Université de Montréal

Direction des bibliothèques

**AVIS**

Ce document a été numérisé par la Division de la gestion des documents et des archives de l'Université de Montréal.

L'auteur a autorisé l'Université de Montréal à reproduire et diffuser, en totalité ou en partie, par quelque moyen que ce soit et sur quelque support que ce soit, et exclusivement à des fins non lucratives d'enseignement et de recherche, des copies de ce mémoire ou de cette thèse.

L'auteur et les coauteurs le cas échéant conservent la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent ce document. Ni la thèse ou le mémoire, ni des extraits substantiels de ce document, ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation de l'auteur.

Afin de se conformer à la Loi canadienne sur la protection des renseignements personnels, quelques formulaires secondaires, coordonnées ou signatures intégrées au texte ont pu être enlevés de ce document. Bien que cela ait pu affecter la pagination, il n'y a aucun contenu manquant.

**NOTICE**

This document was digitized by the Records Management & Archives Division of Université de Montréal.

The author of this thesis or dissertation has granted a nonexclusive license allowing Université de Montréal to reproduce and publish the document, in part or in whole, and in any format, solely for noncommercial educational and research purposes.

The author and co-authors if applicable retain copyright ownership and moral rights in this document. Neither the whole thesis or dissertation, nor substantial extracts from it, may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms, contact information or signatures may have been removed from the document. While this may affect the document page count, it does not represent any loss of content from the document.

Université de Montréal

# Virginia Woolf and the Poetics of Trauma Narrative

par
Ahmed Ben Amara

Département d'études anglaises
Faculté des arts et des sciences

Thèse présentée à la faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du doctorat
en études anglaises

July 2008

©Ahmed Ben Amara 2008

# RÉSUMÉ DE SYNTHÈSE

Au cours des dernières décennies, une attention grandissante a été portée à la dimension de témoignage des textes littéraires, c'est-à dire la manière dont ils tentent de témoigner des événements douloureux ou les pertes dont le deuil n'a pas été pleinement vécu. De ces débats sur la possibilité de connaître et de représenter de tels événements hors de portée, émergea une théorie qui propose d'interpréter la blessure infligée à la psyché avec l'aide de la littérature. Etant une théorie qui traite principalement des moyens de transmission des expériences qui n'ont pas été correctement assimilées, la théorie du traumatisme remet en question les notions traditionnelles de référence, de connaissance et de clôture, et ce faisant, elle met l'accent sur une ouverture déconstructive qui est conforme à l'orientation poststructuraliste de la critique actuelle. .

Cette thèse examine l'œuvre de Virginia Woolf à la lumière de ces développements récents. Les écrits que j'analyse comprennent des grands romans ainsi que des nouvelles, et ils présentent en commun une tentative visant à témoigner d'une série d'événements traumatisants à la fois historiques et textuels. Les événements en question, qu'il soit personnels, historiques ou imaginaires, ne sont pas directement présentés, mais ils font constamment l'objet d'une transformation narrative qui vise souvent à les réinsérer dans une formule reconnaissable. Cependant, au cœur de la conception contemporaine du traumatisme réside l'idée qu'un événement manqué ne sera jamais totalement connu, et ce manque de connaissance se traduira souvent par une répétition de l'événement notamment sous forme de rêves et retours en arrière. Ce manque de

résolution n'est nulle part plus évidente que dans les écrits de Virginia Woolf où le récit est marquée par une série de motifs répétitifs qui témoignent de la dimension obsédante de certaines expériences. Aborder l'œuvre de Woolf c'est faire face à une blessure qui crie constamment pour se faire entendre, mais dont la nature exacte échappe continuellement a notre compréhension.

MOTS-CLEFS: Virginia Woolf, traumatisme, psychanalyse, déconstruction, modernisme

# ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, there has been an increasing attention to the testimonial dimension of literary texts, that is to say the ways in which they attempt to bear witness to painful events or losses that have not been properly mourned. Out of these debates about the possibility of knowing and representing such complex events, a theory has emerged that proposes to read the wound inflicted on the psyche with the help of literature. As a theory that deals primarily with ways of transmitting experiences that have not been properly assimilated, trauma theory challenges preconceived notions of reference, knowledge, and closure, and in doing so, it reveals a deconstructive open-endedness that is in keeping with the poststructuralist moment in criticism.

This dissertation examines Virginia Woolf's work in the light of these recent developments. The works I analyze range from major novels to early short fiction, and they have in common an underlying attempt to bear witness to a set of traumatic events both historical and textual. The events in question, whether personal, historical, or imagined, are not directly presented, but are instead constantly subject to a narrative reformulation that seeks to reintegrate them into a more recognizable scheme. Yet, at the heart of our contemporary understanding of trauma is the idea that a missed event will never be fully known, and this lack of knowledge often results in a situation where the event will be repeated in various forms including, dreams, and flashbacks. This lack of resolution is nowhere more evident than in Virginia Woolf's work, where narrative is marked by a set of repetitive motifs that testify to the haunting impact of certain experiences. To approach Woolf's work, it will be argued, is to come face to face with a wound that

persistently cries to be heard, yet whose exact nature continually escapes our understanding.

KEY WORDS: Virginia Woolf, trauma, narrative, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, Modernism

To the memory of Nabil (1974 – 2004)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Eric Savoy, whose steady help and guidance have made this work possible. I am particularly grateful for the interest and care he has always shown with regard to my work, which, together with insightful response and careful judgement, have made the research journey a most edifying and pleasurable one. I am also indebted to Professor Andrew Miller for the illuminating help and advice he provided during the final stages of the research.

# ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

BTA	Between the Acts
CE	Collected Essays
CR	The Common Reader
Diary	The Diary of Virginia Woolf (5 vols.)
'EP'	The Evening Party
JR	Jacob's Room
'KG'	Kew Gardens
Letters	The Letters of Virginia Woolf (6 vols.)
MOB	Moments of Being
MD	Mrs Dalloway
'MW'	The Mark on the Wall
'OBI'	On Being Ill
'SM'	A Simple Melody
TG	Three Guineas
TTL	To the Lighthouse
TY	The Years
'UN'	An Unwritten Novel
VO	The Voyage Out

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Writing the Abuse of Life: Virginia Woolf and Trauma.................1

Chapter 1: A Squinting Poetics: Trauma and Mimesis in Mrs Dalloway...........37

i An 'Abyssal' Identification: Trauma as Mimesis..........................44

ii 'You Can Never Mourn': A Tropologies of Mourning..................62

iii 'The Hidden Spring': The Primal Scene(s) of Mrs Dalloway..........77

Chapter 2: 'Bringing the Scattered Bits Together': Working Through the Trauma of History in Between the Acts............................................................115

i Between the Traumatic Acts of History: Trauma as Apprehension.....124

ii 'Haunted by Words': the Language of Between the Acts................137

iii A Figurative History: War in Between theActs...........................158

Chapter 3: Images of the 'Dark Cupboard': Illness and Embodiment in Woolf's Short Fiction..............................................................................180

i An "Intoxicating sense of Freedom": Illness and Mysticism in 'The Mark on the Wall'..............................................................200

ii "Light-illuminated moments": Images of Illness and Embodiment in 'Kew Gardens'..............................................................214

iii The Dance of the Moth: Illness and the Creative Process in 'An Unwritten Novel'..............................................................231

Conclusion..............................................................................246

Works Cited..............................................................................251

# INTRODUCTION

# WRITING THE 'ABUSE OF LIFE': VIRGINIA WOOLF AND TRAUMA

In an early short story entitled 'The Evening Party', Virginia Woolf has her narrator hint at major themes that would form the focus of her later fiction. The story opens with the thoughts of a man on his way to a party. Seized by a moment of hesitation and uncertainty, the man, like Eliot's Prufrock, lingers for while on the street to watch the people attending the party, and as he does so, he muses on the fundamental difference between him and the rest of the crowd. What is remarkable about his interior monologue, however, is the centrality of a set of seemingly random images that include trees, moths, the sea, and colors. Interestingly, all these images would become persistently recurrent motifs in Woolf's mature fiction. It seems as if in this early attempt at fiction, Woolf already had an astonishingly clear idea about the kind of imagery that she would exploit in her later career. But that is not all. Half way through the story, two people present at the party are having a fragmentary conversation, when one of them, presumably a writer, starts to extol the virtues of her own hands. Her tribute culminates in an arresting statement: "I am astonished", she says referring to her hands, "that I should use this wonderful composition of flesh and nerve to write the abuse of life. Yet that's what we do. Come to think of it, literature is the record of our discontent" ('EP' 93). These comments, though made in a conversational, casual way, would have enormous implications in connection to Woolf's work in general. They encapsulate in my opinion what would later evolve into a full-fledged theory of fiction as the inscription of 'the abuse of life', that is to say those experiences that leave in their wake indelible scars both on the body and on the mind.

Yet, implied in the process of writing the abuse of life is not only the activity of inscription, the putting into words of these painful experiences, but also the *writing out* of such experiences, that is to say the attempt to master the consequences, ease the pain and move on. It is this interrelation between writing and healing that Woolf will echo almost twenty years later, as she looks back on a life of artistic endeavour and personal struggle with calamities. "I make it real by putting it into words", she says of the pain brought by those extreme moments of 'peculiar horror and physical collapse' (MB 72). She then adds: "it is by putting it into words that I make whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps, because by doing so it takes away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together" (72). Part of the horror of these extreme experiences, therefore, lies in the fragmentary or incomplete way in which they are integrated into consciousness so that narrative becomes a way of coming to grips with this fragmentation, of assimilating what was not known in the first place.

To evoke such disconcerting events, or 'nonexperiences', to borrow Maurice Blanchot's term,[1] is to venture into the indeterminate world of trauma. Cathy Caruth and other trauma theorists have recently underlined the unmanageable nature and surprising impact of certain emotionally charged events, and the ways in which they defy conventional modes of knowledge and assimilation. A traumatic event, says Caruth, is an event that "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (Trauma 4, author's italics). A major consequence of this lack of knowledge, Caruth adds, is that even after the experience is over, it cannot

be clearly recalled and will only be available in the form of intrusive hallucinations, unbidden flashbacks, as well as dreams and nightmares – what Woolf aptly described in her last novel Between the Acts as "orts, scraps, and fragments" (169).

Thus, Caruth's description of the traumatic event seems to fall within Woolf's own conception of the design of her writing as stated in her memoir – namely to deal with the incoherence and pain of certain powerful life experiences. Woolf's 'statement of purpose', however, is only one of several indications that her writing is a constant engagement with trauma. There is for instance her repeated description of her own life as a relentless struggle with devastating events, and we know from biographical sources that this was no exaggeration. What Suzette Henke and David Eberle appropriately call Woolf's 'daunting catalogue of traumas' includes the early death of her mother Julia Stephen, when the young Virginia was only thirteen (Virginia Woolf and Trauma 1). "Her death, Woolf later reminisced, was the greatest disaster that could happen" (MB 40). This early tragedy represented for the Stephen children an untimely initiation into the art of mourning, as it ushered in what Woolf would later call "a period of oriental gloom": "for surely there was something in the darkened rooms, the groans, the passionate lamentations that passed the lamentations of sorrow, and hung about the genuine tragedy with folds of eastern drapery" (MB 40). Anyone familiar with Woolf's work will immediately recognize in these lines echoes from To the Lighthouse, a book in which the loss of the mother is mourned with acute poignancy.

Julia's death was devastating because it meant for Virginia not only the loss of the person closest to her heart, but also the transformation of the Stephen

household from, arguably, a place of merriment and joy, to one dominated by gloom and exaggerated grief. Exaggerated because Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father, like the demanding and intransigent Mr Ramsay of To the Lighthouse, could not handle the loss of his wife and, instead of trying to bring the family together, he selfishly forced them to hear "again and again the bitter story of his loneliness, his love and his remorse" (41). Stella, Virginia's half-sister, was to bear the brunt of the new situation, as she was tacitly called upon to play the role previously played by the devoted Julia. Stella clearly had no choice in the matter, being the eldest child in the house, and with a great deal of stoicism she accepted her new role of step-daughter/wife, and so the "family once more toiled painfully along the way" (44). Not surprisingly, however, it was not long before Stella broke down under the sheer strain of the new arrangement. She started to have repetitive bouts of illness that brought back 'terrible memories' of the last tragedy, until one day "we knew that the worst had actually come to pass". Her death would leave an indelible imprint on the young Virginia's mind. "Even now", she said years later, "it seems incredible" (53).

Thus, by the time she was fifteen, Virginia had already witnessed two shocking deaths in her family. Until the final years of her life, Woolf's accounts of these two losses would continue to testify to their haunting impact: "I shrink from the years 1897-1904 – the seven unhappy years", she later wrote. "So many lives were free from our burden. Why should our lives have been so tortured and fretted" (117). Her language is characteristic of a shocked person's inability to understand the logic of her traumatization, as well as her rage against fate:

> Two unnecessary blunders – the lash of a random unheeding flail that pointlessly and brutally killed the two people who should, normally and naturally, have made those years, not perhaps happy, but normal and natural. Mother's death: Stella's death. I am not thinking of them. I am thinking of the stupid damage that their deaths inflicted. (MB 117)

And this was not all: in 1904, Leslie died after a protracted battle with illness, and although divested of the element of surprise, this additional death would have a devastating effect on the Stephen children. "[T]he event, which seemed terrible in anticipation", writes Virginia's nephew Quentin Bell, "now appeared more heart-breakingly tragic" (87). It was in the aftermath of this loss and the ensuing breakdown that, according to Bell, Virginia made her first attempt to commit suicide. Two years later, death struck again, and this time the victim was Virginia's elder brother Thoby who died at the age of 25 from a fever that he had contracted during a trip to Greece.

"Children never forget", says Mrs Ramsay in To The Lighthouse; Woolf's memoir would come as a confirmation of this statement. In Moments of Being, Woolf repeatedly evokes another trauma that marred her childhood and would have enormous consequences on her adult life. This is the sexual violence that she experienced at the hands of her half brothers, and which would haunt her till the final moments of her life. The first of what would be repeated acts of abuse occurred when Virginia was about six years old and, more than half century later, Woolf would still acutely sense its impact: "I remember resenting, disliking it – what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling"? (MB 69). Louise DeSalvo has drawn attention to the lasting effects on Woolf's life and work of this childhood trauma, arguing that incest was only one part of the violent and abusive atmosphere

in which the young Virginia was raised. Writing the memoir toward the end of her life along with the process of recollection that it entailed, DeSalvo remarks, brought Woolf face to face with the lingering effects of that experience, as she "began to understand that sexual abuse was probably the central and most formative feature of her early life" (101).

To these recurrent episodes of loss and childhood abuse should be added the repeated bouts of illness that often left Woolf on the edge of despair. For most of her life, Woolf was prone to periodic and recurrent attacks of illness that combined severe mental as well as physical symptoms. At least five of these onslaughts resulted in major breakdowns and, as Hermione Lee suggests, were all possibly followed by attempts to commit suicide. To a certain extent, these forced excursions into what she sometimes referred to as 'the deep waters' or 'glooms' of illness shaped her perception of the world at large, of her own body, as well as her writing, and were in large part responsible for those melancholy moments that frequently reverberate in her texts. "Oh it's beginning its coming", she once apprehensively wrote in her diary prior to an imminent attack of illness; "the horror – physically like a painful wave about the heart – tossing me up. I'm unhappy unhappy! Down – God, I wish I were dead" (Diary 3: 110-11).

Aside from these personal tragedies, Woolf's experience of the 'abuse of life' included what might be termed historical or collective disasters: she witnessed two world wars, saw an entire generation of people being decimated, and her own country being attacked and about to be invaded. It should come as no surprise then

that her theme is for the most part elegiac, and that her work exudes what Erich Auerbach famously called "an air of vague and hopeless sadness" (551).

Auerbach's formulation is particularly apt in so far as it does justice to one of the fundamental aspects of Woolf's work. It is true that it requires little effort to identify the "hopeless sadness" that permeates Woolf's *oeuvre*. Before long, the reader of her major works is confronted with a persistently mournful mood that pervades her characters and themes. As Auerbach has perceptively observed, however, the distinctive feature of this mournful mood is precisely its vagueness, so that the more marked we are by the force of elegiac motif, the more confused we become as to its specific causes. It is as if at the core of these narratives lies an unnameable scene or event that keeps generating undercurrents of sadness and melancholy, thus claiming our attention while persistently eluding any attempts to identify it. This contradiction resonates powerfully with the paradoxical nature of traumatic experiences which, as Caruth points out, demand our witness but constantly escape total understanding (Unclaimed Experience 5). As will be argued throughout this dissertation, it is the tension that arises from this paradox – the discrepancy between the urge to fully know and to testify and the impossibility of such an absolute knowledge – that forms the main driving force for Woolf's fictional writings.

To see Woolf's fiction as a testimonial inscription bearing witness to a wide range of traumatic experiences is no stretch of the imagination. After all, Woolf made no secret of the fact that her concerns were primarily with "the dark places of psychology" (CR 152). Reacting against what she viewed as the materialism of

Edwardian fiction, Woolf issued what would prove to be a manifesto for the nascent modernist movement. Life, she famously said, "is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (150). Woolf here seems to anticipate postmodern scepticism about the possibility of certain knowledge, and especially the kind of scepticism associated with recent conceptualizations of trauma which, as Geoffrey Hartman observes, do "not give up on knowledge but suggest [...] the existence of a traumatic kind, one that cannot be made entirely conscious, in the sense of being fully retrieved or communicated without distortion" (537).

Contemporary interest in trauma began 1980 when the American Psychiatric Association included for the first time the new diagnostic category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in its official Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The criteria cited for PTSD were the same as those associated with what had previously been known as shell-shock or combat neurosis. They included a reexperiencing of the traumatic event, a numbing of responsiveness to, or reduced involvement with, the external world, hyper alertness, sleep disturbance, and memory impairment (Quoted in Figley, xx). The years that followed this recognition of a long-neglected phenomenon saw an explosion of interest in trauma and testimonial writing, with the publication of key texts such as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992) and Cathy Caruth's Trauma: Explorations in Memory (1995) and Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History (1996). As

the titles of these works suggest, the field of trauma studies was from the beginning marked by interdisciplinarity. The work of Caruth in particular synthesizes clinical, philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary approaches, and the texts that she analyzes range from theoretical texts to films and survivor narratives.

Despite this multiplicity of perspectives, however, Caruth's approach was only one of several directions that the history of trauma theory has taken. There has also been a clinical impulse which finds its clearest expression in such studies as Ruth Leys's Trauma: A Genealogy, as well as what might be termed a 'historical' approach which is concerned with the writing of actual history and is exemplified by Dominick Lacapra's recent work. These approaches are unquestionably valuable in that they raise issues that are both practical in nature and highly pertinent to the field trauma studies. Leys's work, for instance, brings to the fore the various problems that have beset clinical studies of psychological trauma, and draws attention to a set of recurring tensions that have characterized competing theories and treatments of trauma. LaCapra, too, raises important questions about post-traumatic writing, echoing Adorno's famous statement about the complexities of history and representation in a post-holocaust culture.

Caruth's approach, on the other hand, is narratological in that she is more interested in the ways in which trauma is represented and the set of problems that often beset such a representation. By thus shifting the emphasis from the event itself to the issue of representation, Caruth addresses one of the key aspects of trauma as an encounter with what Annie Rogers calls 'the unsayable' – what in the event is impact that exceeds the resources of language. Trauma for Caruth is a

voice that speaks through a wound and demands to be heard, and it is in the dialogical dynamics of this speaking/listening that she is particularly interested. The guiding principle within such a theory is that trauma narratives engage in various ways with "a problem of listening, of knowing, and of representing that emerges from the actual experience of the crisis" (Unclaimed Experience 5). This moving beyond the crisis as such to the realm of narratology or the poetics of representation seeks not to trivialize the actual traumatic experience but to underline the importance of the equally problematic dimension of representation. Poetics, Caruth suggests, is by necessity removed from personal pain, but it is not secondary to it. It may lack the accuracy and resolution that we would hope for, but it is still our only access to "a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4).

That the rise of trauma studies to discursive prominence should occur during the closing years of the 20th century is hardly surprising. Prior to the official recognition of PTSD as a valid mental pathology, the trauma phenomenon had long stirred interest and curiosity. Beginning with the work of the French Neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot on hysteria in the late 19th century, the study of trauma would continue actively although intermittently for almost a century. And despite what Judith Herman calls the 'episodic amnesia' that characterized the history of the concept, trauma was never completely forgotten.[2] The advent of the 20th century, however, marked a decisive moment in deepening awareness about trauma. With its unprecedented catalogue of catastrophic events that included two world wars, the dropping of a nuclear bomb, repeated episodes of holocaust, as well as massive natural disasters, the 20th century may well be termed, as Shoshana Felman

suggests, a post-traumatic century. The proliferation of such horrific events, moreover, has forced survivors and victims to find appropriate forms of testimony, as much as it imposed on witnesses the ethical obligation of discovering new structures of listening and understanding. It is in response to these new challenges to the otherwise normative categories of speaking and listening that the discourse of trauma has come to acquire the discursive currency that it enjoys today.

Nor is it surprising that the recent revival of the concept of psychological trauma was carried out in large part within the literary establishment. The early theorists who helped shape the field, Caruth, Felman, and Hartman, are all literary specialists associated with Yale, who took what Anne Whitehead calls "a surprising journey from literary criticism to trauma studies" (4). I insist, however, that the 'journey' was not surprising, and this for many reasons. As the earliest attempts to conceptualize trauma have shown, the question of the traumatic has always been bound up in one way or another with the question of the literary. Freud who, despite contemporary prejudice is still largely thought to have "cemented the idea of psychic trauma" (Hacking 76), repeatedly turned to literature to delineate the experience of trauma. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, for instance, Freud takes the story of Tancred in Tasso's Jerusalem Liberated to be a paradigm for the traumatic experience. For him, the tragic repetition of the act of killing in the story exemplifies the uncanny phenomenon of repetition at the heart of traumatic experiences. What is interesting about Freud's presentation, however, is the ways in which it demonstrates that literature was always a valuable and viable tool alongside the psychoanalytic theory for explaining patterns of human behaviour.

This is so, Caruth explains, because "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relationship between knowing and not knowing" (Unclaimed Experience 3).

Another point of intersection between trauma theory and literature is the importance they both attach to the act of receiving/reading. The poststructuralist orientation that the study of literature has adopted over the last few decades has brought about a new awareness of the importance of the act of reading to the process of interrogating a given literary work. It is within this context that J. Hillis Miller has proposed what he calls an 'ethics of reading', an approach that valorizes the activity of close and sustained reading as a means of ensuring that a given work will continue to generate an infinite number of meanings. In trauma theory, too, there is an emphasis on the centrality of this activity of reception. "As in literature", says Hartman, "we find a way of receiving the story, of listening to it, of drawing it into an interpretive conversation" (14). For Hartman as for Caruth, the lack of registration of the traumatic experience, its inherent gap of knowing, poses a challenge not only to the victim seeking to convey the experience but also to the one who listens to it. "How can one listen to what is impossible?", asks Caruth:

> Certainly, one challenge to this listening is that it may no longer be a choice: to be able to listen to the impossible, that is, is also to have been *chosen* by it, *before* the possibility of mastering it with knowledge. This is its danger – the danger, as some have put it, of trauma's 'contagion', of the traumatisation of the one who listens. (Trauma 10, author's italics)

An illustration of this process of 'contagion' is given by Shoshana Felman in her book Testimony, where she recounts an 'uncanny pedagogical experience' – the story of a graduate seminar she gave at Yale on literature and testimony, whose

'unforeseeable eventness' she would later have to articulate in a testimony of her own. Felman recalls how the screening of testimonial videotapes from the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies left the class 'inarticulate and speechless', and how this surprising reaction went beyond the confines of the class to affect the students' behaviour with their family and friends. For her, the break in the class framework mirrors a similar break in the framework of the testimonial literary texts that she and her students were analyzing.

The insistence on reading/receiving has made the literary mode a most suitable vehicle for articulating the challenging experiences of trauma victims. "Testimony", writes Felman, "is the literary – or discursive – mode par excellence of our times" (Testimony 5). This derives partly from the fact that, in the literary mode, the discourse of testimony finds a means of pointing *indirectly* to that which it seeks to communicate. That the language of trauma should proceed by indirectness is no accident, dealing as it does with experiences that have not been assimilated to begin with. Having bypassed the ordinary mechanisms of perception and cognition, the traumatic event 'falls' directly into the psyche, to use Hartman's formulation, and will only be available to memory through "a perpetual troping" of it by the dissociated psyche (Hartman 537). This indirectness, this troping, recall the figurative dimension of literary language, the ways in which "it does not say straightforwardly, what it means, but always says it in terms of some other thing, often by way of what seems wildly ungrounded analogies" (Tropes ix).

The tropological dimension of literary texts, as Miller suggests, is bound up with a performative aspect, so that, far from merely gesturing toward something by

means of indirection, literary texts "use words to try to make something happen in relation to the 'other' that resonates in the work. They want to get the reader from here to there. They want to make the reader cross into that 'something' and dwell there" (ix). Kafka must have had this perfomative dimension in mind when he talked about "books that wound and stab us" (Letters 16). Miller's frequent use of words like 'something' and 'other', however, suggest the differential nature of the kind of knowledge that literature leads to, a feature that renders it similar to traumatic knowledge. As (in) literary texts, trauma narratives are subject to what Caruth calls a 'referential resistance'; that is to say, they achieve a referential function precisely as they turn away from reference. In Caruth's deconstructive model, therefore, the language of trauma succeeds only when it fails; in other words, it is the very gaps and breaks in the language of trauma that render it capable of performatively enacting the aporia at the heart of the experience of trauma.

That modern writers should have recourse to the testimonial mode is not surprising; that a modernist writer like Virginia Woolf should write in this mode is even less surprising. After all, one of the key aspects of the modern sensibility is its seemingly endless mourning of something fundamental that has been lost, and the idea that we will never be whole after this – the idea, as Ian Hacking put it, "that what has been forgotten is what forms our character" (70).[3] The exact nature of this loss remains ever-elusive, but there are identifiable moments. One such moment is the Great War, whose shattering effects went beyond the conventional physical destruction of warfare, to involve the dislocation of an entire system of thought and

beliefs that had sustained an era. With respect to the embryonic modernist movement, it is true that the war confirmed the apocalyptic vision of pre-war modernists, but it also shaped the aesthetic principles of the post-war period. "[H]hardness, abstraction, collage, fragmentation, dehumanization, and the themes of chaotic history, Dionysian energy, the 'destructive element", writes Malcolm Bradbury, "did help to provide the discourse and the forms of the world to come" (84).

Modernism also resonates with trauma narratives in its disruption of chronology and its foregrounding of an alternative temporality. As announced by Woolf in her essay 'Modern Fiction', time in the new novel was not be the time of objective history, but what Peter Nicholls calls "the rhythm of feeling as it is scrutinized and overlooked by the perceiving mind" (264). And while this might not be true of all strands of modernism, it was certainly true of the type of modernist aesthetic that Woolf herself championed. The emphasis within this brand of modernism was not on linear experience but on those moments of heightened intensity, much like Wordsworth's spots of time or Joyce's epiphanies, that are registered by the perceiving mind. The technique with which these 'intermittent intensities' were to be conveyed was the stream of consciousness or interior monologue which, in its irregularities and flux, mirrors the disjunction and fragmentation of testimonial narratives. Thus, with such an "emphasis on interiority, memory, psychological verisimilitude, and personal isolation, and its development of fragmented, nonlinear plots" Modernism provided in the words of Patricia Moran "an ideal medium for the transcription of traumatic experiences"( 3)

Woolf's peculiar aesthetic, with its Proustian concern with consciousness and temporality and its Conradian impressionism, combined with her inward turn and the repeated traumas which she experienced to attract a host of psychological and psychoanalytic studies. Of these many could be said to address the traumatic effect of certain experiences on Woolf's life and work. One such early study was Bernard Blasckstone's Virginia Woolf: a Commentary (1949), in which the author suggested that 'deferred war-shock' is the key theme of Mrs Dalloway.[4] The impact of World War I on Woolf's work would also be thoroughly analyzed by Karen Levenback in her Virginia Woolf and the Great War, in which the author emphasizes the traumatic loss of what she describes as a sense of immunity to outside danger, which the war brought about. Allyson Booth, in an article entitled "The Architecture of Loss: Teaching Jacob's Room", sees Woolf's first experimental novel as an expression of the author's mourning for what she calls 'the lost generation' – the young and promising generation of Englishmen who died in the war. According to Booth, the novel conveys above all a sense of absence, made all the more poignant by recurrent images representing relics from the departed, and the most striking of these images is the architectural one of the room, Jacob's empty room – the supreme symbol of absence (67).[5]

The links between trauma and Woolf's modernist version of subjectivity have also been the subject of sustained scrutiny. Suzette Henke, for instance, proposes what she calls a 'post-traumatic subjectivity' that resonates everywhere in Woolf's work. Woolf's subject position, she says, "reflects and recreates a number of her own traumatic experiences, rehearsed, amalgamated and reconfigured over a

lifetime of literary production" ("Virginia Woolf and Post-traumatic Subjectivity" 147-8). Working along similar lines is Jane Lilenfeld's "Accident, Incident, and Meaning: Traces of Trauma in Virginia Woolf's Narrativity", which underscores the centrality of Woolf's post-traumatic subjectivity to "the conflicted discourse of modernist and postmodernist constructions of subject positions" (153).

