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David Smith 19 April 2011

Fighting the Mental Fight: Virginia Woolf's Lessons for Transforming Cultural Ideologies

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Abstract

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The following essay, "Fighting the Mental Fight," explores the capabilities of Virginia Woolf's final novel *Between the Acts* to transform cultural ideologies and political allegiances. My reading of the novel begins with Woolf's criticism of culture and nation—of England's demanding imperial economy, masculine penchant for war, and educational commitment to training men for imperial imperatives rather than individual gratifications. The purpose of *Between the Acts* is to un-bind her readers to *those* cultural imperatives or, as she says in her novel-essay on war *Three Guineas*, to free her readers from *those* "unreal loyalties." Beyond noting examples of characters' subjectivity and conversations as cultural reflections, I argue that Woolf's novel teaches her reader how to critically assess themselves and their culture. Woolf transforms the ways in which her readers interpret events of history, society, and their own private lives. Her fiction, thus, makes one aware of the forces that affirm and perpetuate destructive cultural ideologies. This socio-political recognition, which requires the critical and creative capacities of the mind that the act of reading fiction (particularly Woolf's) can enhance, allows for the possibility to resist or revise crippling cultural ideologies.

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Introduction:

The first chapter of my essay, entitled "Training for War," focuses on the unhappy life of Giles Oliver, an Englishman of the commuting class, in order to examine the norms of English culture that Virginia Woolf found destructive. Through Giles' personal struggles, Woolf criticizes the factors that have brought her nation to the brink of war, which include a demanding imperial economy, a masculine penchant for war, and a cultural commitment to educating men to place imperial considerations before personal relationships or natural inclinations. The chapter also reviews an episode early in the novel in which Giles' son George experiences a revelatory moment of consciousness while playing in the garden. When Giles' father, Bartholomew Oliver, interrupts and curtails George's interaction with the earth, Woolf illustrates the effectiveness and the pervasiveness of this cultural "training." Yet, George's vision stands out as a hopeful moment, perhaps capable of inspiring him with an alternative to Giles or Bart's education of imperial imperatives.

"Teaching Art, Not War," the second chapter of my essay, explores how Woolf uses the form of her novel, which includes a pageant, and various modes of narration to advance her cultural critique and to develop an artistically imparted training. In her exploration of contrasts, Woolf's goal is to achieve "some kind of whole made of shivering fragments."[1] *Between the Acts,* which shifts narrative voices, demands that the reader piece together multiple perspectives in order to make sense of the novel. Because this task requires questioning authorial control, the origin of knowledge, and the relations of one thing to another, Woolf arms her readers with the critical skills necessary to resist or revise crippling cultural ideologies. Woolf cultivates the creative powers of her reader's

mind, in addition to the critical, by utilizing an impressive aesthetic of symbolism and poetics. In her polemic novel-essay, *Three Guineas*, which Woolf described as her "war book,"[2] Woolf includes the formal aspirations of all her writing: to write unadulterated by a "money motive, power motive, advertisement motive, publicity motive, vanity motive and so on" (97). Writing in her own words and in her own way, Woolf wants to convey the "truth about art"[3]—a lesson so important that "the enjoyment and practice of art [may] become so desirable that by comparison the pursuit of war would be a tedious game for elderly dilettantes."[4]

The essay closes with a chapter, entitled "An Education through Art," that examines Woolf's endorsement of art, nature, and women to impart lessons of empathy, tolerance, and one-ness, rather than cultural lessons of violence, dominance, and competition. I argue, however, that neither the visions provided by art nor the virtues provided by women achieve the dream of *Three Guineas*; war and existing cultural structures remain more than tedious games. The second chapter on formal elements of *Between the Acts*, therefore, serves as a hinge between the negative cultural training of empire, war, and masculinity to the tonic, though not wholly curative, education provided by art.

Chapter 1: Training for War

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant land.
(William Blake, *From the Preface to* Milton)

Written in 1940, against the increasing power of fascism and the outbreak of war, Virginia Woolf's essay "Thoughts on Peace in Air Raid" asks how women, without firearms, can fight for freedom[5]. As her answer, Woolf includes the first line of the featured epigraph, intended for both women and men, and adds, "Mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it" (*Death of a Moth* 244). Despite this explicit expression of antagonism toward conventions of imperial societies, specifically their penchant for war, Mark Hussey's book *Virginia Woolf and War* explains that Woolf was long characterized as "an exquisite stylist with a negligible interest in what has traditionally been allowed as 'politics'" (2). Although Woolf criticism generally did not focus on her political allegiances until the 1980s, recent texts, including Kathy J. Phillips's *Virginia Woolf against Empire* (1994), see a critique of imperialist society as Woolf's primary, all-embracing aim.[6] In their studies of Woolf's anti-imperialism, these critics were reacting against an earlier view of Woolf as a modernist obsessed by interior, subjective, and mystical experiences,[7] adhering to a "Bloomsbury" ethic that supposedly prized personal relations over social action[8]. In her essay, "Virginia Woolf, Empire and race," Helen Carr positions herself between these opposing visions of Woolf, between the exquisite stylist and the serious political thinker, arguing that too much attention to one ignores the other.

Carr's compromising reception of Woolf, as both a social critic and an explorer of the "luminous halo of life," best explains how Woolf used her novel *Between the Acts* to engage in a mental fight against the currents of her time[9]. At the end of 1936, the year in which the Spanish Civil War broke out, Woolf wrote an article for the communist newspaper *Daily Worker* on why the artist had to adopt a political position, concluding that the status of the artist and art itself was under threat.[10] By 1938, when she published *Three Guineas* and was working on *Between the Acts*, war threatened to destroy not art, but civilization itself. The status of art after the war, assuming a Nazi victory, was nearly as bleak as total destruction. During these months of uncertainty, around 1938, E. M. Forster wrote "What I Believe," which celebrated democracy because it allows people the liberty to express themselves and it permits criticism (67). Both Woolf and Forster feared that fascism, which conversely encourages singularity of thought and restricts artistic expression, might destroy their country, culture, and art itself.[11]

As a social satire, *Between the Acts* fights the educational forces, the value systems, and the customs of behavior of English society that inform the actions and feelings of Woolf's characters. Small details carry large cultural significance. When Giles Oliver—a half-hated husband, an absent father, and an embarrassed son—witnesses a snake choked with a toad in its mouth, he solves the dilemma with thoughtless violence, stamping his raised foot on both (*Between the Acts* 99) [12]. Giles' violence represents the actions of nations, including England, to resort to violence because of impatience or the lack of other alternatives[13]. Furthermore, his act of power may represent an attempt to embody a cultural conception of masculinity as an absolute category, which Woolf challenges by emphasizing man's disempowerment and, more generally, by capturing the multiplicity of masculine (and feminine) expression[14]. Though the domestic struggles of Woolf's

characters comment on issues worldwide in scope, characters are as much products of their personal experiences or histories as they are of cultural ideologies. Giles' irritation and unhappiness on one June day in 1939, the span of the entire novel, results from the forestalling of his dreams, the straining of his familial relationships, and the unlikeliness of his emotional renewal.

Woolf, therefore, expresses her anti-imperialism through particular moments of personal experience. Instead of using cultural circumstances to create character-types, an exercise that would see the outbreak of war as the only cause of Giles' frustration, Woolf allows the individualized psychology of each character, as illustrated through her explorations of subjectivity, to reflect larger cultural issues. The episode of Giles' son George being rebuked for playing with flowers, which I will examine latter in the chapter, portrays the problems of England's educational and economic institutions through her illustration of the child's imagination.

Giles Oliver's initial appearance in the novel illustrates Woolf's utilization of a seemingly inconsequential, quotidian struggle as the basis for her social commentary. When he arrives at Pointz Hall after a week of work in the city, the sight of a visiting automobile "[touches] his training," informing him that he must change (46). Acting in accordance with his instinctual awareness of propriety, a "training" fostered by education and cherished by tradition[i], Giles dons the officious, yet appropriate, uniform—a brass-buttoned blue coat and flannels—for a weekend gathering with a few "[u]ninvited, unexpected, droppers-in" (37). Although the outfit accentuates his handsomeness and

[i] In her essay, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," Woolf argues that the young English airman fighting against the young German men is "driven by voices in himself—ancient instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition" (247).

virility[ii], Giles' resemblance to a cricketer, a hero of the imaginary battlefield of sport[iii], enrages him because the artificialness of his uniform trivializes England's actual engagement in World War II. Each morning, as he reads the daily paper on the train, Giles is reminded of the destruction facing England: "sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf" (46). Pieced together, these reports make up Giles' tormenting vision of "the whole of Europe (…) bristling with guns, poised with planes [prepared] at any moment to splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens" (53). In his blue coat, a mere costume which will never be decorated with medals honoring national service, Giles is embarrassed by his inability to protect his country from the chaos of war. Although he wishes he could rebel against the imminence of disaster, he merely dresses the part of Mrs. Manresa's "sulky hero" (107), powerless to stop "the gun slayers or bomb droppers, here or there" (187).

Giles' perceived ineffectiveness results in more than an instance of irritation over an outfit; his anxiety over international pressures also strains his complicity with his father.[15] Unlike Bartholomew Oliver, who sees himself as part of the legacy of English military glory because of his youthful "civil service" in India—where, gun in hand, he hunted savages "in the shadow of the rock" (17)—Giles cannot even feign such an allegiance.[iv] Giles' detachment from the valor of past generations resembles the boredom of the week-enders, who leave sensational novels about the "anguish of a Queen or the

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[ii] Isa describes her husband in his blue jacket and brass buttons, as a "[h]irsute, handsome, virile young man" (106).

[iii] In her article, "Manacled to a rock he was: Exhausted Patriarchy in *Between the Acts*," Luisa Maria Rodrigues Flora says, "Woolf signals the character's inner contradiction even in this choice of costume – the definition of an English gentleman had associated team sports, and particularly cricket, to a imaginary, chivalrous field of battle, but Giles does not think of himself as a soldier (178).

