MT*. Collected in Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “A Haunted House” (1921). Published in *MT* and reprinted in *HH*. Collected in Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Monday or Tuesday” (1921). Published in *MT* and reprinted in *HH*. Collected in Dick 1985 and Kemp 1993. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Gothic Romance” (1921). Review in the *TLS*, 5 May 1921. Reprinted in *G&R*, *CEI*, *CDML* and *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.
- “Henry James’s Ghost Stories” (1921). Essay in the *TLS*, 22 December 1921. Reprinted in *G&R*, *CEI* and *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.
- “On Re-reading Novels” (1922). Essay in the *TLS*, 20 July 1922. Reprinted in *M*, *CE2* and *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.
- “How It Strikes a Contemporary” (1923). Essay in the *TLS*, 5 April 1923. Reprinted in *CR1*, *CE2*, *CDML* and *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.
- “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1923). Essay in the ‘Literary Review’ of the *New York Evening Post*, 17 November 1923. Reprinted in *Nation and Athenaeum*, 1 December 1923, and *Living Age* (Boston), 2 February 1924. Reprinted in *CD1B*, *CE1*, *WE* and *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.

- “Character in Fiction” (1924). Essay in the *Criterion*, July 1924. It is a revised version of a paper read to the Cambridge Heretics on 18 May 1924 which had its source in “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1923). Collected in *CEIII*. References in the text are to *CEIII*.
- “The Russian Point of View” (1925). Published in *CRI*, *CEI* and *CEIV*. References in the text are to *CEIV*.
- “The New Dress” (1925). Published in *Forum* (New York) in May 1927 and reprinted in *HH* and *MDP*. Collected in Dick 1985. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “The Introduction” (1925). Published in the *Sunday Times Magazine* on 18 March 1973. Reprinted in *MDP* and in Dick 1985. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “Modern Fiction” (1925). Originally published in the *TLS*, 10 April 1919 as “Modern Novels” (1919) and revised for *CRI*. Collected in *CE2*, *CDML* and *CEIV*. References in the text are to *CEIV*.
- “Is Fiction an Art?” (1927). Review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, 16 October 1927. A shorter version of the review was published in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, 12 November 1927. Reprinted in *M* and *CEIV*. References in the text are to *CEIV*.
- “The New Biography” (1927). Review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 October 1927. Reprinted in *G&R*, *CE4* and *CEIV*. References in the text are to *CEIV*.
- “The Niece of an Earl” (1928). Essay in Desmond MacCarthy’s *Life and Letters*, October 1928. Reprinted in *CRII*, *CEI*, *CDML* and *CEIV*. References in the text are to *CEIV*.
- “The Lady in the Looking-Glass” (1929). Published in *Harper’s Magazine* in December 1929 and in *Harper’s Bazaar* (New York) in January 1930 with the title “In the Looking-Glass”. The story was reprinted in *HH* and Dick 1985. References in the text are to Dick 1985.
- “The Fascination of the Pool” (1929). Collected in Dick 1985.
- “Leslie Stephen” (1932). Collected in *CDB* and *CE4*. References in the text are to *CE4*.

“A Conversation About Art” (1934). Published in the *Yale Review*, Vol. 24 (September 1934).

“Roger Fry: A Series of Impressions” (1934). Published in Gillespie 1994.

“Portraits” (February 1937). Collected in Dick 1985.

“Fantasy upon a gentleman who converted his impressions of a private house into cash” (March 1937). (MHP, Sussex, A.19).

“Craftsmanship” (1937). Broadcast on 20 April 1937. Published in *DM*, *CE2* and *CDML*.

“The Art of Biography” (1939). Published in *CE4*, *DM* and *CDML*. References in the text are to *DM*.

“Lewis Carroll” (1939). Collected in *M* and *CE1*. References in the text are to *CE1*.

“Anon” and “The Reader” (1940). Published in Silver 1979.