The first book-length publication to deal explicitly with question of trauma in Woolf's work was Patricia Moran's recent comparative study Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma (2007). Moran posits sexual trauma as the originary crisis that generates the complex processes of representation and self-knowledge in Woolf's and Rhys's work. She also suggests that, far from engaging in any conscious attempt at narrative reintegration of traumatic events, both authors "seem far more interested in the ways in which traumatic events impinge upon the workings of memory, and the ways in which traumatic memories impinge upon the lives of those affected by them" (5). This position has recently been contested by Suzette Henke and David Eberly in their collaborative volume Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts (2007), in which they emphasise the fact that, in Woolf's case, the act of writing was for the most part bound up with a therapeutic function, what Henke calls a process of 'scriptotherapy', defined as "writing as healing through the aegis of traumatic reformulation" (15).[6] Drawing on the wealth of biographical material now available, the authors posit a phenomenological link between Woolf's life experiences and her work, seeing the latter as the reflection of Woolf's 'own historically embodied consciousness'.

My own approach to the question of trauma in Woolf's work relies heavily on Henke's and other critics' argument about the continuity between Woolf's life experiences and her work. I therefore agree with Stanley Fish's statement that despite the post-structuralist moment in criticism, an adequate interpretation of a literary work can only proceed "when notions of agency, personhood, cause, and effect are already assumed and are already governing the readings we produce" (15). Also, like Henke, I believe in the existence of a close link between the scene of writing and the process of therapy. It would seem that, for Woolf, writing about her traumatic experiences was the only way she could attempt to reintegrate these experiences into a recognizable scheme. This was certainly the case, for instance, with the death of her mother, which she would rehearse with cathartic effects in To the Lighthouse. Thus, after finishing the book, Woolf was able to declare: "I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed with my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her" (MB 81).

Yet, while Woolf's work may well have served such therapeutic ends, her 'texts' nevertheless remain haunted by traces of the traumas they engage with. Thus, instead of giving the impression of mastery and control, *they* continue to be controlled by the intrusive repetition of that which they attempt to exorcise. This lack of resolution is to be expected of an experience that has not been properly assimilated to begin with. How, indeed, Caruth repeatedly asks, can one master what was not known in the first place? Her answer to this question underscores precisely the problematic nature of such an endeavour. The attempt to understand trauma, she says, "brings one repeatedly to this peculiar paradox: that in trauma the

greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness" (Trauma 6). In trauma, one might say, one is always already dealing with a paradox, with aporia and, as a result, while a text may engage with an experience of trauma, it will not offer what Felman describes as "a completed statement, a totalized account" of that experience (Testimony 5). In fact, one might even question Caruth's model of belated knowledge with its assumption of an ultimate though delayed resolution. In this model where 'immediacy' takes the form of 'belatedness', traumatic nightmares and flashbacks are viewed as a literal memory of the traumatic event. Caruth's position, as Ruth Leys has recently argued, relies on a literalist interpretation of Freud that foregrounds such notions as 'accident' and 'latency' in order to establish what Leys calls "a structure of temporal deferral now stripped of the idea of retroactive conferring of meaning on past [...] experience" (270). A good counterexample to this literalist paradigm would be the famous Wolf Man case history, in which Freud's attempt at projecting certainty and mastery is marred by what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok call "an insidious incredulity" (2). After years of diligent investigation, Freud acknowledges that the analysis was "most terribly disjointed" and that as a result his "exposition show[ed] corresponding gaps" (The Wolf Man 245).

Freud's difficulty in recovering a primal scene of trauma had to do with the fact that all he had at his disposal were the words of the Wolf Man and his "pieces of information" (170). Likewise, the student of a literary work has to find his/her way to such a scene amid a maze of words produced not only by the author but also

by the diverse discourses that often compete to present their own versions of the 'author'. Here, Virginia Woolf stands as an excellent example of the problematical nature of the attempt to treat the figure of the author as a stable entity. Today, with the ongoing proliferation of diverse versions of Woolf across cultural categories, one is under the impression that in talking about Virginia Woolf, one is evoking not so much a historical or 'real' figure as what Brenda Silver calls a "polysemous image", "a powerful and powerfully contested cultural icon, whose name, face and authority are persistently claimed or disclaimed in debates about arts, politics, sexuality, gender, class, the 'canon', fashion, feminism, race, and anger" (3). One merely has to look at the sheer number of biographies that have been written about Woolf to get a sense of how overdetermined her 'life' has become in contemporary culture.[7] What some of these competing narratives seem to have in common, however, is a compulsive attempt to uncover an ineluctable primal scene which nevertheless remains elusive. Thus, guided by Caruth's remark that "trauma is not locatable in [a] simple and original event in an individual's past" (4), my own purpose is not so much to identify a definitive originary scene in Woolf's life, as to point to cross-currents of traumatic moments that resonate everywhere in her text.

The recurrent references I have made to Caruth, Felman, Hartman and the other theorists reveals a certain affinity with the compelling conceptualizations of trauma that they have offered. By proposing a new methodology for reading and engaging with trauma narratives, as well as a set of illuminating concepts, these critics helped shape the emergence and development of the field of trauma theory. Caruth's original and groundbreaking contribution lies in the ways in which she

integrates neurobiological, philosophical, psychoanalytic, and literary insights into a comprehensive approach to trauma. I am particularly indebted to her view about the existence of an enigma at the heart of the experience of trauma, what she frequently refers to as 'a gap of knowing', which challenges any attempts at absolute knowledge. Another equally enigmatic aspect of trauma for Caruth is the relation between trauma and survival. "For those who undergo trauma", she says, "it is not only the moment of the event, but the passing out of it that is traumatic; [...] *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*" (Trauma 9, author's italics). As my own reading of Mrs Dalloway shows, Septimus's main predicament occurs not during his time at the front when his friend Evans was killed, but years later as he adjusts to his new civilian life as a survivor of the war.

Being a survivor of a given catastrophe often involves bearing witness to that event, a task that has increasingly gained urgency in the light of the growing violence and destruction over the last decades. Here, the shifts in our understanding of the testimonial nature of much contemporary writing occurred in large part thanks to the work of Shoshana Felman. She especially deserveses credit for pointing out the complexities and aporia inherent in the act of bearing witness. It is, she says, "a strange appointment, from which the witness-appointee cannot relieve himself by any delegation, substitution or representation" (Testimony 3). It is customary for Felman when evoking the category of witnessing, to use such expressions as 'appointment', 'burden' and 'noninterchangeable', expressions that in my opinion show that, like Caruth, she views survival as a crisis.

My own readings of Woolf's novels and short fiction draw attention precisely to the continuities between the categories of victim and witness as they both bear the impact of trauma. The primary figure for the victim in Woolf's work is the character of Septimus Smith in Mrs Dalloway, whose suicide toward the end of the novel I take to represent the often aporetic encounter with trauma. In another equally thought-provoking novel, Between the Acts, Woolf underscores the ways in which the unsettling encounter with trauma can also occur at the level of representation, as she herself attempts to integrate the impact of the troubled years just before and during the Second World War into a narrative frame. By occupying the position of the witness, Woolf re-enacts Septimus's impasse through the failure of language and narrative: if trauma, as Caruth suggests, occurs as a "breach in the mind's experience of time", so does its impact involve a breach in the symbolic order.

Behind the discourse of trauma, the ineluctable figure of Freud and the psychoanalytic project loom large. Freud's early work with people suffering from hysteria and his discovery of the psychosomatic nature of hysterical symptoms basically laid the foundations for the field of psychological trauma. And despite his notorious recantation of the traumatic theory of hysteria, Freud would repeatedly return to what he called "the dark and dismal subject of traumatic neurosis", thus contributing most of the insights that are at the heart of our modern understanding of trauma (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 8). Thus, like the contemporary theorists I have cited, I frequently return to such foundational works as Beyond the Pleasure

trauma as a field of study was from the beginning associated with hypnosis, which was used by therapists to induce altered states of consciousness to obtain access to traumatic memories. Leys, in particular, has emphasized the centrality of hypnosis to the history of the concept of psychic trauma. The passivity and repetition that characterize hypnotized people provided a model, she says, for the behaviour of traumatized victims. Similarly, the complete identification with a given situation during hypnosis would explain the victim's immersion into the traumatic experience, and the absence of what Leys calls "the specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge of what happened" (9). Both the concept of mimesis and the spatial-visual metaphor of distance from the traumatic experience resonate, as I argue, with particular force in Mrs Dalloway, and provide a model both for Septimus's story and for Woolf's frustrations as she confronted the difficulties of writing the book. Septimus's stalemate underscores his failure to wrench himself from that uncomfortable proximity to the traumatic event. Likewise, Woolf used a visual metaphor to describe the kind of crisis that she reached in writing the parts of the book that deal with Septimus. Mrs Dalloway, she complained in 1923, "makes my mind squint so badly" (Diary 2: 248). Woolf seems to have trouble keeping authorial distance, which would suggest an affinity or, should we say, an 'identification' with her character that verges on mimesis.

Another crisis in the narrative that remains unresolved, I would argue, is the process of mourning. By constructing the narrative of Mrs Dalloway around an event of loss, Woolf seems to be drawing our attention to the complex dynamics of the so-called 'work of mourning', at the same time as she challenges our

conventional understanding of mourning as a 'normal' phenomenon. In doing so, Woolf anticipates Derrida's recent reconfiguration of the process of mourning. Mourning for Derrida is not to be viewed as a 'work' like others, but is rather "the name of a problem" (The Work of Mourning 50). Within the Derridean aporetic scheme of mourning, success fails and failure succeeds: the psychoanalytic process of interiorizing the other within the self renders the other both living (in us) and dead (as we grieve for him). Conversely, however, failure succeeds because an 'aborted interiorization' is an act of renunciation that both leaves the other his alterity and preserves his 'infinite remove'. This, says Derrida, "is the law, the law of mourning, and the law of the law, always in mourning, that it would have to fail in order to succeed" (144). I would suggest that this aporia of mourning is enacted in Mrs Dalloway as Septimus comes into contact with what Derrida calls 'the impossibility of the impossible'. With the end of the war and the advent of the Armistice, Septimus evidently has a chance to mourn the death of his friend and move on, but that does not happen. What takes place instead is a dramatization of the concept of mourning as an unfinished work, as a process without closure.

Woolf's identification with the crisis of her character, together with her often confusing and sometimes contradictory comments about the inception of Mrs Dalloway, suggest that the book itself might be the site of trauma, that in depicting the psychological struggles of her traumatized protagonist, Woolf was rehearsing in narrative terms an equally shattering experience that she herself had undergone. Thus, adhering to Caruth's principle that trauma should be approached obliquely by directing one's attention to indirect references, tropes, and repetitions, I examine

recurrent figures and repetitive motifs in search of what Lacan calls "the real behind the fantasy".[8] As is usually the case with most of Woolf's works, however, such an analysis would lead not to a specific primal scene but to what Ned Lukasher describes as a 'constellation' of originary scenes, some real some less so, whose cumulative impact resonates in the novel.

Chapter two is devoted to Between the Acts, Woolf's last novel and in my opinion her most engaging work. Woolf herself called the book her 'most quintessential work', and apart from the fact that it includes her last printed words, it comes as a summing up of the various vicissitudes of Woolf's personal and writing career. In it, the opposed categories of the conventional and innovative, the optimistic and apocalyptic, the continuous and intermittent are surprisingly but remarkably conjoined. Woolf shifts the focus from the individual to the communal, thus relocating trauma, as Freud did in his war-time Moses and Monotheism, in a collective unconscious. Such a shift entails, as Ronald Granofsky observes, a move from a psychoanalytic to a historical typology. The action of the book therefore occurs between the acts of a major historical drama – the Second World War. Such a positioning allows Woolf to explore the continuous psychological impact of the Great War as it is reinforced by the equally powerful effect of an "imagined trauma" (Granofsky 7). In other words, the collective consciousness evoked in the book is caught between traumatic recall and traumatic apprehension. All of this is complicated by the fact that Woolf wrote the book as the war was raging and the threat of a German invasion was an imminent prospect, which gave the novel the kind of historical edge that might be expected of a document bearing witness to the

shattering impact of a major historical catastrophe. Surprisingly, however, the war is relegated to the background, as the narrator focuses on the otherwise mundane interactions of a day in the life of an upper-middle class family. In doing so, I would suggest, Woolf finds a model in Freud's Moses and Monotheism, where the trauma of history is repressed and operates only at the level of the text's unconscious. Both Freud in war-time Vienna and Woolf in the London of the Blitz struggled hard amid the confusion and anxiety of the war to keep authorial control and prevent what Maria DiBattista calls 'the chaos of contemporary history' from invading their respective works. The result, however, was that the impact of history became all the more powerful for being indirectly portrayed, and is enacted in Between the Acts by the failure of language to refer to anything other than its own breakdown.

In chapter three, I focus on Woolf's harrowing experience of illness, with the aim not of bringing forth another diagnostic category, but of describing how Woolf lived the trauma of illness and how this was reflected in her fiction. I specifically turn to Woolf's experimental short fiction for traces of what she called 'the horrors of the dark cupboard of illness'. Trauma theorists have underlined the centrality of the image both to the experience and the language of trauma. "What the survivor retains from the traumatic experience", writes Robert Jay Lifton, is "an indelible image" (170) that "keeps recurring, in dreams and in waking life, precisely because it has never been adequately enacted" (171). Accordingly, "the formulation of trauma as a discourse", as Liza Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg observe, "is predicated on metaphors of visuality and image as unavoidable carrier

of the unrepresentable." Thus, "[f]rom primal scene to flash back to screen memory to dream, much of the language deployed to speak trauma's character is emphatically, if not exclusively, visual" (xi-ii). In fact, the visual element in the stories is such that they have a remarkable dream-like quality: they unfold more like capricious reveries than narratives in the conventional sense of the term. By treating the stories as if they were transcriptions of dreams rather than plot-based narratives, moreover, one becomes alert to the various processes of transformation that take place by virtue of what Freud called 'the dream work' – the processes of condensation and displacement. Analyzing the stories in terms of what they repress rather than what they foreground would, I would argue, reveal their subtext as the site of the trauma of illness.

For Woolf, however, the act of writing was never entirely divorced from the activity of working through. As many commentators have pointed out, Woolf's fiction is a repeated attempt at coming to terms with the numerous traumas that she had to undergo. In the case of her illness, in particular, Woolf's fictional representations of her recurrent episodes of physical collapse were characterized by a steady attempt to comprehend the contradictions and figure out the gaps that occur with the onset of illness. In this context, her essay 'On Being Ill' comes as a theoretical description of the various vicissitudes of the experience of illness, its insights as well as its aporia. Illness, Woolf argues in the essay, is a 'great experience' in which both mind and body are taken on a metaphorical journey to 'undisclosed countries' where deeper truths are revealed. It is this movement from the superficial consciousness of health to the profound insights of illness, I would

suggest, that is enacted in the stories that I analyze. This rehearsing of the experience of illness in fictional terms is aimed at integrating it within a comprehensible scheme and therefore mastering its impact.

In focusing on Mrs Dalloway, Between the Acts, and the experimental short fiction, I am aware that I am leaving out two works which are considered by many scholars to be Woolf's best novels, and by this I mean To the Lighthouse and The Waves. Moreover, most critics would agree that these two novels represent the crux of Woolf's achievement in depicting the elegiac mood associated with mourning and loss, which would make them highly pertinent to any discussion of trauma in Woolf's work. As a number of trauma theorists have shown, however, trauma can be located not only in identifiable, specific psychical wounds, but also in what Henke describes in an essay on The Waves as "an original traumatic moment undefined and inexplicable – a Lacanian lack-in-being" (124). Proust comes perhaps closest to capturing this indeterminate 'lack-in-being' when talks about "the incurable imperfection in the very essence of the present moment" (quoted in Benjamin 203). As it is, the works that I analyze seem to be working toward a narrative resolution of a particular traumatic event or set of events. Whether this event is a personal loss, the Great War, the Second World War, or the experience of illness, narrative, like Miss Latrobe's play in Between the Acts, is often a staging of the event in fictional terms in an attempt to come to grips with its impact. Thus, the discussion of such events often leads to a consideration of biographical experiences that are usually transformed and then incorporated as fiction.[9]

In the case of To the Lighthouse and The Waves, however, things are different. For although To the Lighthouse could be seen as an attempt on Woolf's part to abreact her tumultuous relationship with her father and mourn the death of her mother, the main source of melancholia in the book lies not in these biographical facts but in a sense of 'existential malaise' with regard to mortality and the modern condition (Henke 124). In The Waves, too, the "event" of Percival's death is significant for Woolf only insofar as it provides a context for the exploration of what Henke calls the "more pervasive psychological anxieties precipitated by parturition and abjection, by neonatal separation from the maternal body, and by terrifying intimations of mortality" ("Anxiety" 124).[10] These existential concerns have their roots both in the historical context in which Woolf evolved as a writer, as well in her aesthetic orientations. In Death, Men, and Modernism, Ariela Freedman argues that Woolf shared with a number of other modernists the view that modernity is fundamentally 'doomed', and that to engage with modernity is to confront "an end game" and a "crisis of meaning" (6). One of the symptoms of this cynical attitude toward modernity is what Henke describes as "a morbid, almost pathological preoccupation with the topic of death" characteristic of much modernist writing ("Anxiety" 125). Freedman, following Peter Brooks, sees this as Modernism's endorsement of Freud's 'master plot' – "a fatalist and devolutionary death plot" (6).[11] Thus, Freedman argues,

> in the modernist novel, the movement of the subject is always a movement toward death: toward the trauma that has not occurred, but is still inscribed in the novel's anticipations and repetitions. Trauma becomes a foundational principle rather than an exceptional event. (7)

It is this kind of foundational trauma that we encounter in To the Lighthouse, The

Waves, and to a certain extent in Jacob's Room, as these texts engage in different ways with what Dominick LaCapra terms "the absence of ultimate metaphysical foundations" (46).[12] For this reason, these three works require, in my opinion, a dissertation in their own right, so similar and complex are their themes. This being said, one cannot afford to exclude these deeply elegiac works altogether, especially in the context of a psychologically oriented study, if only because Woolf's existential concerns cannot be entirely separated from the historical and objective reality in which she lived. I therefore make frequent and extensive references to these novels since, in my opinion, they illuminate certain facets of the works that I explore.

One final remark needs to be made, and this time it concerns the order in which the chapters are placed. Obviously, my approach is not chronological but one that reflects both the evolution of this research work as well as a concern with themes and genre. Leaving the chapters in the same order in which they were written serves, I think, to highlight the progression of my own approach and style as I advanced though the various stages of the research journey. It is also my opinion that it would be fruitful to group Mrs Dalloway and Between the Acts together without a separating section, since that would do justice to the continuities between the two novels in terms of themes and methods. My decision to finish with the short stories was perhaps also the result of an unconscious attempt to foreground the importance of these remarkable works within the Woolf canon. It is a common place of much contemporary criticism to direct a great deal of its scrutinizing energy to a given author's novels, usually at the expanse of the short story genre.

Thus, by discussing the short stories alongside two of Woolf's major novels, I hope to contribute, in the words of Susan Dick, to "deepen[ing] our appreciation of [Woolf's] remarkable achievement" (5) in this genre.

# Notes

[1] Blanchot defines 'nonexperience' as "experience that is not a lived event, and that does not engage the present of presence...It is just an excess of experience, and affirmative though it be, in this excess no experience occurs". Maurice Blanchot, The Writing of Disaster, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986) 51.

[2] As Judith Herman shows, the history of trauma as a field of study was from the beginning characterized by periods of active interest to be followed by interludes of complete neglect. The earliest serious inquiries into the peculiar symptoms of trauma were carried out in mid-nineteen century Paris and took the form of an interest in the disorder called hysteria, a condition that was considered common among women at the time. The French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot is credited with providing the impetus for the study, and his findings caught the attention of physicians worldwide. Among the latter were Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, the two physicians who would take over the task of studying the strange disorder. Freud and Janet, however, were not satisfied with Charcot's taxonomic approach, which sought for the most part to observe and classify hysterics. What they wanted to discover were the causes of hysteria, and by the mid-1890s, they had both come to the conclusion that hysteria was a condition caused by psychological trauma. They had also developed a new technique to deal with hysterical symptoms, which involved helping patients to recover traumatic memories and then recounting these memories. Freud's findings, in particular, would take him into unexpected terrains. In 1896, he published The Aetiology of Hysteria, where he suggested that hysteric women suffered mainly from traumas of childhood sexual abuse. The publication of the book was significant not only for the amount of ostracism that Freud would face but also because it marked the end of public interest in the traumatic theory of hysteria, and the onset of a long period of neglect that would last until World War I. The terrors of the Great War revived interest in psychological trauma, as scores of soldiers broke down under the stress of prolonged exposure to danger, showing symptoms that were similar to hysterics. 'Shell-shock', as the condition was initially called, was so common among combatants that military psychiatrists were forced to acknowledge the existence of a combat neurosis. With the end of the war, however, the initial curiosity faded and psychological trauma was once again confined to oblivion. The next wave of public interest would occur with the advent of World War II, and the ensuing necessity to treat soldiers who were showing stress reactions to combat. Hypnosis and other artificially induced altered states of consciousness were used to help traumatized soldiers recover shocking memories with a view to a cathartic reintegration of these painful memories into normal consciousness. Once again, the end of the war marked the onset of the familiar phase of amnesia, and it would take the combined political efforts of Vietnam veterans, psychiatrists, activists and others to bring the issue of the long-term effects of psychological trauma back to the fore. These militant efforts were rewarded when, in 1980, the new category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was recognized and included in the American Psychiatric Association's official manual for mental health. For a more detailed account of the vicissitudes and history of the concept of trauma, see Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror (New York: Basic Books, 1992); see also Ruth Leys, Trauma: A Genealogy (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000).

[3] Many critics have pointed to the fact that modernist literature is a 'literature of loss'. In a study of the traumatic nature of American modernism, Seth Moglen describes the engagement of the writers of this period with collective shock in terms that may well be applied to Anglo-American modernism in general. "While modernists experienced their deprivations in acutely personal ways", she says, "they recognized that the traumas they were undergoing were collective and social in nature. They felt themselves to be grievously injured, but they knew that they were not alone in their grief and that their injuries were not purely private. It was a generation (and more) that was lost – and these writers set out to tell the parables of their collective desolation". Seth Moglen, Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism (Sanford: Stanford UP, 2007). Alessia Ricciardi, too, sees the achievements of modernism (at least in its first phase) to be closely connected to its preoccupation with loss and mourning. "Because of its preoccupation with questions and temporality and subjectivity, she writes, first-generation modernism by and large succeeded in depicting the interiorization of loss". Freud and Proust were, in her opinion, outstanding examples for having "propounded some of the most original and enduring figures of mourning in this sense". Alessia Ricciardi, The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film (Sanford: Stanford UP, 2003) 3. In a 1998 article on Mrs Dalloway, Karen DeMeester suggested that

modernism was the literature of trauma par excellence. Commenting on the modernist works written in the aftermath of World War I, she argued that they "constitute a literature of trauma: their forms often replicate the damaged psyche of a trauma survivor and their contents often portray his characteristic disorientation and despair. Imagist poetry and the experimental novels of the postwar decade, for example, reflect the fragmentation of consciousness and the disorder and confusion that a victim experiences in the wake of a traumatic event". Karen DeMeester, 'Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway', Modern Fiction Studies 44.3 (1998) 650.

[4] For the theme of the war trauma in Mrs Dalloway, see also Karen DeMeester, 'Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway', Modern Fiction Studies 44.3 (1998) 649-673.

[5] Julia Briggs, in Reading Virginia Woolf, extends this architectural metaphor and its implications of absence to the novel itself. The novel, she writes, "is just such an empty container, recording the traces and imprints of Jacob's life, and the narrator's search for those traces, as he disappears, the representative of a whole generation of young men lost in the killing fields of Flanders, anticipated in his surname". Julia Briggs, Reading Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006) 142.

[6] For more on the concept of scriptotherapy, see Suzette Henke, Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing (New York: St. Martin's P, 1998).

[7] Studies that take Woolf's life as their subject matter include Aileen Pippett's The Moth and the Star: A Biography of Virginia Woolf (1955), Quentin Bell's Virginia Woolf: A Biography (1972), Lyndall Gordon's Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life (1984), Jean Moorcroft Wilson's Virginia Woolf: Life and London: A Biography of Place (1987), Alma Bond's Who killed Virginia Woolf? : A Psychobiography (1989), Louise DeSalvo's Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work (1989), Hermione Lee's Virginia Woolf (1996), Mitchell Leaska's Granite and Rainbow: the Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf (1998), Herbert Marder's The Measure of Life: Virginia Woolf's Last Years (2000), Nigel Nicolson's Virginia Woolf : a Penguin Life (2000), Katherine Dalsimer's Virginia Woolf: Becoming a Writer (2001), and Julia Briggs's Virginia Woolf: an Inner Life (2005).

[8] The importance, the necessity even, of an indirect approach to trauma has also been underlined by Slavoj Žižek in his book The Metatastes of Enjoyment. Owing to what he views as the paradox of trauma as a cause that does not pre-exist its effects, as well as its 'temporal loop', he argues, "a direct approach [to trauma] necessarily fails: if we try to grasp trauma directly, irrespective of its effects, we are left with a meaningless *factum brutum* – in the case of the Wolf Man, with the fact of the parental *coitus a tergo*, which is not a cause at all, since it involves no direct psychic efficiency. It is only through its echoes within the symbolic structure that the *factum brutum* of the parental *coitus a tergo* retroactively acquires its traumatic character and becomes the Cause". Slavoj Žižek, The Metatastes of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality (New York: Verso, 1994) 32. Žižek's temporal loop is an allusion to the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action, a notion that is central to his view of psychical temporality and causality. According to the logic of *Nachträglichkeit* a significant event or memory is revised at a later stage of development and reinvested with meaning and psychical efficacy. The concept would have important implications for the theory of psychological trauma for, as J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis have pointed out, the process of revision does not affect all lived experience, but "specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context", and "[t]he traumatic event is the epitome of such unassimilated experience". J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973) 112.

[9] Outstanding examples of significant or emotionally charged events in Woolf's life that not only found their way to her fiction, but also became recurrent motifs throughout her work include for instance the birds singing in Greek episode, which apparently occurred during Woolf's breakdown of 1904, and would later be incorporated in Mrs Dalloway as part of Septimus's hallucinations. In her memoir "A Sketch of the Past", Woolf also recalls how, as a child, she was told a story that left a powerful impression on her. It was about the skeleton of a dog that her brother Thoby and her sister Vanessa one day found in a swamp. "[I]t must have been covered with reeds and full of pools", she wrote of the swamp, "for we believed that the dog had been starved and drowned. In our day, it had been drained, though it was still muddy" (76). Echoes of this childhood memory would reverberate both in Jacob's Room, where Jacob comes across a sheep skull, and in Between the Acts where, years after a woman had drowned in a pool, a similar, macabre discovery is made: "it was in that black heart, that the lady had drowned herself. Ten years since the pool had been dredged and a thigh bone recovered" (40). Another childhood memory that would continue to haunt Woolf for years is the suicide of an unknown man and the way it was inexplicably connected in

Woolf's mind to an apple tree. The event is narrated in "A Sketch of the Past" as follows: "[t]he next thing I remember is being in the garden at night and walking on the path by the apple tree. It seemed to me that the tree was connected with the horror of Mr Valpy's suicide. I could not pass it. I stood there looking at the grey-green creases of the bark – it was a moonlit night – in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape. My body seemed paralysed" (71). This 'exceptional moment', as Woolf described it in her memoir, would be re-enacted twice in The Waves, first by Neville: "there were the floating, pale-grey clouds; and the immitigable tree; the implacable tree with its greaved silver bark. The ripple of my life was unavailing. I was unable to pass by. There was an obstacle... And the others passed on. But we are doomed, all of us, by the apple trees, by the immitigable tree which we cannot pass" (16); and then by Rhoda who cannot cross a puddle: "[it] was midsummer, after the garden party and my humiliation at the garden party. Wind and storm coloured July. Also, in the middle, cadaverous, awful, lay the grey puddle in the courtyard, when, holding an envelope in my hand, I carried a message. I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell" (47).

[10] Henke's 'psychological anxieties' recall Dominick Lacapra's traumatic 'absence', as opposed to loss. For Lacapra absence is to be situated on a transhistorical level because "it is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, future)". Dominick Lacapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001) 49.

[11] In his study of plots and narrative models, Brooks focuses on Beyond the Pleasure Principle which, in his opinion, contains Freud's 'master plot' for narratives. After a lengthy discussion of the uncanny phenomenon of repetition, Freud came to the conclusion that "the most universal endeavour of all living substance [is] to return to the quiescence of inorganic world" (56). Brooks takes this conclusion to be equally applicable to narrative plots, arguing that it "gives an image of how the nonnarratable existence is stimulated into the condition of narratability, to enter a state of deviance and detour (ambition, quest, the pose of a mask) in which it is maintained for a certain time, through an at least minimally complex extravagance, before returning to the quiescence of the nonnarratble". Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (New York: Alfred A. Knope, 1984) 108.

[12] Andrew Solomon, in his study of depression The Noonday Demon, refers repeatedly to Woolf's work and especially Jacob's Room in which, he argues, Woolf has written about the elusive state of depression with an 'eerie clarity'. Andrew Solomon, The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression (New York: Scribner, 2001).

# CHAPTER 1

## A SQUINTING POETICS: TRAUMA AND MIMESIS IN MRS DALLOWAY

Mrs Dalloway, Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, was originally to be a sequence of linked short stories entitled Mrs Dalloway's Party, dealing with what the author called in her diary "the party consciousness" (Diary 2: 12). Woolf began work on the sequence in the summer of 1922, writing the story 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street' and then 'The Prime Minister'. By October, however, she wrote in her diary that "Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book; & I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side" (Diary 2: 207). Woolf gave her prospective book the title of "The Hours", which in effect would continue to be its working title until 1924, when she decided to give the name of her female protagonist to the book. The novel was finally published in its present form in 1925, to the admiration of Woolf's friends and critics.[1]

The novel encompasses the events of a single day in June 1923. The title figure, Clarissa, is an upper-middle class woman in her fifties who is about to have a party. A large section of the book deals with Clarissa's thoughts and reminiscences as she prepares for this social event: we are told about her husband Richard, her one-time suitor Peter Walsh, Sally Seton a female friend with whom she had a short-lived affair, and her young daughter Elizabeth, who is gradually drifting away from her. Parallel to Clarissa's story is the story of Septimus Warren Smith, a young clerk who has fought in the Great War, and who is now suffering from a severe mental condition. The two characters never actually meet, but news of Septimus's suicide reaches Clarissa in the middle of her party, resulting in an intense moment of soul-searching.