[iv] Bart claims to remember the Napoleonic wars (4).

heroism of King Henry" behind on the train (16). Instead, Giles angrily affiliates himself with his Aunt Lucy, who sits "looking at views [of the English landscape over coffee], instead of—doing what?" (53). As the narrator explains, Mrs. Swithin's Guide Book, a topographical companion for travelers, "still told the truth. 1830 was true in 1939" (52). The country of England, like the life of Giles, is in a shameful state of paralysis.[16]

Comparisons like these, which broaden Woolf's role as a social critic, have caused critics like Kathy J. Phillips to argue that Woolf's characters serve "as microcosms of the cultural macrocosm" and that society at large becomes the main character in her novels[17]. For example, Isa's admission that "there is little blood in my arm" (90), argues Phillips, signifies England as a waste land, a home of the dead, and an abode of darkness.[18] In response to Phillips's labeling of Woolf merely as a "social critic," Helen Carr argues that "to cast [Woolf's] characters as only microcosms of the cultural macrocosm is to give a very reduced sense of [her] endeavor" (201). Carr believes that Phillips ignores "the importance of the more positive aspects of community in her work" (201). Giles' struggle to describe his vision of Europe highlights other limits of metonymic comparisons between the novel's characters and public events or social ideologies. Specifically, Phillips' parallelism ignores, and consequently misunderstands, the causes of character's vulnerabilities. When the pleasantness of the English countryside, which he views "over coffee and cream" outside of Pointz Hall, sours for Giles, he imagines "Europe—over there—[bristling] like . . . [a hedgehog]" (53). His ineffective description of bumbling Europe—"[h]e had no command of metaphor"—also applies to his own behavior: "He nicked his chair into position with a jerk. Thus only could he show his irritation, his rage with old fogies . . ." (53). In such moments of social satire, Kathy Phillips argues that the material conditions of England create characters' mental

patterns[19]. This argument, however, is wrongfully limiting, for it attributes the cause of Giles' frustration only to the imminent war, ignoring the domestic causes of his unhappiness.

Woolf certainly did recognize the influence that cultural events could have on the mind. The minds of Woolf's characters in *Between the Acts* are linked to the surrounding world through newspaper items they have seen and conversations they have heard. But, the characters also have their own past histories—they remember their childhood and think in half-remembered quotations from books they have read.[20] In her essay *Three Guineas*, Woolf describes the semiotic codes of dress that influence a particular way of thinking: a man wearing a gown that signifies him as a "Master of Art" prompts a person, most of England would agree, to conclude that "he must be a very clever man" (20). In their chapter "Woolf's Keen Sensitivity to War," Nancy Bazin and Jane Lauter explain that her own diaries and letters persistently stress the stifling effects that war had on her own creativity, including the following sentence as evidence:[21]

> I should, if it weren't for the war—glide my way up & up in to that exciting layer so rarely lived in: where my mind works so quick it seems asleep.

During the finale of the pageant in *Between the Acts*, twelve zooming planes "in perfect formation "like a flight of wild duck" interrupt Mr. Streatfield's summary of the pageant's "message," cutting the word "opportunity" into "opp . . ." and "…portunity" (193). The drone of the planes distracts the audience and disrupts Miss La Trobe's aesthetic vision. Woolf's ineffective comparison of the planes overhead as ducks in flight, which echoes Giles' misdirected metaphor and Miss La Trobe's failed illusions,[v] expresses her difficulty

[v] In a high state of anguish because of her fear of failure, Miss La Trobe panics: "This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when illusion fails" (180).

to write, her failure to glide into "that exciting layer [of thought] so rarely lived in," because of the stressful uneasiness of war.

Besides symbolizing the destructiveness of war on art, the splitting of the letters, which forces the clergyman to say, "portunity . . . to make a contribution" (193), disrupts one's reading experience, for the new, undefined word seems familiar. What is the definition of "portunity"? Coming from a clergyman who expects a contribution for "the illumination of the dear old church," the word seems akin to "importunity," meaning "a troublesome pertinacity in solicitation[vi]." Perhaps Woolf is comparing the intrusiveness of the solicitation—"[i]nstantly collecting boxes were in operation"—to the intrusiveness of the sudden airplanes. Perhaps, the sight of the planes, at which the audience "gapes" and "gazes," is merely a portentous sign of the world's impending doom.

Woolf's critique of English culture, however, aspires to do more than indicate the cultural symbols that influence thought or convey the cultural malaise that frustrates specific characters. Instead, Woolf insists that ideologies can be modified because accepted ways of thinking are merely social conventions. In *Three Guineas*, for example, she encourages her country to look on the uniforms of military office—which imply superiority and emphasize positions of "power over" rather than "power to"—as a "ridiculous, a barbarous, a displeasing spectacle" (21). In *Between the Acts*, Woolf attributes her characters with the capacity to reflexively examine their own emotional conditions. Unlike thoughtlessly paralyzed England, Giles can choose which ideologies to believe in, which customs to respect, and which values to cherish. Although Woolf often presents his choices as mistakes, her allowance for freedom of thought reflects her confidence that, for

[vi] From the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary, "importunity, n."

both individual and nation, a mental fight against convention—the transformation of the "mind"—can produce a transformation of either's material conditions.

After his decision to change, Giles, for example, considers whom he is to blame for his unhappiness. The act of blaming proves that Giles is aware of his own condition; he wrestles with his own afflictions. The impulse to place blame, because it allows for self-reflection, is evidence of Giles' ability to think differently about his career and life; however, he repeatedly listens to cultural, rather than personal, voices. This "training" compels him to "exempt from censure" his father, whose disapproving glances and exhortations, for years, have encouraged him "to give over [his] womanish vapours and be a man" (133). Instead, he blames his Aunt, Mrs. Swithin. As Giles changes into his cricketer flannels, the narrator explains, "It was Aunt Lucy, waving her hand at him as he came in, who made him change" (46). Giles' reasons for "hanging his grievances" on Mrs. Swithin start with her blindness to the looming war. Mrs. Swithin's obsession with nature and pre-history (before the history of great men) contrasts Giles' obsession with human historical circumstance and Armageddon. While Giles' Europe bristles with guns, poised for destruction, she carries on as she normally would, "stationed that is in that one corner of the world to have taken indelibly the print of some three hundred years of customary behaviour" (27), and remains unaffected by present realities, thinking instead "of rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" (8). Unlike Giles who feels himself to be "forced passively to behold the indescribable horror," Lucy feels "forced to listen" to the singing of birds (8).

Aside from her caring solely about the upcoming pageant and the weather, Lucy's inability to appreciate the oppressiveness of modernity infuriates her nephew, an Englishman of the commuting class. The narrator explains that Lucy:

> always, since [Giles] had chosen, after leaving college, to take a job in the city, expressing her amazement, her amusement, at men who spent their lives, buying and selling— ploughs? glass beads was it? or stocks and shares?—to savages who wished most oddly—for were they not beautiful naked?—to dress and live like the English? (47).

Through Lucy's "amusement" and "amazement," the narrator compares Giles' indebtedness to incomes to England's own indebtedness to the proxies of its empire, to the "savages" who dream of being "English." Giles' career as a stockbroker represents a problematic phenomenon of twentieth century imperialism whereby a colonial power, turned tyrannical, destroys its own freedom.[vii] The volatile sale of commodities to foreign buyers[viii], for example, has forced men into careers, which they choose not out of passion but out of an obligation to cultural mores or to the preservation of English empire. The occupational forces of modernity appear to have forced Giles into a life of "transacting business." In *Three Guineas*, Woolf describes the herding of men into the workforce as a solemn sight:

> There they go, our brothers who have been educated at public schools and universities, mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, teaching, administering justice, practising medicine, transacting business, making money. It is a solemn sight always — a procession, like a caravanserai crossing a desert (60).

Although in *Three Guineas* Woolf notes the disturbing exclusion of educational and professional opportunities for women, in *Between the Acts* Woolf conveys the alarming

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[vii] My description of this phenomenon borrows from George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant:" "And it was at this moment, as I stood there with a rifle in my hands . . . standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality . . . only an absurd puppet . . . [that] I perceived that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys (Orwell 6). Additionally, the final voice of the pageant, talking "without larding, stuffing, or cant," (Orwell's ideal literary style), makes a similar remark about the futility and hollowness of ruling subjects: "A tyrant, remember, is a half slave" (187).

[viii] Flora explains that a recent depression in 1939 had "just revealed how out of control the whole system might get" (178).

unhappiness of men, the apparent beneficiaries of this profitable procession. When Lucy questions Giles' occupational choice, she implies that he could have chosen the farming life of the plough, once available to the men of her generation, rather than the modern life of stocks and shares. Yet, Giles feels that he was not given his choice: "he would have chosen to farm" (47). Instead, he had to obey the "infernal, agelong and eternal order issued on high" of modernity; so, he answered to the voice within him that commanded: "Forward! . . . Serving, pushing, striving, earning wages" (119). " The same voice that compels the fish delivery boy to speed off, on his motor bike to faraway towns, to ones that the old cook, Trixie, "had never in all her fifty years been . . . nor wanted to [go]" (31). And the boy, even if he wished to, cannot stay to "[feed] the pony with lumps of sugar at the kitchen door," for his round has been increased. Having always been her brother's married sister and never a delivery boy, a pupil, or a stockbroker, Lucy is indifferent to these cultural forces that negatively affect the men of England.

While Giles' career as a stockbroker may seem forced upon him, it results from his decision to follow cultural agendas. Yet, Woolf never tells her reader exactly how Giles could have resisted the "the conglomeration of things," including England's modernization, that has pressed him flat (47). Roger Poole, in his essay "We All Put Up With You Virginia," argues that Woolf recognized that once she began to say what was true, no one wanted to hear.[22] As his evidence, Poole refers to critical reception of Woolf's explanation of war as an affair engineered by men, for men, amongst men, women excluded.[23] The obviousness of Woolf's statement of fact about the war, the sudden illustration of things as they literally are, was for some, including Maynard Keynes whose disapproval of *Three Guineas* hurt Woolf*,* merely intolerable oversimplification. Perhaps, a statement of how Giles life could have been different—all he had to do was choose to be

a farmer—is offensively obvious. After all, though Giles dreams of being a gentleman farmer—the type of man his wife could love—he was bred within a nation fit for "dapper city gents" (48). The aim of *Between the Acts*, however, is to illustrate how its reader might learn to listen to such obvious voices.

Similar to Giles, William Dodge, an unexpected visitor at Pointz Hall, is miscast in his professional life. Despite his appreciation of art and his friends' introductions of him as an artist, Dodge is a clerk in an office (60). Bart, too, dreaming of his "youth and India," desires a different role in his life (18). Aside from squashing his dreams, Giles' career, with its stress and commuting, has strained his relationship with his wife and may cause him to lose his own son, as his own father has "[lost] him in the crowd" (115). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf expresses the consequences of the daily routine for the "processing" sons of education men, who "leave the house at nine and come back to it at six, [leaving] very little time for fathers to know their children. They have to do this daily from the age of twenty-one or so to the age of about sixty-five. That leaves very little time for friendship, travel, or art" (70).