### *Collections*

Bowlby, Rachel. Ed. *A Woman's Essays*. (London: Penguin, 1992).

- Ed. *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life*. (London: Penguin, 1993).

Dick, Susan. Ed. *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1985).

Guiguet, Jean. Ed. *Contemporary Writers*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1965).

Kemp, Sandra. Ed. *Selected Short Stories of Virginia Woolf*. (London: Penguin, 1993, 2000).

Lyon, Mary. Ed. *Books and Portraits*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).

McNeillie, Andrew. Ed. *The Collected Essays of Virginia Woolf*. 4 vols. to date. (London: Hogarth Press, 1986- ).

McNichol, Stella. Ed. *Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1973).

- Woolf, Leonard. Ed. *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1942).
- Ed. *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1944).
  - Ed. *The Moment and Other Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1947; repr. 1964).
  - Ed. *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*. Ed. Leonard Woolf. (London: Hogarth Press, 1950).
  - Ed. *Granite and Rainbow*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1958).
  - Ed. *The Common Reader*. (First Series, London: Hogarth Press, 1925; repr. 1968; Second Series, London: Hogarth Press, 1932; repr. 1965).
  - Ed. *Collected Essays*. 4 vols. (Vols. 1-2, London: Hogarth Press, 1966; Vols. 3-4, London: Hogarth Press, 1967).

#### *Letters and Diaries*

References in the text are to *Diaries, Letters and Moments of Being*.

Bell, Anne Olivier. Ed. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. 5 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1977-1984).

Leaska, Mitchell A. Ed. *A Passionate Apprentice. The Early Journals of Virginia Woolf*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1990).

Nicolson, Nigel and Joanne Trautmann Banks. Eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. 6 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1975-1980).

Schulkind, Jeanne. Ed. *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1985).

*Unpublished letters* (in alphabetical order by author's surname)

Clive Bell/Virginia Woolf, 19 July 1917 (MHP, Sussex).

Gerald Brenan/Virginia Woolf, 30 April 1922 (MHP, Sussex).

Katherine Cox/Virginia Woolf, 17 June 1923 (MHP, Sussex).

T.S. Eliot/Virginia Woolf, 4 December 1922 (MHP, Sussex).

T.S. Eliot/Virginia Woolf, Winter 1923 (MHP, Sussex).

T.S. Eliot/Virginia Woolf, 1 May 1924 (MHP, Sussex).

Roger Fry/Virginia Woolf, 18 October 1918 (MHP, Sussex).

### **Other works consulted**

Adams, Bronte and Trudi Tate. Eds. *That Kind of Woman: Stories From the Left Bank and Beyond*. (London: Virago, 1997).

Anon. "The Nut Brown Maid", *The Oxford Book of Ballads*. Ed. A. Quiller-Couch. (Oxford: 1910), 295-307.

Anon. Unsigned review, *Observer*. (4 April 1915). Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. Eds. *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975), 50-51.

Anon. Unsigned review, *Morning Post*. (5 April 1915). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 51-52.

Anon. Unsigned review, *Dial* (New York). (1922). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 92.

Anon. Unsigned review, *Times Literary Supplement* (1922). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 95-97.

Anon. Unsigned review, *Pall Mall Gazette* (1922). Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. Eds. *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1975), 99.

Anon. Ed. *Georgian Stories*. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1922).