As one would expect, a great deal of critical work has focused on making sense of the disconnectedness of these two stories. The apparent fragmentation of the narrative, together with the sad ending and the mournful atmosphere of the book, have resulted in a general critical consensus that Mrs Dalloway is fundamentally an elegiac work.[2] Maria Dibattista gives an eloquent statement of the elegiac theme when she states that the novel projects a "vague but universal sense of malaise, of spiritual incapacity, of frustrated expectations" (24). The melancholy aspect of the book has been alternately seen as a reflection of the pervasive sense of disillusionment that characterized post-World War I literature, and as an expression of what Elizabeth Abel calls "the modernist lament for a lost plenitude" (42). Exactly what was lost and is now being lamented has been the subject of an intense and interesting debate: is it the innocence of the old world which was shattered by the Great War? Or is it an irretrievable wholeness of the present moment which is constantly haunted by the past? What is that "something central which permeated" (MD *24*) yet is nevertheless impossible to reach?

To answer these questions, and following Virginia Woolf, who not only suggested that Clarissa Dalloway is the central character in the book, but also gave her name to the book, scholars have for the most part focused on the character of Clarissa whose thoughts and development were considered to contain the key to the novel's meaning.[3] The other main character in the book, Septimus, has been taken a little less seriously, in that he was thought to be a hypothetical character, a mere foil to the complex Clarissa.[4] And whenever approached as a real, independent

character, Septimus has for the most part been seen as either a case of insanity, repressed homosexuality, or the victim of a ruthless patriarchal society. Against these interpretations, however, one could argue that Septimus' condition cannot be understood in isolation from his war experience: Septimus, after all, had led an ordinary life before he went to the front. This argument has already been advanced by a number of commentators who, nevertheless, tended to limit the analysis of the effects of Septimus' combat experience to the generic phenomena of 'shell-shock'. Moreover, the theme of the shell-shocked soldier was seen as an isolated issue within the more 'profound' and universal preoccupations of the book. An exception to this would be Bernard Blasckstone, who suggested in an early study that Septimus's condition may indeed be of more importance to the overall theme of the book: "deferred shell-shock", Blackstone remarked, "is Sir William Bradshaw's diagnosis of Septimus's malady; deferred war-shock, might, perhaps, be our account of the total motif of Mrs Dalloway" (98).

Blackstone's comment seems particularly perceptive today in the light of recent developments in trauma theory. Cathy Caruth and other trauma theorists, following Freud, have emphasized the belated effects of traumatic experiences, as well as what in such experiences remains unknown. Trauma, Caruth argues, is not located in the violence of an event, but "rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Unclaimed Experience 4, author's italics). This would explain the general feeling of undecidability that permeates the novel, an undecidability whose effects are not limited to Septimus, but also extend to the

other characters, the narrator, and sometimes even the author herself. Seen from this perspective, the novel becomes a dramatization of that central paradox of trauma as a crisis that "simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (Unclaimed Experience 5), or to use Virginia Woolf's own formulation, the discrepancy between the "attempt to communicate" and the frustrating awareness of "the impossibility of reaching the centre" (MD 134).

For Caruth, trauma narratives are to be understood in terms of a voice that cries out to be heard, and once that voice is heard, it changes not only those who recount the story but also those to whom it is addressed. To read Mrs Dalloway as a book about trauma, therefore, is to make sense not only of Septimus' predicament, but also of Clarissa's melancholy thoughts at the end of the book. Her uncanny reaction to the news of Septimus's death is in this sense emblematic of "the trauma's 'contagion', of the traumatization of the one who listens" (Trauma 10). This would also lead us to think of Virginia Woolf herself as shouldering what Shoshana Felman calls the "radically unique, non-interchangeable, and solitary burden" of bearing witness to an unspeakable crisis (Testimony 3).

The recent developments within the field of trauma studies have especially demonstrated that the traumatic event is an experience that, in its force, exceeds the subject's cognitive capabilities. The event itself is not assimilated as it happens, but will return later in the form of dreams and flashbacks. The repetitive intrusion of these nightmares has led many theorists to believe that the traumatic nightmare is a literal, unmediated recreation of an original violent event. The traumatic experience itself is therefore seen as an outside event that shatters an already constituted

subject: "[i]n trauma", Caruth tells us, "the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (Unclaimed Experience 59). What is implied in this model of trauma is that the reverse movement is also possible; that is to say, the survivor is able to restore and maintain a distance from the traumatic experience, thus allowing him/her to represent it to him/herself and to others.

In her recent genealogy of trauma, Ruth Leys calls this dualistic model of trauma 'anti-mimetic', and shows that it has developed along with another equally influential model which she calls 'mimesis'. Within the mimetic paradigm, there is no longer 'inside' and 'outside', as the victim is immersed in the traumatic situation in a manner akin to hypnotic identification. And because the traumatic experience "shatters or disables the victim's cognitive and perceptual capacities", it cannot be recalled, but is acted out or imitated (Leys 298). I would argue that this model of trauma would constitute a useful paradigm for understanding the complex experience of Septimus in Mrs Dalloway. Septimus, evidently, cannot detach himself from the original traumatic event, and this uncomfortable proximity renders futile his repeated attempts at acquiring knowledge of what has happened to him. The result is that Septimus's story becomes a series of confrontations with the 'primal scene' of his trauma that almost invariably degenerate into an act of mimesis – a total identification with the scene.

Moreover, Septimus's predicament is strikingly reflected in the history of the book's composition. Woolf's repeated complaints and expressions of frustration during the writing of the book suggest a great deal of difficulty in the process of composition and, as such, they echo the fragmentation of Septimus's own story. In

1923, Woolf wrote in her diary that she expected 'The Hours' "to be the hell of a struggle", a comment which would prove highly prophetic (Diary 2: 249). Woolf, it seems, was herself unable to keep a safe distance from the narrative she was constructing and would later use the metaphor of 'squinting' to describe the effects of such painful proximity.

## AN 'ABYSSAL' IDENTIFICATION: TRAUMA AS MIMESIS

In her outline of the history of psychological trauma, Judith Herman has emphasized what she calls an "episodic amnesia", which has characterized interest in the field. Over the last century, both awareness of and interest in trauma theory have intermittently risen and declined with a persistence that reflects the repetitively intrusive nature of traumatic experiences themselves. Moreover, within trauma theory itself, certain principles and ideas seem to have been subject to systematic repression, as is the case with the mimetic paradigm which, as Ruth Leys shows, was from the beginning a disturbing presence to early conceptualizations of trauma. In her genealogy of the discursive history of trauma, Leys points to the prevalence of two opposed models of trauma which she calls diegesis and mimesis. The first she defines as "a verbalization…in which the patient recounts and recollects the traumatic scene in full consciousness" (37); the second is defined as "an acting out that, because it takes place in the mode of an emotional identification that constitutes the hypnotic rapport, is unavailable for subsequent recollection" (37). The threat that the notion of mimesis posed to the developing theory of trauma lay in the fact that it undid precisely those rigid polarizations that had long sustained the field: inside/outside, subject/external trauma and so on. Its value, on the other hand, was that it helped account for those cases where, instead of remembering the traumatic experience, certain victims tended to *relive* the event as if it were happening again, as is the case with Septimus. Septimus's story exemplifies, I would argue, not only the dissolution of

the boundaries between the subject and trauma, but also the difficulties of recovering traumatic memories.

We meet Septimus Smith in the book as early as the second chapter. He is introduced to us as a young man "aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat" (MD 11). Except for his eyes, which have "that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too", there seems to be nothing unusual about Septimus's appearance (11). Nor is there anything extraordinary in his background: he grew up in a small town, and like "millions of young men called Smith", he goes to London and is soon 'swallowed up' by the pandemonium of the big city. In London, Septimus meets and falls in love with Miss Isabel Pole who lectures on Shakespeare in the Waterloo Road. This romance, though it apparently ends in disillusionment, has the effect of sharpening Septimus's already promising literary qualities. And despite his poor heath, he continues to impress Mr Brewer, his superior at a real estate company, and was on his way to promotion and a raise of salary when "something happened which threw out many of Mr Brewer's calculation" (64): the 'European War' breaks out and Septimus is among the first to volunteer.

Septimus goes to France, we are told, "to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in green dress walking in a square" (64). In the trenches, his health improves, and he does so well that he earns both the admiration and affection of his officer Evans, with whom he develops a close friendship. Toward the end of the war, however, Evans is killed, and Septimus "congratulated himself upon felling very little and very reasonably"

(64). Reflecting on the war that has just ended, Septimus is filled with pride and optimism: "the war had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won a promotion, he was still under thirty and was bound to survive" (64). Moreover, he has met Lucrezia, the daughter of an Italian Innkeeper in Milan, and becomes engaged to her.

One evening, however, Septimus is seized by an overwhelming fear "that he could not feel" (64); and this is going to be only the tip of the iceberg: a few days later, he starts to have panic attacks, and sometimes even nightmares. "The bed was falling; he was falling" (65). Back in London, his condition deteriorates, as he becomes more and more withdrawn from the real world and entrenched in his inner thoughts. He is not exactly mad, at least not in the usual sense of the word, because "he could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily...his brain was perfect" (65). Also, he is sometimes capable of behaving in a perfectly normal way, giving his wife reason for hope: "it would always make her happy to see that. He had become himself then, he had laughed then, they had been alone together. Always she would like that" (105). Yet, five years of predominantly unhappy marriage have finally convinced Rezia that she "can't stand it any longer" (49) and that Septimus needs to see a doctor. Septimus, however, does not believe in doctors anymore than Woolf herself did, and opts for ending his life rather than going through therapy.

A cursory look at this story is enough to establish that Septimus is a victim of trauma. He seems, indeed, to conform to Freud's archetypal traumatized subject

– the railway accident victim – which he delineated in his book Moses and Monotheism:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a 'traumatic neurosis'" (84).

Septimus does come out of the war with the impression that he has managed to escape unscathed: "he was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference" (64). Like Freud's trauma victim, moreover, Septimus seems to be subject to what Freud calls 'the compulsion to repeat', a process whereby victims tend to repeat or reenact traumatic events in order to master their devastating consequences.

Freud's discovery of the compulsion to repeat was the result of his analysis of the now famous *fort/da* game in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In observing the reaction of a child to the departure of his mother to whom he was deeply attached, Freud noticed that he repeatedly played a game which consisted in throwing a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it out of sight while uttering an o-o-o-o sound, and then bringing it back into view with a joyful "da". Freud interpreted the two sounds as corresponding to the German *for*t (gone) and *da* (here) respectively, and concluded that the game was in fact a staging of the painful departure and the joyful return of the mother, and that by reenacting the painful event, the child was able to master its consequences. "The child", Freud says, "compensated himself for…[allowing his mother to leave without protest] by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within reach" (9) or, as

Lacan would have it, we consent to losing the mother because we find her again in language, in resources of the symbolic.

Like the child in Freud's game, Septimus's attempt to master his shattering war experience takes the form of a rehearsal of the catastrophic event that excludes any possibility for retroactive comprehension. What takes place in his case, in other words, is what Leys calls an act of 'mimesis', defined as "an experience of hypnotic imitation or identification" (8). The mimetic model of trauma collapses the distinction between inside and outside, or subject and external trauma, implying that everything happens inside. During the act of mimesis, it is impossible for the survivor to know with certainty what happened because he/she lacks what Leys calls "the specular distance necessary for [such a] knowledge" (9). Leys's visual metaphor resonates with force in Mrs Dalloway, and is reflected in the recurrent theme of the failure of vision. It is echoed obliquely in the book not by Septimus himself, but by his wife Rezia who is so desperate to 'see' into Septimus's condition. Her failure to see is reflected in a series of metaphors that convey precisely a hazy kind of vision: "dark descends", "all the boundaries are lost", "lifting the mist from the fields", "hazed in smoke" (MD 18-9). While in the park, for instance, Rezia has trouble seeing clearly as she tries to observe Peter Walsh and the elderly nurse with the child, and this time the lack of clear vision is caused by her tears: "slightly waved by tears the broad path, the nurse, the man in grey, the perambulator, rose and fell before her eyes" (49). The recurrence of such metaphors suggests that Septimus does not have access to the primal scene of his trauma, and though it is possible to establish a connection with his war experience and the death

of his friend Evans through the pervasive motif of death in his thoughts, it is not easy to construct a specific event, a defined scene that could have triggered his distress.

Interestingly, a variation on Leys's visual metaphor was used by Woolf herself to describe the difficulty of writing the parts of the book that deal with Septimus's hallucinations. "The mad part tries me so much", she complained in 1923, "makes my mind *squint* so badly that I can hardly face spending the next weeks at it" (Diary 2: 248, my italics). The verb 'squint', as Daniel Ferrer points out, implies a difficulty in seeing due precisely to the lack of necessary distance: "too close for comfort" (18). Woolf, too, it seems, had her own problems in keeping a necessary distance from the narrative as she was writing Mrs Dalloway. Her diary entries during the period in which the book was conceived and written reveal extremes of exhilaration and frustration, a condition that would last until the book was finally published. Nor was she unrealistic about her hopes. The years 1922-1925 marked a change in her fortunes: not only had she just published Jacob's Room and was clearly on her way to fame and recognition, but she was now able to relish a newly acquired sense of confidence in her own distinctive artistic method and, more importantly for her, an independence from what she called 'the underworld' of critics and reviewers. "If they say this all a clever experience", she wrote in 1922 referring to Jacob's Room, "I shall produce Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street as the finished product" (Diary 2: 178). This psychological buoyancy was reinforced by a noticeable stabilization in her physical and mental condition; she now seemed to have completely recovered from her last breakdown of 1921 and

would continue to do well for the next four years. Thus, in 1924 she was able to declare: "in some ways this book [Mrs Dalloway] is a feat; finished without break from illness, wh[ich] is an exception; & written really, in one year" (Diary 2: 316-17).

This account, however, does not reflect the difficulties she encountered in writing the book, which made her at least twice think of abandoning the project altogether. "What is the matter with it?", she wrote in frustration in 1923, describing the process of composition as a 'battle' (Diary 2: 262). It is within this context of struggle and frustration that she would later use the metaphor of a squinting mind as an allegory of the subject's futile attempt to wrench him/herself from that uncomfortable position *inside* the experience, in order to be able to assess and eventually represent it. This attempt, Leys reminds us, is not always possible because once you are inside, there is usually no outside, and this applies not only to victims but even to witnesses. "It is inconceivable", says Dori Laub, "that any historical insider could remove herself sufficiently from the contaminating power of the event, so as to remain a fully lucid, unaffected witness, that is to be sufficiently detached from the inside so as to stay entirely *outside*" (Testimony 81).

One problem besetting such a representation is a feature that is central to the mimetic paradigm as such, namely its hypnotic-suggestive dynamic. As Leys shows, trauma was from the beginning understood as "a situation of dissociation or 'absence' from the self in which the victim unconsciously imitated, or identified with, the aggressor or traumatic scene in a condition that was likened to a state of heightened hypnotic trance" (8). This means that access to the traumatic experience

is not voluntary, but rather requires a trigger, a suggestion that would take the victim back to that experience.[5] In Mrs Dalloway, Septimus's recollections of his war trauma are by no means systematic, but depend for the most part on external stimuli. An example of this would be the scene of the sky-writing aeroplane, which has the effect of recreating in the minds of the people of London the terrifying and perilous atmosphere of the war: "dropping dead down the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffle bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters" (MD 15). Yet, if the sight of the aeroplane inspires the inhabitants of London with both awe and apprehension, its effect on Septimus is even more devastating. As a survivor of the war, Septimus clearly does not need to imagine what it was like to be stuck in the trenches, with the deafening roar of aeroplanes submerging all human sounds, and threatening to destroy everything including the serene, natural beauty:

> So, thought Septimus, they are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible clarity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks. (17)

If the beauty that Septimus laments, or yearns for, is that of the French countryside, which was an important casualty of the war, then it should come as no surprise that, as soon as he hears the voice of the nursemaid interrupting the ominous drone of

the aeroplane, Septimus is filled with joy, as he discovers that "human voice in certain atmospheric conditions…can quicken trees into life" (17).

Another instance of the associative dynamic of Septimus's memory occurs a little later as the married couple prepares to leave the park to visit Doctor William Bradshaw. "It's time", Rezia reminds her silent and oblivious husband. The word 'time', however, has little connection to temporal reality in Septimus's mind and, instead, brings him back to a scene from the past:

> The word 'time' split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; and immortal ode to time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the war was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself… (52)

As this passage indicates, Septimus's memory of the war is for the most part symbolic, and far from being a literal recreation of his trauma, it underscores Leys' notion of "the fictive-fantasmatic-suggestive dimension of the traumatico-mimetic repetition" (275). Taking issues with what she calls "literalist" approaches to traumatic memory, which see the traumatic nightmare as "the literal return of the event against the one it inhabits" (Unclaimed Experience 59), Leys emphasizes instead the representational and symbolic nature of this 'return'.

One of the key characteristics of the mimetic paradigm of trauma is a total immersion in, and complete identification with, the primal scene, a process which had already been observed by Freud in the course of his clinical practice, and which he described as "a complete transplanting of the patient into the traumatic situation" ("Fixation to traumas" 275). The patient or survivor is under the illusion that it is

all happening over again, and this occurs of course at the expense of his/her connection with objective reality. This 'transplanting' occurs in the mode of a hypnotic identification that precludes any notion of intention or free will on the part of the subject. The notion of identification, usually thought of in connection with the subject's response to or defense against trauma, could in this sense provide an explanation for the traumatized subject's lack of memory of his/her trauma. Thus, Leys evokes what she calls "the vacancy of the traumatized [...] ego in a hypnotic openness to impressions and identifications [which occur] prior to all self-representation and hence to all rememoration" (32). This condition seems to recall Freud's own depiction of melancholia as a situation in which not the external world, but the ego itself becomes poor and empty.

Interestingly, metaphors of hollowness abide in Mrs Dalloway, beginning with Clarissa's gloomy thought early in the book that there is "an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room" (MD 22); later on, Peter Walsh experiences the same feeling, which he expresses in a striking metaphor: "[r]igid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame. Where there is nothing [he] said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within" (36). The word 'skeleton' here operates on two levels: it brings to mind the image of a structure or mold into which anything can be fitted and shaped, hence the idea of identification; at the same time, it points to the potentially fatal consequences of such an identification. It is this 'abyssal' identification, to borrow Leys's term, which seems to be at the of origin of Septimus's difficulty in remembering what happened to him, and would explain why, instead of recounting his shattering experience, he relives the past event as if

it were happening in the present. Leys goes even further by questioning the validity of the term 'event' within the parameters of this model of trauma, since whatever happens, she says, "does not occur on the basis of a subject-object distinction" (33).

Leys's characterization of mimetic identification as 'abyssal' is significant because it calls to mind one of the primary definitions of trauma as a hole – a 'wound' inflected on the mind, as Freud seems to suggest in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Freud alludes to Tasso's romantic epic Gerusalemme Liberata in which the hero Tancred

> unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial, he makes his way into a strange forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again. (16)

Freud would continue to conceptualize the experience of trauma in somatic terms (the wound) in Moses and Monotheism, where he discusses another kind of 'gap' peculiar to trauma – the temporal gap: "the time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called 'the incubation period', a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease...It is the feature we might term *latency*" (84). According to Freud, the latency period is a gap in that it is characterized by a complete forgetting of the traumatic event. Interestingly, however, and as Caruth points out, the "inexplicable traumatic void" is not restricted to the latency period only, but is a function of the traumatic event itself: "what is truly striking about the accident victim's experience of the event and what in fact constitutes the central enigma of Freud's example", Caruth says, "is not so

much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself" (Trauma 7).

Because of this missing of the experience as such, the event is not available to consciousness but is relived in nightmares and flashbacks, or reenacted by the logic of the repetition compulsion. It becomes clear therefore that, in the words of Michael G. Kenny, "[m]emories of traumatic events live on outside of consciousness", that is to say they dwell in the realm of the unconscious (153). Now this is significant because this region of the psyche is characterized by the absence of conscious time; thus, the "fall" into trauma becomes analogous to standing on the edge an abyss, or falling into a bottomless hole, where consciousness of time is utterly obliterated. The survivor relives or recreates the event as if it were happening in the present – the eternal present of the unconscious. It is interesting that in the early 1920s, that is shortly before she began working on Mrs Dalloway, Woolf's mood was characterized by a recurrent melancholy thought that associates the tragic side of life with precisely a vision of the abyss, as is shown by this diary entry: "why is life so tragic, so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss. I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end" (Diary 2: 72).

Woolf's reflection seems to anticipate post-structuralist skepticism about meaning and referentiality. In doing so, Woolf demonstrates the ways in which literary texts that seek to bear witness to overwhelming experiences often end up reenacting the aporia at the heart of such experiences. Viewed from a

deconstructive angle, Woolf's confrontation with the abyss becomes an allegory of the postmodern subject's plight, as he stands on the edge of language and faces what might be termed the abyss of reference – the gap resulting from the absence of the referent. Trauma in this sense is aligned with deconstruction in that it is not based on full understanding but claims a referential truth, as Caruth suggests, *precisely* in the act of turning away from reference. Unlike the apprehensive Woolf, however, the attitude of the deconstructionist toward the encounter with the abyss is more complex, as is eloquently expressed by Spivak in the preface to her translation of Derrida's Of Grammatology:

> Deconstruction seems a way out of the closure of knowledge. By inaugurating the open-ended indefiniteness of textuality – by thus "placing in the abyss" (*mettre en abîme*), as the French expression would literally have it – it shows the lure of the abyss as freedom. The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom". (lxxvii)

The same intoxication with the abyss is echoed by J. Hillis Miller, who declared in an essay on Stevens that far from being a 'science of truth', the deconstructive "study of rhetoric leads to the abyss by destroying, through its own rhetorical procedures, its own basic axiom". Miller, as Vincent Leitch remarks, "accepts this impasse and celebrates the abyss" (53).[6]

The deconstructive celebration of the abyss, however, does not mean a downright abolition of reference, a move that would be tantamount to denying history. Instead, deconstruction seeks to challenge our preconceived ideas about the availability of reference to conventional modes of cognition, in order to teach us that the path to reference is not always straightforward, but goes through gaps and

breaks. It is in the light of what Caruth calls "this surprising realignment of reference with what is *not fully masterable by cognition*" that the deconstructive intervention should be considered (Critical Encounters 3, author's italics). Likewise, the encounter with traumatic stories and survivor narratives involves dealing with fragmentary and confusing accounts with a view to recovering memories from the unconscious and integrating them within the consciousness of victims, a goal which, Leys reminds us, it is not always possible to achieve. In other words, confronting the abyss does not always mean that the gap will eventually be bridged, that the long-sought referent will be found, as is clear in Septimus's case. There seems to be a complete and irremediable rupture between signifier and signified since "he was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind" (MD 71). The only options left for Septimus are either to take a step back from the abyss, or plunge into the unknown, hence the significance of the suicide method in the book.

Within the mimetic model of trauma, moreover, access to the traumatic scene occurs in a fundamentally performative mode, so that instead of recollection and subsequent representation of the experience, we have total identification. Yet, as a number of trauma theorists have shown, the process of recovery from trauma involves *recovering* those experiences that caused the traumatic symptoms in the first place. This act of recovering does not take place with Septimus and, despite the efforts of his wife and physicians to get him to *talk* about what happened in the front, he would only *mimetically* relive certain moments of his trauma.

Septimus's inability to remember what happened to him and his subsequent deadlock underscores the centrality of memory to the process of 'working through'. The turn-of-the-century French psychiatrist Pierre Janet distinguished between 'narrative memory' which recounts the past as past, and 'traumatic memory' which "merely and unconsciously *repeats* the past" (Leys 105). Narrative memory is conscious, and consciousness is organized temporally, whereas the unconscious, the site of traumatic memory, knows no temporal difference: it is always the present in the unconscious. For Janet, the purpose of therapy is to transform the traumatic memory into a narrative memory, so that it will be integrated into the survivor's life story. The second stage of therapy consists in the survivor him/herself recounting the traumatic story. Janet called this act of narration 'presentification', defined as an operation of self-knowledge and self-representation, and consisting in the ability to communicate present experiences to oneself and to others.[7] Janet's 'presentification' recalls Leys' notion of the specular distance in that it is predicated on the survivor's ability to distance him/herself from the traumatic event in order to be able to represent it to himself/herself and then to others. In the case of those suffering from traumatic memory, this process of distancing is not always possible, that is to say the victim's speech is usually anything but a coherent narrative:

> If speech or verbalization often accompanied those scenes, it did not do so in the form of a discourse in which the patient narrated the truth of his past to himself or to another (the physician or hypnotist), but in the mode of an intensely animated, present tense miming or emotional reliving of the alleged traumatic scene that occurred in the absence of self-observation and self-representation. (Leys 100)

Once we begin to grasp the importance of the act of 'presentification' as a fundamental stage in the process of recovery, we will arrive at a better understanding of the situation of impasse that characterizes Septimus's condition. Septimus's memory is evidently traumatic, characterized as it is by the absence of linear structure and the prevalence of what Marian MacCurdy calls 'iconic images' and sensations.[8] His visions are not entirely made up of hallucinations, but they still make no sense to us because they lack narrative organization and therefore appear to be an odd collage of otherwise incongruent snapshots. They have taken on what Roberta Culbertson calls "a cast of unreality" that would make them "seem unbelievable, even to the survivor who knows quite well the truth, in his body if not in words" (171). An illustration of this would be an early scene in the book where we have what might be described as our first glimpse into Septimus's memory. Following an abstract reflection on trees, Septimus's mind is suddenly submerged by a more concrete memory that takes him back to the front: "there was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railing opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railing" (MD 18). Thus, what promised to be a clear memory quickly degenerates into a fragmentary account that lacks logical progression. The narrator's peculiar use of syntax and punctuation here serves to enhance the confusion that characterizes this memory: the short, elliptical sentences clearly recall Judith Herman's characterization of traumatic memory as being fundamentally "wordless and static" (175).

Another intrusive flashback will occur later on, with the effect of further emphasizing the traumatic nature of Septimus's memory. This time, he asks his

distressed wife to write down the things that he sees, and her reaction dramatizes the perplexing nature of a memory that lacks narrative and context: "perfect nonsense it was; about death; about Miss Isabel Pole. She could stand it no longer. She would go back" (MD 50). Yet as readers, we know that this is no nonsense; we know, that is, that both Miss Isabel Pole and death were central episodes in Septimus's traumatic past, a past which he cannot see as past but continues to rehearse as an eternal present.

This inability on Spetimus's part to distance himself from the past explains the failure of the medical establishment represented in the book by Sir William Bradshaw to help the traumatized young man recover his troubling memories. The encounter between physician and patient acquires additional significance as it precedes the act of suicide, thus symbolizing the aporia that is always already at the heart of the mimetic act. Asked by Bradshaw whether he has served with distinction in the war, Septimus replies by interrogatively repeating the word 'war'. To the physician's other questions Septimus responds by stammering utterances that rarely go beyond the pronoun "I". The scene at Bradshaw's expansive mansion shows Woolf having trouble keeping authorial detachment, as she describes what to her must have been an all familiar interaction between patient and therapist. The passages dealing with Bradshaw are written in a mocking, derogatory style that evokes both her contempt for the medical establishment and her bitterness with regard to its oppressive practices. Bradshaw's overbearing manner and his ineffectual approach to Septimus's condition ("it was merely a question of rest, said

Sir William; of rest, rest, rest", MD 71) recall Woolf's own frustration with her successive doctors and their traditional method of rest-cure.

Within the context of this bitterness, Septimus's death at the end of the book becomes an emblem of society's failure to deal with those who have been unfortunate enough to undergo terrifying experiences. Woolf here seems to point her finger not only at the patriarchal society that sent young men to their ruin in order to pursue policies of violence and aggression, but also medical establishment of the time which treated people suffering from mental problems as if they were misfits who needed to disciplined, even if brutally so, in order to be reintegrated into 'normal' society. On another level, Septimus's tragic end challenges the closure at the heart of many traditional approaches to trauma theory, the idea that a particular set of actions would necessarily bring about a complete recovery. Instead, Septimus's fate dramatizes the recalcitrant nature of the experience of trauma as mimesis, the ways in which "fixed, or frozen in time, it refuses to represent the past *as* past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (Leys 2, author's italics).

# "YOU CAN NEVER MOURN": A TROPOLOGIES OF MOURNING

> *[P]hilia* begins with the possibility of survival. Surviving – that is the other name of a mourning whose possibility is never to be awaited. For one does not survive without mourning. No one alive can get the better of this tautology, that of the stance of survival [*survivance*] – even God would helpless.
> – Jacques Derrida, Politics of Friendship.

Trauma often involves loss, and loss entails mourning. Since Freud, we have become accustomed to think of mourning as a 'normal affect' and a salutary "reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction, which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 243). Accordingly, when the 'work of mourning' is completed, the grieving person is expected to regain his normal self and get on with his life. Recently, however, the work of Jacques Derrida on mourning has started to question this Freudian closure. Derrida's position, articulated in a series of articles and essays he wrote in the wake of the deaths of friends and colleagues, revolves around the principle that mourning is always an 'unfinished business', a process that is constantly subject to the force of *différance*. "The work of mourning", Maurice Blanchot reminds us, "is not grief that works: grief keeps watch" (51). It is a similar *remise en question* that we find at the heart of Derrida's conception of mourning. What happens, Derrida asks, when mourning ends in aporia? What if, after going through the process of mourning, the ego is still not 'free' and 'uninhibited'. Freud, obviously, seemed to be aware of this possibility when he wrote that in "some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition" (243). Yet, how does one know if one is dealing with 'normal' or 'pathological'

mourning? In other words at what precise moment does mourning become pathological?