Although the unhappiness of these men arises from cultural pressures, their gloominess persists because these public decisions continue to disrupt their private lives. Woolf's objections, for example, to Giles' life of stocks, in comparison to a life of farming, are not hackneyed criticisms of financial service jobs as vapid, possessive, combative, or unnatural (although much can be learned and felt by interacting with the natural world). Instead, she laments the imprisonment of men to a mentality that works to preserve economic and national power, rather than friendships and artistic sensibilities. By highlighting the discomforting ramifications of Giles' professional decision, Woolf asks a question she first posed in *Three Guineas* (1938):

> Let us never cease from thinking — what is this "civilization" in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us, the procession of the sons of educated men? (63)

Although Giles presumably followed the procession as instinctively as he now hangs his grievances, thinking very little of the potential emotional afflictions, Woolf encourages her readers to contemplate the effects of cultural agendas on one's personal life. The example of Giles—a damnably unhappy champion of the capitalist system—criticizes and questions the value of professional life—"not its cash value; that is great; but its spiritual, its moral, its intellectual value."[24] In *Between the Acts*, Woolf takes a position regarding patriotism, and regarding the choice of profession of life, that is similar to one which her friend E. M. Forster, a fellow member of the Bloomsbury movement, articulated in his essay "What I Believe[ix]": "if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend I hope I should have guts to betray my country" (66). This humane and vulnerable belief, which values personal friendships and aspirations above moneymaking, opposes conventional modern ideologies, influencing, Woolf hopes, the actions of men and women both in the home and abroad.

In *Three Guineas* Woolf took her questioning of the professional life radically further. Considering whether women should enter the professions previously denied to them, Woolf asks, "in another century or so if we practise the professions in the same way, shall we not be just as possessive, just as jealous, just as pugnacious, just as positive as the verdict of God, Nature, Law and Property as these gentleman now are? (66). Here, Woolf's description of the sons of educated men, a class to which Giles belongs,

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[ix] In *Two Cheers for Democracy*, Forster adds: "Personal relations are despised today. They are regarded as bourgeois luxuries, a product of a time of fair weather which is now past, and we are urged to dedicate ourselves to some movement or cause instead. I hate the idea of causes . . ." (66).

contradicts her more subtle representation of Giles, in *Between the Acts*. In the novel, his inability to appreciate the relations between things, including his historical circumstance and his own existence, or between professional service and domestic conversation, or between traditional expectations and personal desires—too attentive to the first in each case—is his fundamental affliction. In *Three Guineas*, most men appear so rotten that the chance of them joining Woolf's mental fight or regaining their "command of metaphor" is an impossibility. The proposed solution, one targeted at the majority of women, is to "withhold their co-operation from the male-run state intent on war"[25] (or to "declare the whole of human life is a mistake and so end it" [26]). Though these propositions indicate the seriousness of Woolf's critique of her culture, her proposed solutions of thought, *not literal actions,* in *Between the Acts* —specifically her urging that humanity resist the cultural "training" that has bred men of hollowness and plans to do the same for women—are more convincing (and less dispirited) because of their confidence that thinking, or re-thinking, can produce more humane material conditions.

Woolf credits institutions, particularly the family and marriage, with the perpetuation of the dominant ideology of her time, which Kathy Phillips defines as materialism, competition, and a prideful exclusivity.[27] An early episode from the novel, in which Bart interrupts his grandson George, who is "grubbing" in the garden, criticizes the pedagogic influences that force males into lives of unhappiness and insists that the nurturing of certain attributes innate in the child could save him from a wasted life. The scene begins with George "down on his knees [holding] a flower complete" (11). As he handles the torn membranes of the flower, George experiences an intense shock: "the flower blazed [a] soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light" (11). Through his interaction with nature, George experiences

a radiating moment of mental clarity in which "the grass, the flower, and the tree were entire" (11). The light from the flower's roots reveals to George some otherwise unnoticed and unfamiliar reality that appeals to his senses. In his search for something in the earth, he uncovers the primordial source of all life, existing in all things; he senses the *completeness* of the flower by recognizing its relations to the earth. Although this earthy unification may not be George's exact recognition, something is certainly revealed to him: "All the inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling, of yellow light" (11).

While the activity of grubbing may allow for the transcendence of reality, George's caretakers rebuke his grubbing. As he grouts in the grass, George's two nurses, Amy and Mabel, continue "trundling the perambulator up and down the terrace" (11). When Mabel notices that George has lagged behind, she "turns sharply," swallowing her sweet, and commands: "Leave off grubbing. Come along, George" (11). Although Mabel mostly disapproves of George dirtying himself by playing with the earth and its worms, her demand that George follow the chattering nurses' aimless rolling of the baby-carriage echoes the demand that Giles give up farming to follow modernity's occupational procession. George's lagging suggests that he wishes, as most children would, to play with the ground, or mud, or in the sandbox. But, he must obey his educators. Despite the intensity of his atavistic connection with the earth, today's lesson—"Don't play with the ground," which one day, if George becomes a fighter-pilot, might be the cultural command: "Don't let Germany destroy England's freedom"[x]—will likely compel George to repress his fascination with nature, changing the raptures of youth into the traumas of adulthood. Thus, here, at the beginning of the novel, "the imagination, the response to

[x] In her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940), Woolf characterizes the England's military engagement with Germany as "a fight by the English to protect freedom, by Germans to destroy freedom" (243).

beauty, the sense of wholeness of life are curtailed and banished by patriarchal, imperial imperatives" (Carr 208).

Lucy embodies this vision as an adult. As she gazes out of an open window, listening to singing birds, the sight of "an obliging thrush [hopping] across the lawn [with] a coil of pinkish rubber [twisting] in its beak," activates her imagination. Pausing at the instance of predation, she submits to a mental flight into the past, when dinosaurs blundered through primeval thickets of fern, in a land not yet England, since it is still joined to the continent.[28] While Julia Briggs argues that Lucy's re-connection of England to the continent reflects the need to reassess the status of England as an island, since German airplanes can zoom over dividing channels, her repositioning of her nation in a global context questions the notion of "Englishness."[29] Furthermore, her fascination with the natural life of this pre-history trivializes the lives of "great men," who claim to be at the center of the world. Woolf jokes that the "Olivers couldn't trace their descent for more than two or three hundred years. But the Swithins could" (30). Yet, as Lucy gazes at the birds outside, she remembers her mother "in that very room rebuking her" (9). When characters in the novel mock Lucy for her inability "to fix her gaze," calling her "Batty" or "Old Flimsy," they portray the hostility of English culture to the imaginative forces of the mind. Faulting his sister, Bart believes that had she focused more on the current historical moment, she could have discovered a more practical, more influential purpose for her life. However, Woolf presents Lucy's "foolish" wonderment not to endorse, but rather enhance our understanding of "history." In the same way, Lucy's "sentimental one-making,"[30] which is misunderstood by most though tolerated by Isa and Dodge, marks an ideal conception of reality; however, the achievement of such mental peace, such crystallized wholeness, especially with the destruction of war looming, never feels

possible within the novel. Nevertheless, Mrs. Swithin enjoys, for this novel, a rare degree of happiness, perhaps because of her ability to respond to beauty.

Artistic beauty frames the discussion early in the day during the uneasy picnic before the pageant. William Dodge, Mrs. Manresa's unknown guest, beneath his breath, shares a memory with Isa, with whom he has only exchanged glances. Dodge recalls his father, "who loved pictures," prompting Isa to remember her own uncle, who as "a clergyman [. . .] never did anything; [not even preaching]; but made up poems, walking in his garden, saying them aloud. (50-51). She adds: "People thought him mad . . . I didn't" (51). Through their recollection of another's appreciation of art, both characters admit their own artistic sensibilities. Like her uncle, Isa walks the garden, reciting lines of poetry as she absorbs "the drone of the trees," "the chirp of birds", and "other incidents of garden life" (14). She is a writer of poems too, yet hides her talents within a bounded book "lest Giles might suspect" (50). William Dodge, despite his denials, is an artist and an admirer of antique coffee mugs and the portraits in Pointz Hall. But, when Mrs. Manresa misidentifies the painter of one of the portraits, he is afraid to correct her.

Isa and Dodge's discomfort with expressing their artistic tastes or abilities, their fear of being thought mad for what they might say, suggests that conversing about art is a cultural taboo; like political discourse, it is unfitting for a dinner party, or a picnic. The more chatty characters—Bart and Mrs. Manresa—find art puzzling, something that takes up a great deal of room and time but with which they could do without. Bart jokes that he is a "degenerate descendent," for like most Englishmen, "so incurious, irresponsive and insensitive to noble art" (54), who is unaware of the authorship of his ancestor's portrait (49). Yet, Mrs. Manresa's slightly more than nominal knowledge of Shakespeare confirms that the valuation of all art, at all levels of popularity, is waning. Therefore, at risk of

seeming at best priggish and at worst subversive, the "conspirators"—Isa and Dodge—generally hush their recitations. However, as the picnickers manage to call to mind only the most famous of Shakespeare's lines, specifically the opening of Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide,[31] Isa cannot resist contributing to the suicide theme: "Fade far away and quite forget what thou amongst the leaves has never known . . ." (54). Dodge quickly adds, "The weariness, the torture, the fret . . ." (54). These recitations relate both to the previous conversations about the cultural relevance of art, which may be fading far away, and to the anguish of an artist imagining a world without art. As misquotations[32] of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," these lines also question the immortality of the art object, which Woolf explained in "A Letter to a Young Poet" kept poets like "Keats, Shelley, and Byron [alive]" in readers' minds.[33] Aside from some individuals' forgetfulness of the art object and the artist, the weariness, the torture, and fret of war threatens to destroy the very civilization to which art contributes.[34]

Woolf's belief in the value of art is never in question. The voices of Amy and Mabel chastising George, of the villagers patronizing Old Flimsy, or of Isa and Dodge hushing their memories come to criticize educational and social conventions for stultifying the imaginative, creative, and the artistic capacities of individuals. In the episode of George grubbing Woolf stresses the ability of these capacities to articulate the intense moments of life's deep significance.[35] In her essay, "A Sketch of the Past," which Woolf worked on concurrently with *Between the Acts,*[36] she recalls experiencing a shock of recognition in her own childhood, similar to George's, after looking at a plant with its leaves spread:

> It seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was part of the earth; that ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower, part earth, part flower (McNellie 17).