- Abbot, H. Porter. *Diary Fiction: Writing As Action*. (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- Akhter, Ahsen. *New Surrealism: The Liberation of Images in Consciousness*. (New York: Brandon House, 1992).
- Albright, Evelyn May. *The Short Story: Its Principles and Structure*. (London: MacMillan, 1921).
- An Announcement of the Publications of the Hogarth Press, signed Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf*. (London: Hogarth Press, [1919?]).
- Araujo, Victor De. “ ‘A Haunted House’ - The Shattered Glass”, *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 3 (1966), 157-64.
- Armitt, Lucie. *Theorising the Fantastic*. (London: Arnold, 1996).
- Bader, A.L. “The Structure of the Modern Short Story”, *College English*, Vol. 7 (1945), 86-92.
- Balakian, Anna. *Surrealism: the Road to the Absolute*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972).
- Baldwin, Dean R. *Virginia Woolf: A Study of the Short Fiction*. (Boston: Twayne, 1989).
- Banks, Joanne Trautmann. “Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield”. *The English Short Story: 1880-1945*. Ed. Joseph M. Flora. (Boston: Twayne, 1985), 57-82.
- Barzilai, Shuli. “Virginia Woolf’s Pursuit of Truth: “Monday or Tuesday”, “Moments of Being” and “The Lady in the Looking-Glass”, *Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 18 (Autumn 1988), 199-210.
- Bates, H.E. *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey*. (London: Michael Joseph, 1941; repr. 1972).
- Bayley, John. *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen*. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988).
- Beachcroft T.O. *The Modest Art: A Survey of the Short Story in English*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).



- Beja, Morris. "Matches Struck in the Dark: Virginia Woolf's Moments of Vision", *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1964), 137-52.
- Bell, Clive. Clive Bell on Virginia Woolf's painterly vision, *Dial* (1924). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 138-47.
- "How England met modern art", *Art News* (October 1950), 24-27, 61.
- Bell, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. 2 vols. (London: Pimlico, 1996).
- Bicki, Nora Lynne. 'Virginia Woolf: "Invisible Presences" and Silent Storytellers'. *Modernist Discourses: Reading the Short Fiction of Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield*. (Ph.D Dissertation University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1993), 33-71.
- Bishop, Edward L. 'Pursuing "It" Through "Kew Gardens"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 19 (1982), 269-75.
- Blackstone, Bernard. *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1949).
- Blain, Virginia. "'Dinner is Served': The Hogarth Press, Sexual Abuse, and the Ritual Site of the Dining Room", *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, No. 42 (Spring 1994), 5.
- Bonheim, Helmut. *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*. (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982).
- Bowen, Elizabeth. "Introduction", *Chance: New Writing Arts* (October 1952), 6-7.
- "The Faber Book of Modern Short Stories". *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 256-62.
- Bradley, Fiona. *Surrealism*. (London: Tate Gallery, 1997).
- Breton, André. *Manifestos of Surrealism*. Trans. Richards Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Michigan: 1969).
- Briggs, Julia. *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story*. (London: Faber, 1977).
- Brombert, Victor. "Opening Signals in Narration", *New Literary History*, Vol. 11 (1979-80), 489-502.

- Burgan, Mary. "The "Feminine" Short Story: Recuperating the Moment", *Style*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Fall 1993), 380-86.
- Canby, H.S. "The Modern Short Story", *Dial*, Vol. 37, No. 437 (September 1904), 101-04.
- Cardinal, Roger and Short, Robert Stuart. *Surrealism: Permanent Revelation*. (Studio Vista: Dutton Pictureback, 1970).
- Catalogue of books from the library of Leonard and Virginia Woolf, taken from Monks House, Rodmell, Sussex and 24 Victoria Square, London, and now in the possession of Washington State University, Pullman, U.S.A.* (Brighton: Holleyman & Treacher, 1975).
- Caws, Mary Ann. *Reading Frames in Modern Fiction*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- Chapman, Robert T. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass": Modes of Perception in a Short Story by Virginia Woolf", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 18 (1972), 331-37.
- Child, Harold. "Kew Gardens" (1919). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 66-67.
- "Unsigned review, *Times Literary Supplement*" (1921). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 87-88.
- Collins, Joseph. "Two Lesser Literary Ladies of London: Stella Benson and Virginia Woolf". *The Doctor Looks at Literature*. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1923), 181-90.
- Cory, H.E. "The Senility of the Short-Story", *Dial* (May 1917), Vol. 62, No. 741, 379-81.
- Cowley, Malcolm. Review, *New Republic* (New York) (1941), *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 447-50.
- Cuddy-Keane, Melba. "Virginia Woolf and the Varieties of Historicist Experience". *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*. Eds. Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino. (London: MacMillan, 1997), 59-77.