Derrida has further problematized the end point of mourning. With the loss of a friend, he argued following the death of Paul de Man, the Other no longer exists except in us; yet we are never ourselves, and this "specular reflection never closes on itself" resulting in aporia instead of liberation (Memoires for Paul de Man 28). This is so because mourning is always caught up in a structure of allegory "which constitutes in advance all 'being-is-us', 'in-me', 'between-us', or 'between-ourselves'" (28). Just as in language we persistently seek to contain the endless play of reference, so does the mourner seek to "reduce [the dead] to what can still be contained by a literary or rhetorical performance" (The Work of Mourning 50). Freud's 'pathological', therefore, becomes for Derrida synonymous with the tropological, the ways in which the presence of the dead Other is sustained through figurative processes. This is why, Derrida says,

> there can be no *true mourning*, even if truth and lucidity always presuppose it, and, in truth, take place only as the truth of mourning. The truth of the mourning of the other, but of the other who always speaks in me, who signs in my place, the hypogram of epitaph being always of the other, and for the other. Which also means: in place of the other. (Memoires 29)

True mourning is only possible in so far as it designates a 'tendency' to deny the rhetoricity of the true, and so Derrida evokes instead the 'truth' of mourning, which lies precisely in its rhetoricity, in the tropological structure or allegorical memory "which constitutes any trace as always being the trace of the other" (Memoires 31).

One key factor for a 'successful' work of mourning according to Freud is what Judith Butler described as "a kind of promiscuity of libidinal aim" (21), which means that investment in, and attachment to, loved objects might be withdrawn and attached to other objects. This represents for Freud another instance in which 'normal' mourning is different from melancholia. For in melancholia, one is aware of a loss but one is not certain about what has been lost and, due to this lack of knowledge, the process of affective reinvestment becomes impossible. Again, central to Freud's conceptualization is the assumption that grief is an uncomplicated condition which, with some time and cathectic energy, would eventually be overcome. What this view does not seem to take into account is what Butler calls the 'transformative effect of loss':

> One mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submitting to a transformation) the full results of which one cannot know in advance. (21)

One aspect of this transformative effect is the realization that, as Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas put it, "the living are who they are only in and through [...] others. Their interiority, even their narcissism, constituted always in relation to them, their memory itself formed [...] only through this movement of mourning" (The Work of Mourning 11).

In Mrs Dalloway, a text that deals with loss and trauma, mourning is a central theme. In an early version of the novel Woolf repeatedly quoted a line from Shelley's Adonais that says "you can never mourn".[9] As the phrase suggests, however, Woolf's concern, just like Derrida's, is with the aporia of mourning, what Christine Froula calls "the violence intrinsic to mourning [...] that threatens to

derail the mourner's progress toward acceptance and consolation" (87). This aporia is enacted through a series of tropes that shows precisely the endless play in the relationship between the living person in mourning and the dead Other. When Evans, Septimus's officer and close friend during the war, is killed just before the Armistice, Septimus surprisingly does not show any emotion or recognize that there is "the end of a friendship". Instead, he actually congratulates "himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably" (MD 64). Septimus's reaction is surprising because Evans was not just an officer, or a friend; nor was he just one of the thousands of fellow soldiers who lost their lives in that large-scale conflict. To Septimus, he represented both a source of affection and authority, friendship and duty: "they had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other" (64). Yet, this was an unusual friendship as it evolved in the middle of war and death; a friendship, that, as Derrida would have it, bore with it the seeds of mourning.[10]

This awareness of the ultimate law of friendship – that one friend will die before the other – could explain the lack of immediate reaction on Septimus's part after Evan's death, but fails to account for the long-term consequences of this loss. The impasse which Septimus reaches years after the incident can be best understood, I would suggest, in the light of the crucial distinction that Derrida makes between 'possible' and 'impossible mourning'. To confront the aporia of mourning with which we are left following the death of a friend, Derrida argues, is to ask the ultimate question:

> Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, idol,

> or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us? Or is that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism? (Memoires 6, author's italics)

In other words, the impossible choice is between acknowledging the definitive loss of the other, and continuing to give the other life within the self at the risk of being altered as a subject.

Septimus seems to have taken this latter course, for he refuses to admit the death of his friend, and continues to talk to him as if he were still alive, to the great distress of his wife Rezia: "she must go back and tell him, go back to him sitting there on the green chair under the tree, talking to himself, or to that dead man Evans" (MD 50). Rezia's thought, however, is not entirely accurate because she has failed to understand that, within the logic of possible mourning, Septimus and Evans are from this moment on no longer entirely separate. The interiorizing process that Derrida mentioned has been completed, with the uncanny result that the boundaries between the self and the Other have become quite fluid: "*we* are never *ourselves*", says Derrida in the wake of Paul de Man's death, "and between us, identical to us, a 'self' is never in itself or identical to itself" (Memoirs 28, author's italics). It is to this painful conclusion that Rezia comes on that June day in the park, "having left Septimus, who wasn't Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself; to talk to a dead man, on the seat over there" (MD 49).

There are many indications in the text of this identification process, as when Septimus, echoing the Phoenician sailor in The Waste Land, says: "I went under the

sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive" (52), a statement that clearly applies to Evans. Septimus also repeatedly has visions of himself as the bearer of some burdensome truth, of an important message that would save mankind from an imminent doom:[11]

> The voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness. (19)

An almost accurate reproduction of this vision will occur later on, with the exception that we are now no longer so sure whether the Christ-like figure is Septimus himself or his dead friend Evans:

> A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the world, Septimus cried… raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone. (52-3)

The 'man in grey' is of course Peter Walsh who happens to be in the park around the same time as the Smiths, but in Septimus's raving mind he becomes Evans. Toward the end of the book, however, there is little doubt that the prophet of 'universal love' is indeed Evans: "Evans, Evans, Evans – his messages from the dead; do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister. Universal love: the meaning of the world" (107). This is significant because long before he has this vision, Septimus has already been advocating these same and similar principles: "Men must not cut down trees. There is a God…change the world. No one kills from hatred" (18). What is at work here is what Derrida calls "a certain mimetism", a process whereby the mourner seeks to take the departed friend into himself, "to

identify with him in order to let him speak within [himself], to make him present and faithfully to represent him" (The Work of Mourning 38).[12]

Septimus's confused thoughts, however, are not so much the result of a loss of identity as they are a consequence of an invasion of the self by what Derrida calls "the trace of the other in us, the other's irreducible precedence" (Memoires 29). It is, in other words, result of the contamination of the living present by the signature of memoirs-from-beyond-the grave (29). To grasp this trace, Derrida warns us, is a hopeless enterprise, because "it defies any totalization, and directs us to a scene of allegory, to a fiction of prosopopeia, that is, to a tropologies of mourning: to the memory of mourning and to the mourning of memory" (Memoires 29).

The notion of the trace,[13] together with the process of interiorization, implies a parasitical presence of the Other within the self, which in turn calls to mind the idea of haunting. Haunting, as Jodey Castricano points out, "implies interiority: the necessary construction of an "inside" whether of a house, a text, a thesis, a system of representation, or a 'subject'" (22-3). The subject becomes, in this sense, a haunted house – a space to which the ghost of the dead Other keeps coming back. J. Hillis Miller was among the first commentators to point to the presence of a ghostly theme in Mrs Dalloway. In Fiction and Repetition, he argued that narration in the book is "repetition as the raising of the dead" (178). Even more uncanny is Miller's assertion that "Woolf has…buried within her novel a clue to the way the day of the action is to be seen as the occasion of a resurrection of ghosts from the past" (Fiction 189). To be sure, the novel does generate an eerie

impression of undecidability; one has only to think of the mysterious motor car with its "air of inscrutable reserve" (MD 12), or the old lady whom Clarissa repeatedly sees look out her window and then "disappear again into the background" (92), to get a sense of Miller's buried clue. Moreover, it seems as if Woolf wanted to force the reader into awareness of this mystery, by throwing several hints here and there, as when Mr. Bentley compares the aeroplane to a "symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly" (21). Later, the narrator will describe Sir William Bradshaw as a "ghostly helper, the priest of science" (70); Peter Walsh, too, echoes the same eerie comparison when he thinks of the old nurse sitting beside him in the park as "one of those spectral presences which rise in twilight in woods made of sky and branches. He also has a vision of a "solitary traveller, haunter of lanes, disturber of ferns, and devastator of great hemlock plants" (42). The idea of haunting also appears in Clarissa's thoughts as she muses upon that unseen part of ourselves which "might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death" (111).

It is especially in terms of this last thought that the connection with Septimus could be established. Castricano points to the connection between haunting and what she calls "unresolved mourning" (5), a connection that has already been suggested by Derrida in his discussion of mourning in Mnemosyne. The death of the Other, Derrida says, marks the limits of the self, which finds itself "obliged to harbor something that is greater and other than [itself]" (Memoirs 34).

The figure for this harboring process, according to Derrida, is that of metonymy, "where the part stands for the whole and for *more than* the whole that it exceeds" (34, author's italics). Metonymy, as Roman Jakobson has shown, implies a relationship of contiguity, as opposed to metaphor, which is based on similarity.[14] This would point to the otherness of that 'something' which invades the self and goes beyond its limits. Just as metonymy in this case implies an overflowing of the borders of reference, so is Septimus described by the narrator as "a border case, neither one thing nor the other" (MD 62)[15]. The notion of a space no longer capable of containing an invasive presence is also echoed through the metaphor of the bell sound "flood[ing] the room with its melancholy wave; which receded, and gathered itself to fall once more, when she heard, distractingly, something fumbling, something scratching at the door" (86). Implied in this thought is not only the persisting presence of the Other 'within', but also the ghostly nature of this presence.

To point to this presence, however, in other words, to acknowledge the 'metonymic force' of mourning, is not to say that the mourner and the dead Other have become one and the same. Derrida reminds us that despite the movement of identification, "[t]he alterity remains almost intact; that is the condition. I do not put myself in his place..." (Memoires 58). This is so because of that putative 'absolute unicity', of the me, of the Other, which the power of metonymy recalls but never effaces. The other's alterity is thus preserved, but is never present as a stable referent; what is left in the end is an endless state of desire for an ever-elusive signified: "the metonymic force thus divides the referential trait, suspends the

referent and leaves it to be desired, while still maintaining the reference. It is at work in the most loyal of friendships; it plunges the destination into mourning while at the same time engaging it" (The Work of Mourning 61).

It is, therefore, not surprising that Septimus's vision is strikingly metonymic: his perception of the world around him is constantly governed by one form of metonymy or another. England, which he tries to save by going to war, to him "consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square" (MD 64). Miss Pole herself is often reduced in his mind to the green dress she only wore once on a summer evening, so that when he visualizes her now, all he can think of is that "[i]t has flowered" (63). Similarly, the Italian city of Milan, where he found himself when the Armistice was signed, is associated in his mind with "flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, [and] daughters making hats" all of which he saw at the house of the innkeeper whose daughter Septimus would marry (64). Elsewhere, when he realizes that his marriage ceased to have any meaning, and that from now on he is destined to be alone, Septimus can only think of the wedding ring which his wife has just taken off (51).

Another central figure in the rhetoric of mourning is the figure of prosopopeia. In The Resistance to Theory, Paul de Man described prosopopeia as "the master trope of poetic discourse" (48), arguing that it is more important to poetry than metaphor. Its importance to the process of mourning is made evident in the essay 'Autobiography as De-Facement', where de Man defines prosopopeia as

> the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech. Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poein,*

> to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*). (The Rhetoric of Romanticism 76)

Prosopopeia operates as a master trope in Septimus's mourning of Evans. The movement of the trope outlined by de Man is set in motion early in the novel when Septimus confers upon his dead friend the faculty of speech: "the voice which now communicated with him was the greatest of mankind" (MD 19). And while the 'voice' initially seems to take the form of an incomprehensible song ("Evans sang, among the orchids" 52), it will later acquire the attributes of clear speech: "[a] voice spoke from behind the screen. Evans was speaking" (69). Eventually, of course, the mouth that speaks would attach itself to a face, thus completing the tropological movement of prosopopeia. As with the voice, however, the face is at first a polymorphic sight "he had seen mountains [...] he had seen faces, where he had seen some beauty" (106). This 'beauty' is nonetheless brought into question by repeated textual allusions to monstrosity, such as "prehistoric monster" and "dwindling [...] monster" (92), as well as Septimus's recurring vision of a "repulsive brute, with [...] blood-red nostrils" (68).

In addressing and letting himself be addressed by the dead friend, Septimus has surrendered to the lure of the "power of resurrection" inherent to prosopopeia (Tropes 246). Yet, as Derrida observes, the trope of prosopopeia is essentially fictive or, to use de Man's term, it is 'hallucinatory', and as such it entails a sacrifice: "we are sacrificing to fiction through love for him [the lost one], in his naked name, in memory of him. In the movement of this trope, we turn toward him, we address ourselves to him, who addresses himself to us" (Memoires 26). The sacrifice involved here is the ultimate insight into the fictive

nature of prosopopeia, an insight which, as Miller argues in his essay on Hardy's short story "Barbara of the House of Grebe", "is intolerable. No human being can live with it" (Tropes 248). To look prosopopeia in the face, then, is to confront madness. Just as Barbara, the heroine in Hardy's story, falls in love with the statue of her dead husband, and finally utters a mad laughter, so do Septimus's attempts to resurrect his dead friend end in madness, and ultimately, suicide.

Septimus's suicide, too, is prefigured by the trope of prosopopeia or, more precisely, by the underlying 'reversibility' that according to Paul de Man inhabits this trope.[16] "By making the dead speak", de Man observes, "the symmetrical structure implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death" (The Rhetoric of Romanticism 78). This would explain, it seems, the uncanny atmosphere of stasis that accompanies Septimus's first appearance in the book, an atmosphere evoked by a succession of tropes such as "weighted there" and "rooted to the pavement" (MD 12). Together with the statement that Septimus is "being looked at and pointed at" (12), these tropes conjure up the image of a statue that has been planted in the middle of the city for public display. The transformation into a statue and the ensuing drift into death are also echoed in Clarissa's description of Lady Bruton's face as being "cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life" (23). The most explicit hint to death and statues, however, occurs during Peter Walsh's stroll through the city of London after his turbulent visit to Clarissa, and precisely as he comes across a band of marching soldiers. In a significant but obviously unconscious allusion to Septimus, Peter is reminded of Nelson, Gordon "and all the exultant statutes", and thinks that, like Septimus, these

triumphant warriors "have trampled under the same temptations[17], and achieved a marble stare" (38).The reverse effect of prosopopeia is now complete: having looked the dead in the face, it is now the living's turn to bear the gaze of the dead. The situation of paralysis at the beginning of the second chapter is of course due to the "the motor car [that] ha[s] stopped outside Mulberry's shop window", and made "everything... come to a standstill" (11). The motor car coming to a standstill in the middle of traffic becomes therefore, an allegory of that "emptiness [at] the heart of life" (23), of that "death that surprised in the middle of life" (37) which Clarissa will later acutely feel in a moment of premonition; it is the allegory of death – of the reversibility of prosopopeia.

It is awareness of this perilous reversibility that constitutes what Caruth calls "the language of parting [...] that moves the speaker forward to a life that is not simply possessed, but given, in some sense and received, as a gift from the dead" ("Parting Words" 58).[18] In other words, it is by taking leave from the departed that we paradoxically accept their gift – the gift of life. This represents for Caruth "a creative act, an act that bears witness to the dead precisely in the process of turning away" (58). This attitude is evoked in the novel by Peter Walsh's reaction to the "marble stare" projected by the "exultant statues". Though he acknowledges the strong temptations behind both projecting and partaking in that stare, Peter is convinced that he does "not want it for himself in the least" (MD 38). The same course of action is taken by Rezia herself who, despite her simple-mindedness, has enough insight to resist such a temptation, an insight that she expresses in her characteristically plain language: "such things happen to everyone.

Everyone has friends who were killed in the war…but Septimus let himself think of horrible things, as she could too if she tried" (50). Septimus, however, unlike the child in Freud's game refuses to say "gone", and like the elderly woman in Peter Walsh's dream, continues to search for his lost friend: "to seek, over the desert, a lost son; search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world" (MD 43).

According to Derrida's understanding of mourning, however, Septimus's reaction should come as no surprise. The aporia of mourning is such, Derrida suggests, that in the end, we are always left with an impossible choice. In this case, the impossible choice is between resurrecting the dead (through the figure of prosopopeia), and metaphorically completing the rites of burial. "To say that prosopopeia is a speech act giving a name, a face, and a voice to the absent, the inanimate, or the dead", as Miller observes, "is to confront an ultimate question" (Tropes x). It is an ultimate question because awareness of the effects of prosopopeia does not provide us with a closure to the endless play in the process of mourning. If prosopopeia as the giving of a face to the absent dead, that is to say as act of *figuration*, results in a deadly blow to the living, as de Man suggests, then speaking of the dead Other, as dead, would be an act of *disfiguration*, of mutilation, a second *coups de grace* to the already dead Other. "In both cases", Derrida says, "I disfigure, I wound, I put to sleep, or I kill. But whom? Him? No. Him in me? In us? In you" (The Work of Mourning 44). In other words, speaking *to* the dead, *and* speaking *of* the dead are both attempts at looking horror in the face.

In the text, the disfigured face of the other is suggested through the recurrent

motif of an unseen 'thing', a sight that whenever unveiled to a character, it strikes him/her with terror. Maisie Johnson, the ingenuous young country girl who appears briefly in the book, upon seeing Septimus and his wife in the park is given, we are told, "quite a turn". "Horror! Horror! She wanted to cry", a reaction that recalls Kurtz's confrontation with the darkness of his own soul in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. It must be an equally disturbing 'apparition' that pushes Clarissa to utter the same interjection: "'oh this horror'! she said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness" (MD 26). A more direct allusion to the encounter between Septimus and the monstrous face of the Other occurs, significantly, just before the suicide scene. Septimus, we are told, "shut his eyes" and immediately after, the narrator tells us that "he started up in terror. What did he see?" (105). We are not told what he saw, but whatever it was, it could only be a gruesome sight, for he now realizes that he is doomed: "[t]hat was it: to be alone for ever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckrum shapes with their scissors; to be alone for ever" (105).

# 'THE HIDDEN SPRING': THE PRIMAL SCENE(S) OF MRS DALLOWAY

"Every novel", writes Morris Beja, "tells a story, but it also has its own story – the story of its creation and publication" (128). In the case of Mrs Dalloway, the story is indeed an interesting one. In Virginia Woolf and the Madness of Language, Daniel Ferrer points to the discrepancy between the account of Mrs Dalloway's genesis given by Woolf in the preface to the American edition of 1928, and what we now know to be the real facts. In the preface in question, Woolf states that in the first version of the novel Septimus "had no existence; and that Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps die at the end of the party" (The Mrs Dalloway Reader 11). As Ferrer points out, however, at the stage referred to in the preface, Woolf projected a collection of short stories that would be loosely connected, and there was no question of a tragic ending. Moreover, in her first reference to the transformation of 'Mrs Dalloway' into a novel ("Mrs Dalloway has branched into a book", Diary 2: 207), the author was already talking about Septimus as a character. Ferrer, therefore, concludes that Woolf's account was a "fiction about the origins of a fiction" (9); that is to say, Woolf lied about the genesis of her book, and this leads him to ask the inevitable question: "is there something dangerous at the source of this novel?" (11).

Ferrer's interrogation is suggestive not only of the fascination that Mrs Dalloway still holds for readers and critics alike, but also of the difficulties that have hitherto attended to the interpretation of a novel that Woolf herself described as "one of the most tantalizing and refractory of my books" (Diary 2: 262). One of

the intriguing facts about Woolf's fourth novel is its resistance to attempts to place it within any teleological narrative of progression of the author's thought and work. Written after the so-called breakthrough that Woolf achieved with Jacob's Room, as well as the crystallization of her own distinct voice and technique that that novel accomplished, Mrs Dalloway does not echo the spirit of confidence and liberation that might be expected of such a ground-breaking work.[19] It surprises us, instead, with a deeply melancholy tone and an elegiac mood, together with a strikingly repetitive structure that creates an impression of paralysis and futility. Cathy Caruth has recently argued that repetition is one of the symptoms of a writing that emerges from, and seeks to engage with, an actual experience of trauma. Far from carrying a fully referential meaning, trauma narratives are governed instead by the Freudian 'compulsion to repeat', which becomes the chief mode of transmission.

To approach Mrs Dalloway as a text about trauma, however, is to become aware of the fact that it is a work which, to use Shoshana Felman's words, is closely "tied up with the act of bearing witness" to a crisis (Testimony 2). The notion of crisis is evoked in the book through the story of Septimus, a young clerk who returns home after having fought in the Great War to face a severe psychosis that culminates in suicide. The striking aspect of the narrative that Woolf weaves out of Septimus's story is its gaps and breaks, so that by the end of the book, we still have no certain knowledge of what has triggered Septimus's predicament in the first place. This gap in meaning, while doing justice to the elusive nature of traumatic experiences, also creates the impression that Woolf herself, in attempting to trace the origins of the crisis of her protagonist, has come to a deadlock. This

deadlock. This raises the question of whether Woolf's desire to know the unknowable was in fact a displaced attempt to go to the roots of her own condition. To achieve this aim would mean that, not only could she identify the sources of her own intermittent states of depression, which in 1923 she compared to a gloomy "mist that comes and goes" (Diary 2: 237), but also that she might start a therapeutic process through the act of writing. "[T]he act of bearing witness", writes Felman, "embod[ies] some remedial quality and belongs already, in obscure ways, to the healing process" (Testimony 4).

To be able to bear witness to an event, however, requires a certain degree of knowledge of that event. Yet, it is precisely the absence of that knowledge that characterizes traumatic experiences.[20] Trauma, writes Caruth, "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it is precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Unclaimed Experience 4, Author's italics). Just like Septimus, therefore, Woolf has to grope amid that darkness, that gap peculiar to trauma, for an original event, a 'primal scene' as Freud would call it,[21] and Mrs Dalloway seems to be the inscription of that journey. Journeying functions as a master trope in Mrs Dalloway, with the main characters engaged each in a journey of some kind, symbolic or otherwise. On the day of the action in the book, Clarissa conducts her own journey through the city of London; the solitary traveler in Peter Wash's dream resolutely crosses the wood toward a mysterious village; and Septimus embarks on a quasi-ontological quest in search of a meaning to his trauma. Likewise, this chapter conducts a journey of its own, into

both Woolf's tumultuous life and the text's various aporias for what J. Hillis Miller calls the 'buried clue' to the mystery of Mrs Dalloway. It will become clear in the course of this 'journey' that the putative originary event, what Woolf in her diary cryptically referred to as the "hidden spring" (272), might not be a single event after all, but a number of experiences that Woolf went through both as a child and as an adult. "[A]t the origins, says Ned Lukacher, one discovers not a single event that transpires in one temporal sequence but a constellation of events that transpire in several discrete temporal sequences" (36). Interestingly, as she was writing the book, Woolf seems to have suddenly become aware of this daunting prospect; yet instead of being deterred, she became even more invested in her novel: "I have my hopes for this book. I am going on writing it now till, honestly, I can't write another line – Journalism, everything, is to give way to it" (Diary 2: 272).

The undecidability that continues to surround the origins of Septimus's ordeal is evocative of the indefinable nature of trauma. The traumatic experience, Caruth reminds us, "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Unclaimed Experience 4); and even then, that is to say, with the outbreak of traumatic symptoms, the experience is still not completely grasped due to the temporal gap between the occurrence of the event and its subsequent cognition. This raises questions about the possibility of transmitting what Caruth calls "a crisis that is marked, not by simple knowledge, but by the way it simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (5). Acknowledging the difficulty of such transmission and

its indirectness, Caruth suggests that the road to the site of trauma, what J. Hillis Miller calls that thing "glimpsed down or at the far horizon" of trauma narratives, should follow a no less indirect path. In other words, our attention should be directed not toward "the explicit references to traumatic experience", but to "the textual itinerary of insistently recurring words or figures" (Unclaimed Experience 5).

One of the recurrent motifs in the text is the metaphor of sinking and the dichotomy of surface/depth. Right from the first page of the novel, we are introduced to the notion of sinking, as Clarissa exclaims early in the morning of that June day: "what a lark! What a plunge!" (MD 3). Later, at the height of Septimus's crisis, we are told that every time Rezia cries, he feels that "he descended another step into the pit" (67). Septimus, too, often has visions of being "drowned" (102), and of "falling through the sea, down, down into the flames" (104). Clarissa's interpretation of Septimus' suicide reproduces a vision of sinking: "this man who had killed himself – had he plunged holding his treasure?" (135). This vision is confirmed later as she meditates upon the incident: "Somehow it was disaster – her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman" (134). It would seem, then, that sinking operates as a metaphor for death, so that Septimus's visions of drowning become the result of his increasingly suicidal thoughts.

J. Hillis Miller has argued that sinking is part of two opposite movements – the other being rising – that govern the entire book, and he links this movement to Clarissa's exclamation at the beginning of the book: "What a lark! What a plunge!"

Miller takes the two movements to represent two poles in the novel, one attracting characters toward plunging into death, as in Septimus's case, and the other inviting life and constructive action, and is represented by Clarissa's party. Yet, while this binary opposition seems to imply the privileging of what Miller calls the "rising motion of building it up" (Fiction 183), Clarissa's final thoughts at the end of the book are in no way those of someone who knows that they have made the right choice.[22] This situation is made even more complex by the fact that, in Woolf's fiction, the metaphor of sinking recurs with what Katherine Dalsimer calls 'shifting valence': "it is an ambivalent metaphor, one whose emotional valence quickly reverses itself" (194). Thus, it is also usually associated with a crux in the narrative, one that often involves the discovery of a profound truth. In The Waves, for instance, Bernard, on his way to join his friends for the important moment in the book where they dine with Percival on the eve of his leaving for India, experiences exhilaration for being "at liberty now to sink down, deep, into what passes, this omnipresent, general life" (84). He also expresses "the wish to go under, to visit the profound depths; once in a while to exercise my prerogative not always to act, but to explore" (85). This association of sinking with freedom and meaningfulness also seems to be at work in the in the experimental short story 'The Mark on the Wall', where the narrator expresses a similar desire "to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with hard separate facts" (37). From this perspective, sinking – or the plunge into death – is given a different dimension, namely that of depth and meaning, as opposed to the illusory and superficial nature of the act of living: death, as Suzan Dick observes, "is not the enemy to be fought [...] but a vision to

be embraced, an escape into the other reality behind appearances" ('Literary Realism' 70).

This revaluation of death, however, is only partially the result of the suicide act in the novel. In fact, even before Clarissa has ever heard of Septimus, she shows a constant preoccupation with death as well as a tendency to question received ideas about the finality and the significance of mortality: "did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely", she muses, that "all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely" (7). A few pages later, the narrator in the book expresses an eerie satisfaction at the thought that only death will satisfy the general curiosity as to the identity of that important person whose car stopped in the middle of Bond Street on that June day:

> When London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable teeth. The face in the motor car will be known. (13)

Here, again, death is associated with knowledge and revelation and, as a result, it should come as no surprise that after the initial shock of hearing the news of Septimus's suicide, Clarissa is filled with admiration – almost with jealousy: "this young man who had killed himself – had he plunged holding his treasure?" (134). Yet, this admiration quickly changes into bitterness as she realizes that Septimus has done the one thing that she has always secretly yearned for, achieving wholeness and total communication with the others through death. Deep down, she has always believed that death "was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically evaded them; closeness drew

apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death" (134). Yet, despite this insight, it is her destiny to remain a mere observer of this embrace; it is "her disaster – her disgrace" and also her "punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness...[while] she [is] forced to stand here in her evening dress" (134).

What significance are we to attach to this? Are we to interpret this as Woolf's own narrative version of Freud's master-plot leading to the triumph of 'the death instinct'? Or does the valorization of death have a purely ontological foundation? To be sure, Woolf had her own reasons for toying with the idea of death. With the successive tragedies in her family,[23] and the recurring nervous breakdowns that ensued, Woolf's life seemed from the beginning to be an unrelenting battle against the ghost of death. Interestingly, just as in Freud's theory the death instinct looks beyond the repetitive 'detour of life' toward a primordial state of quiescence, so did Woolf at times seem to find in death the only means to break the repetitive cycle of what must have appeared to her as a repetition of one catastrophic death after the other. In 1924, Angelica, Vanessa's daughter, had a car accident, and although she was saved and quickly recovered, Woolf was deeply shaken, and recorded her state of agitation in her diary entry of Saturday April 5:

> What I felt was...that death & tragedy had once more put down his paw, after letting us run a few paces. People never get over their early impression of death I think. I always feel pursued. But theres end of this. Nothing was wrong with Angelica – it was only a joke this time. (299)

One wonders if this feeling of being 'pursued' might have been at the origin of Woolf's desire to put "an end to this", to break the cycle of repetition, and lay her

soul to rest.

To talk about repetition in Mrs Dalloway is also to become aware of the great attention that Woolf gives to things and objects. From the car that stops in Bond Street, to the great – almost obsessive – attention given to trees, things and objects repeatedly seem to occupy the position of an important signified in the book. A study of the function of these 'things' in the novel would therefore not only contribute to an understanding of its meaning, but also shed light on certain aspects of Woolf's narrative technique.