While Andrew McNellie does not note the similarities of George's grubbing to Woolf's own earthy epiphany, he includes the above passage in order to explain that Woolf "recognised the usefulness [of such "moments of being"] and stored them as a resource for her writing."[37] Woolf's characters experience a moment of full consciousness in which they are not only aware of themselves, but recognize patterns hidden behind the mysterious surface of daily life. Andrew McNellie elaborates that Woolf supposed that her "shock-receiving capacity" is what makes her a writer. She has to explain these "moments of being" in writing.[38]

George's ecstatic grubbing, despite its revelatory power, turns traumatic when Bart interrupts his connection with the flowers. Described through the eyes of George, Bart, the "terrible peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms," springs from a hiding spot and roars, with a newspaper as his mouthpiece, "Good morning, sir" (12). Already conceiving of his grandson as an adult, Bart's greeting becomes an exhortation, like the one he gave to Giles, to "give up the womanish vapours." Helen Carr explains that Bart sees boyhood in the terms he has been taught, a time when future servants of the nation need training to be leaders and commanders.[xi] Yet, when Bart destroys George's vibrant sensory experience, George is unable to "say 'Good morning Grandpa'" (12). With his grandson "gaping" and "gazing," Bart, as if "commanding a regiment," orders his Afghan hound, Sohrab, who is running playfully in the flowers, to "Heel! Heel, you brute!" (12). Although Bart's display of authority impresses the nurses,

[xi] Helen Carr includes Woolf's own description, from her essay "A Sketch of the Past," of "the patriarchal machinery" of school and university which had shaped the men in Woolf's family. "Every one of our male relatives,' Woolf writes, 'was shot into that machine and came out at the other end, at the age of sixty or so, a Headmaster, an Admiral, a Cabinet Minister, a Judge'" (208).

George, who confusingly turns his head towards the barking Bart, imagines himself in the position of Sohrab, the cringing hound, strung with a noose. George neither respects nor appreciates his grandfather's macho posturing; instead, the old man's mindless ordering and tortuous brutality forces the child to cry.

Attributing the child's discomfort with brutish power as the only cause of his tears, however, provides an incomplete understanding of both George's emotional registry and Woolf's anti-imperialism project. Although George's tears represent an indirect shaming of the cultural task of toughening sensitive little boys for the service of their country and Empire, the psychological effects of George's interruption cannot be ignored.[39] His tears not only express his sadness over the disrupted, perhaps irrecoverable, rapturous experience, but they also represent his embarrassment. Unaware of the patriarchal machine that looks to "possess" him, George cries because he senses that his Grandpa disapproves of his fearful "gaping" and girlish grubbing (13). Like the "apologetic" Afghan hound, who regrets running in the flowers, George wants to impress his grandfather, rather than upsetting him by being a "cry-baby" (18). Therefore, although the failure of Bart's "little game" suggests a breakdown in the effectiveness of this patriarchal pedagogy, George's yearning to be well-liked by his grandfather—his willingness to blame himself for Old Oliver's swollen veins—suggests that he will learn to admire the "old brute." After hearing from the teasing Bart, of her son's cowardly "howling," Isa also forecasts this unfortunately likely future by frowning at and looking away from "the domestic, the possessive; the maternal" (19). George's feelings of inadequacy reveal the extent to which personal affinities reinforce cultural imperatives.

Throughout *Between the Acts*, Woolf exposes the dominant ideologies of her time that had brought her nation to the brink of war. In "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid,"

Woolf asks in all seriousness whether "the current thinkers honestly believe that by writing 'Disarmament' on a sheet of paper at a conference table they will have done all that is needful" to prevent war and save her country's culture (246). Aware that the pervasiveness of cultural voices, which fall on young ears, grow louder through familial bonds, and resonate with tradition, Woolf aims to inform her readers of otherwise unheard voices of experience. In her mental fight, Woolf includes deeply personal moments so that she may shed light on alternative experiences of reality, informed by personal revelation rather than cultural instruction. Her illumination of George's cavernous eyes symbolizes this effort. The moment for Giles to experience explanative shocks of experience, like George's, may have passed; but for the young airmen in the sky or the reader of her novel, Woolf wishes "to reveal the patterns behind the wool,"[40] so that her reader might recall such personal moments, listening to them amongst the fugue of cultural decrees.[xii] The following chapter examines how Woolf's style helps her reader resist cultural imperatives and appreciate illuminating moments of experience.

[xii] For more on the myriad sounds in *Between the Acts*, see Patricia Laurence's "The Facts and Fugue of War," which discusses the interplay between Woolf's inner voices and the fugue of airplanes, guns, loudspeakers, the newspaper, and the radio.

Chapter 2: Teaching Art, not War

> Miss La Trobe stopped her pacing and surveyed the scene.
> "It has the makings . . ." she murmured. For another play
> always lay behind the play she had just written.
>
> (*Between the Acts* 63)

In his essay "Why I Write" (1946), George Orwell lists sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse, and political purpose as the "four great motives for writing" (392). He describes "aesthetic enthusiasm" as the desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed and "political purpose" as the desire to alter peoples' idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.[41] In the late 1930s after the Spanish Civil War (1936), an event that compelled Orwell thereafter to write "every line of serious work . . . *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism,"[42] Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* and *Between the Acts*. In these works, Woolf's aesthetic enthusiasm--the style, form, and perception of beauty--underwrite her political criticisms. Woolf relies on her own literary aesthetic, her own way of thinking and writing, to fight destructive ideologies and pedagogies. Her enemy is the prevailing cultural "mind," so receptive to convention, modern industry, and war, so hostile to undocumented histories, nature, and peace. Her firearm becomes her writing style, which in *Three Guineas* comes to criticize authorial control and singularity of thought itself. As Orwell admits for writers of this period like Woolf, "it seems nonsense to me to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects, like fascism and totalitarianism, in a period like our own; it is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows[43].

In *Between the Acts,* Woolf's goal is not just to expose her readers to new voices, to

the "moments of being,"[xiii] she thought useful for her as a writer, but also to show her readers how to hear and appreciate them. Mark Hussey argues that in her fiction Woolf is not "writing manifestos but creating art that subtly transforms our perspectives by enacting in its form a subversive content" (10). The form and narrative style of *Between the Acts* encourage multiplicity, contemplation, and a desire for unity, and reflect upon the possibility or inevitability of change. As she breaks away from the traditions of the Edwardian novel, Woolf's own work, which she described as "a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole," demands the reader to join her in the quest for unity[44]. The disruptive reading experience calls into question the nature of reality and the nature of the self. In this chapter, I will examine how *Between the Acts* instructs its readers how to critically read the narratives of everyday life. This education opposes the "training" that has forced Giles into a life of unhappiness or England into another devastating war. Woolf's aesthetics also help the reader develop a capacity to see outside of the self and to see through convention so that cultural scripts may be resisted or revised.

In *Three Guineas*, the Fascist state, as a "daily and illuminating example of what we do not wish to be," becomes a central trope for advancing Woolf's feminism and pacifism.[45] Woolf demonstrates how the struggle of women against tyranny that limits their freedom in the home and in the workplace is an inherent part of the struggle against tyranny in national and international politics.[46] While this summation captures the thematic importance of her epistolary essay, Teresa Winterhalter argues that Woolf's stylistic approaches advance her fight against tyranny by countering the way her audience

[xiii] Woolf first uses the phrase "moments of being" in her essay "A Sketch of the Past" to describe a moment when an individual is fully conscious of his experience (e.g. George's grubbing).

approaches expository prose.[47] For example, Woolf's deliberate shifting of speaking positions, from a polemical voice to an apologetic voice or from obvious fact to equivocal supposition, discourages the self-promotion of an 'I' in narration of a conventional essayist. As Winterhalter explains, the disruption of such a convention may be "the only viable method [for resisting] the expansion of the fascist sentiment."[48] Woolf's presentation of a variety of kinds of evidence—including historical "facts," biographical stories, photographs, newspapers, quotations, etc.—undermines the infallibility of one particular viewpoint. Woolf's disruptive discourse also repeatedly insists on postponing meaning. For example, in the opening chapter of *Three Guineas*, Woolf appears to be moving towards the first of three conclusions for preventing war when she writes, "You shall only have our guinea with which to help you to rebuild your college if you will help [. . .] to prevent war." Yet, this answer gives way to another question: what kind of education will teach men to feel the inhumanity, beastliness, and insupportability of war?[49] Woolf's constant re-questioning and reluctance to provide an answer rejects the expository traditions that tacitly assent to war's proliferation and undermines the Fascist ideal that knowledge arises from one, dominant, point of view.

The complex structure of *Between the Acts*, which Susan Dick and Mary S. Millar describe as a "medley of contrasting elements,"[50] opposes the narrative tradition of fiction in which a plot forms sequentially, with its pattern of cause and effect. Woolf admits to this artistic dissidence when she speaks of "Edwardian novelists:" "[their] business is not our business. For those conventions are ruin, those tools death."[51] Julia Briggs adds that "Woolf was justifiably wary of the kinds of messages [conventional plots] carried, having recognized from the outset the heavy burden of social pressure within the plots of love and romance" (84). The distanced narrator, speaking for Miss La Trobe or, equally

plausible, for Woolf, tells each artist's audience: "Don't bother about the plot: the plot's nothing" (91). Yet, the pageant unfolds linearly, moving through history chronologically and allowing the audience breaks in the action. Overall, the book favors a cyclical view of history, articulated through Mrs. Swithin's reading about prehistoric England, in which time approaches an end which is also a beginning (a curtain rises at the novel's end). [52] Woolf's reduction of English history in the pageant to a sequence of traditional plots, which Julia Briggs argues becomes comic, questions a liner perspective of history that relates events disproportionately from the perspective of "civilized" nations and "historic" men, and forgets the obscure, the unprivileged, and the lives of women. Additionally, Woolf's evoking of numerous voices within the pageant through songs, verses, and audience's responses, echoes her rejection, in *Three Guineas*, of the "I" in favor the communal "we."[53] A cyclical view of history eases the restrictiveness of the past, which often allows for the preservation of certain ways of thinking.