- Davenport, Tony. "The Life of Monday or Tuesday". *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*. Ed. Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy. (London: Vision Press, 1983), 157-75.
- Dearden, Liz. "Reviewing Women's Biography". *All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography*. Ed. Teresa Iles. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 143-51.
- Defoe, Daniel. "A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs Veal" (1706). *The Augustan Reprint Society*, No. 115 (University of California, 1965), no page numbers.
- Defromont, Françoise. "Mirrors and Fragments". *Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Rachel Bowlby. (London: Longman, 1992).
- Delbaere-Garant, Jeanne. "'The Mark on the Wall': Virginia Woolf's World in a Snailshell", *Revue des Langues Vivantes* (1974-75), 457-65.
- Dick, Susan. *To the Lighthouse: The Original Holograph Draft*. Transcribed and edited by Susan Dick. (London: Hogarth Press, 1983).
- "The Writing 'I' Has Vanished: Virginia Woolf's Last Short Fictions". *Omnium Gatherum: Essays for Richard Ellmann*. Eds. Susan Dick, Declan Kiberd, Dougald McMillan and Joseph Ronsley. (Colin Smythe: Gerrards Cross, 1989a), 134-45.
- "'I am not trying to tell a story': Three Short Fictions by Virginia Woolf", *English Studies in Canada*, Vol.15, No.2 (1989b), 162-77.
- Dunn, Jane. *A Very Close Conspiracy: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf*. (London: Pimlico, 1990).
- Éluard, Paul. "Poetic Evidence". *Surrealism*. Ed. Herbert Read. (London: Faber and Faber: 1936), 169-83.
- Engler, Bernd. 'Imaging Her-Story: Virginia Woolf's "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn" As Historiographical Metafiction', *Journal of the Short Story in English*, Vol. 20 (1993), 9-26.
- Ferguson, Suzanne C. "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 13-24.

- Fleishman, Avrom. "Forms of the Woolfian Short Story". *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity*. Ed. Ralph Freedman. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 44-70.
- Flora, Joseph M. Ed. *The English Short Story: 1880-1945*. (Boston: Twayne, 1985)
- Forster, E.M. "Visions" (1919). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 68-70.
- "E.M. Forster, a survey of Virginia Woolf's work" (1926). Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. Eds. *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. (London: Routledge, 1975), 171-78.
- *Aspects of the Novel*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1927; repr. 1963).
- *Virginia Woolf*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942).
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny" (1919). *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVII (1917-1919)*. Ed. James Strachey. (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 218-56.
- Frow, John. "The Literary Frame", *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer 1982), 25-30.
- Fry, Roger. "Roger Fry, an 'unintentional parody'" (1919). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 70-71.
- *Vision and Design*. (1920; London: Chatto & Windus, 1925).
- *L'Amour de l'Art*, Vol. 7 (1926), 389-418.
- Gerlach, John. "The Margins of Narrative: The Very Short Story, the Prose Poem and the Lyric". *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey. (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 74-84
- Gillespie, Diane F. Ed. *Roger Fry: A Series of Impressions*. (London: Cecil Woolf, 1994)
- Gillespie, Diane F. and Elizabeth Steele Eds. *Julia Duckworth Stephen: Stories for Children, Essays for Adults*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987).
- Gordimer, Nadine. "The Flash of Fireflies". *New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 263-67.