When at the very end of the first chapter Clarissa is startled by the sound of a tire explosion , and Miss Pym the keeper of Mulberry's exclaims: "dear, those motor cars" (10), the reader is left with the impression that the motor car 'incident' is just a digression, a parenthesis no sooner opened than the author decides to close it. The following chapter, however, unexpectedly takes up the incident, and with great detail, too. We are told that the explosion "came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window" (11). At once, everybody's attention is drawn to the motor car, and a peculiar focus on the car's progress follows: "the motor car had stopped outside Mulberry's shop window"; "the motor car stood, with drawn blinds drawn" (11); "the motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly" (12); "the car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailor's shops on both sides of Bond Street" (13) ; "gliding across Piccadilly, the car turned down St James's Street" (14).

The significance of the motor car in the book lies precisely in the fact that it becomes the centre of everyone's attention; in other words, it is important in so far as it changes from a thing to an object: "everyone looked at the motor car" (11). In thus attracting everyone's attention to itself, the motor car becomes for a moment a point of intersection for people who would otherwise never cross paths. Just like the passers-by in Bond Street on that June day, Clarissa and Septimus are united for one rare moment in the observation of an object. This is why, as he gazes at the car, Septimus is terrified by "this drawing together of everything to one centre" (13). The 'Thing' has cast its spell and drawn everybody into its vortex, so much so that Rezia herself, who tries to break the spell by prodding her husband to walk on, cannot "help looking at the motor car and the tree pattern on the blinds" (12). And even when the car is out of sight, it still manages to unite the *minds* of the characters who have seen it. All the people on the scene, we are told, "looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire" (14). What has taken place during this brief but intense moment of union is not clear, not even for the seemingly all-knowing narrator, who for once admits uncertainty:

> When the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, through capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional. (14)

This is the Thing, the "it" or "unnamable X", as Miller calls it, "a 'thing' in the sense of some substratum which is hidden and never appears, something that remains outside" (Tropes 255). By 'outside', Miller means not only outside language and reference, but outside any frame of perception. Thus, the narrator's

uncertainty as what exactly happened in that fraction of a second should come as no surprise: the "it", Miller says, "cannot be glimpsed or heard as such" (257).

Another 'thing' that gets repeatedly mentioned in the novels is the tree.[24] Interestingly, trees are a central image in Septimus's visions. During the motor car incident, for instance, which coincides with his first appearance in the book, Septimus's attention is particularly attracted to the car's drawn blinds, upon which he saw "a curious pattern like a tree" (11). A little later, while sitting with his wife in Regent's Park, Septimus is overcome by a hallucinatory fit where he sees "the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling, with their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave" (17); and even more alarmingly, as he shuts his eyes in an attempt to keep his grasp on reality and not go mad, he still sees that "they beckon[...]" (17). "They" of course refers to trees, which become a symbol of the precariousness of the line that separates reality from illusion, sanity from madness. The power of the trees – the thing – conveyed here through the figure of prosopepeia ("they beckon"), seems to lie in the insight it gives into the intrinsically sorrowful nature of the human condition.

The connection between 'tree' and sorrow is repeatedly evoked in Woolf's work, including her autobiographical writings . In her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf recalls a childhood incident where, attempting to comfort Jack Hills after the death of Stella (Jack's wife and Woolf's half-sister), she was struck by "the shape of a small tree which stood in a little hollow in front of us, and how, as I sat holding Jack's hand, I came to conceive this tree as a symbol of sorrow, for it was silent, enduring and without fruit" (MB 56). We find the same ominous and

melancholy symbolism in Jacob's Room, where the tragic fate of the protagonist is prefigured as early as the second chapter by the recurring image of a fallen tree: "the tree had fallen the night he [Jacob] caught the [moth]", and again "the tree had fallen, though it was a windless night, and the lantern, stood on the ground, had lit up the still green leaves and the dead beech leaves" (17).

Still, if this were true – if trees, that is, were a constant reminder that "sorrow is our lot" (MB 32) – then how are we to interpret Septimus's almost obsessive preoccupation with trees, or else his directive that "[m]en must not cut down trees" (MD 18)? One possible explanation for this would be to say that trees in this case function as an allusion the large-scale destruction of the French countryside during the Great War. Images of blasted trees were a common sight at the western front and, after the war was over, they became invested with the additional burden of bearing witness to the horrors that took place there. This is why even though they continue to painfully bring survivors back to those horrific scenes, their existence is important in so far as they represent the only access left to that unspeakable trauma. As a result, trees have become what Ernst van Alphen calls "indexical traces" of what remains unspeakable and unrepresentable by language.[25] Yet trees are 'things' and as such have to be personified in order to be invested with the kind of agency that would turn them into enduring witnesses; that is why in Septimus's mind "they beckoned; leaves were alive, trees were alive" (17). And it is because, unlike his wife and doctors, trees *have been there* and have seen the horrorthat their "leaves are [now] connected by millions of fibres with his own body" (17). If the war has inflicted a deep wound on Septimus's psyche,

seeing trees being cut down or uprooted would be like delivering another blow, inflicting yet another wound. Interestingly, Freud's conceptualization of the traumatic neurosis involves not only the notion of a double wound as "an event that cannot be simply left behind" (Trauma 2), but also the parable of striking a tree as a dramatization of the repetition at the heart of the traumatic experience.[26]

If Septimus has already been victimized once, he would not let himself be victimized again. Having been traumatized, he now wants to preserve a trace, some kind of evidence of his trauma; in other words, he would not be 'wronged' in the sense given to the term by Jean-Francois Lyotard. A wrong, Lyotard writes, is "a damage [*dommage*] accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage" (5). Yet desiring to preserve trees for testimonial purposes is one thing, and looking his trauma in the face is another. Again, the question of distance is brought up as Septimus clearly cannot stand the overwhelming vision: "[t]here was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look" (18). And although the 'thing' – the trees – continues to beckon, Septimus decides to "shut his eyes; he would see no more", and he is overcome by relief and gratitude to his wife when "she put her hand with tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down, transfixed" (17).

Septimus, however, knows perfectly well that eluding the 'thing' can only happen at the risk of relinquishing whatever hope he still has of reaching the truth about himself and the world. Nor does the shutting of his eye succeed in blocking the charm of things, for even in the darkness of his mind they still beckoned. Interestingly, Septimus's little adventurous escape from things is replicated by no

less an unlikely character than his shallow wife Rezia. As she leaves her absent-minded husband in frustration for a walk in the park, Rezia notices that darkness was descending, "pour[ing] over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hillsides soften and fall in" (18). What is interesting, however, is that although they seem to have faded in the surrounding darkness, the presence of things becomes even more impressive:

> though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit – the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated here in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each windowpane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye; exists again. (18)

We have seen that the function of the motor car, and for that matter that of the sky-writing aeroplane, as 'things' in the book is to provide some kind of remedy for what Woolf saw as the intolerable situation of dispersion inherent to the human condition. 'Things' in the novel allow the narrator to slip easily from one character's mind to another and, in doing so, they create unity and reconciliation where fragmentation and dispersion used to be. This is certainly the narrative technique that Woolf had in mind when she spoke of a 'discovery' in Mrs Dalloway: "I should say a good deal about The Hours, & discovery", she wrote in her diary, "how I dig beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth; the idea is that the caves shall connect" (Diary 2: 263). And a discovery it was, because it allowed Woolf not only to capture her characters' stream of consciousness, but also to create an alterative situation where disparate characters are connected in the contemplation of things.

Woolf's awareness of the importance of things in Mrs Dalloway was nothing new to her. In her first short story to date "Phyllis and Rosamond", a semi-autobiographical account of the Stephen sisters initiation into the world of Bloomsbury intellectuals, Woolf had already shown an interest in exploring the possibilities of objects. Bored beyond measure by a party that she forced to attend, Phyllis is relieved when she finally meets "an intelligent elderly man" with whom she has an interesting conversation, at the end of which "she was glad to realize that the world was full of solid things, which were independent of her life" (23). Woolf would continue to explore the theme of objects in her short fiction and particularly in her 1920 story significantly entitled 'Solid Objects', in which a man's pursuit of objects leads to the ruin of the political career. In her first novel The Voyage Out, Woolf toyed with the idea that there is more to this world than the human beings who inhabit it; in fact, the world of objects is depicted in that novel as having more depth and meaning.[27]

By 1923, however, and while working on Mrs Dalloway, Woolf's interest in things had become even deeper: "oh to be able to slip in and out of things easily", she wrote in a diary entry of this period, "to be in them, not on the verge of them", (Diary 2: 250). The desire to be "in" things and not on the verge of them demonstrates that Woolf has taken the crucial step back from what Heidegger calls "the sphere of mere attitudes", that is to say the sphere of representation and explanation, and that her thinking of things has become one that "responds and recalls" (181). Woolf seems to be "thinking of the thing as thing", by letting "the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world" (181). According to

Heidegger, it is only by getting rid of such traditional ideas about things as the assumption that they are essentially men's making, that we can "bring about the advent of thing as thing" (182). Heidegger's thinking and that of Woolf also converge in their emphasis on the unifying power of things. Just as Woolf seems to suggest that things create unity and connection between people, so does Heidegger's 'thing' gather earth, sky, God, and mortals in a "united fourfold" (179).

It is also significant that Woolf's innovative conception of 'things' should crystallize in Mrs Dalloway, a novel that confirmed the shift in Woolf's technique, already announced by Jacob's Room, from the conventional prose of The Voyage Out and Night and Day to the avowedly experimental novels of the twenties. The significance of the concurrence of these two events points to the fact that interest in the objects of the world was a central feature of the emerging modernist method. In 1913, Ezra Pound, a key figure in Anglo-American modernism called for direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective. Pound's directive to focus on the 'thing' would eventually go beyond the limits of the imagist movement in which he was involved at the time, to become a central principle of the modernist project at large. One of the fundamental strains of modernism, as Bill Brown observes, was the "effort to fathom the concrete, and to imagine the work of art as a different form of mimesis – not one that serves to represent a thing, but one that seeks to attain the status of a thing" (3). Woolf, in particular, was actively responsive to the new esthetic preoccupation with things. She was profoundly interested, for instance, in James Joyce's Ulysses, a novel that she read as she was

writing Mrs Dalloway. The parallels between the two novels are of course obvious and have been underlined by commentators,[28] but in this case Joyce was important for problematizing what Brown calls "the mereness of things", and this by investing a great deal of narrative energy in what might appear to be trivial objects.[29]

The problem with the 'thing' is that while it insistently "demands to be perceived, thought, and named" (Tropes 256), it paradoxically defies any such attempt at representation. And since it remains, as Miller suggests, outside any referential or perceptive framework, "it can only be perceived, thought or named in figures or in negations" (257). This recalls the tantalizing aspect of traumatic experiences, which invite, as they persistently resist, being represented. Trauma, in this sense, *becomes* the 'Thing', the 'Other', which eludes literal language, and can be captured at best indirectly through the circuitous workings of figurative language.

The 'thing' resonates also with trauma in the way in which it is capable of triggering a heightened state of consciousness that is not without its dangers. This is so because while objects are a crucial part of the structure that allows us to apprehend the world around us, their 'overwhelming proximity', to use Merlau-Ponty's terms, often brings about hallucinations and myth. Thus, just as the trauma victim usually experiences what Bernard Blackstone calls a state of 'abnormal perception", so does the artist who 'seeks to attain the status of things' need to go beyond conventional modes of perception. The lengthy passages in Mrs Dalloway dealing with Septimus represent, in Blackstone's view, "the world seen from a mind so exquisitely sensitive that it has become unbalanced" (Blackstone 79); yet

in this world we also find

> Virginia Woolf's vision of *things* carried to an extreme point. Her sensitiveness is just of this quality, kept in check by humour and irony, by the historical sense, by an interest in human beings...she shows us what happens to this vision when the checks have been removed. (Author's italics, 79)

Blackstone's 'checks' recall Freud's concept of the 'protective shield' which he describes in Beyond the Pleasure Principle as a cluster of layers that protect the organism from the energies and stimuli of the external world. For Freud, the failure of the protective shield heralds the onset of trauma: We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. (23)

Woolf's 'visionary' style, together with the book's repetitive tropes, point to the possibility that Mrs Dalloway may itself be a site of trauma. In fact, one is under the impression that Woolf is trying to trace the origins of Septimus's trauma, an attempt that ineluctably goes awry. This raises the question of whether Woolf's desire to comprehend the incomprehensible was in fact a displaced attempt at self-knowledge. The early studies of Woolf's work were primarily concerned with issues of a literary nature and tended to steer clear of the details of the author's life. This resulted in a gap between Woolf's work and her life, a gap that many commentators seemed reluctant to bridge. In The Unknown Virginia Woolf, Roger Poole stresses the need to reassess Woolf's work in the light of her own lived experiences, as some of these experiences would provide the key to several

recurrent themes in her novels. In support of Poole's argument, one might point to Woolf's treatment of the character of Mrs Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, which provided the author with the possibility of a cathartic discharge of her strong emotions with regards to her father. But if this were true of To the Lighthouse, would it also be true of Mrs Dalloway? In other words, can we find in Woolf's life the answer to the persistently gloomy mood of her fourth novel?

Judging by Woolf's own comments about the progress of the novel, there seems to be little doubt that Mrs Dalloway was from the beginning granted special attention by its author. Woolf started work on the book in the fall of 1922, that is immediately after the publication of Jacob's Room. In the spring of the following year, she was already excited that her circle of Bloomsbury friends, including E. M. Forster, seemed to admire her book: "They think of my next book, which I think of calling The Hours, with excitement. This does encourage me" (Diary 2: 242). A month later, however, inspired by Katherine Mansfield's comments on her own writing in The Dove's Nest, Woolf started to have doubts not only about the book but her writing in general: "but now what do I feel about *my* writing? – this book, that is, The Hours, if that's its name? one must write from deep feeling, says Dostoevsky. And do I?" (248). Woolf then goes on to talk about direction she thought her book would take, and this in a language that shows both anticipation and apprehension:

> The Hours…is going to be the devil of struggle. The design is queer & so masterful. I'm always having to wrench my substance to fit it. The design certainly is original, & interests me hugely. I should like to write away & away at it, very quick and fierce. Needless to say, I cant. In three weeks from today I shall be dried up. (249)

The psychological intensity of writing Mrs Dalloway is also echoed in Quentin Bell's biography, when he describes "a short but violent mental tremor" that Woolf experienced in September of the same year (100). The incident occurred when Woolf went to meet her husband Leonard in the train station on "a strange night", and experienced instead "an intensity of feeling" which led her to think that "[r]eality…was unveiled" (100). The significance of the experience in Bell's view is that it might have been connected to the book she was working on, "for at that time she was describing the madness of Septimus Warren Smith" (101). Another unsettling event that could have been at the origin of the book according to Bell was the sudden death in 1922 of Katherine Maxse, a close friend whom Woolf had known from when she was a child. Katherine, or Kitty as she was called, died after she fell from the top of a flight of stairs, and Woolf interpreted her death as an act of suicide; and it was almost certainly this event, Bell suggests, that "helped transform the stories into a book and to give that book its final character" (87). If Bell were right in his guess, then this would explain the recurrent motif of the old lady ascending the stairs in Mrs Dalloway, as well as the repetition of the words 'stairs' and 'staircase' just before Septimus commits suicide: "he saw her amount the appalling staircase" (107), "Septimus could hear her talking to Holmes on the staircase", "Holmes was coming upstairs" and so on (108).[30]

Whether Bell's conjectures are accurate or not is not what matters here; what is important is that together with Woolf's own comments they point to an originary crisis that lay at the roots of Mrs Dalloway, a crisis for which the act of writing the book was perhaps intended as a remedial strategy. To find the road to

this crisis, as is usually the case with writings about trauma, is to come against a series of gaps and breaks which characterize the discourse of those who attempt to bear witness to traumatic experiences. Things are even more complicated in the case of a writer like Woolf who, while leaving a wealth of prefatory work (a diary, an autobiography, prefaces), still puzzles readers by "pretending to reveal the origins of her novel so as to hide them away, the better to conceal them behind a veil" (Ferrer 11).

If this strategy of concealment were to be admitted, then it would be logical to seek that truth which lies behind a veil in unexpected places. In other words, it is by reading against the grain that we are likely to arrive at an understanding of a novel like Mrs Dalloway. We have seen, for instance, that in talking about the genesis of her book Woolf insisted that Septimus was not going to be there at all, and that the unequivocal protagonist of the book was Clarissa. In November 1923, she wrote in her diary: "the doubtful point is I think the character of Mrs Dalloway. It may be too stiff, too glittering & tinsely – But then I can bring innumerable other characters to her support" (272). Almost a year later, and at the final stages of writing the book, we find the author "driving my way through the mad chapters of Mrs D[alloway]. My wonder is whether the book would have been better without them" (321). This would mean one of two things: either the author thought the parts that deal with Septimus were not good enough from a literary point of view, and was therefore worried that they would result in a negative critical response; or, she dreaded those parts *precisely* because they were the closest she could get to the source of her own problem, and she therefore backs away from them just as the

sleeper wakes in fright from a traumatic dream. I take the second hypothesis to be more probable, and I would argue that it is precisely in the distance that Woolf tried to create between herself and the character of Septimus that the key to her own trauma lies. Consider for instance this diary entry of 1924:

> I see that Mrs Dalloway is going to stretch beyond October. In my forecasts I always forgot some most important intervening scenes: I think I can go straight at the grand party & so end; forgetting Septimus, which is a very intense & ticklish business… (Diary 2: 310)

Clear in Woolf's words is not only her attempt (conscious / unconscious?) at evading ("forgetting") the chapters that deal with Septimus, but also her acknowledgement that these chapters are sensitive ("ticklish").

Nor is it hard to find evidence of the parallels between Woolf and Septimus. Septimus suffers from a severe mental condition and so did Woolf at various points in her life[31]; Septimus commits suicide and Woolf, after a few unsuccessful attempts, finally took her own life; at the height of his illness, Septimus hears birds singing in Greek, and likewise Bell says that during her breakdown of 1904, Woolf "lay in bed, listening to the birds singing in Greek and imagining King Edward VII lurked in the azaleas using the foulest possible language" (90); the motif of the birds singing in Greek would be echoed again by Woolf in her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" when, praising the grandeur and mastery of Greek drama, she writes: "[h]ere we listen to the nightingale whose song echoes through English literature singing in her own Greek tongue" (CR 28). Septimus's problem is that he cannot feel, and Bell tells us that Virginia Woolf was constantly tormented by the fact that she was "frigid" (6).

Bell is using the word 'frigid' here in a sexual context to refer to Woolf's inability to have sexual relations with her husband. Bell also alludes to the part played by George Duckworth's sexual advances *vis-à-vis* the young Virginia but only to minimize their significance: "George certainly had left Virginia with a deep aversion to lust; but perhaps he did no more than inflame a deeper wound and confirm Virginia in her disposition to shrink from the crudities of sex" (6). Yet, one should be careful not to rush – as Bell does – into a theory of Woolf's homosexuality to explain her apparent aversion to sex. A number of critics have recently argued that George's sexual attention to his half-sister did have considerable psychological effects on her as evidenced in her autobiographical work Moments of Being. In a section of this autobiography entitled 'A Sketch of the Past' written towards the end of Woolf's life, the author, looking back on her childhood, recounts a strange event:

> There was a small looking-glass in the hall at Talland House. It had, I remember, a ledge with a brush on it. By standing on tiptoe I could see my face in the glass. When I was six or seven perhaps, I got into the habit of looking at my face in the glass. But I only did this if I was sure that I was alone. I was ashamed of it. A strong feeling of guilt seemed naturally attached to it. But why was this so? (68)

Woolf then goes on to conduct a self-analysis in order to answer this question and find the origins of this problem, and one of the causes that present itself to her is another memory – this time involving Gerald Duckworth:

> Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto [a ledge], and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember

> resenting, disliking it – what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? (69)

In another section 'Reminiscences', written much earlier, Woolf implies that her other half-brother George was guilty of the same incestuous conduct: "he would play with us in the back garden and pretend, for we guessed that it was pretence, that he read our school stories" (MB 57). It becomes clear from the span of almost thirty-five years that separates these two accounts that Woolf was considerably more affected by her half-brothers' sexual attention than Quentin Bell seems to suggest. In 'A Sketch of the Past', again, and after musing on the complexity of her attitude to her body, Woolf mentions a dream that had some connection to the looking-glass incident: "I dreamt that I was looking in a glass when a horrible face – the face of an animal – suddenly showed over my shoulder. I cannot be sure if this was a dream, or if it happened" (*MB* 69). Poole interprets the dream as an incarnation of what Woolf must have perceived as the animal lust of her half-brothers.

Woolf's retrospective incomprehension and confusion ("I cannot be sure if this was a dream, or if it happened") is characteristic of trauma as a truth that, "in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Unclaimed Experience 4). Woolf's wondering whether the animal face she saw in the mirror was real or part of a dream seems to be beside the point, because in either case it is a vision that would haunt both her mind and writing for years. The animal in the dream, for instance, will reappear under a different guise in The Voyage Out in Rachel's dream. Animal imagery also abounds in Mrs Dalloway,

especially in connection to Miss Kilman, who, like Woolf, has to come to terms with the sexual part of herself: "it was the flesh that she must control" (94). Miss Kilman is described as having "the power and taciturnity of some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare" (92); she is also 'heavy', 'ugly', has a way of "eating with intensity" (95) – all attributes that precisely emphasize the lack of femininity in her person. Miss Kilman, we are told has "a violent grudge against the world" (94), and like Mrs Swithin in Between the Acts, she turns to religion for comfort.

Yet, despite her best attempts at projecting inner peace and happiness, Miss Kilman only succeeds in revealing the extent of her bitterness when she thinks that "[t]he pleasure of eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her, and than to be baffled even in that!" (95); or else when she complains about her situation using such metaphors as "she was like a wheel without a tyre" (MD 95). The failure of her faith in God to appease her turbulent desires is also reflected in her language, which is constantly governed by a binary oppositions such as body/soul, comfort/suffering, delicate/monster, pleasure/faith, agony/escape, and so on. And although Woolf never had any such reverence for religion, a parallel could still be established with Miss Kilman, who like the author is deeply ashamed of her body: "the world…scorned her, sneered at her, cast her off, beginning with this indignity – the infliction of her unlovable body which people could not bear to see" (94). One might see in this an echo of the looking glass incident which Woolf recounted in her memoir.

The incidents with George and Gerald, however, were only one part of the tumultuous atmosphere in which Woolf lived as a child. In a study of Woolf's childhood, Louise DeSalvo has made the case for the existence of what she calls a pattern of "incest, sexual violence, and abusive behavior" in the Stephen family (1). As well as being a victim of incest herself, Woolf had to go through the additional trauma of witnessing the other young female members of her household being either sexually or emotionally abused. In turn, Woolf had to witness the cruelty with which her parents dealt with her mentally challenged half-sister Laura; then it was her other half-sister Stella's turn to suffer the "violent pursuit" of her cousin J. K. Stephen, a situation which must have been extremely shocking for Woolf because despite their knowledge of J. K.'s insane and violent character, her parents would still allow him unlimited access to Stella. Next in the list of victimized girls was Woolf's elder sister Vanessa and the closest of all her siblings. As shown in Woolf's memoir, Vanessa was the target of George's Duckworth's violent "gusts of passion" and incestuous assaults from 1897 until 1904 (DeSalvo).

In the opening of 'A Sketch of the Past', Virginia Woolf tells us that her most vivid impression of her childhood is "of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a yellow blind" (MB 64). She also recalls that "the rooks cawing [was] part of the waves breaking…and the splash as the wave drew back and then it gathered again" (66). Her next memory is that of the looking-glass phobia and the incestuous incident with Gerald. As in Woolf's other works, the sea imagery is here linked to fear and disaster. Louise DeSalvo has pointed to the frequent use by incest victims

of drowning metaphors, a feature that is strikingly present in Woolf's writing and especially in Mrs Dalloway. Images of drowning are particularly associated with the character of Septimus, who is in many ways Woolf's double. Septimus frequently compares himself to a drowned person: "[h]e himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock" (52); and again "this outcast, who gazed at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world" (69) Elsewhere, in a remarkable moment of self-reflexivity in the text, we are told that Clarissa is "fond of ...nautical metaphors" (58).

The atmosphere of gloom in Mrs Dalloway was also certainly informed by the collective feelings of shock and loss that were predominant in the wake of World War I. The book could be seen from this perspective both as an attempt to bear witness to the effects of the Great War on the nation's psyche, and as a ritual of mourning aiming at overcoming these effects. Woolf's insistence on the belated repercussions of the war is evident in the way the narrator emphatically asserts with mock confidence at the beginning of the book that "the war was over...thank heaven – over" (4), only to show throughout the book the persistence of the war trauma in the minds of thousands of young men like Septimus Smith. This is also evident in the fact that the book was begun four years after the end of the war that is in 1922, a year that saw the appearance of two key modernist works dealing the with the themes of loss and failure in post-war Europe – James Joyce's Ulysses and T. S. Eliot's The Waste land.

To point to the impact of the Great War on Virginia Woolf's person and writings, however, is to come up against a strong current of Woolf criticism that

has long maintained the view that Woolf was almost unaware of the developments in the war.[32] This view was for the most part based on the scarcity of references to the war in Woolf's diary and letters. Recently, however, scholars have started to question this and similar assumptions about Woolf's attitude to the war and her so-called 'apolitical' perspective. In the introduction to the volume Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth, Mark Hussey points to the centrality of the war theme in Woolf's work, a feature which he links to the continuities between private and public violence in Woolf's view (3).

I would argue that it is *precisely* in the paucity of references to the war *as it was happening* that we are likely to find evidence of the traumatic impact it had on Woolf. Both in her diary and in her letters, Woolf tried to keep a record of countless events in her life, important and otherwise. The war, however, was not an event like others; it had the traumatic consequence of shattering what Karen Levenback calls a "sense of immunity" from outside danger that Woolf shared with most English people at the time (42). It is true that at the very beginning of the war Woolf's attitude was marked by a denial of the reality of what was happening, as is shown in a letter addressed to Katharine Cox, dated August 12, 1914:

> I never felt anything like the general insecurity. We left Asheham a week ago, and it was practically under martial law. There were soldiers marching up and down the line, and men digging trenches and it was said that Asheham barn was to be used as a hospital. All the people expected an invasion – Then we went through London – and oh Lord! What a lot of talk there was! (Letters 2: 82)

As the war raged on, however, and reports of casualties continued to arrive, Woolf started to think that the event *was* after all probably worth the talk, and in 1916 her

exasperation was evident as she began to wonder when "this preposterous masculine fiction" was going to end (Letters 2: 89). The stark reality of war started to descend on her with such intensity that, toward the end of the conflict, she found herself writing to her sister Vanessa: "you almost lost me. Nine bombs on Kew; 7 people killed in one house, a hotel crushed…" (Letters 2: 96). One should not be led by the detached, almost casual, style of these remarks into believing that Woolf did not care about the loss of human life that the war was causing. She was, on the contrary, extremely sensitive to the plight of those women who had lost their husbands or sons to the war, having had her own share of death and loss in the family. This ability to empathize with the bereaved is clearly reflected in her mature fiction. In Jacob's Room, for instance, we are under the impression that Woolf's sympathy lies more with Betty Flanders whose son Jacob is killed in the war than with the tragic but supercilious Jacob himself; in Mrs Dalloway, the figure of the bereaved woman is represented by Mrs Foxcroft who is "eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed", and Lady Bexborough "who opened the bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favorite, killed" (4). She also appears as the elderly woman in Peter Walsh's dream, who "seems (so powerful in this infirmity) to seek, over the desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world" (43).

Woolf herself was not left untouched by the loss brought about by the war. In 1915, her childhood friend and congenial literary spirit Rupert Brooke died in the war at the age of 27. This event marked a crucial moment in Woolf's

developing conception of the war and her understanding of its grim realities. The significance of this loss for Woolf was not only that it meant the end of a long friendship, nor was Brooke the only poet to die in the war; what was especially tragic about Brooke's death was that it symbolized the loss of an entire generation of young, talented Englishmen. Brooke's promising poetic career as and his legendary looks made it painfully clear to politicians and ordinary men alike what irreplaceable loss the war was leaving behind.[33]

The dangers of the war came even closer to the Woolfs as they faced the possibility of Leonard's conscription. Leonard was called up in October 1917, at a time when Virginia was recovering from one of her worst breakdowns. The two knew perfectly well that if Leonard was to go to the front, the stress and anxiety would most likely destroy her nerves and plunge her into yet another breakdown. The situation must have been extremely difficult for the Woolfs, as is shown in this diary entry: "[i]t was piteous to see him [Leonard] shivering, physically shivering, so that we lit his gas fire, and only by degrees became more or less where we were in spirits; & still, if one could wake to find it untrue, it would be a mercy" (Diary 2: 56). And although Leonard was eventually spared by the medical board thanks to "a trembling of the hands which prevented him from filling tea cups with any ease or, on occasions, from signing his own name" (Bell 30), the year 1917 would prove to be disastrous for the Woolfs. In December, Leonard's brothers Cecil and Philip were hit by one shell that killed the former and left the latter almost a cripple. A year later, on seeing how wretched and divested of hope the convalescing Philip

looked, Woolf reflected: "[t]he more one sees of the effects on young men who should be happy the more one detests the whole thing" (Diary 2: 123).