Instead of following linear plots, Woolf explores the interplay among a series of contrasts—love and hate, sound and silence, past and present, success and failure—which was central to her sense of reality.[54] Her stylistic movements between unity and separation, between completeness and fragmentation, capture the flux of everyday life. Knowledge, or what we can call our closest understanding of reality, seems to rest on a continuum between absolutes. Bart and Lucy's visions of history, for example, are equally limiting: a linear view of history focuses too intently on discrete moments and ignores whatever is deemed non-historic; while Lucy's one-making of history inhibits understanding of particular moments, especially the present moment. The opposition of the novel's two reoccurring refrains—unity and dispersal—also remains unresolved. Although Woolf wishes for unity, for example in *Three Guineas* she imagines hearing the

"voices of poets . . . assuring us of unity that rubs divisions as if they were chalk marks only,"[55] Woolf recognizes its transience and darker manifestations, including the unified support in Germany and Italy for fascist dictators like Hitler and Mussolini or England's shared horror of approaching war. Conversely, although feelings of dispersal calls to mind "refugees . . . the Jews . . . People like [the characters in *Between the Acts*], beginning life again," Woolf values, perhaps above all else, the state of private separation into the mind, during which true awareness may become clear[xiv] (121). Woolf summarizes her own stylistic ambitions of negotiating between contrasts in one of her early journals:

> I want to express beauty too—but beauty . . . in action. Conflict?—is that it? . . . [I want to] achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the minds passage through the world; & achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments.[56]

The presence of two narratives in the novel—the events of the Oliver family and the scenes of the pageant—allows the characters a shared moment, however temporary, yet ensures its disintegration, for when the pageant stops each character must disperse back into their own individualized emotions, thoughts, and histories. The relationship of these narratives can also be reversed, with the Olivers' roles becoming the acts disrupting the pageant.[57] Woolf alerts the reader to the theatrical elements in the Oliver's narrative by re-casting characters: Mrs. Manresa plays a "wild child of nature" (41), Dodge an artist (49), Giles a "the cricketer of love and hate" (46), and Rupert Haines is "the gentleman farmer" (49). With the last two sentences of the book, Isa and Giles transform from characters in the story we have just read into characters in a play: "Then the curtain rose. They spoke" (219). While the characters are forced to watch Miss La Trobe's pageant,

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[xiv] In their introduction to *Between the Acts* (Oxford Ed.), Susan Dick and Mary S. Millar include Woolf's reflections, from her diary and letters, on the "community feeling: all England thinking the same thing—this horror of war—at the same moment. Never felt it so strong before. Then the lull & one laspses again into private separation" (xvii).

Woolf's readers are invited to view her characters as players in a play. For example, when the picnickers stare at the view of the fields in silence before the beginning of the pageant, the reader views the reactions of the characters through narrated physical actions. Giles, for example, bounds his hands tight, glaring, while his father jerks and places his hand on Sohrab (66). Moving from realistic events to inner drama, the narrator describes the others characters' reactions, urging the reader to make sense of the view through multiple perspectives, and concluding in an unassigned voice: "How tempting, how very tempting, to let the view triumph . . . to let their own minds ripple, to let outlines elongate and pitch over—so—with a sudden jerk" (66).

Woolf tempts her reader to contemplate, as the Oliver party is, the significance of the view by holding together a multitude of perspectives, at once. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that "the dream of peace, the dream of freedom" comes from the "capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and make unity out of multiplicity" (143). Like "the sound of guns," which explicitly disrupts Woolf's dream, the sudden jerk of Bart's head back to physical reality captures the feebleness of moments of mental "triumph." The cast seems incapable of altering the "senseless, hideous, stupefying" repetition of England engaging in war (67). While the cause of the disruptive intrusion of war is explicitly stated in *Three Guineas*, the characters' contemplation of the view, like the reader's viewing of the characters themselves, disintegrates for unexpressed reasons. The disruptions, which hint to the repulsive war instinct contained within Bart's jerking head, certainly do suggest that complete recognition or complete unity are unattainable; such achievements are still dreams. Woolf rejects attempts at absolute determinacy, for the beauty and significance of the landscape, like the identity and character of the viewers, are not absolute, especially in a time of impending war in which character's opinions of war tend to differ. Woolf,

however, encourages her reader and her characters to look at the view—to examine all the outlines of English culture—so that each may broaden their sense of reality.

By reading the "Oliver plot" as a play between the real action of the pageant, Woolf becomes a playwright, whose artistic ambitions can be collapsed with Miss La Trobe's. Woolf wishes for her novel, like Miss La Trobe's pageant, "to expose [the audience], as it were, to douche them, with present-time reality" (179). The similarities of style and form between the works, which include the use of multiple perspectives or the combination of various textual sources, from references (both current and historic) to war, people, media, art and literature, encourage equivalent intentions. One allusion, Mrs. Swithin's free-floating aphorism, which supposes that books are "the mirrors of the soul[58]," affirms the novel's support for Miss La Trobe's belief that art has the power to teach their readers about themselves (16). The narrator, however, undermines the capabilities of books to inform its readers about themselves. Characteristically affirming the multiplicity of selves (or souls), Woolf jokes about the likelihood of a reader, bored while traveling, of having a revelatory experience: "no one ventured so long a journey, without buying a book on a bookstall. Thus, the mirror that reflected the soul sublime, reflected also the soul bored" (16). Miss La Trobe also recognizes the limits of her art: "She hadn't made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual" (98). The inability of Miss La Trobe to express her vision to her audience echoes the picnickers' inability to make sense of the English countryside. Yet, as is the case in Woolf's exploration of contrasts, Miss La Trobe's pageant is not an absolute failure; it achieves a measure of success, for her "vision imparted was a relief from agony [. . .]for one moment [. . .] for one moment" (98).

As a pastiche of English history, the pageant blends together allusive scraps of literature and culminates in the self-reflective vision of the audience, "all shifted, preened, minced" (186). Miss La Trobe hopes her audience can unify the pageant's fragmented episodes, which shift between the past and present. Before the play begins, Miss La Trobe overhears the audience talking in a cluster of "scraps and fragments" about the weather, the cast, an old tophat in a cupboard, politics in Russia, cafes in Rome, and day's most alarming newspaper article—the case of the dog without puppies (120-121). Together these snippets of reality haunt the artistic vision of Miss La Trobe, who "over there, behind the tree," feels incapable of imparting a sustained vision of her united meaning. Her worry is that her audience will not be able to piece together the "scraps and fragments" within her pageant. This artistic endeavor of instructing her audience how to comprehend reality echoes Woolf's aesthetic desire to include "moments of being" which she thought should not be missed. The likelihood of the audience responding to such visions, however, is never certain, especially when frightening realities compromise the vision of the artist. As Woolf finished *Between the Acts* during painful war months in 1940, she expressed this fear: "There's no standard to write for: no public to echo back. Hence a certain energy & recklessness—part good—part bad I daresay."[59]

Despite the temporality of the pageant's vision, its form accomplishes Miss La Trobe's goal of informing the audience about themselves. In her essay "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf states that the "whole world is a work of art; and [all human beings] are part of the work of art."[60] Thus, the form of the world resembles a pastiche, containing the ostensibly disconnected lives of the being and of the non-being. As a representation of art, the human life itself is a series of fragments, comprised of a multitude of emotions, facts, thoughts, and memories; it has its own history and its own contradictions. For example,

Mrs. Manresa's life history, which appears to the Olivers' as "scraps and fragments," captures the impossibility of ever fully knowing someone (39). The difference of perspectives between the siblings Bart and Lucy, is the novel's clearest expression of the distance between people: "What she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't—and so on, *ad infinitum*" (26). Mrs. Manresa's incomplete history reiterates Woolf's critique of how history is recorded. The guests only know of her public, social history, like her ear for jazz and her taste for booze, but "nothing private" (39).

Because the fragmented form of the pageant requires its audience to join together seemingly discordant parts, the audience learns how to examine themselves. After the pageant's final scene, in which an unknown voice speaks out from behind the bushes, the audience diverges, but each has benefited from watching the play: "On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descend to wrestle with meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted" (189). Although each character's reaction to the performance differs, Miss La Trobe's play compels all of them to contemplate its meaning and its effect on them. The task of introspectively examining the self prepares one to thoughtfully question cultural imperatives. As the hidden voice of the gramophone at the play's end explains:

> *I too have had some, what's called education . . . Look at ourselves, ladies and gentleman! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization to be built by* (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) *orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?* (188).

This passage outlines Woolf sense of reality in which the world, the person, and human culture are artistic representations. Therefore, we can criticize culture by using artistic or technical terminology. Though calling culture a pastiche may be too metaphorical, Woolf insists that human culture is a reflection of individual lives. The image in the mirror of

English audience, incomplete and varied, is a representation of their culture. Woolf explicitly expresses this connection in *Three Guineas* when she states, "the public and private worlds are inseparably connected: […] the tyrannies and servilities of one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (142). While in *Three Guineas* Woolf largely criticizes the treatment of women in her country as not substantially different than dictatorial tyranny aboard, the gramophone criticizes war everywhere: "*the gun slayers, bomb droppers, here or there. They do openly what we do slyly*" (187).

Although Woolf's conception of English culture as a reflection of the domestic life enables her criticism of it (which I discuss in the opening chapter), it also informs how we should consider fighting the tyrannies of the public world. Woolf's work teaches her reader to hold together, simultaneously, perspectives in the mind so that he or she may move towards a better understanding. The narration stresses the need for multiplicity of perspectives and the form captures the flux of experience. The experience of reading *Between the Acts*, of oscillating between prose and play, between unity and dispersal, reflects the natural process of human experience, as illustrated by the picnickers viewing party, in which the mind flies from one emotion to another, or from one "ripple" to another. Woolf prefers to present discords rather than reconcile them, for she is all too aware of the capabilities of a union set on destruction or exclusion (Nazi Germany or, closer to her, the English public school system are obvious examples). Woolf encourages a movement towards the possibility of reconciliation but never its permanence.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf's narrative style questions the nature of experience by providing its readers with a disruptive reading experience. It is often difficult to identify definitively who is speaking or thinking and to whom the speech or thought is directed.[61] Perspectives shift frequently, without usual narrative significations, between distanced,

authoritative third-person narration, direct quotations, and reported speech. Isa's first moments of the morning, before her three-folded mirror, is an example of the various, often unclear, narrative voices working together. The narrator brings the reader close to Isa by reporting: "she could see three separate versions of her rather heavy, yet handsome, face; and also, outside the glass, a slip of terrace, lawn and tree tops" (13-14). Mixing reportage with Isa's emotions, the narrator adds that Isa "saw what she had felt overnight" for the gentleman farmer (14). This voice alone, which manages to speak from within Isa's mind, is responsible for the readers' understanding of her character and her strained marriage. Isa corrects the narrator for referring to Giles as "her husband, the stockbroker," voicing her own characterization of Giles as the "father of my children" (14). Her convenient cliché for Giles only confirms her already known dissatisfaction thereby reinforcing the narrator's omniscience.[62] But as the narrator seems to uncover precisely how Isa feels, an undetermined voice—is it the narrator, Isa, or the narrator on behalf of Isa?—poses a question: "But what feeling was it that stirred in her now when . . . she saw coming across the lawn the perambulator; two nurses; and her little boy George, lagging behind?" (14). Neither Isa, the now-limited narrator, nor the reader can be sure of the answer; however, Woolf suggests that the meaning of experiences or emotions can be postponed. A few pages later, for example, the narrator expresses Isa's loathing of the fiercely transformative patriarchal machine, which may transform her little boy—"my husband's son," she might be saying soon, slipping into another impersonal cliché.