- Gordon, Lyndall. *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
- Guiguet, Jean. *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*. Trans. Jean Stewart. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965; repr. 1976).
- Gullason, Thomas H. "The Short Story: An Underrated Art", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 2, No.1 (Fall 1964), 13-31.
- "Revelation and Evolution: A Neglected Dimension of the Short Story", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 10 (1973), 347-56.
- "The Short Story: Revision and Renewal", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 19 (1982), 221-30.
- H.D. "Oread". *Imagist Poetry*. Ed. Peter Jones. (London: Penguin, 1972).
- Hall, Bonnie Heather. *The Lure of the 'Extra Dimension', Memory: Fantasy & Irony in the Short Fiction of Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen and Mary Lavin*. (Ph.D Dissertation. Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University, 1993).
- Hanson, Clare. "Moments of Being: Modernist Short Fiction". *Short Stories and Short Fictions: 1880-1980*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985), 55-81.
- Ed. *Re-Reading the Short Story*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989).
- Harpham, Geoffrey. "The Grotesque: First Principles", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Summer 1976), 461-68.
- Head, Dominic. *The Modern Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Writing, A Woman's Life*. (London: The Women's Press, 1997).
- Hesse, Douglas. "A Boundary Zone: First-Person Short Stories and Narrative Essays". *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey. (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989). 85-105.
- Holmes, Rachael. "Identity in 'The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection'", *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, No. 1 (January 1999), 25-27.
- "Clothing and the Body: Motifs of Female Distress in Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield", *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, No. 3 (January 2000), 9-14.

- Hotho-Jackson, Sabine. "Virginia Woolf On History: Between Tradition and Modernity".  
*Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (1991), 293-313.
- Jacks, L.P. *Mad Shepherds and Other Human Studies*. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1910).  
- *All Men Are Ghosts*. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1913).
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. (London: Methuen, 1981).
- James, Henry. "The Real Thing" (1892). *Fourteen Stories by Henry James*. Selected by David Garnett. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1948), 181-210.
- Johnson, George. "'A Haunted House': Ghostly Presences in Woolf's Essays and Early Fiction". *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*. Eds. Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino. (London: MacMillan, 1997), 235-54.
- Johnstone, John. *The Bloomsbury Group: A Study of E.M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf and Their Circle*. (New York: Noonday, 1954).
- Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. (New York: Columbia University, 1968; repr. 1981)
- Kennedy, Leo. "These Stories by Virginia Woolf May Well Be The Last Fiction of Hers We Will Ever See", *The Chicago Sun* (16 April 1944), 3.
- Kenney, Susan M. and Edwin J. Kenney Jr. "Virginia Woolf and the Art of Madness", *Massachusetts's Review*, Vol. 23 (1982), 161-85.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).
- King, James. *Virginia Woolf*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994).
- Kurtz, Marilyn. *Virginia Woolf: Reflections and Reverberations*. American University Studies Series IV English Language and Literature, Vol. 119. (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

- Landow, George P. "And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy". *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*. Ed. Roger C. Schlobin (University of Notre-Dame, Notre-Dame, Ind.; Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1982). 105-42.
- Latham, Jacqueline E.M. "The Origin of *Mrs Dalloway*", *Notes and Queries*. Vol. 211 (1966), 98-99.
- Lautréamont, Le Comte de. *Les Chants de Maldoror; Poésies I et II; Correspondance*. Ed. Jean-Luc Steinmetz. (Paris: Flammarion, 1990).
- Lawrence, D.H. *Complete Poems*. Eds. Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts. (London: Penguin, 1993).
- Lee, Hermione. *The Secret Self I: Short Stories by Women*. (London: Everyman's Library, 1995).
- *Virginia Woolf*. (London: Vintage, 1996).
- Lohafer, Susan. *Coming to Terms with the Short Story*. (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).
- *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey. (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).
- Lonergan, Bernard "Consciousness and the Trinity". *Interfaces of the World*. Ed. Walter J. Ong, S.J. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).
- Love, Jean O. *Virginia Woolf: Sources of Madness and Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
- Lumpkin, Janet. "Woolf's "Mark on the Wall" as a Voice in Transition", *Conference of College Teachers of English Studies*, Vol. 54 (September 1989), 28-33.
- MacCarthy, Desmond. "'Affable Hawk", review, *New Statesman*' (1921). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 89-91.
- Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. Eds. *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. (London: Routledge, 1975).