Woolf's displeasure with the war must have only intensified after the Armistice, as scores of shell-shocked soldiers returned home from the front to face the post-traumatic consequences of the brutal scenes they had witnessed during the war. The plight of these traumatized soldiers is remarkably captured by Wilfred Owen who, ironically, would not survive the war:

> These are men whose minds the Dead have ravished.
> Memory fingers in their hair of murders,
> Multitudinous murders they have witnessed.
> Wading sloughs of flesh these helpless wander, –
> Treading blood from lungs that had loved laughter.
> Always they must see these things and hear them,
> Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles,
> Carnage imcomparable, and human squander –
> Rucked too thick for these men's extrication". (77)

These lines are from a 1917 poem entitled 'Mental Cases', and they are significant because they show that while the war may have been over for the civilian population, it was not entirely so for these 'mental cases'. For these men, 'sunlight [still] seems a bloodsmear, night comes blood-black / dawn breaks like a wound that bleeds afresh" (Owen 77). Owen, of course, had a first-hand experience of the horrors of the war, and cases like these must have been a common sight during his time at the front. In 1917, he wrote to his mother: "[m]y feet ached until they could ache no more, and so they temporarily died. I was kept warm by the ardour of Life within me. I forgot hunger in the hunger for Life...We were marooned in a frozen desert. There is no sign of life on the horizon and a thousand signs of death" (121). Unlike Owen, however, Woolf did not witness the Great War first hand, and her

experience of it was dependent for the most part on what she heard from the people around her. What Woolf did see, however, was certainly enough to leave a permanent mark on her mind. In 1910, Woolf had declared in her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (91). This statement was part of an elaborate argument for the necessity of new techniques in the novel to deal with the 'modern' human condition. It would seem, however, that had she later been given a chance to revise her position, she would have set the year 1918 as a turning point in modern history and in her conception of human nature. In June of that year, Woolf reproduced the same railway carriage setting in order to make a new statement: "[p]erhaps the horrible sense of community which the war produces, as we all sat in a third class railway carriage together, draws one's attention to the animal human being more closely" (Diary 2: 153).

This is an important statement because it anticipates Woolf's mood during the early phase of the Second World War, and the contradictory feelings she experienced in response to the threats posed by that massive conflict. Just like the Great War, this second European drama brought about a strong 'sense of community' that proved salutary in the face of the threat of collective disaster and shrinking national boundaries. Yet this sense of community was 'horrible', as Woolf says, because it evolved in large part as an ineffectual attempt to mask the grim realities of the war and the pervasive sense of doom that it projected. More importantly, the sense of belonging to a shared tradition was seen by Woolf as being perhaps a necessary if futile response to the growing conviction of mankind's

potential for violence and destruction. This idea was be consolidated, in large part, by her reading of Freud's late work during the thirties, and would be explored more thoroughly in her last novel Between the Acts.

Notes

[1] With the exception of Lytton Strachey, Woolf's circle of family and friends was unanimous in praising the book. Leonard Woolf thought it was her best; Jacques Raverat, a French painter with whom Virginia Woolf maintained a life-long correspondence wrote from this death bed: "[a]lmost it's enough to make me want to live a little longer, to continue to receive such letters and such books" (Diary 7); even the usually fastidious and much respected E. M. Forster expressed great admiration.

[2] For the elegiac theme in Mrs Dalloway see for instance Laura Marcus, Virginia Woolf (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004); see also Elizabeth Abel, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of psychoanalysis (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1989). Christine Froula, in Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-garde (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) sees Mrs Dalloway as developing out of Woolf's attempt to modernize the genre of elegy "by adopting its poetics to prose fiction and its work of mourning to post-war London's post-theological cosmos" (87).

[3] This has resulted in a variety of feminist approaches to the book; for a Lacanian-inspired feminist criticism of Mrs Dalloway, see for instance Makiko Minow-Pinkney, Virginia Woolf & the Problem of the Subject (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).

[4] In other words, Septimus was seen as Clarissa's double. Here, again, critics seemed to follow the path that Woolf pointed to when she declared in the preface to American edition of 1928 that Septimus was to be Clarissa's double.

[5] The trigger does not necessarily have to be an important event or one related to the traumatic experience itself. As Judith Herman observes, "[s]mall, seemingly insignificant reminders can also evoke these [traumatic] memories, which often return with the all vividness and emotional force of the original event. Thus, even normally safe environments may come to feel dangerous, for the survivor can never be assured that she will not encounter some reminder of her trauma. Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery (New York: Basic Books, 1992) 37.

[6] Miller's essay "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure" is an excellent gloss on the deconstructive concept of *mise en abyme.* Within the so-called linguistic moment, Miller says, a distinction has to be made between the Socratic critics with their promise of a scientific understanding of literary study, and the Apollonian/Dionysian or uncanny critics whose approach is rather "wildly orgiastic and irrational" (122). Thus, although the work of these uncanny critics might give the impression of a 'sane' and 'reasonable' procedure, "[s]ooner or later there is an encounter with "an aporia" or impasse. The bottom drops out, or there is an 'abyssing', an insight one can almost grasp or recognize as part of the familiar landscape of the mind, but not quite, as though the mental eye could not quite bring the material into lucid focus" (123). The encounter with the abyss, however, does not mean that one has reached a solid bottom, a stable footing that would open up the possibility of absolute knowledge, because the "*mise en abyme* of uncanny criticism…is not the abyss itself in the sense of some direct representation of the truth of things…There is no truth of things, as such, to be represented. The mise en abyme of uncanny criticism is rather the ordering of the abyss, the blank, *cent blancs*, its formulation in one or another terminology or figure" (131). The 'ordering' of the abyss would mean that, far from reaching any closure, the critic will continue to feel "his way from figure to figure, from concept to concept, from mythical motif to mythical motif, in a repetition which is in no sense a parody" (126). J. Hillis Miller, 'Stevens's Rock and Criticism as Cure', Theory Now and Then (Durham: Duke UP, 1991).

[7] In Janet's famous formulation, "Presentification consists of making present a state of mind and a group of phenomena". He explains that the "real present for us is an act of certain complexity which we grasp as one single state of consciousness in spite of this complexity" (quoted in H. F. Ellenberger 376). For Ellenberger, "the natural tendency of the mind is to roam through the past and the future; it requires a certain effort to keep one's attention in the present, and still more to concentrate it on present action". H.F. Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry (New York: Basic Books, 1970) 376. Due to this 'complexity', the act of the 'presentification' is presented as a difficult maneuver, what Leys calls "a feat of internal policing or self-surveillance by which at any moment we are compelled to attend to

and communicate our present experiences to ourselves and above all to others…and to situate and organize those experiences in their proper time and place" (112).

[8] Drawing on contemporary neurobiological findings, MacCurdy writes that while ordinary events are assimilated in such a way that their individual details will be forgotten, emotionally charged or extreme events are encoded in the brain as images and emotions and can thus become indelible. Thus, "traumatic memories are sensory; that, is the body reacts to them even when the conscious mind is not aware of such reactions. This is because these iconic memories are stored in the parts of the brain that not only retain these memories but are responsible for attaching emotional weight to them". Marian MacCurdy, The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing about Trauma (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2007) 21.

[9] In the short story 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', the sketch that would later 'branch' into the novel, Clarissa repeatedly evokes Shelley's line about mourning, while musing on the ancient poets' greatness in dealing with the theme of death: "And now you can never mourn, can never mourn, she repeated, her eyes straying over the window; for it ran in her head; the test of great poetry; the moderns had never written anything one wanted to read about death, she thought; and turned". Virginia Woolf, 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf, ed. Susan Dick (London: Hogarth P, 1985).

[10] In Memoires for Paul de Man, Derrida talks about the "strange situation" where everything he said following de Man's death, he would have been able to say *before* he died. "It suffices that I know him to be mortal, Derrida says, and he know me to be mortal – there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude" (29).

[11] In a study of the effects of Holocaust trauma on survivors, Dori Laub points to a pervasive sense among survivors of an "imaginary complicity… and a conviction of their having been chosen for a secret mission". "survivors, he says, often claim that they experience the feeling of belonging to a 'secret order' that is sworn to silence. Because of their 'participation' in the Holocaust they have become the 'bearers of a secret (*Geheimnisstraeger*)' never to be divulged". Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimoney: the Process and the Scourge'. Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995).

[12] Derrida observes that, while writing in the wake of Barthes's death, he noticed that he was using capital letters in the same unique way that Barthes was known for; Derrida sees this as an act of mimetism peculiar to mourning.

[13] In Of Grammatology, Derrida writes: "[w]ithout a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear (62). The 'trace' is one of Derrida's most elusive concepts, yet is important for an understanding of his thought. The "trace" is Derrida's alternative to the Saussurean sign, with its assumption of a stable relationship between signifier and signified. Instead, Derrida argues that each signified carries the trace of other signifieds in an endless chain of signification. Leitch defines the trace as the 'sum of all possible relations, whether isolated or not, which inhabit and constitute the sign" (28). The concept of 'the trace' also implies the absence of an absolute origin, an idea that it central to the deconstructive project.

[14] In a study of the linguistic behavior of people suffering from aphasia, Jakobson identified two kinds of speech disturbance which he termed 'similarity disorder' and 'continuity disorder', and associated with the metonymic and metaphoric aspect of language, respectively. Jakobson then proceeded to make generalizations about forms of writing, including literary writing, suggesting that realist writing shows highly a metonymic quality whereas modernist, experimental writing has a more metaphoric quality. This would imply that most modern writing, which is a reaction against traditional realism, is predominantly metaphoric. As David Lodge has shown, however, modern prose, in particular, is generally characterized by what he calls an "extensive and deliberate exploitation of metonymy" (486). Lodge suggests that while Jakobson was right about the connections between the metaphoric and modernist fiction, one should be aware that "prose fiction is inherently metonymic, and cannot be displaced towards the metaphoric pole without turning into poetry" (493). David Lodge, "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy". Modernism: 1890–1930, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

[15] Derrida warns that "the border line is never a secure place, it never forms an indivisible line, and it is always on the border that the most disconcerting problems of topology get posed". Jacques Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis", quoted in Linden Peach, Virginia Woolf (New York: St. Martin's P, 2000) 109.

[16] In her discussion of Paul de Man's essay "Autobiography as Defacement", Barbara Johnson points to the "reversibility" inherent to the mode of propospopeia, "a reversibility that, in seeming to bring the dead back to life, threatens to strike the living dead" (22). Barbara Johnson, The Wake of Deconstruction (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

[17] Derrida describes this temptation as "the worst of temptations, the most indecent and most murderous" (The work of Mourning 38).

[18] Cathy Caruth, "Parting words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival", in Acts of Narrative, ed. Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003). Caruth recounts the story of Gregory, a 17 year-old child whose best friend, Khalil, is killed in a shooting. In refusing to take possession of the dead child's cap as a memento, Caruth argues, Gregory declines to "simply re-enact his friend's or attempt to return to his life, but bears witness, creatively, in the act of parting from his dead friend" (58).

[19] Jacob's Room is regarded by many critics and reviewers as the starting point for Woolf's serious career. With the exception of Middleton Murray, who famously stated that Woolf had reached a dead end with the book, commentators were unanimous in their praise: Leonard Woolf thought it was 'amazingly well written' and called it "a work of genius...unlike any other novel" (Diary 2: 186); Quentin Bell believed that it marked for Woolf "the beginning of her maturity and her fame" (88); and T. S. Eliot wrote famously: "you have freed yourself from any compromise between the traditional novel and your original gift. It seems to me that you have a certain gift which existed between your other novels and the experimental prose of Monday or Tuesday and that you have made a remarkable success". Quoted in Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography (New York: Quality Paper Book Club, 1992) 88. Virginia Woolf herself seemed to be equally satisfied with her novel. In August 1922, that is three months before the publication of Jacob's Room, she wrote in her diary: "[t]here is no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice; & that interests me so much that I feel in can go ahead without praise" (Diary 2: 186).

[20] According to Ruth Leys, it is the lack of what she calls the 'specular distance' between the event and the victim that that lies at the heart of that incomprehensibility characteristic of trauma. "[f]rom the beginning, she says, trauma was understood as an experience that immersed the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it precluded the kind of specular distance necessary for the knowledge of what happened". Leys compares this identification with the traumatic experience to the kind of identification or imitation that takes place during a hypnotic trance. Hence, her word for this model of trauma is 'mimesis'. Ruth Leys, Trauma: A Genealogy (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000) 9.

[21] The 'primal scene' is Freud's term for those originary traumatic events that lie behind adult neuroses. He used the term in the now famous "Wolf Man" case history to refer to a sexual scene that the patient witnessed at the age of one and half. The focal point in this case is a dream that the patient had of wolves in tree, a dream that Freud associated with infantile sexuality. At the end of the analysis, Freud came to the conclusion that the patient had seen his parents having sex 'a tergo', and called this scene the 'primal scene', of which the dream was a reproduction. As Laplanche and Pontalis have observed, however, the reality of the primal scene – whether it is "an actually experienced event or [...] a pure fantasy" (335) – continued to be a source of tension for Freud and the psychoanalytic project at large. For Freud's initial emphasis on the reality of the primal scene seemed to be destabilized by his insistence that it is available for interpretation only through a deferred action. J. Laplanche & J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, trans. Donald Nocholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973).

[22] Clarissa chooses life over death, and this choice is symbolized by her party. The narrator, however, does not seem neutral (and neither does Clarissa herself) to the use of the party as a metaphor for the forces of life. Consider, for instance, Peter Walsh's repeated jeers at Clarissa's parties: "the perfect hostess', he said to her, whereupon she winced all over" (46); the same disparaging attitude would be echoed again in The Years by Martin toward Kitty's parties.

[23] Mrs Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf's beloved mother died in 1895 when Virginia was only 13; two years later, Stella, Virginia's half sister died of peritonitis; her father, Sir Leslie Stephen died in 1904; in 1906 tragedy hit again with the untimely death of her brother Thoby, a promising Cambridge student, at the age of 26.

[24] The figure of the tree, as Douglas Mao observes, has occupied a central position in Western literary and philosophical discourse. Mao especially cites Saussure's Course in General Linguistics, where "the tree appears as the referent in Saussure's crucial diagram of the signified-signifier relationship...the Latin word 'arbor' stands as a signifier, and the 'concept' of a tree, illustrated by a small drawing of a branched thing with a trunk and leaves, appears as signified". Douglas Mao, Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1998) 46

[25] Van Alphen defines the index as "a sign motivated by contiguity, one form of which is continuity; there is juxtaposition in time or space or causality between the sign and the object it stands for" (32). In his study of the representation of WW II in the work of the Dutch writer and visual artist Herman Dirk van Dodeweerd (known as Armando), van Alphen writes that "*[h]is language is radically indexical.* He "encircles" the unspeakable of "the war" by speaking, or representing what is contiguous to it, what touches it. Not the violence and destruction of death itself, but what was present when it happened is what he formulates or shapes" (32). In this case what was present was the trees, which witnessed the horror and have therefore become in Armando's opinion 'complicit' and also 'guilty': "[t]he trees were witnesses but do not testify. Their refusal to testify, to serve as traces of "the war", constitutes their guilt: trees are guilty not only because of their inability or unwillingness to testify, but because they efface the traces left by the violence. They overgrow the place where it happened" (34). Ernst van Alphen, "Touching Death", Death and Representation, ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Maryland: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993).

[26] In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud takes Tasso's Gerusalemme Liberata to be the paradigm for the trauma experience. In the story, Tancred unknowingly kills his beloved Clorinda, and when the terrible knowledge dawns on him, he strikes a tree with his sword only to realize that he has once again wounded his beloved, whose soul was imprisoned in the tree.

[27] It seems that for Woolf the fascination of objects lies in their indifference to the human world. Thus the narrator in the experimental short story "The Mark on the Wall" muses upon "worshiping the chest of drawers, worshiping solidity, worshiping the impersonal world which is proof of the existence of other than ours...wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree; and trees grow, and we don't know how they grow. For years and years they grow, without paying attention to us...". The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf, ed. Susan Dick (London: Hogarth P, 1985) 82. The same idea would be echoed again by Woolf in her 1930 essay "On Being Ill" where, in talking about flowers, she writes: "it is by their indifference that they are comforting. That snowfield of the mind, where man has not trodden, is visited by the cloud, kissed by the falling petal, as, in another sphere, it is the great artists, the Miltons and the Popes, who console not by their thought of us but by their forgetfulness". Virginia Woolf, Virginia Woolf: Collected Essays (London: Hogarth P, 1967) 198.

[28] For Joyce's influence on Woolf see Leon Edel, "The Novel as Poem" in Virginia Woolf: A Collection of critical Essays, ed. Claire Sprague (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971); see also Maria DiBattista, Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: the Fables of Anon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

[29] Other remarkable examples of modernism's preoccupation with things are to be found on the other side of the Atlantic. These include Wallace Stevens' poetry especially his poem entitled 'Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing itself', a poem that in the words of Miller "circl[es] around the thing itself" (256). One might also mention William Carlos Williams' famous dictum "no ideas but in things". William Carlos Williams, 'A Sort of Song', William Carlos Williams: Selected Poems, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions, 1985) 145.

[30] It also seems that for Clarissa, the climactic point of her much anticipated party is that moment when she stands at the top of her stairs. Early on the day of the action in the book, Clarissa, on seeing the motor car in Bond Street, thinks that she "too, gave a party. She stiffened a little; so she would stand at the top of her stairs" (13). The same poise is implied at the very end of the book: "[f]or there she was" (141).

[31] Roger Poole objects to the use of the word 'madness' to characterize Virginia Woolf's condition. In The Unknown Virginia Woolf, Poole points to the ways in which Quentin Bell's indiscriminate and for the most part inaccurate use of words like 'mad' and 'insane' to describe Virginia's mental breakdowns have resulted in a misconception about the author's condition.

[32] In her edition of Virginia Woolf's letters, Joanne Trautmann Banks states that while "the war raged…Virginia was scarcely aware of it" p.74. Joanne Trautmann Banks, Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf. London: Hogarth P, 1989. Quentin Bell seems to suggest the same idea in his biography of Woolf.

[33] After his death in 1915, Rupert Brooke was transformed into a myth in the minds of Englishman, and Winston Churchill obliged by writing an obituary.

# CHAPTER 2

# 'BRINGING THE SCATTERED BITS TOGETHER': WORKING THROUGH THE TRAUMA OF HISTORY IN BETWEEN THE ACTS

In 1938 Virginia Woolf published an unconventional short story entitled 'The Shooting Party'. The story, conceived in 1932, was initially intended to be a book of caricatures about "a country house life with the red-brown pheasants" (Diary 5: 302). In its final version, however, the story is a fragmentary, elliptical account of a scene from the life of an upper-middle class family, narrated by the housekeeper Milly Masters, an elderly woman who has the characteristics of a Conradian narrator. Two elderly sisters are home, while their brother, the Squire, is out shooting pheasants in King's Ride. The striking aspect of the narrative is the juxtaposition of two contrasting scenes: the serene, domestic world of the sisters, and the bloody, chaotic events of the shooting party:

> Out in the King's Ride, the pheasants were being driven across the noses of the guns. Up they spurted from the underwood like heavy rockets, reddish purple rockets, and as they rose the guns cracked in order, eagerly, sharply, as if a line of dogs had suddenly barked. Tufts of white smoke, held together for a moment; then gently solved themselves, faded, and dispersed. (249)

Eventually, however, the two worlds clash, as the Squire violently returns home, thus revealing the utter fragility of the domestic scene:

> The immensely high door burst open. In rushed three great hounds and stood panting. Then there entered, slouching, the Squire himself in shabby gaiters. The dogs pressed round him, tossing their heads, snuffling at his pockets. Then they bounded forward. They smelt the meat... 'Curse you, cursed you!' howled the Squire. But his voice was weak, as if he shouted against the wind. 'Curse you, curse you!' he shouted, now cursing his sisters...with one lash he curled to the ground the vase of chrysanthemums. Another caught Miss Rashleigh on the cheek. The old woman staggered backwards. She fell against the mantelpiece. (254)

Yet, even before this eruption of violence, the lingering mood in the household is one of anxiety and apprehension, heightened by the pervasive awareness of an

approaching end. Thus, after she has finished knitting a jersey for her son, Milly Masters ominously mutters "the end o' that!" (251); and later on, as she and Wing the gamekeeper finish emptying the blood-smeared cart of the dead pheasants, she remarks: "the last of the lot" (251); Miss Antonia, too, while having lunch with her sister, cryptically mutters "Hugh's last shoot" (251); and as they sit drinking sherry by the fireplace, the two sisters are aware that "it was the last toast, the last drop" (253).

With its Conradian echoes,[1] its premonition of a threatening destructive violence and its apocalyptic mood, 'The Shooting Party' remarkably anticipates not only the unsettling atmosphere of Woolf's final years, but also the general mood of her last novel Between the Acts. The book is as much about the contrast between the serenity of Woolf's life in the Sussex countryside and the European conflict that was brewing, as it is about various kinds of ends: the end of peace, the end of the European concept of history, the end of civilization and so on. In 1938, when 'The Shooting Party' was published and Between the Acts conceived, the Woolfs divided their time between their London residence in Tavistock Square and their country house in Rodmell. They had been staying most of the time in London with occasional stays at Monks House. Toward the end of the year, however, the situation was inverted, as the Woolfs moved to Mecklenburgh Square, and henceforward they stayed at Monks House most of the time, going to London usually once a week. The new arrangement marked a major alteration in Virginia Woolf's life: the serene beauty of the Sussex country provided a welcome change from the hectic London life.

Yet those times were far from idyllic for Woolf. There was, to begin with, the impending European war. 'The old horror' was threatening to re-emerge and to disrupt the peacefulness of her new country life. Woolf's diary entries during the last three years of her life reveal the weight of an uncertain future. "The public world notably invaded the private at M[onks] H[ouse] last weekend", she wrote in 1938. "Almost war: almost expected to hear it announced" (Diary 5: 131). And as the days went by, "the prospect of another glissade…into the abyss" (173) became more and more real, so that by the time the war actually broke out with the German invasion of Poland, there was hardly any surprise, only rather the usual village gossip and the routine business of nightly blackouts. And of course expecting the worst: "[n]o raids yet, she wrote in September 1939. Poland being conquered, & then – we shall be attended to" (236). Nor was she entirely wrong; a year later, the Battle of Britain began, bringing the horrors of war very close to Woolf, so close indeed that, in September 1941, her house at Mecklenburgh Square was severely damaged by a bomb and, a month later, her previous London house at Tavistock Square was completely demolished. "Tavistock is gone", she wrote to T. S. Eliot shortly after the incident. "We go up tomorrow to salvage what we can" (Letters 6: 441). Nor was the destructive impact of the war restricted to the city of London. Even in the relatively remote village of Rodmell, Woolf could still feel the dangerous atmosphere of the war. Just as the two elderly sisters in 'The Shooting Party', who sit quietly at their country house sipping sherry while outside "the guns were barking. Something cracked in the woodwork" and "the glass rattled in the windows" (Diary 5: 252), so did Woolf record working at Monks House while

German war planes flew overhead: "[n]ow and then theres a thud. The windows shake" (318).

Woolf's last years, however, were difficult not only because of the war. She also started to develop what Frank Kermode calls an "eschatological anxiety" (The Sense of an Ending 95). It was becoming clear to her as it was to the other modernists of her generation that hers was an age of successive ends. The German attacks on England marked for her the beginning of the end of the great age of British hegemony and imperialism. Also, saddened by the negative critical reception of Three Guineas, she started to think that her own reputation was in decline, and that she would soon see the end of her literary career: "[I] am unlikely to write anything good again", she wrote in 1938. "[I] am a secondrate, & likely, I think, to be discarded altogether" (Diary 5: 188). Her anxiety about her career was also exacerbated by the approach of old age and the growing sense of belonging to a dying generation. Those last years saw the writers of her own generation die one after the other: in January of 1939, Yeats died at the age of 74; the same year saw the death of Freud at his Hampstead home; Joyce followed suit in 1941; "Joyce", Woolf mused, "about a fortnight younger than I am" (Diary 5: 353).

These were clearly hard times, then. Woolf, however, was not one to give in to such morbid thoughts, not if she could still write. And write she did, and with outstanding energy, too. She herself was surprised when the initial feeling of 'complete nullity' that accompanied the outbreak of the war was soon superseded by "such pressure of ideas & work that I feel the old throb and spin in my head more of a drain than ever" (241). The upshot of this creative surge was a biography

and novel. Woolf had committed herself to the task of writing the life of her Bloomsbury friend Roger Fry. Yet, what began as a gesture of dedication to her dead friend ended up being a most exacting and "ungrateful task" (Bell 211). To escape the tedious engagement with the biography, Woolf turned to her new novel which she had begun to conceive in April 1938, and to which she gave the initial title of Pointz Hall. The novel, which was to be Woolf's last, was finished in February 1941, and was published posthumously as Between the Acts.

Between the Acts, which falls within what Jed Esty calls "the temporal economy of the modernist day-book" (86), in this case a June day in 1939, is organized around a village pageant celebrating the history of England. The framing narrative, however, is concerned, much like that of 'The Shooting Party', with the life of an upper-middle class family at their ancestral country house. Both Mrs Swithin and Isa, with their introspective domesticity, recall the characters of Miss Antonia and Miss Rasleigh; as for Giles and his Father Mr Oliver, they echo instead the aggressive masculinity of the Squire and his hunting friends. The events of this single day in the life of this family take place against the backdrop of the looming European war.

In many ways, Between the Acts has continuities with Mrs Dalloway, especially in its preoccupation with war and its melancholy mood. While in Mrs Dalloway Woolf sought to give expression to her own suffering by focusing on the traumatic aftereffects of war, however, Between the Acts is poised at the threshold of war but is not the less melancholy for that. The source of crisis in this case is no longer the intrusive repetition of the past in the present, but the projection of that

past onto the future. J. Hillis Miller calls this process 'extrapolation', "how one moves out into the void from the known to the unknown" (Fiction 216).[2] The characters of Between the Acts seem to be trapped in the void that separates past and future, capable neither of reuniting with the glorious past, nor of envisaging the future except in terms of chaos and despair. Trauma, in this sense, is not located in the missing of the experience but, paradoxically, in the apprehensive awareness of its imminence. The site of this kind of trauma is, therefore, the hazy region that lies between recollection and anticipation, that is to say between historical memory and subjective interpretation. The primal scene of such a trauma is therefore not an actual event, but what Ned Lukacher calls "an ontologically undecidable *textual* event that is situated in the differentiated space between historical memory and imaginative construction" (24, author's italics).

The unaccomplished and therefore elusive nature of the event is bound to be reflected in the language in which it is conveyed. Here, again, a comparison with Mrs Dalloway is useful. In that novel, language is fragmentary, repetitive, and highly symbolic, all attributes which make it a prototypical text of high modernism. Between the Acts, on the other hand, signals a return on Woolf's part, although under different auspices, to notions of plot and chronology characteristic of 19th century realism. What is striking about this 'return', however, is the way in which Woolf's attempt to establish continuities with Victorian narrative conventions is destabilized by what Miller calls "the stubborn particularity of words" (Fiction 212). Thus, although plot and chronology are preserved, they are relegated to the background, allowing Woolf to focus on the activity of words and metaphors within

language, as they disrupt the attempt to bear witness to the trauma of war: "words this afternoon ceased to lie flat in the sentence. They rose, became menacing and shook their fists at you" (BTA 55). This peculiar activity of signification recalls Shoshana Felman's notion of the unfinished nature of the language of trauma. "In the testimony", she says, "language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constatation of a verdict or the self transparency of knowledge" (Testimony 5).[3] Instead of constatively signifying the breaks inherent to trauma, that is, language perfomatively enacts these breaks. In other words, the language of trauma succeeds, as Caruth observes, *precisely* when it fails.

Between the Acts also shows a persistent preoccupation with history which is consistent with the historical ferment in which it was written. Like Moses and Monotheism, one of the founding texts of trauma theory[4] that Woolf read as she was planning her book, Between the Acts was to be inescapably entangled in the circumstances of its composition. Just as Freud had to consider the painful prospect of leaving Austria because of the looming threat of a German invasion, so did the Woolfs discuss the option of committing suicide in case England were to experience the same fate. Interestingly, however, war in Between the Acts is pushed to the background, and its impact is only indirectly felt, which suggests that Woolf's engagement with history is an attempt at what Cathy Caruth calls 'a rethinking of reference', that is, it permits "history to rise where *immediate understanding* may not" (Unclaimed Experience 11).[5] To see Between the Acts as a text that struggles with the difficulties of "writing a history from within it", is to make sense not only of its recurring tropes of origin and end, temporality and

for the various gaps in the text, and in the last analysis the elusive nature of the historical referent.

# BETWEEN THE TRAUMATIC ACTS OF HISTORY: TRAUMA AS APPREHENSION

> I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled innumerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have found the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story. And I begin to ask, Are there stories?
> – Virginia Woolf, The Waves

This passage from The Waves anticipates many of the issues raised in Between the Acts. Bernard's predicament in attempting to find the ultimate narrative form for his experience prefigures similar problems that Woolf faced in the late 1930s. Having found in the modernist fragmentary technique a suitable medium for articulating the breaks in the experience of Septimus in Mrs Dalloway, Woolf was now faced with an altogether different set of problems. Amid the 'medley' that characterized both her private and public world, she realized, to use Yeats's words, that if "the centre cannot hold / Mere anarchy [will be] loosed upon the world" (124).[6] This explains why, in sketching out her new book, Woolf finds herself entreating her muse not to "impose that huge burden on me again", an allusion perhaps to the struggle she went through in writing the disconnected story of Septimus. What she wanted this time, she adds, is "a centre: all lit" (Diary *5*: 135), that is, a privileged position from which to achieve a wholeness of vision. Yet, as the question mark at the end of Bernard's speech indicates, the task is not an easy one. In fact, the lingering mood at the end of the novel is one that echoes Bernard's very interrogation: does such a story exist indeed?

We have seen how narrative in Mrs Dalloway was an attempt to come to grips with the central experience of the novel – the trauma of Septimus Smith.

Septimus's difficulties in reconstructing and therefore overcoming his shattering war experience were the result of a gap caused by the lack of necessary distance from the experience. In Between the Acts, too, the attempt to achieve a unity of vision through narrative form is thwarted by another kind of gap – that of the unknown future. Thus, while Clarissa, Peter Walsh and Septimus are repeatedly plunged into the past, the characters in Between the Acts are equally unable to dissociate their thoughts from the impending future with its fearful uncertainties. The attempt to see the structure whole, as Frank Kermode suggests, is hampered by the position of the subject in the middle.