Woolf's alternating of perspectives prevents the reader from maintaining a fixed position from which to judge the narrative and its characters.[63] Isa's confused understanding of herself, splintered amongst three mirrors, for example, resembles the reader's own confusion and the works' obsession with self-examination. In her book

Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist (1945), Joan Bennett celebrates Woolf's method of characterization, which was criticized as too insubstantial or too fluid by critics in the 1940s, for its resemblance to the human experience of coming to learn about someone. She analyzes the first appearance of Mrs. Swithin in the novel, when she awakes to begin her daily routine of listening to birds, reading her favorite book an *Outline of History*, and day-dreaming of "rhododendron forests in Piccadilly" (8). Forcing the reader to read Woolf's text with her, Bennett argues that Woolf presents Mrs. Swithin, "as she is in her privacy; as she thinks of herself; and as Grace, [the maid who interrupts Lucy's private thinking] sees her."[64] Bennett argues that Woolf's form, which combines Lucy's emotions, thoughts, and spoken words with the indirect impression they make on [Grace's] mind, does not limit her to describing merely idiosyncratic explorations of subjectivity, but rather broadens our understanding of human experience[65].

Moving freely among the minds of these characters, Woolf's narration allows her to use a variety of tones[66]. After recalling her mother rebuking her for her day-dreaming, the narrator expresses dissatisfaction at Lucy's meekness. Instead of resisting her reproving mother, she returns to her morning tea—to the "usual trappings of rather shabby but gallant old age" (10). Yet, the narrator's comparison of Lucy to "other old [ladies]" mildly forgives her for belonging to a generation of women incapable of acting otherwise. In the presentation of Isa, as she gazes outside above the looking-glass, the narrator, with joy, discovers Isa's poetic voice: "Isolated on a green island, hedged about with snowdrops, laid with a counterpane of puckered silk, the innocent island floated under her window" (14). The next sentence—"Only George lagged behind" (14)—undercuts the exuberance, capturing the fluctuation of Isa's emotions between love and

hate. Woolf's modulation of tone, therefore, helps to capture the interplay among these contrasting emotional absolutes.

Julia Briggs' application of the technical terms of art to the nature of Isa and Giles' experiences works as another illustration of Woolf's exploration of discords. The plots of love and hate, Briggs argues, respectively constrict Isa and Giles. Isa struggles to reduce all of her emotions to one story, the plot of love, which stars the little known, yet much admired, "gentleman farmer" Rupert Haines[67]. The narrator complains, "Love and hate –how they tore her asunder! Surely it was time someone invented a new plot" (215). Giles recognizes a new plot, the emerging act of war which features warring dictators in leading roles[68]. Nevertheless their marriage, which restarts at the novel's end, requires an alternative way of acting and thinking. Particularly, Isa's addition to Giles' epithet—"the father of my children, *whom I love and hate*" (215) marks her awareness of the multiplicity of her emotions towards him, which exist outside the boundaries of love and hate.

Woolf cultivates the creative powers of her reader's mind, in addition to the critical, by utilizing an impressive aesthetic of symbolism and poetics. In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that an anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders would help to affect a cultural changes including the prevention of war and the protection of freedom. In their refusal to join the present society, an "ill-fitting form that distorts truth; deforms the mind; fetters the will,"[69] and their commitment to justice, equality, and liberty for all men and women may, Woolf demands that the Society of Outsiders must be "creative in their activities, not merely critical" (113). This requirement captures the fundamental styles of her fiction: she not only informs her reader of how to critically assess themselves and their culture, but she re-creates the ways in which they read the events of history, society, and their private life.

During an interval between the first and second scenes of the pageant, the detached narrator describes the events occurring inside the Olivers' barn. The description, which encourages the reader to notice nature in action, resembles the theatrical narration of the picnickers watching the view. In this respect, the animals inside the barn, like the nibbling mice, the constructing swallows, and the newborn puppies, and outside in the countryside, like swallows or the cows, become a minor cast within the novel. Woolf emphasizes the barn animals' actions, which parallel activities of human society—eating, home-building, and procreation, to the same degree as the Olivers' actions.[70] The mice, for example, which slid in and out, echoes the movements of the pageant's audience. As is the case in the human world, which for Woolf is more about emotions—specifically, the tensions between emotions—than actions or plot, the natural world can arouse intense, sensual feelings:

> Whiffs of sweetness and richness veined the air. A blue-bottle had settled on the cake and stabbed its yellow rock with its short drill. A butterfly sunned itself sensuously on a sunlit yellow plate. (100)

Yet, before the barn, which Woolf capitalizes perhaps to suggest its significance, is described, the narrator comments, "The Barn was empty" (100). Mrs. Sands, who approaches the barn, sees its great door open, but does not notice the animals—"mice for her were only black pellets in kitchen drawers,"—or the "shaft of light [slopping] from roof to floor" inside the barn (99-100). Woolf emphasizes that the presence of such scents, sounds, and colors should not be missed. The color yellow, which shines on the barn doors and the butterfly, symbolizes the revelatory potential existing within nature. Patricia Mills argues that the bluebottle fly stabbing the cake with its drill is one of the many cases of the piercing or wounding in the human relationships of the novel. I believe the penetration of the cake, the drilling of the yellow rock, reiterates the revealing power

of breaking the surface of the earth to uncover and experience a primeval force, which George discovers when he grubs with the soil and which Lucy feels as she gazes into the lily pool at the end of the novel (an episode I will discuss in the final chapter). The strange phrase for the cake, "yellow rock," echoes the yellow, pre-historic stone that Giles kicks during his walk to the barn, which immediately precedes the description of the barn (99). Giles kicks the stone until he comes across, and kills, the snake-toad. His kicking represents a problematic way of interacting with nature. For Giles, the yellow rock is a nuisance, something from which nothing can be learned, something that interrupts his daily action. Woolf discourages Giles' blind fixation on the present historical of men and nation. Giles tries to kick nature into shape, yet the game illustrates his misguided frustrations and calls into question the ability of human "civilization" to curb pre-historic impulses. He tries first to contain the wild "lust" of Mrs. Manresa and next the natural "perversion" of Dodge. Mrs. Sand's lack of a vision also underscores the need for Woolf's readers to recognize the beauty and emotion within nature and to appreciate their real connection to the natural world. While Woolf lists national, religious, familial, and sex pride as "unreal loyalties" in *Three Guineas*, a connection to nature may be considered a "real loyalty."[71]

In addition to her detached voice which de-centralizes human behavior, conveying a different way of reading the narratives of everyday life, the poetic passages of *Between the Acts* require the reader to create meaning through language rather than absorb meaning from fact. Woolf's prose resembles poetry when characters experience moments of full consciousness particularly by experiencing nature. For example, while Lucy stares at the lily pool, the narrator says,

> Then something moved in the water; her favorite fantail. The golden orfe followed. Then she had a glimpse of silver—the great carp himself, who came to the surface so very seldom. They slid on, in and out, between the stalks, silver; pink; gold; splashed; streaked; pied. (205)

As she connects with the golden fish, Lucy imagines the two of them moving together, between the surfaces of the earth, and, like George, between the stalks of the earth. The narrator expresses her emotions by uniting individual words, in the form of two repetitive tri-colons, one of colors and the other of artistic valuations. The description is quick; the image like the silver carp itself whizzes by. In an early description of the lily pool, Woolf utilizes this technique of stringing together isolated words to describe the flight of the water-pavement spiders, who "paused; poised; equipped; mailed; then with a waver of undulation off they flashed" (45). The speed of the language in these examples captures not only the animals' movements, but also the ephemeralness of the transcendental moment of consciousness[xv]. The poetic voice urges the reader to feel the emotional possibilities of the words.

When she looks into her looking-glass, thinking of love and the gentleman farmer, Isa engages in this same mental exercise; she tries to tease out her emotions from the gentleman farmer's words, which "could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her" (15). As she searches for the words to describe her emotions, Isa thinks of the quick vibrations of an airplane propeller she once saw: "faster, faster, faster, it whizzed, whirred, buzzed, till all the flails became one flail and up soared the plane away and away" (15). This image of independent parts forming a whole—the aspiration of the novel—

[xv] In the essay "The Last Parade," E. M. Forster's describes a model of the Earth from the Paris Exhibition in 1937. He writes: "It revolves at a suitable rate. It does not take twenty-four hours to go round as in fact, nor does it whizz as in poetry" (3). Forster's assessment of poetry also alludes to ways of reading, for fact or for expression (see pg. 41-42 of this essay).

summarizes the reading experience of poetry: words whizzing together to form a coherent moment of consciousness. Woolf not only wants to expose her readings to the presence of such moments, as she does by mentioning Lucy's flights of the mind in which she imagines alternative worlds, reconstructed pasts; but Woolf is also taking her readers on a poetic flight, forcing them to construct meaning and thereby transforming how they might read a text.