- Mansfield, Katherine. "Review of Night and Day" (1919). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 79-82.
- Marcus, Jane. Ed. *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1981).
- Marcus, Laura. Ed. *Virginia Woolf*. (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997).
- Mare, Walter de la. "The Empty House", *Collected Poems*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1953), 289.
- Marsh, Jan. *Bloomsbury Women: Distinct Figures in Life and Art*. Foreword by Frances Partridge. (London: Pavilion, 1995).
- Martin, Graham Dunston. "A Measure of Distance: The Rhetoric of the Surrealist Adjective". *Surrealism and Language: Seven Essays*. Ed. Ian Higgins. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986), 12-29.
- Marvell, Andrew. "To His Coy Mistress", *Andrew Marvell: The Complete English Poems*. Ed. Elizabeth Story Donno. (London: Allen Lane, 1974), 50-51.
- May, Charles E. Ed. *Short Story Theories*. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976).
- "The Nature of Knowledge in Short Fiction", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 21 (1984), 327-38.
  - Ed. *The New Short Story Theories*. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994).
- Mephram, John. *Virginia Woolf: A Literary Life*. (London: MacMillan, 1996).
- Meyerowitz, Selma S. "What is to Console Us?: The Politics of Deception in Woolf's Short Stories". *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Jane Marcus. (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1981), 238-52.
- Miller, C. Ruth. *Virginia Woolf: The Frames of Art and Life*. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1988).
- Mortimer, Raymond. "Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey". *Bookman* (New York) (1929). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 238-43.



- Murry, John Middleton. "Romance", *The Athenæum* (10 March 1923), 882-83.
- "The Cause of it All", *The Adelphi*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (June 1923), 1-11.
- Narey, Wayne. "Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall": An Einsteinian View of Art", *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter 1992), 35-42.
- Naremore, James. "The World Without a Self: The Novels of Virginia Woolf", *Novel*, Vol. 5 (1971), 122-34.
- Oakland, John. "Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens"", *English Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (June 1987), 264-73.
- O'Connor, Frank. *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*. (London: MacMillan, 1963).
- O'Faolain, Sean. *The Short Story*. (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1951).
- "It No Longer Matters Or The Death of the English Novel", *The Criterion*, Vol. 15, No. 58 (October 1935), 49-56.
- Partridge, Eric. *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English Vol. 1*, 7th edition. (London: Routledge, 1970).
- Pasco, Allan H. "The Short Story: The Short of It", *Style*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Fall 1993), 442-53.
- "On Defining Short Stories". *New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), 114-30.
- Penzoldt, Peter. *The Supernatural in Fiction*. (London: Baynard Press, 1952).
- Phillips, Robert. Ed. *The Omnibus of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Ghost Stories*. (London: Robinson, 1992).
- Poe, Edgar Allan. Reviews of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*. *Graham's Magazine* (April 1842) and *Godey's Lady's Book* (November 1847). Reprinted in *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*. (The Library of America, 1984), 568-88.
- "The Masque of Red Death". *The Complete Poems and Stories of Edgar Allan Poe Volume I*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 384-88.