To underscore the importance of the future to the characters in Between the Acts might at first appear implausible, so focused is the book on the themes of past and tradition. For one thing, the center of the novel is occupied by the pageant, a celebration of English history and tradition. Tradition in this case is marked by continuity, so that "1833 was true in 1939" (BTA 48). Nor is continuity restricted to the landscape; it is also to be seen in the people who inhabit this landscape, represented in this case by the members of the audience attending the pageant: "had Figgins been there in person and called a roll call", the narrator tells us, "half the ladies and gentlemen present would have said: '*Adsum*; I'm here, in place of my grandfather or great-grandfather', as the case might be" (69). In certain cases, the continuity between past and present is so marked that it verges on literal repetition, or so it seems to Isa at least, as she sits listening to a conversation between Mr Oliver and Mrs Swithin about the prospective pageant: "every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the

pageant and the weather. Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was – one or the other. The same chime followed the same chime…" (20).

Subtly, however, the reader is made aware that continuity is present for the most part only in the minds of those who like to believe in it; in other words, rather than describing an actual situation, continuity is to large extent an effect of the mind's propensity for creating patterns. The neighborhood of Pointz Hall, for instance, has been changed by the "building of a car factory and of an aerodrome", and the old population of the village has been infused with new-comers such as "the Manresas, bringing the old houses up to date, adding bathrooms" (68). Miss LaTrobe, too, with her alien origins and homosexuality represents the new elements of discord within the seemingly homogenous make-up of the aristocratic village population. Figgins' hypothetical roll call, too, is contrasted with Reverend Streatfield's own actual roll call at the church which, if anything, points to the life-changing effects of modernization, with "the motor bike, the motor bus, and the movies" occupying an increasingly important role in people's lives.

The notion of continuity is also displaced by the recurring tropes of rupture and interruption. This is clear in the very structure of the book, with the dramatic form of the pageant interrupting the flow of the narrative. The pageant, however, is not the only disruptive element in the narrative; there are repetitive sequences such as the rape scene which Isa reads about in a newspaper, and the scene in which Bart frightens the little boy George. Even the pageant itself is interrupted on several occasions. There is, first, the arrival of Mrs Swithin which cuts the play just it begins, making Miss LaTrobe writhe in anguish: "the torture of these

interruptions", she mutters in exasperation (73). This moment of anguish, however, is nothing compared to the agonizing moment caused by a more serious interruption – the interval that gives the book its title. This particular interruption is made all the more painful as it occurs precisely at a time when Miss La Trobe seems to have finally captivated her audience. Instead, she feels that "she had gashed the scene...Just as she had brewed emotion, she split it" (85).

The drama of unfulfilled promise is not restricted to Miss La Trobe's art but is repeated on many occasions involving the other main characters. These latter seem to be constantly aspiring toward something which continues to elude them, resulting in a situation of frustrating stasis. Isa's word for such a state of affairs is 'abortive', a word particularly fitting not only for her tentative poetry, which she keeps in a "book bound like an account book in case Giles suspected" (14), but also her relentless though futile affection for 'the man in grey'. Equally ineffectual are Mrs Swithin's plans to set up a house of her own near the garden at Kensington or Kew, rather than continue to live with her brother at Pointz Hall. Giles, too, seems to be unable still to digest the fact that his childhood peer Pinsent stayed on the land and became a farmer, while he went to an office in London and became a stockbroker.

The contrasting sense of continuity and interruption are felt acutely by the characters on this June day in 1939 because of the premonition that the future is going to change everything. Accordingly, the sense of the prevalence of the ordinary that the narrative at times seems to convey is repeatedly shot through with uncomfortable glimpses of the impending future, a future conceived mainly in

terms of chaos and annihilation: "[a]t any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into Smithereens and Blast the Folly" (49). It is interesting that statements like this about the approaching war are never made directly by the characters, but are instead always expressed through the stream-of-consciousness technique, which implies that the future, with its images of war and destruction, operates primarily at the level of the unconscious. Thus relegated to the unconscious, the future, like a traumatic dream, will intrusively appear *despite* the conscious will of the characters. In fact the latter, if anything, seem to be constantly trying to keep the future at bay, and this by taking refuge in some kind of symbolic activity, whether it is Mrs Swithin's 'imaginative reconstruction of the past', or Bart's daydreams of youth and Empire, or Isa's romantic world of poetry and love.

Yet these private worlds of unity and accord, just like Mr Streatfield's speech at the end of the play, are merely desperate attempts to confer cohesion upon an otherwise discordant reality. The future in this sense, "like the sun coming through the many-veined transparent vine leaf", functions as a constant reminder that reality is "a criss-cross of lines making no pattern" (103). It is a reminder, in other words, that Mrs Swithin's religion is absolutely ineffectual in preventing the gathering storm; that Bart's Empire, just like his youth, is a thing of the past; that Isa's love for poetry and 'the gentleman farmer' will eventually degenerate into cliché. The narrator's debunking of these futile alternatives echoes Virginia Woolf's own impatience with certain discourses of the time that sought to divert attention from the grim realities of the impending war through a celebration of communal ideas such as Englishness. In Three Guineas, Woolf had criticized such

discourses for their appeal "to listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets, answering each other, assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only" (143).

Woolf too, it should be noted, had trouble accepting the reality of the looming disaster. In 1938, she still called the excruciating state of anxiety that came before the war a 'welter of unreality': "I dont feel that crisis is real", she wrote at a time when, all around her, "[e]very preparation is made. Sirens will hoot in a particular way when there's the first hint of a raid" (Diary 5:167). Later on, however, this mood of denial gave way to a resignation not unlike the one that pervades Between the Acts. The new mood was especially characterized by a persistent, almost obsessive, concern with the development of the crisis as reported by the media. Thus, in September of 1938, she recorded in her diary listening to a speech delivered by Hitler to a cheering German crowd, the histrionic overtones of which would reverberate throughout the pageant play:

> Hitler boasted & boomed but shot no solid bolt. More violent rant, & then broke off. We listened in to the end. A savage howl like a person excruciated; then howls from the audience; then a more spaced & measured sentence. Then another bark. Cheering ruled by a stick frightening to think of the faces. & the voice was frightening. (169)

Added to the increasing sense of the inevitability of the impending war was Woolf's conviction that the war was not going to be like any other catastrophe. It is true that from an early age she had gone through several devastating experiences, and had also lived through the First World War; this time around, however, she felt that she might not survive the ordeal. This sense of imminent personal annihilation was translated at the time into an increasing if morbid interest in the beauty of the

landscape at Rodmell. In January of 1941 – that is at the thick of the crisis – Woolf confessed being obsessed by a "phrase I always remember – or forget. Look thy last on all things lovely" (Diary 5: 351). The line by Walter de la Mare from a poem significantly entitled 'Fare Well' is an excellent description of Woolf's mood during those last days of her life. She was evidently bidding farewell to her beloved Sussex country by recording for the last time its generous beauty, a beauty compared to which everything else was inferior – the war, politics, and even her own writing:

> The haystack in the floods is of such incredible beauty…When I look up I see all the marsh water. In the sun deep blue, gulls caraway seeds: snowberries: atlantic flier: yellow islands: leafless trees: red cottage roofs. Oh may the flood last for ever – a virgin lip; no bungalows; as it was in the beginning. (336)

Between the Acts, too, is interspersed with similar passages celebrating the beauty of the land, the familiar, the lasting, but at the same time lamenting the fact that there will soon be no eye left to admire that beauty: "[t]hat's what makes a view so sad, Mrs Swithin remarks fatefully. And so beautiful. It'll be there…when we're not" (BTA 49).

The destructive threat of war, however, was not conceived in terms of personal annihilation only, but was seen as foreshadowing what Claire Kahane calls "an even greater meta-trauma – the potential devastation of Western civilization though a terrifying liberation of its discontents" (227). It should be noted that, after the outbreak of the war, Woolf finally started reading Freud's works such as Moses and Monotheism, Civilization and its Discontents, and especially his war-time essay 'Thoughts for the Time on War and Death', where he argues for the existence

of a primeval instinct in modern man, an instinct which is aggressive and self-destructive, and which could only be tamed and sublimated with the hard work of civilization.[7] These views, as Hermione Lee points out, were largely responsible for Woolf's fear that the world was on the brink of a regression to barbarism, and were reflected both in her fictional and non-fictional writings of the time. In October 1939, the Woolfs spent a week at their house in Mecklenburgh Square, London and were struck by the war atmosphere that pervaded the city's life during the day. By nightfall, however, the city is described in strikingly pre-historical terms:

> [a]t night it's so verdurous & gloomy that one expects a badger or a fox to prowl along the pavement. A reversion to the middle ages with all the space & the silence of the country set in this forest of black houses. A torch blinks. An old gentleman revealed. He vanishes. That red light may be a taxi or a lamppost. People grope their way to each others lairs. (Diary 5: 242-43)

Woolf then adds that, inside her own 'lair', "the clerks scream like parrots. Miss Woodward left in torrents of tears. Rain poured – profuse unbridled mediaeval rain" (243).

In Between the Acts, too, the advent of war is seen as "the primeval voice sounding in the ear of the present moment" (BTA 126), and is similarly allegorized in an ominous passage from Outline of History, in which "[p]rehistoric man…half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones" (197). During the interval between the acts of the play, Isa looks at Mrs Swithin "as if she had been a dinosaur or a very diminutive mammoth. Extinct she must be, since she had lived the in reign of Victoria" (156). Mrs Swithin's mind, too, is constantly invaded by fantasies about the time "when the earth, upon which

the Windsor chair was planted, was a riot of rhododendrons, and humming birds quivered at the mouths of scarlet trumpets" (98).[8]

It is worth noting that, contrary to the modernism of her contemporaries, with its frequent use of what Eliot called 'the mythic method' and its celebration of particular periods of the past, Woolf's 'glimpses of prehistory' do not serve to give shape and order to the chaos of modern experience, but function rather as a questioning of civilization and the view of history as a linear narrative of progress.[9] On the other hand, they also seem to question certain appropriations of Freud's notion of the 'primal scene' as a definite point of origin, and posit instead Woolf's own view that the primal scene signifies rather what Ned Lukacher calls 'an ontologically undecidable event' that is "situated between archival verification and interpretive free play" (24). Instead of 19th century fictions of origin and beginnings, therefore, Woolf underscores the notions of undecidability and construction, which would form the nucleus of her own approach to history as well as her extrapolation of the future.

Woolf's fears about the future were further intensified by the onset of her own old age and the growing sense that hers was a dying generation. Her diary entries of the period show an almost obsessive attention to her aging process and an increasing preoccupation with the idea of death. In 1939, Woolf was 59 years old and could therefore "detect every one of the gradual stages towards death" which her age brought (Diary 5: 230). This awareness of the nearness of death was to a large extent responsible for her rush to write her autobiography for the Memoir Club. "I'm on the qui vive to describe age: to note it" (212), she wrote before going

to the meeting at the Memoir Club. Old age also brought with it a feeling of vulnerability to danger that was unlike anything she had experienced during previous crises: "I got this feeling for the first time completely yesterday. The feeling of pressure, danger horror" (313). This sense of the precariousness of her situation, as well as the fact that Leonard was a Jew, made the idea of death look less scary than what might happen to the couple in the event of a German invasion. Consequently, in 1940 the Woolfs considered for the first time the option of committing suicide, an option that would be repeatedly discussed over the following months.

These suicidal thoughts, however, were mostly the result of practical considerations and do not accurately reflect Woolf's psychological state at the time, which was much more complex. It is true that Woolf's prospects prior to, and during, the war were not particularly cheerful, and this for all the reasons that have been mentioned. Yet, to say that she was utterly disillusioned and saw death as the only solution is to miss a very important aspect of her psychological state during those difficult years, namely what Hermione Lee calls her 'switches of mood'. This is to say that Woolf's mood kept vacillating between thoughts of the dark future that lay ahead and the conviction that she was still capable of writing; indeed, that she was on the brink of producing her best work. "I don't want the garage to see the end of me", she wrote in 1940. "I've a wish for 10 years more, & to write my book wh[ich] as usual darts into my brain" (Diary 5: 285). She was also intermittently seized by gusts of optimism, the idea that 'it can't last this intensity', and by her unflinching love for life: "a hot day to be wounded", she said, echoing Septimus's

thoughts just before he jumps out of his window.[10] It is perhaps during one such wave of optimism that the ending of Between the Acts was conceived, with its suggestion of hope and regeneration – the idea that out of the present crisis, "another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of the night" (BTA 197).

As this passage with it Conradian overtones indicates, however, this and similar moments of hope are often filtered through a great deal of cynicism. Woolf's narrator, just like Miss La Trobe the artist-figure in the book, seems to fluctuate between a belief in the power of art to transcend and otherwise organize the chaos of the real world, and the opposing thought that any such endeavor is doomed to failure. Woolf is here echoing a dilemma that would continue to resonate through the modernist project, namely the need for an audience, and the resistance endemic to most strands of modernism to mass culture and the commodification of art. Thus, though Miss La Trobe despises her audience and dreams of writing "a play without an audience – *the* play", she is filled with agony at the though that "they [the audience] were slipping through her fingers", and ultimately considers her work a failure (161, author's italics).

Woolf, too, it should be said, faced similar problems at the time. In 1934, Wyndham Lewis had published his Men without Art, a scathing critique of his contemporaries that contained a chapter on Woolf. In it, he declared that "Mrs.Woolf is extremely insignificant", that "she is taken seriously by no one any longer today", and that her "intrinsic literary importance…may be exaggerated by her friends" (159). He also poked fun at her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown',

and accused Woolf of inhabiting those "half-lighted places of the mind – in which, quivering with a timid excitement, this sort of intelligence, shrinks, thrilled to the marrow, at the wild goings-on" (169). Needless to say, these slashing comments caused a great deal of pain to the hypersensitive Woolf who, at the height of her fame, was made aware of 'an active opposition'. In 1938, moreover, Woolf's premonitions as to the unexpected turn that her reputation was taking were confirmed by the hostile reception of Three Guineas, the book that "made my own friends hostile [and] laid me open to abuse and ridicule" (Diary 5: 170). In a review of the book for Scrutiny, Q. D. Leavis attacked the book for containing "some dangerous assumptions, some preposterous claims, and some nasty attitudes" (quoted in Diary 5: 165). The attack, while it confirmed for Woolf her new-found position of 'an outsider', one who writes 'against the current', it nevertheless revived her old anxiety over her reputation, and made her start to think that she, like Miss La Trobe, is a failure: "[u]ndoutedly Morgan [Forster]'s reputation is much higher than my own. So is Tom [Eliot]'s. Well?" (189).

At this late stage in her life and career, Woolf is obviously less prone to the effects of 'praise or wigging'. But to be criticized as she was then is one thing, while to be completely ignored would be another. Here, too, Woolf is projecting her own fears about her future reputation and, in doing so, she reveals her theory of a dialectical relationship between artist and audience, within the parameters of which, the loss of an audience results in the loss of the artist's identity. The metaphor of a voice without echo would reverberate again and again in her conceptualization of this terrible situation: "[i]t struck me that one curious feeling

is, that the writing 'I', has vanished", she wrote in 1940. "No audience. No echo. That's part of one's death" (Diary 5: 293). And again:

> No echo comes back. I have no surroundings. I have so little sense of a public that I forget about Roger coming or not coming out. Those familiar circumvolutions – those standards – which have for so many years given back an echo & so thickened my identity are all wide & wild as the desert now. I mean, there is no 'autumn' no winter. We pour to the edge of a precipice... (299)

The connection between the loss of audience and the resulting death of the artist is also one of the major themes of The Waves. Bernard's final speech is interspersed with words such as 'answer', 'opposition' and 'desertion' – words that would acquire more edge for Woolf as she came face to face with the prospect of her own artistic decline. Toward the end, Bernard's predicament becomes strikingly anticipatory of Woolf's: "[n]o echo comes back when I speak", he says, "no varied words. This is more truly death than the death of friends, than the death of youth" (The Waves 218).

# 'HAUNTED BY WORDS': THE LANGUAGE OF BETWEEN THE ACTS

"But for pain words are lacking".
– Virginia Woolf, The Waves

"Our gift of speech, of situating ourselves in time for another, could exist nowhere except beyond an abyss".
– Julia Kristeva, Black Sun

Toward the end of 1938, at a time when the nation was bracing itself for war, Virginia Woolf was grappling with an altogether different set of issues. The 'cursed year' had been marked for her by the persistence of two contradictory moods: the apprehension caused by the threat of war, and the gratifying prospect of writing her book. The writing of Between the Acts was, like that of The Waves, a pleasurable activity, and the 'relief of fiction' that it provided was a welcome break from the strenuous task of writing her biography of Roger Fry. Woolf's last novel, however, was not without its headaches. For in 1938, Woolf was becoming increasingly preoccupied with language and its ability to reflect experience. She alternately felt that she was being submerged by "words, words, so many and so many" (Diary 5: 182), and that words were 'bodiless' and 'ugly'; and on one occasion, she declared in a strange statement that she was "word-haunted" (183).

This concern with language was not new to Woolf. In Mrs Dalloway, Septimus interprets the message left by the sky-writing aeroplane as being written in a new language that he is still unable to master. The fact that he, just like Bernard in The Waves, cannot attach meaning to those 'imperceptible signs' (The Waves 50) reflects Woolf's increasing attention to the relationship between the impact of certain experiences and language's ability to bear witness to them. By 1925, Woolf

had already come at the conclusion that meaning is located "just on the far side of language. It is the meaning which in moments of astonishing excitement and stress, we perceive in our minds without words" (*CR* 31). It is only at a late phase in her career, however, that the outline of Woolf's new peculiar relationship to language started to emerge, with The Waves representing a decisive moment. In it, Woolf takes on many of the issues that would become a central preoccupation during the final years of her life, and which would set the tone for her last novel. Bernard, the central figure in The Waves, is a story-teller, an expert in the art of 'making phrases', and in that capacity he is made to fulfill a synthesizing task, one that involves linking the disparate worlds of the other diverse characters. Through the character of Bernard, Woolf explores not only the futility of the attempt to find 'the perfect phrase for the moment', but also the conception of language as potentially a device "for filling up crevices" (The Waves 47).

When Woolf returned to these issues again in Between the Acts, she did so with the pressures of history and imminent annihilation weighing down on her, and the view of language that emerged out of this tumultuous situation was therefore inevitably colored by these uncertainties. In Between the Acts, language is not only a futile exercise in the pursuit of an elusive referent, but sometimes even ceases to ensure the basic task of communication. On the other hand, the language of the book keeps drawing attention to itself and to its activities, in an apparent attempt to achieve a defamiliarization effect, or to use Julia Kristeva's formulation, it "seeks to become alien to itself, in order to discover, in the mother tongue a '*total word, new, foreign to the language*', for the purpose of capturing the unnameable" (42,

author's italics). Shoshana Felman has argued that since what is offered in testimony is not a complete statement, the language of testimony does not possess itself as a finished product, but rather as something that is constantly 'in trial' (Testimony 5). Yet it is precisely due to its unfinished nature and its persistent questioning of itself that the language of testimony succeeds in transmitting the impact of events that exceeds any conceptual framework, or what Dominik LaCapra calls 'limit events'. I would suggest that the language of Between the Acts is language 'in process'; in other words, it is a speech act that addresses the impact of a particular period of history. Both in its fragmentation and its repetitive rhythms, the language of the book seems not only to act out the impasse that Europe has reached, but also to point to its excessive impact on those who witnessed it.

Woolf's peculiar handling of language in Between the Acts is announced right from the outset, when the narrator describes a scene in which the nurses at Pointz Hall are talking while "trundling the perambulator up and down the terrace" (BTA 9). What is striking about their talk, however, is that they are "not shaping pellets of information or handing ideas to one another, but rolling words, like sweets on their tongues; which as they thinned to transparency, gave off pink, green, and sweetness" (9). The metaphor of words 'thinned to transparency' is a fascinating one, as it suggests here not the transparency of pure referentiality – of the union between signifier and signified – but rather a thin, empty, vacuous, and unsubstantial language. 'Rolling words', moreover, is not restricted to the playful nurses, but seems to be a function of the speech of the other characters as well. We

are constantly under the impression that instead of performing the task of ensuring communication and the transmission of information, language as used by characters in the book is for the most part empty and repetitive. The first scene of the book in which the occupants of Pointz Hall discuss the cesspool is emblematic of this static quality. Mrs Haines, for instance, on hearing about the topic of the conversation indignantly exclaims: "what a subject to talk about" (13). When Isa arrives and is informed by Mr Oliver that they have been 'discussing the cesspool', Mrs Haines repeats the same exclamation verbatim, and we feel that the 'discussion' is going nowhere. Isa herself is not entirely unaffected by repetition. When, for instance, she says that "the library's always the nicest room in the house", she is merely repeating what a "foolish, faltering lady...had once said" about Pointz Hall (15).

The language of narration, too, is strikingly repetitive, with the narrator either repeating what other characters have said or thought, or saying things that will later be repeated by them. A good illustration of this repetitiveness is the passage where the narrator mentions Mrs Swithin's abortive plans to "set up a house of her own; perhaps in Kensington, perhaps at Kew...[but] when winter came, [she] retired to the Hastings" (7). This piece of 'information' will be echoed again by Mr Oliver, as he muses on his old sister's 'recurring question': "should she live at Kensington or at Kew? But every year, when winter came, she did neither. She took lodgings at the Hastings" (22). And in the manner of this almost literal repetition, narration in the book seems, indeed, to be a sequence of "recurring questions' or issues: Mrs Swithin's religiosity, Giles's disappointing career, Isa's abortive poetry and so on. The effect of this repetitiveness, just like

that of the pageant, is to halt narrative progression, creating an impression of deadlock not unlike the one that pervades Mrs Dalloway. "The repetition", says the narrator in a moment of irony in the book, "was senseless, hideous, stupefying" (61).

Yet despite such statements, Woolf's handling of repetition in Between the Acts is more complex than one might be tempted to think. In Mrs Dalloway, we have seen that repetition was the return of the traumatic event against the will of the survivor. Septimus is repeatedly brought back to the scene of his trauma, with such a force and vividness that he thinks he is reliving the event. For Caruth, this repetition is caused by the fact that traumatic event is not experienced in time, and as such it is always a missed experience. "What causes trauma", she says, "is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (Unclaimed Experience 61). This missing of the experience as such generates a repetition that aims not at reproducing the original experience but at mastering what was not known in the first place. Repetition in this sense becomes not so much a repetition of an event, as the repeated confrontation with the impossibility of *knowing* that event. In other words, it is repetition of a repetition. This generative quality in repetition, what Caruth calls its 'endless inherent necessity', may ultimately have destructive consequences for the traumatized individual, whose history becomes "nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction" (Unclaimed Experience 63). We see this model of repetition clearly in Septimus's recurring confrontation with his trauma,

organized as it is around an unknown event which he persistently but unsuccessfully attempts to assimilate until the repetition destroys him.

The compulsive and potentially dangerous effects of repetition had formed the focus in Freud's discussion of the traumatic neurosis in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In observing a game played by a child whose mother has just left, Freud came to the conclusion that the child was staging through the game the painful departure and the joyful return of his mother. This left Freud with the theoretical problem of reconciling 'the repetition of this distressing experience' with the concept of the pleasure principle. "It may perhaps be, Freud says, [...] that [the mother's] departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it is in the latter that lay the true purpose of the game" (9-10). This explanation, however, proved inadequate in the case of those suffering from traumatic neurosis and whose, "dreams have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing [them] back to the situation of [the] accident" (7). Freud was therefore left with the conclusion that the compulsion to repeat could only be explained in terms of the existence of something, some instinct 'beyond' the pleasure principle: "[i]f we take into account observations such as these, based upon behavior in the transference and upon the life-histories of men and women", he was led to conclude, "we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle" (7).

What is remarkable about Freud's presentation, however, is not only its tentative and fragmentary quality – what Caruth calls its 'curious wavering' – but more importantly what Derrida sees as its 'singular proceeding [*démarche*]', which

dramatizes the very repetition it seeks to explain.[11] The first chapter of the book, Derrida says,

> repeats, in place and in another place, the immobile *emplacement* of the *pas de thèse*. It repeats itself, it illustrates only the repetition of that very thing (the absolute authority of the P[leasure] P[rinciple]) which finally does not let anything be done without (him), except repetition itself". (The Post Card 520, author's italics)

What Freud does in this chapter, according to Derrida, is systematically to reject [or to make disappear] the very hypothesis which he seems to push forward, in a manner akin to the *fort* of the child's game. The hypothesis is then made to come back [*revenir*] only to be rejected again. To say, therefore, that the hypothesis actually comes back [*revient*], would be inaccurate; instead, Derrida proposes '*revenu*' – "that which has only passed by in the specter of its presence" (521). Toward the end of the chapter, however, we are left with the impression that no progress has been made except for Freud's 'indefatigable motion' of rejection, distancing, deferral. The illusion of the already spectral presence has further dissolved into a *différance* in which repetition reverberates:

> in this foot-stamping,[12] echoes, repetition insists, and if these determined repetitions, these contents, kinds, examples of repetitions do not suffice to dethrone the P[leasure]P[rinciple], at least the repetitive form, the reproduction of the repetitive, reproductivity itself will have begun to work without saying anything, without saying anything other than itself silencing itself. (522)[13]

Repetition in this sense seems to be another word for impasse: neither Septimus nor the child, nor even Freud for that matter, seem to be able to achieve the desired breakthrough.

In Between the Acts, however, repetition appears in a rather different light. Trauma, as we have seen, is located in an uncertain future that threatens to disrupt

the present. The present, just like the past of which it is a continuation, is the site of the familiar, the ordinary – in other words it is the site of repetition. The traumatic impact of the future lies, therefore, precisely in the threat it poses to the possibility of repetition, hence the apocalyptic mood of the novel. There are many indications in the text for what Gillian Beer calls "the need for repetition and recurrence" (399). The village where the action takes place is in a certain sense a microcosm of a world based on repetition. It is cast in the light of a rare, idyllic place where "1833 was true in 1939" (BTA 48). Significantly situated at the heart of England, it is made to appear as a bastion of tradition, a fortress where the glories of the past still resonate both in the landscape and in people's imagination. This is why it is hard for the village people to comprehend the new changes that have started to occur all around them, especially in the form of new buildings. This concern over their common heritage in the face of the emerging forces of change is translated into an attempt to freeze history into a particular moment of communality:

> At this very moment, half-past three on a June day in 1939 they greeted each other, as they took their seats, finding if possible a seat next one another, as they said: 'that hideous new house at Pyes Corner! What an
> eyesore! And those bungalows! – have you seen'em'. (69)

Woolf's use of the modernist technique of synchronicity or simultaneity, as well the temporal economy of the book (one day in June), point to the need to arrest the movement of history before 'the doom of sudden death' becomes a reality, a need which also gives rise to the pageant itself.

Jed Esty has underlined the increasing popularity of the pageant-play form among English writers during the last phase of the modernist movement. He

analyzes the revival of that ancient form by writers such as Woolf, Forster and Eliot in terms of an 'anthropological turn' that was dictated by the decline of Empire and inter-war cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the resulting necessity to find alternative spaces for the exploration of what he calls 'a resurgent nationalist culture'.[14] Now among the writers mentioned above, Woolf was perhaps the one least affected by the emerging nationalist sentiment, opposed as it was to her intractable Bloomsbury pacifism. Yet it would be difficult, as Esty suggests, to ignore the presence in Between the Acts of "moments of communal longing that run against the grain" (92), and these are especially to be found in the pageant. I would argue, furthermore, that the pageant in Between the Acts functions as a ritual that aims through its repetition of particular periods of English history not so much at constructing what Esty calls "a cohesive version of national identity" (54), as it seeks to establish a comfort zone where the bafflement and uncertainties of the present give way to the redemptive familiarity of the past. The barn in which the pageant is performed is itself an illustration of the redemptive power of a history based on repetition, not only because it "had been built over seven hundred years ago" but also because it "reminded some people of a Greek temple, others of the middle ages, most people of an age before their own" (BTA 90). The barn becomes in this sense a most convenient location for the performance of the ritual. Narrative emphasis on ritual could also be seen in the lengthy and extensively detailed passages that describe the various ceremonies at Pointz Hall such as the tea ceremony or the preparations for meals. Even the conversations that take place during such ceremonies are less real conversation than they are repetitive gossip.

What matters, Gillin Beer writes, is more "saying things again, [...] than [...] what is said" (400). This is why when "Isa heard Mrs Swithin say: 'I've been nailing the placard to the barn', she knew she would say next:

> 'For the pageant.'
> And he would say: 'Today? By Jupiter! I'd forgotten!'" (20).

The need for ritual and repetition is also reflected in the language of the book with its recurrent tropes and repetitive rhythms. Language on that June day seems particularly in tune with the general feeling of anxiety and the collective need for repetition that permeate the village population; so much so that on that day "words were like the first peel of a chime of bells. As the first peels, you hear the second; as the second peels, you hear the third" (20). Equally striking are the triadic structures of which the novel abounds, and whose function seems to provide some kind of anchoring defense against the emerging forces of chaos: "the music chanted: dispersed are we. It moaned: dispersed are we. It lamented: dispersed are we" (86); even the reticent old Bart on occasions cannot help being verbose: "'why, tell me, he asks Mrs Manresa, are we, as a race, so incurious, irresponsive, and insensitive' – the champagne had given him a flow of unusual three-decker-words" (50). Yet while Bart's uncharacteristic verbosity might in this case be attributable to alcohol, the narrator's own repetitiveness seems to be the result of a different kind of intoxication – intoxication with language: "[t]hey were suspended, without being, in limbo" (159). At times, repetition goes beyond the rhythm and becomes literal, as when the Miss La Trobe exclaims in her mind: "[t]his is death, death, death" (161); or else when the narrator says: "[t]his dry summer the path was hard as brick across the fields. This dry summer the path was strewn with stones" (89).