In the opening of the third chapter of *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that a fundamental step towards the prevention of war requires that writers practice their profession in the interests of culture and intellectual liberty. She defines culture as the disinterested pursuit of reading and writing in the English language and intellectual liberty as the right to say or write what you think in your own words, in your own way (91). Woolf believed that the way in which a text is written influences readers' reactions to that text. Several motivations, including the need to make a living, the policies of a directing or editing board, or authorial vanity, threaten to compromise works of art. Although Woolf condemns novels, like the culture-distorting works of Mrs. Oliphant, which "smear one's mind and deject one's imagination,"[72] Woolf isolates newspapers, as particularly dangerous scripts, because they prescribe the reader's experience of the very events that they relate.[73] In *Three Guineas*, for example, Woolf warns the "daughters of educated men" of the need to read and compare "at least three different papers, at least three different versions of the same fact" in order to come to [a] conclusion.[74]

Woolf's treatment of the newspaper in *Between the Acts* reflects what she feared about the newspaper and what informs her own stylistic decisions. The newspaper first appears in the novel, folded, in the shape of a beak, booming like a megaphone from Bart's mouth to George. Although Woolf recognized the necessity of newspapers, which

informed her of the war, the newspaper is a disturbing prop in Bart's little game. Containing the "real" plots of war and history, it upsets George's mystical moments with the earth. Later in the scene, however, Bart returns to his paper, trying to "find his line in the column," as he mutters "A cry-baby—a cry-baby" (13). Karin E. Westman argues that here the newspaper stabilizes Bart's experience of the world because it "confirms his location within his habitus of 1930s England."[75] The shame and embarrassment he feels at the failure to connect with George subsides as he reads, "M. Daladier [has] been successful in pegging down the franc . . ." (13). The ideologically comforting paper reassures Bart that all is back to normal. Westman's essay, "Media, Meditation, and Oscillation in *Between the Acts*," chronicles the history the English newspaper, *The Times*, which the Olivers subscribe to. She argues that during the 1930s nearly every aspect of *The Times*, from the editorial page to even the font of the page[xvi], confirmed the newspaper's pro-Empire policies.

As Westman's scholarship illustrates, Woolf believes that newspapers can perpetuate cultural ideologies because they present an imagined political community as reality. Miss La Trobe worries that her pageant will not be appreciated because her audience is "swathed in conventions," unable to see that a "dish cloth . . . looked much richer than real silk" (64). The preference of reality rather than suggestion marks the apparent difference between newspapers and novels, between literature of fact and literature of fiction. Woolf worried that people believed the newspaper to contain facts,

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[xvi] In 1932 *The Times* began using Times New Roman font after a report to the "typographic office committee called for a new typography that was 'masculine, English, direct, simple […] and absolutely free from faddishness and frivolity'" (Westman 5). Although Times New Roman is the standard font for most classes, especially ones in the English department, at Emory, I believe Woolf would appreciate my decision not to use it in my essay.

unable to see the ideological framework behind the text. Bart's unreflective reading of the paper illustrates this concern, which she explicitly addressed in *Three Guineas*: "So then literature of fact and literature of opinion, to make a crude distinction, are not pure fact, or pure opinion, but adulterated fact and adulterated opinion" (96).

When Isa reads *The Times* after her father-in-law had left it in the library, she picks out bits of the story and reflects on what she is reading.[76] " 'A horse with a green tail . . .' which was fantastic. Next, 'The guard at Whitehall . . .' which was romantic" (20). Isa strings the separate elements together in a narrative sequence to form a continuous story that culminates in the troopers raping a girl.[77] Instead of reading the newspaper to garner facts, Isa glimpses and pieces together the story, reacting emotionally to the text. She feels an immediate experience of the girl's encounter with the troopers.[78] Thus, Isa's reading experience, unlike Bart's which repositioned him within a welcomed framework of empire, patriarchy, or war, transposes the violation of the girl to her own life. This engaged reading allows Isa, who stays at home with a toothache, wishing she had access to a life as a poet, a freedom-fighter[xvii], a Prime minister,[xviii] to connect the girl's subjection to masculine authority to her own—a fundamental illustration of *Three Guineas.*[79]

Woolf wants *Between the Acts* to mediate a reflective reading experience that is similar to Isa's reading of *The Times*. The reader should glimpse, reflect, and piece

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[xvii] As Isa scans the library like "a person with a raging tooth [running their] eye over green bottles [looking for] (. . .) a cure" (19), she looks at books as a "remedy" for her curiosity (and confinement in the household). One of these books is "The Life of Garibaldi," who was a leader of the fight for Italian independence (*Between the Acts*, Oxford, 126).

[xviii] Isa also considers reading "The life of Lord Palmerston (19)," who served as Britain's prime minister in the mid nineteenth century (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: "Temple, John Henry"), but settles on *The Times*, because "for her generation the newspaper was a book" (20).

together the series of contrasts, receptive to shocks of emotion and encouraged to relate the conditions of the novel to their own personal experience. For, how we come to read her book, her pageant, the newspaper—all literature—shapes our experience of the world. In the next chapter, "An Education of Art," I examine the visions and virtues of nature and art that can inform one's actions and thoughts now, once one learns to resist cultural ideologies.

Chapter 3: An Education through Art

> It was a pity that the man who had built Pointz Hall had pitched the house in a hollow, when beyond the flower garden and the vegetables there was this stretch of high ground. Nature had provided a site for a house; man had built his house in a hollow.
>
> (*Between the Acts* 10).

In the first chapter of this essay, I introduced George's ecstatic shock from grubbing in the garden to illustrate the cultural curtailing of the imagination, the response to beauty, and the sense of the wholeness of life. Woolf's own fondness of these experiences, however, suggested that such moments of consciousness, though fleeting and susceptible to cultural pressures, might serve as catalysts for a cultural transformation. While Woolf stylistically helps her reader become aware of such moments, providing them skills to see beyond cultural ideologies, Woolf believes that art, nature, and women have the power to repair England's great house, a metaphor for its culture, by teaching empathy, tolerance, and one-ness, rather than cultural lessons of violence, dominance, and competition. The visions provided by art, the emotions provided by nature, and the virtues provided by women, however, never coalesce into a dogmatic manual for improving English culture or for preventing war. Both the ending of the novel and Woolf's own recognition of the limits of art suggest that neither of these contrasting educations—the lessons taught through art or the lessons taught for war—are effective repairs in isolation. Instead, *Between the Acts* positions these versions of culture on a continuum, with the familiar thematic poles of unity and dispersal, and voices an unspoken way of thinking, a new plot, which must emerge in reality and in the imagination, in the public and the private worlds, and in the minds of men and women.

At the end of the pageant, Lucy wheels away to the lily pool as Bart returns to the house. As she scans the water, looking for fish, her seduced eye breaks the surface of the water and envisions, "beauty, power, and glory in [human beings]" (205). While Giles obsesses over the destruction facing humanity, tormented by the violence of his world, the natural world substantiates Lucy's belief that "People are gifted—very. The question is—how to bring it out?" (59). For Lucy, nature communicates the potential of mankind to act towards goodness. Although Lucy's optimism seems naïve to many characters in the novel, considering the horrors facing England, her faith in this vision of human decency and the wholeness of life never falters. Despite his jokes about her beliefs, Lucy never changes them because of her brother Bart. As he did to George's revelatory experience of nature, Bart intrudes during Lucy's glimpsing of the lily pond, objecting, here within Lucy's mind, that there must be a reason why the seldom-seen goldfish had come to the surface. For years, Bart's commitment to reason, his asking of "Why?" and never "Who?," has tested her faith in the goodness of people, in the cooperation of the weather, and in a prayable being. Though Bart, who finds the grey water "opaque over the mud," may rationalize that the fish had come to the surface for a crumb of a biscuit,[xix] there is no confirmable reason: "Lucy had nothing to give them—not a crumb of bread" (206).

Although this scene illustrates the limits of Bart's attempts to rationalize every experience, Woolf connects his resolute devotion to reason to the perpetuation of destructive cultural ideologies. The objection to insisting on rationalizing experience echoes Woolf's criticism of traditional plot structures, in which effects or events have explainable causes. Aside from the potential for manipulation of thought, the

[xix] At the end of the novel, Bart snaps at the paper like "a fish rising to a crumb of biscuit" (216).

acceptability, socially or politically, of actions often depends on the likelihood or normality of the causes. The litany of causes of war, for example, can justify its pervasiveness and, one could reason, also its necessity. In this respect, Woolf condemns Bart for "[carrying] the torch of reason till it went out in the darkness of the cave" (206). Some realities, including the development of her own culture, require asking not only why people think and act a certain way, but who is informing these thoughts and actions. Yet, causality should not be totally dismissed; for example, Woolf believes that a society that selects rivalry, egotism, and aggression from the great arc of potential human purposes and motivations will perpetuate war, empire, and patriarchy.[80] But, her questioning of the forces (or people) selecting these motivations, which Bart never considers, allows her to encourage the integration of new motivations into institutions. Bart's causal reasoning limits him from achieving an emotional connection with nature, through which he might be able to re-imagine his world.

In both of the moments of being that I have presented—George's grubbing and Lucy's gazing—Bart misses an opportunity to have a similar experience. Before he finds his "line in the column" after upsetting George, a breeze blows the newspaper; "and over the edge [Bart] surveyed the landscape—flowing fields, heath, and woods" (13). The view impresses Bart: "had he been a painter, he would have fixed his easel here, where the country, barred by trees, looked like a picture" (13). Lacking the artistic sensibilities to appreciate fully this picture (which Woolf hopes her fiction can cultivate), Bart returns to the paper, as the breezes subsides. Like sightless Mrs. Sands in the barn, Bart, the "eyeless monster," lacks the capacity to fix his gaze on the natural world—his usual criticism of Lucy's ambivalence to human historical circumstance (12). Instead of the trees barring his view of his country, he sees England barred by the columns of the newspaper.

Furthermore, Bart stops at the lily pool before Lucy, noting only the opaqueness of the water. He sustains no connection with nature. Instead, after the pageant, which "had obliterated the house," he hurries back to solitude and "reason and the lamplit paper" (204).

Although Lucy's hopeful vision recognizes nature and encourages respect of humanity, her faith is as fervid as Bart's commitment to reason or Giles' obsession with destruction. While Isa admires Lucy for "[beating] up against those immensities and the old man's irreverences," (24), she hints at the delusion of Lucy's conclusion that "[s]heep, cows, grass, trees, ourselves—all are one," when she says, "[w]ell, if the thought gave her comfort, . . . let her think it" (175). Oblivious to the discomforts of her family, including the torment of war for Giles, of rape for Isa, and the torment of marriage for both, Lucy manages to always see her vision. Dodge, too, who wishes to tell Mrs. Swithin "you've healed me," questions the religiousness of her faith: "How could she weight herself down by that sleek symbol? How stamp herself, so volatile, so vagrant, with that image [of a cross]" (73). Although this may suggest a sacrilegious transfiguration in which Lucy's faith appears more spiritual than the image of Christ, it more likely faults Lucy for reducing her active mind to a single, totalizing perception of the world. She seems capable of seeing this compassionate view in everything: she engages in one-making when she reads of the past in an *Outline of History*, when she views the countryside, and when she watches the pageant. Giles' bleak vision of Europe consumes him in much the same as Lucy's, for he reads it through the paper, sees it in the landscape, and feels it during the pageant: "This afternoon he wasn't Giles Oliver come to see the villagers act their annual pageant; manacled to a rock he was, forced passively to behold indescribable horror" (60).