- Pratt, Mary Louise. "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It", *Poetics*, Vol. 10 (1981), 175-94.
- Prince, Gerald. *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative*. Janua Linguarum Series Major, 108. (Berlin: Mouton, 1982).
- Pritchett, V.S. "Short Stories", *Harper's Bazaar* (New York), Vol. 87 (July 1953), 31, 113.
- Raitt, Suzanne. *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
- Read, Herbert. Ed. *Surrealism*. (London: Faber and Faber: 1936).
- Reynier, Christine. "'A Haunted House' or the Genesis of *To the Lighthouse*", *Journal of the Short Story in English*, Vol. 14 (1990), 63-78.
- Rohrberger, Mary. "The Short Story: A Proposed Definition". *Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles E. May. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976).
- Rosenbaum, S.P. "Three Unknown Early Essays by Virginia Woolf". *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, No. 26 (Spring 1986), 1-4.
- Rosenberg, Beth Carole and Jeanne Dubino. Eds. *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*. (London: MacMillan, 1997).
- Rosemont, Franklin. Ed. *André Breton: What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*. (London: Pluto Press, 1978).
- Rougemont, Denis De. *L'Amour de l'Occident*. (Paris: Plon, 1939).
- Royle, Nicholas. 'A Walk in "Kew Gardens"'. *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 111-20.
- Sakamoto, Tadanobu. 'Virginia Woolf: "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street" and *Mrs Dalloway*', *Studies in English Literature* (Tokyo), English No. 50 (1974), 75-88.
- Salvo, Louise De. *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work*. (London: The Women's Press, 1991).
- Seeley, Tracy. 'Virginia Woolf's Poetics of Space: "The Lady in the Looking-Glass": A Reflection"', *Woolf Studies Annual*, Vol. 2 (1996), 89-116.

- Shanks, Edward. "Reflections on the Recent History of the English Novel". *The London Mercury*, Vol. 4, No. 20 (June 1921), 173-83.
- Shaw, Valerie. *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction*. (London: Longman, 1983).
- Silver, Brenda. Ed. "'Anon' and 'The Reader': Virginia Woolf's Last Essays". *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 25, Nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 1979), 356-441.
- Squire, J.C. "Editorial Notes", *The London Mercury*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1919), 1-6.  
- "Editorial Notes", *The London Mercury*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (January 1920), 257-62.
- Squier, Susan. "Mirroring and Mothering: Reflections on the Mirror Encounter in Virginia Woolf's Works", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 27 (1981), 272-88.
- Squier, Susan and De Salvo, Louise. Eds. "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn". *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 25, Nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 1979), 237-69.
- Sullivan, Jack. *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story From Le Fanu to Blackwood*. (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978).
- Swinnerton, Frank. *Evening News*, review (1931). *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*. Eds. Majumdar R. and A. McLaurin. (London: Routledge, 1975), 267-68.
- Tennyson, Alfred. "Mariana". *The Poems of Tennyson*. Ed. Christopher Ricks. (London: Longmans, 1969), 187-90.
- VanStavern, Jan. 'Excavating the Domestic Front in "Phyllis and Rosamond" and "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn"'. *Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Third Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. Eds. Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow. (New York: Pace University Press, 1994), 252-59.
- Velicu, Adrian. *Unifying Strategies in Virginia Woolf's Experimental Fiction*. (Uppsala University: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1985).
- Welty, Eudora. "Mirrors for Reality", *The New York Times Book Review* (16 April 1944), no page numbers.
- Williams, Raymond. *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 125-47.

- Wolf, Werner. 'Intermedialität als neues Paradigma der Literaturwissenschaft? Plädoyer für eine literaturzentrierte Erforschung von Grenzüberschreitungen zwischen Wortkunst und anderen Medien am Beispiel von Virginia Woolf's "The String Quartet"', *Arbeiten Aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* (Tubingen Germany). Vol. 21, No. 1 (1996), 85-116. Abstract in English.
- Woolf, Leonard. Ed. *Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964).
- Wordsworth, William. "The Prelude", *The Works of William Wordsworth*. (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1994).
- Worrell, Elizabeth. "The Unspoken Word". *Studies in Interpretation*. Eds. Esther M. Doyle and Virginia H. Floyd. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1972), 191-203.
- W.T.S. Review of *Haunted House*. *The Providence Sunday Journal* (16 April 1944), no page numbers.