The differences between Lucy and Giles' reaction to the pageant suggest that Miss

La Trobe's play functions as both a critique and re-imagination of English history. Though these contrasting interpretations—Giles' horrifying and Lucy's inspirational experience ("I might have been—Cleopatra. [Miss La Trobe has] stirred in me my unacted part"[81])—upset Miss La Trobe, who wishes to dictate rather than communicate meaning,[82] the play succeeds, as does *Between the Acts*, in fostering the emotion of hate by exposing destructive cultural norms and the emotion of love by calling for the villagers to appreciate that though they "at different parts; [they] are the same" (192). The critical and creative ambitions of the pageant invalidate the notion that Giles and Lucy merely fit their predetermined world-views to the scenes of the pageant. Rather, art shares the capability of nature to provide revelatory visions.

Yet, as the inability of Bart to connect with nature suggests, not all of the characters of *Between the Acts* have the capacity to see unifying potentialities within art. During the pageant's first scene, Mrs. Manresa imagines only the actualization of her lust for Giles, the play that stars her as "the Queen [and he as] the surly hero" (93). Unlike Isa, who rejects Giles' petty displays of masculinity, calling him a "silly little boy, with blood on his boots"[83] after his squashing of the snake and toad, Mrs. Manresa adores his "fierce, untamed" violence and power.[84] Throughout the novel, Woolf associates Mrs. Manresa and Bart with Giles: "the wild child, afloat once more on the tide of [Bart's] benignity, looked over her coffee cup at Giles, with whom she felt in conspiracy" (55). Isa and Dodge form a similar bond:

> [They] talked as if they had known each other all their lives . . . Weren't they, though, conspirators, seekers after hidden faces? That confessed, she paused and wondered, as they always did, why they could speak so plainly to each other (114).

Apart from the other table-members, Isa and Dodge, as artists and outsiders, have a capacity to "pause" and "wonder" at the occurrences of their world, considering their own attractions, diversions, and respecting those considerations in others. For example, when Isa first appears in the novel, she apologizes for not greeting the guests, the Haines, sooner; she was "sitting with her little boy who wasn't well" (4). Isa's concern for others contrasts Giles' anger towards the unexpected pair of Mrs. Manresa and William Dodge. Woolf suggests that the development of creative capacities allows for the appearance of "hidden" connections, like those beneath the surfaces of the earth.

The language of conspiracy also implies that Isa and Dodge's perceptive abilities threaten traditional ideologies or normative experiences. In her essay "Virginia Woolf's Matriarchal Family Origins in *Between the Acts*," Patricia Cramer argues that "by highlighting the capacity for empathy, vision, and song which draw Dodge, Lucy, and Isa together, Woolf urges our nurturing and creative capacities as a basis for social cohesion rather than the fascination with destruction and domination which connect Bart, Giles, and Manresa" (171). Because the prevention of war requires a reexamination of culture, a reshaping of the spiritual values of existence, Cramer reads *Between the Acts* as a call for breaking apart from the existing traditions of patriarchy.[85] According to this argument, the end of patriarchy means the end of society's union to the customs that perpetuate war, specifically (these values that Giles, the representation of masculinity, embodies): hero-worship, competition, conflict, and intolerance. Thus, the "matriarchal potential" articulated through Lucy, Isa, and Dodge, becomes the impetus for re-claiming the "patriarchal take-over of culture."[86] Many passages from *Three Guineas* inform such readings of patriarchal defiance in *Between the Acts*: women, for example, are considered the fighters of "the tyranny of the patriarchal state" (102), observers of an existing

"society, so kind to you, so harsh to us" (105), and members of an "Society of Outsiders," whose "four great teachers—poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties" (79)—could stimulate a new culture.[87] In *Between the Acts*, however, Woolf does not assert that womanly virtues, or artistic visions, have influence to replace completely existing cultural structures. If the dream in *Three Guineas* is a world free of war, the wish in *Between the Acts* is less ambitious; a fresh start, in which man is still living and not totally destroyed by war, will do.

In his chapter, "What was Modernism?," Harry Levin articulates a specific dilemma modernist writers faced when they wrote for the purpose, to however large a degree, of achieving political goals. The first and most treasonous mistake that must be avoided was "talking down to their audience in hopes of enlarging it" or their political stances.[88] Writers had to balance between producing art, which was divorced from the culture at large, fit for art's ivory tower, and adulterating their works to affect cultural changes. Accusing Woolf of the latter offense was unthinkable, however, her husband Leonard Woolf did feel the need to say that Virginia was not "a frail invalidish lady living in an ivory tower . . . and worshipped by a little clique of aesthetes."[89] Another problem, which Levin presents in the words of the poet W. H. Auden was the dissolution of artists with the impossibly utopian political goals of the 1930s. After the Nazi-Soviet pact, Auden concluded: "poetry makes nothing happen."[90]

Woolf articulates the pressures on artists to articulate political messages through the struggles of the pageant's commanding leader Miss La Trobe. "Always agog to get things up," the director of the play, "Bossy" as they called her, insists on impressing her own vision of English social life on her audience. Miss La Trobe treats meaning as "hers," finished when written, complete as she conceived it. [91] Authoritative control of meaning,

a few steps beyond authorial control, resembles the unfair selection by men of rivalry, egotism, and aggression from potential human purposes and motivations for institutions to endorse. Woolf's awareness of the limitations of art and her fear of imposing meaning on her readers suggests the wrongfulness of conceptualizing her political allegiances in the late 1930s as military articulations of matriarchy fighting against patriarchy, womanly virtues *overthrowing* those (oppressive) virtues of men, or outsiders *reclaiming* the power to shape culture.

The novel's ending also illustrates the need for an alternative plot that does more tear down existing cultural structures or imagine the construction of new ones. At the end of the novel, the reader learns of Miss La Trobe's next play, in which, at midnight, "there [will] be two figures, half concealed the curtain would rise" (210). Giles and Isa, whose first conversation of day occurs on a "night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among the rocks," the reader learns are her actors. In the old plots, Isa's return to her husband with their relationship unchallenged and unchanged might symbolize her tragic acquiescence to patriarchy[92] or, in the battle between present-day reality and pre-history, Lucy's worldview may have persevered in spite of Bart's rationalizations. After the pageant, the narrator provides Miss La Trobe's reaction to the lily pool. "What she wanted, like the carp (something moved in the water) was darkness in the mud; a whiskey and a soda at the pub; and coarse words descending like maggots through the waters" (203). She gets her wish. At the novel's end, all that remains is the fertile mud. The mud represents a fluidity—a combination of earthy air and liquid water—that symbolizes not only human beings' times on the earth but also their imagined existences, rippling in lily pool like Lucy's visions. Thus, from this primordial source, with Isa and Giles speaking together, combining the lessons from of the past, the present, and the future, Woolf

illustrates the need for all people with all the faculties of their mind to fight for cultural changes.

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---------"Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid." *The Death of a Moth*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, Inc., 1942. 243-248.

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[1] Woolf, Virginia. *Between the Acts*. Ed Susan Smith and Mary S. Millar. (Blackwell) 167.
[2] Bazin and Lauter 27.
[3] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 97.
[4] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 91.
[5] Carr, Helen 206.
[6] Carr 206.
[7] Carr 201.
[8] Phillips, Kathy xiii.
[9] Carr 202.
[10] Briggs, Julia 80.
[11] Woolf, "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" 245.
[12] Bazin, Nancy and Lauter, Jane 37.
[13] Bazin and Lauter 37.
[14] Flora, L. M. Rodrigues 172, 179.
[15] Flora 177.
[16] Flora 178
[17] Phillips 5.
[18] Phillips 200.
[19] Phillips xxvii
[20] Carr 206.
[21] Bazin and Lauter 35.
[22] Poole, Roger 82.
[23] Poole 97.
[24] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 72.
[25] McNellie, Andrew 3.
[26] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 74.
[27] Phillips 221.
[28] Briggs 84.
[29] Briggs 84.
[30] Woolf, *Between the Acts* 175.
[31] Woolf, *Between the Acts* (Blackwell) 133.
[32] Woolf, *Between the Acts* (Blackwell) 134.
[33] Bazin and Lauter 33
[34] Bazin and Lauter 33.
[35] Carr 207.
[36] Carr 207.
[37] McNellie, Andrew 17.
[38] McNellie 18.
[39] Carr 207.
[40] Carr includes this quotation from Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past" in her chapter "Virginia Woolf, Empire and race" (207).
[41] Orwell, George "Why I Write" 393.
[42] Orwell, "Why I Write" 394.

[43] Orwell, "Why I Write" 394.
[44] Dick, Susan and Millar, Mary S. xxxii.
[45] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 114.
[46] Bazin and Lauter 27.
[47] Winterhalter, Teresa 237.
[48] Winterhalter 238.
[49] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 22.
[50] Dick and Millar xxxii.
[51] Bennett, Joan 91.
[52] Dick and Millar xxxiv.
[53] Briggs 83.
[54] Dick and Millar xxxii.
[55] Woolf *Three Guineas* 143.
[56] Woolf, *Between the Acts* (Blackwell) 167.
[57] Dick and Millar xxxiv.

[59] Dick and Millar xvii.
[60] Bazin and Lauter 33.
[61] Westman, Karin 11.
[62] Westman 12.
[63] Westman 12.
[64] Bennett 118.
[65] Bennett 117.
[66] Dick and Millar xxxvii.
[67] Briggs 85.
[68] Briggs 85.
[69] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 105.
[70] Mills, Pamela 35.
[71] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 80.
[72] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 91.
[73] Westman 2.
[74] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 95.
[75] Westman 7.
[76] Westman 8.
[77] Westman 8.
[78] Westman 8.
[79] Woolf, *Between the Acts* 20.
[80] Cramer 168.
[81] Woolf *Between the Acts* 153.
[82] Joplin, Patricia Klindienst 90.
[83] Woolf *Between the Acts* 111.
[84] Woolf *Between the Acts* 47.
[85] Cramer 169.
[86] Cramer 178.
[87] Woolf, *Three Guineas* 110.
[88] Levin, Harry 292.
[89] Hussey 59.
[90] Quoted from James Longenbach's chapter on "Modern Poetry" 102.
[91] Joplin 90.
[92] Cramer 178.