These textual repetitions are inextricably linked to the elegiac theme of the novel. They appear as a reaction to an original though undefined moment of loss, the consequences of which have yet to be assimilated. Julia Kristeva has argued that the mourning that accompanies a loss "draws signs out of their signifying neutrality" (42). In Between the Acts, there is an almost obsessive attention to signs and their arbitrariness. This is translated for instance in a striking concern with naming. Interestingly, most characters in the book have more than one name: Mrs Swithin is sometimes called Lucy, or 'old flimsy', but her brother calls her "Cindy, or Sindy, for it could be spelt either way" (BTA 19); Isa is Isabella or Mrs Giles Oliver; Mrs Sands the cook is called Trixie by 'old friends'; Miss LaTrobe is privately called 'bossy'; even the cat's name Sung-Yen "had undergone a kitchen change into Sunny" (29); Mr Oliver's name is Bart, but his drawing room name is The Master, and "in the kitchen they called him Bartie" (29). The importance of names is also emphasized when comparing the two portraits in the Oliver's drawing room, for one (the lady's) is 'just a picture', whereas "the man was an ancestor. He had a name" (33). The arbitrariness of the signifying bond is also evoked by Mrs Swithin as she meditates on her Cook's second name. "Trixie", for her, "was not a name that suited, as Sands did, the acid woman, red-haired, sharp and clean, who never dashed off masterpieces, it was true; but then never dropped hairpins in a soup" (30-1).

Derrida has emphasized the significance of 'the name' as a speech act conferring life, an inaugural moment of being. The name, he says in Glas, "seems produced, one time only, by an act without a past. There is no power more present,

no generosity more inaugural" (6). Yet he adds that, like a birth certificate, the act of giving a name serves both "to sublimate a singularity and to inform against it" (7). In Memoires for Paul De Man, Derrida picks up on this remark, and the name becomes for him not so much a sign of 'presence' as a ritual aiming at coming to terms with an ineluctable absence:

> In calling or naming someone while he is alive, we know that his name can survive him and *already survives him*; the name begins during his life to get along without him, speaking and bearing his death each time it is pronounced in naming or calling, each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature. (49, author's italics)

The name becomes thus the starting point for the process of mourning; with the name, we begin to prepare for loss and for the situation of being a survivor. Similarly, the emphasis on naming in Between the Acts shows that the inhabitants of Pointz Hall have already started the "codes and rites" of survival in anticipation of the death (or deaths) that are inscribed in this plurality of names (The Work of Mourning 34).

Words, too, like names, seem to fail to carry out fully their signifying role, leaving those who use them stuck between the yearning for what Bernard in The Waves calls "the perfect phrase for the moment" (51), and the impossibility of capturing an ever-elusive referent. This situation often results in an unfinished kind of speech, a speech which, like that of the actors in the pageant, is full of gaps and breaks. The story of Mrs Manresa stands as a clear example of the discrepancy between desire, on the one hand, and the inadequacy of language on the other. On the one occasion when the mysterious lady's background was to be told, an obscure character intervenes and contests the use of the word 'exported'; "expatriate, he

says, was more like it, but not the right word which was on the tip of his tongue, but he couldn't get at" (BTA 36). As a result of this disruptive remark, the story 'got no further'; it 'dwindled away', and Mrs Manresa remained the emblem of a mysterious, recalcitrant referent. This moment of incompleteness will be reproduced as Giles attempts to articulate his vision of a Europe devastated by an imminent war. Giles, too, cannot find the perfect word, and as "he had no command of metaphor[,] [o]nly the ineffective word 'hedgehog' illustrated his vision" (49). The narrator, too, sometimes seems unable to find words in order to proceed with the narrative, as when describing the effect of the dispersing audience on the aging Mr Oliver: "[w]hat word expressed the sag at his heart, the effusion in his veins" (182). Even The Reverend Mr Streatfield, otherwise verbose and effusive, experiences 'the stubbornness' of words as he addresses the audience at the end of the pageant. Streatfield's predicament is caused both by the advent of warplanes whose drone drowns out his words, and his momentary contemplation of Albert, the village idiot. Meditating on these two discordant phenomena, Streatfield "lost the thread of his discourse. His command over words seemed gone" (174). The irrationality of both the approaching carnage and the idiot seem to underscore for the Reverend not only the fundamentally contingent and cacophonous nature of reality, but also the failure of language to operate as device "for filling up the crevices and disguising these fissures" (The Waves 47).

These last words are uttered by Rhoda in The Waves as she meditates on the numerous gaps that render human experience at best a collection of 'orts, scraps, and fragments'. The ultimate symbol of these cracks in experience for Rhoda is

"the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle" which she cannot cross, and as such becomes an allegory of what in experience will always remain unknown. Yet in Between the Acts, the question that Woolf seems to be asking is what happens if these 'crevices' and 'fissures' occur *within* language?[15] To be sure, the language of the book is full of gaps and empty spaces. We have seen how the characters' speech is often incomplete, incapable as they are to find the final word that would render their thoughts whole. These empty spaces, however, are not only a function of the end of speech, as in the case of Mrs Manresa's life story, but are to be found everywhere whenever language is used. During the pageant, for instance, the wind blows away the actors' words, so that only half those words actually reach the audience: "cutting the roads…up the hill top…we climbed. Down in the valley…sow, wild boar, hog, rhinoceros, reindeer…Dug ourselves in to the hill top…Ground roots between stones…Ground corn…till we too…"(BTA 72). And as the pageant progresses, "the words died away [...] Only a few great names" continued to be heard; but in the end, even these "great words became inaudible, and the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came" (125). This is clearly the zero degree of signification, a speech that is tantamount to silence, or what Kristeva calls asymbolia.[16]

The gaps, however, do not designate only that empty space – that 'something missing' – which exists between words, but also the emptiness and hollowness *within* words (Fiction 216). Words, the narrator tells us, "raised themselves and became symbolical" (BTA 66), in other words they became empty. The notions of silence and emptiness are pervasive in Between the Acts: "empty,

empty, empty; silent, silent, silent", is the description the narrator gives of the drawing room at Pointz Hall. Within the room, narrative attention is momentarily focused on a vase "that stood in the heart of the house", "the distilled essence of emptiness, silence" (34). The empty vase becomes for narrator the 'objective correlative' of the general mood of hollowness of speech that permeates the book. The gap within words is often the result of what Miller calls "the alternations between possible literal meanings and possible figurative meanings" (Fiction 216). There is the scene, for instance, where Isa mentally visualizes the violence with which a trooper attempts to rape a girl in a barrack room: "the girl was screaming and hitting him in the face" (19). Isa's reverie is interrupted when Mrs Swithin arrives carrying a hammer. Figuratively, the word 'hammer' stands as a logical continuation of the violence in the previous scene, yet there seems to be a narrative insistence on the *literality* of the interruption: "the door (*for in fact it was a door*) opened and in came Mrs Swithin carrying a hammer" (19, author's italics). The same undecidability characterizes the various usages of the word 'blood' in the book. If taken literally, the word stands in stark contrast to the lyrical quality of the narrative, and the reader is as shocked as Mrs Swithin by the first encounter with 'blood': "the blood had shocked her – 'Oh!' she cried – for the gills were full of blood" (19). The next time the word 'blood' appears, the effect is even more disturbing. This is the much debated scene where Giles comes across a snake choked with a toad in its mouth which it is unable to swallow:

> A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round – a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. (89)

This scene has been interpreted in a variety of ways, most notably as a metaphor for the deadlock that Europe was reaching.[17] Yet the sheer strangeness of the scene, the fact that it is uncomfortably graphic as well as incongruous with the overall tone of the book, all seem to suggest that Woolf perhaps wanted the reader to stop at this scene in the same way that Rhoda had to stop at the mysterious puddle, and to see it in terms of a break in the signifying chain, a gap in meaning. The scene becomes in this sense an illustration of the performative dimension in the text, how the text enacts the very gaps it seeks to signify by inducing affect in the reader, in this case horror and disgust.

Yet if gaps operate primarily at the level of the signified, the central desire in the text is to *bridge* these gaps. Interestingly, however, the attempts to fill in gaps occur outside the realm of the Symbolic. Mrs Swithin continually dreams of the time when there were no geographical gaps, when "there was no sea ...No sea at all between us and the continent" (27), but as soon as she tries to communicate these thoughts, her vision degenerates into a fragmentary conversation with Isa. Also, we are told that during a triumphant moment for Miss La Trobe, "[t]he cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion" (126). But again, this happens at the precise moment when the gaps in the actors' words made them almost completely inaudible. It becomes clear therefore that whatever glimpses of meaningfulness the narrative offers are not generated through language but take place precisely because they have escaped language. One such moment is the scene where a girl is raped by a group of soldiers in a barrack, which Isa reads in The Times:

> The troopers told her the horse had a green tail; but she found it was just an ordinary horse. And they dragged her out to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed. Then one of the troopers removed part of her clothing, and she screamed and hit him about the face... (18)

This incident will continue to haunt Isa's mind throughout the day of the novel; she cannot bring herself to concentrate on anything else, so deep is the impact of the girl's ordeal on her, and at the same time she can find no expression of the scene in the resources of the Symbolic. The scene, just like that of the snake choking upon the toad, seems to represent the traumatic encounter with the Real, which always eludes signification:[18] "[t]hat was real; so real that on the mahogany door panels she saw the Arch in Whitehall; through the Arch the barrack room; in the barrack room the bed, and on the bed the girl was screaming and hitting him on the face" (18-9).

It is worth noting here that though apparently not directly related to the main 'plot' of the novel, the rape incident as well as Isa's surprising reaction to it are not entirely a digression from it. Rather, they are part of what critics often call the 'elegiac' mood of Woolf's mature fiction. In Mrs Dalloway, for instance, the narrator mournfully declares with reference to the Great War that this "late age of the world's experience has bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing" (7). The statement would reverberate not only throughout Mrs Dalloway, but in later novels as well. Bernard in The Waves describes himself as someone who is permanently "holding my sorrow – no, not my sorrow but the incomprehensible nature of this our life" (205). In Between the Acts, too, the mood is predominantly

melancholy, as illustrated by this passage about a shower of rain that takes place just before the pageant's dramatization of the present time:

> And then the shower fell, sudden, profuse.No one had seen the cloud coming. There it was, black swollen, on top of them. Down it poured like all the people in the world weeping. Tears, Tears. Tears. 'O that human pain could here have ending!' Isa murmured. Looking up she received two great bolts of rain full in her face. They trickeld down her cheeks as if they were her own tears. As they were all people's tears, weeping for all people. (162)[19]

What is the significance of these tears? Why are 'all the people in the world weeping'? What does it mean for life to be a permanent test of 'courage', 'endurance' and stoicism? To ask these questions is to confront one of the fundamental aspects of Woolf's fiction, namely its melancholy nature. In reading Between the Acts, one is constantly under the impression that something has been lost and is being mourned. Now the significance of this within the discussion of language in the book is that it could account for the various aporias in the text – the way language fails as it seeks to mourn an originary loss. Kristeva points to the traumatic circumstances that accompany the beginnings of language. Language, she argues following Lacan, starts with loss and the negation of that loss; what is lost is that primordial symbiosis of mother and child, and negation occurs when the speaking subject consents to losing the object of desire knowing that that object could be recovered within language. When this negation is disavowed, however, melancholia sets in; the melancholy subject refuses to accept the loss and, in doing so, he/she will always be fixated on the object of desire or, to use Kristeva's terms, the primal Thing:

> The denial *(Verleugnung) of negation* would thus be the exercise of an impossible mourning, the setting up of a fundamental sadness and an

> artificial, unbelievable language, cut out of the painful background that is not accessible to any signifier. (44, author's italics)

An 'artificial, unbelievable language', 'not accessible to any signifier', would be an excellent description of the language of Between the Acts. Consider for example this passage in which Isa reflects on her feelings for 'the gentleman farmer':

> 'In love', she must be; since the presence of his body in the room last night could affect her; since the words he said, handing her a teacup, handing her a tennis racquet, could so attach themselves to a certain spot in her; and thus lie between them like a wire, tingling, tangling, vibrating – she groped, in the depths of the looking glass, for a word to fit the infinitely quick variations of the aeroplane propeller that she had seen once at Groydon. Faster, faster, faster, it whizzed, whirred, buzzed, till all the flails became one flail and up soared the plane away and away ... (13-4)

Reading this passage, one is struck by the strangeness of the language, so that 'love' becomes an occasion to think about aeroplane propellers, and by the end of the passage the original idea has been completely superseded by a description of the plane's movement. One is also struck by the succession of what Frank Kermode calls 'triadic patterns' – structures such as 'tingling, tangling, vibrating' and 'whizzed, whirred, buzzed'. Kermode's explanation for the persistence of these triads is that they comprise scraps that will only acquire meaning if associated with other more obviously significant scraps. The point, according to him, is to "refer to the integrity of the book and possibly of the world perceived in 'rapture'" (Introduction xxiii). But instead of referring to any notion of 'integrity' or closure, these triads rather seem to exemplify rather the Derridean concepts of play and *différance*, which he defines as follows: "every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the

systematic play of differences" (Margins of Philosophy 62). Thus, in the image of Isa's failure to find the perfect phrase to capture the variations of the aeroplane propeller ("she groped ...for a word"), language fails to capture the elusive referent and ensure a stable meaning. "There is no stability in this world", says Bernard in The Waves, anticipating some of the main tenets of post-structuralist thought. "Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of word? It is a balloon that sails over tree-tops" (88).

Yet unlike Bernard, who becomes aware of the fact that there is no stable meaning, that meaning is an ever-elusive balloon, the melancholy subject, as Kristeva remarks, does not accept the fundamental loss and so persists in a dogged attempt to 'capture the unnameable' in language "[u]ntil the weight of the primal Thing prevails, and all translatability become impossible. Melancholia then ends up in asymbolia, in loss of meaning: if I am no longer capable of translating or metaphorizing, I become silent and I die" (42). Silence has a long history in Woolf. In The Voyage Out, her first novel, Terence Hewet dreams of writing 'a novel about Silence', and in Mrs Dalloway there are recurring moments when "the whole world became perfectly silent" (16). It is in Between the Acts, however, that Woolf's conception of silence seems to crystallize into a clear alternative to speech. In the world depicted by the novel, characters are persistently drawn 'down the paths of silence': they often have wordless conversations and frequently find themselves led 'to the heart of silence'. It is also interesting that some of the most meaningful experiences in the story, such as Isa learning about the rape incident or Bart's frightening of George are shrouded in silence.

"Orts, Scraps, and fragments", this is the account of the human condition given toward the end of book by that mysterious collective voice, "the voice that was one's voice[,] the voice that wept for human pain unending" (162).[20] To speak this dispersion and fragmentation, it is suggested, a new language must be invented, one in whose cracks and crevices the fundamental human trauma is preserved. "Let us talk in words of one syllable" says the unknown voice echoing Bernard's own 'little language', "without larding, stuffing or cant. Let's us break the rhythm and forget the rhyme" (168).

# A FIGURATIVE HISTORY: WAR IN BETWEEN THE ACTS

It has been suggested that, among Virginia Woolf's novels, Between the Acts is her most direct engagement with history. In it, Woolf shifts the emphasis from the consciousness of individual characters toward a group consciousness in a particular historical context. The historical context in question is the Second World War, which Woolf witnessed, but the end of which she never lived to see. The book is, in a sense, a testimony bearing witness to the deep impact of that conflict, and a confirmation of Woolf's new historical 'consciousness' which had already been given voice in Three Guineas. In that 1937 pamphlet, Woolf made the case for the connection between the private and public worlds, how "the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other" (142). This meant for Woolf that the violence she saw everywhere in gender relations was in large part reflected in the violence that threatened to erupt between nations. By this Woolf is referring to the rise of fascism and dictatorships in Germany, Italy, and Spain, and so what started out as a questioning of patriarchal values developed into a critique of European politics, with its cult of the hero and its cultivation of military values. The modern European male, she says, is

> the quintessence of virility...his eyes are glazed; his eyes glare. His body, which is braced in an unnatural position, is tightly cased in a uniform. Upon the breast of that uniform are sewn several medals and other mystic symbols. His hand is upon a sword. He is called in German and in Italian Fuhrer or Duce; in our own language tyrant or dictator. (Three Guineas 142)

We encounter this type of man again in Between the Acts in the character of Mr Oliver, who has no use for 'crying babies', and also in the character of Giles who believes in the relief of bloody action. Both the scene of frightening the little boy

and that of crushing the agonized snake exemplify Bart's and Giles's respective aggressivity, and what Louise A. Poresky calls their 'repressed savagery' (248). The book also takes up the issues of fascism and the threat of war that formed the background of Three Guineas.

By the time Woolf was working on Between the Acts, however, the threat had become a reality and the war was raging, which gave the book the kind of urgency that Three Guineas lacked. Woolf's attention to history, as one might expect, was only intensified by the European crisis, and this was reflected in the way the shadow of the war weighs both explicitly and implicitly on all the characters in the book. It is implied for instance that, despite the seemingly cheerful atmosphere of the pageant, the audience cannot dissociate their thoughts from the ominous specter of the developing disaster. Nor does the pageant, with its celebration of the continuity of English history and tradition, succeed in dissipating fears about the future. More explicit references to history in the book include Mrs Swithin's obsession with her Outline of History, and the pageant's peculiar rendering of the history of the English nation and literature.

This concern with history, however, is complicated by a set of disruptive elements, not least of which is the temporal economy of the book. Just as the action of the book takes place on a single June day, so does the pageant play contract centuries of English history into a few acts, thus raising questions about the validity of such a totalizing narrative of history. The book's temporal frame is also problematic because, while it was written in the early years of the war, the narrative is deliberately poised *before* the war, in that period of waiting and suspense that

came to be known as the 'phony war'. Such positioning, while giving Woolf the possibility of a retroactive rendering of the events that shaped that period, it also brings into question the book's historicity. This historicity is further destabilized by the book's paradoxical rhetorical insistence, that is to say the way in which language in the book keeps drawing attention to itself. We have seen how, instead of attempting to refer to external events, the language of Between the Acts, like that of The Waves, keeps referring back to itself and to the figurative bases that underlie all systems of signification. In doing so, Between the Acts, while hinting at its spatio-temporal situatedness and therefore its status as historical document bearing witness to a particular historical event, continuously undermines whatever illusion of mastery it may lay claim to.

The question that arises out of the tension between the referential claims of the book its 'rhetorical potential' is not peculiar to Between the Acts. Cathy Caruth discerns a similar tension in Freud's war-time fictionalization of Jewish history Moses and Monotheism. In this unusual account, Freud challenges the biblical story of Moses and foregrounds his own narrative of Jewish history. In Freud's version, Moses was an Egyptian who was a fervent follower of the Pharoh Akhenaten and his sun-centered monotheism. When the pharoh was killed, Moses established himself as the leader of the Hebrews and undertook the task of leading them out their captivity in Egypt, only to be subsequently murdered by them in a rebellion. The Hebrews then repressed the murder, and two generations later, they attributed his deeds to another man, a priest whose name was also Moses. This act of repression and its subsequent effects become for Freud the pivotal moment in

Jewish history, a history which becomes closely bound up with a trauma[21] – "the forgetting (and return) of the deeds of Moses" (Unclaimed Experience 15). Thus, by repositioning historical events within the indeterminate realm of trauma and foregrounding his own speculations, Freud, Caruth suggests, would seem to deny historical reference.

To talk about Freud's Moses and Monotheism within the context of a discussion of Between the Acts is nothing new. Many commentators have pointed out the connections between the two texts, as well as their significance to both authors' work (they were both their authors' last works).[22] Freud's book was written between 1934 and 1938 and was published in 1939, a few months before his death. Woolf's last novel was started in 1938, but she never lived to see it published. The pivotal events that marked the year 1938 – the rise of fascism, the Munich crisis, the annexation of Austria by the *Anschluss*, and the increasing possibility of another European war – therefore cast their shadows on both works. As such, both books could be seen as historical documents, attempting to bear witness, each in its own way, to the impact of those crucial events. Freud wrote Moses and Monotheism in the shadow of an eminent German invasion of Austria and the threat of Nazi persecution of the Jews. Woolf, likewise, worked on Between the Acts amid the roar of airplanes, the ruin of her houses, and recurring discussions of suicide. Both books exemplify in this sense what Caruth calls "the difficulties of writing a history within it" (Unclaimed Experience 12).

Moses and Monotheism was also important because it marked, along with a few other late works by Freud, the beginning of Woolf's interest in psychoanalysis.

After years of dogged neglect, Woolf finally seemed no longer able to resist the increasing currency that Freud's late works had gained in the light of the developing world events. "Freud", writes Herminone Lee, "was one of the many insistent voices which troubled and challenged her [at the time]" (726). She therefore began reading Moses and Monotheism, Civilization and its Discontents, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, 'Thoughts for the time on War and Death', and Why War, in an attempt, she said, "to enlarge the circumference. To give my brain a wider scope: to make it objective; to get outside" (Diary 5: 248). A few days later, she declared that she was 'gulping up Freud', and she was already using terms borrowed from psychoanalysis both in her diary and in her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past'. And although her initial reaction to the new reading material was to think that it was 'upsetting', she found much to admire in Freud's notion of man's latent aggressive instincts and his potential regression to the primitive. The content of her new readings was also reflected in her new interest in group psychology and behavior, which would find expression in Between the Acts.

This interest provided Woolf with the model of a shift from individual to a collective, transgenerational trauma, that is to say from the specific case of the war neurosis exemplified by the character of Septimus to a larger conception of historical consciousness on the edge of trauma. According to Caruth, 'the historical pattern' had already been evoked by Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle through the central tropes of departure and return, but would be dealt with more explicitly in Moses and Monotheism. The significance of this for Woolf was that the linking of displeasure and repetition which had formed the basis of Freud's

argument in the earlier book was now given a historical dimension. The death drive which Freud hypothesized as the explanation for the compulsion to repeat becomes within Woolf's new historical scheme a compulsion in history itself, a compulsion that – to use Kristeva's formulation – is the 'thing' that both negates negation and shapes Woolf's performative dimensions of narration and its peculiar rhythm in Between the Acts. We have seen that unlike Mrs Dalloway, where repetition is both intrusive and destructive, Between the Acts, with its lyricism and repetitive rhythms, conveys a rather different conception of repetition, one in which recurrence seems to be the repository of safety and meaning. This is linked in large part to the apocalyptic mood that characterized Woolf's final years, and her fear that this current crisis might not end with the same kind of denouement that concluded earlier calamities. It is the utter fragility of the present situation then that gave rise to the yearning for the redemptive power of a history based on repetition. Yet despite this yearning, Woolf was not entirely oblivious to the fact that what was happening at the time was a mere repetition of the 'old horror', which in turn was a repetition of even more ancient horrors. This peculiar view of repetition as a compulsion in history was strengthened of course by the new ideas she came across while reading Freud, especially those involving group behavior and the imminent regression to primitive history. Within this new conception, history appears as a series of repetitions driven by the death instinct that inhabits human beings and will only be satisfied when the entire edifice of human civilization is reduced to shreds.

Moses and Monotheism was also important for its foregrounding of a new type of history, a history that is "no longer based on simple model of experience

and reference" (Unclaimed Experience 11). Caruth points for instance to the entanglement of the book with the historical circumstances that surrounded its composition, and especially to the fact that it was published in two installments and thus had two prefaces. More importantly, she adds, the site of the book's referential force lies not so much in the direct allusions it makes historical events, but is paradoxically 'perserved' within the various gaps in the text.[23] Thus, Woolf's new book Between the Acts, poised as it is between what Hermione Lee calls "private illusions and desires, and the levelling pressure of history" (735) found a model in Freud's attempt to rethink conventional forms of historical writing. It is in Freud's linking of history with what is not grasped by immediate understanding, I would suggest, that Between the Acts is primarily indebted to Moses and Monotheism. For Caruth, this rethinking of reference "is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (11). The question that Woolf seems to be asking in Between the Acts is not so much what can history tell us about trauma, but rather what can trauma tell us about history.

In doing so, Woolf seems to anticipate recent developments in post-modern approaches to historiography. In his book on trauma and history, Dominik LaCapra distinguishes between two opposing models of historiography, which he terms the 'documentary' or 'self-sufficient research model' and 'radical constructivism', respectively. The former is based on referential statements and truth claims, whereas the latter, championed by such figures as Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit, is more interested in foregrounding the "performative, figurative,

esthetic, rhetorical, ideological, and political factors that 'construct' structures – stories, plots, arguments, interpretations, explanations – in which referential statements are embedded and take on meaning and significance" (Lacapra 1). Underscoring the centrality of rhetorical processes to historical discourse, Hayden White states that "the *form* of a putatively straight historical narrative is as much dependent upon the governing tropological mode of figuration, as the *form* of any historicist account is dependent upon the theory which it seeks to justify" (116, author's italics). It is, I would argue, with this second view of history in mind that Woolf proposes her own narrative of those tumultuous years before and during the war. Interestingly, White associates Woolf with those writers who "have implicitly condemned the historical consciousness by suggesting the contemporaneity of all significant human experience" (31) , and she is therefore listed among the figures responsible for what he calls the "current rebellion against the past" (41). Woolf certainly did play an active role in challenging conventional approaches to historiography, but she did so with a view not to eliminating the past or undermining its significance, but rather in an attempt to point to the fact that what the historical discourses "say about their subject is inextricably bound up, if not identical, with how they say it" (White 105). It is for this reason that Woolf figures among the theoreticians whom White approvingly labels 'figurative historicists' – those who have given up the illusion of complete objectivity and mastery in favor of the undecidability and play characteristic of all discourse.

Woolf's concern with history is made clear from the outset. On the first page of the book, the narrator gives us a bird's-eye view of the country surrounding

Pointz Hall, a view marked by "the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars" (BTA 3-4). This description, while foregrounding a particular view of history as the infliction of violence both on the people and the landscape, also anticipates the kind of approach to history that would be dramatized by the pageant, namely history as repetitive cycle of events. Mrs Swithin is the major proponent of such a view of history in the book. In response to Isa's curiosity about the Victorians, she says: "I don't believe...that there ever were such a people. Only you and me and William dressed differently" (156). The view of history as a recurring set of events and peoples is also reflected in the way the audience reacts to the pageant. The 'scenes from English history', as Mrs Manresa calls them, represent figures and periods of history in a way that emphasizes the familiar, the ordinary: "[e]arly Briton; Plantagenets; Tudors; Stuarts – she ticked them off" (75). Yet, with the slightest disturbance of the pattern, the extremely conventional audience is deeply perplexed. "Why leave out the British Army, Colonel Mayhew asks in protest. What's history without the army?" (141).

Miss LaTrobe, however, had her own conception of history, a conception that has less to do with real armies and battles than with those battles that take place in 'the mud', in other words those aspects of history that are not available for immediate understanding. The word 'mud' is used repeatedly in the book and is particularly associated with Mrs Swithin and Miss LaTrobe. Contrary to what her name implies Mrs Swithin, introverted as she might seem, is interested only in what she can perceive visually.[24] At the end of the pageant, she is described by her

brother as being blinded by her faith: always 'skimming the surface', "she ignored the battle in the mud" (183). The description will prove particularly apt when, a moment later, absorbed in her favorite activity of gazing at the lily pond, Mrs Swithin is disconcerted at not being able to see the fish: "[a]ll gone, she murmured, under the leaves. Scared by shadows passing, the fish had withdrawn. She gazed at the water. Perfunctorily she caressed her cross. But her eyes went water searching, looking for fish" (184). As her brother has already suggested, however, her search will only be restricted to the surface: "[t]he fish had come to the surface...Then a shadow fell. Off they flashed. How vexatious!" (185).

Miss LaTrobe, on the other hand, is associated with that dark, unfathomable part of the lily pond; she seems to inhabit precisely that muddy part which Mrs Swithin's understanding cannot reach. To use Bart's terms again, she wants "darkness in the mud; a whisky and a soda at the pub; and coarse words descending like maggots through the waters" (183). With her unknown origins, unconventional ways, and homosexuality, she exemplifies the cacophonous thrust in the book, what Miller calls the "penchant toward discord, toward breaking the rhythm and mocking the rhyme" (Fiction 222). At the end of the pageant, Miss LaTrobe goes to a dirty public house where she relishes 'the acrid smell of stale beer' and listens to meaningless conversations; and contrary to Mrs Swithin, who is puzzled by the muddy depth of the pond, she readily plunges into the mud: "the mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning – wonderful words" (BTA 191). The 'mud' in this sense becomes a metaphor for those aspects of experience which escape our

conventional modes of perception and representation; in other words a metaphor for what what Caruth calls "a history that is constituted by its continually delayed entrance into experience" (Unclaimed Experience 1).

History, as Miss LaTrobe understands it, is not an activity of 'one-making', a totalizing narrative that celebrates harmony and discards the dissonant and the incomprehensible. Her version of history has as much room for idiots and peasants as for kings and queens, and her narrative works not through continuity and cohesion but through silences, gaps, and interruptions. The moment of silence in the pageant before the last act is particularly illustrative of the surprising impact of Miss LaTrobe's tactics, predicated as they are on the Brechtian strategy of continually disrupting the audience's expectations:

> All their nerves were on edge. They sat exposed. The machine ticked. There was no music. The horns of cars on the high road were heard. And the swish of trees. They were neither one thing nor the other; neither Victorians nor themselves. They were suspended, without being, in limbo. Tick, tick, tick went the machine. (159)

This is a pivotal moment in the play because it is the prelude to the pageant's rendering of the present moment. It also anticipates the kind of stark and direct method that Miss LaTrobe will follow in representing the present. The present time, 'ourselves', is a problematic issue for the audience: "'[o]urselves…'. But what could she know about ourselves? The Elizabethans yes; the Victorians, perhaps; but ourselves; sitting here on a June day in 1939 – it was ridiculous. 'Myself' – it was impossible" (160). The present is in a sense complicated by its relationship to the future, to the 'doom of sudden death' which hangs everywhere; the point behind the pageant was precisely to *avoid* the present time, to hide that is from what Maria

DiBattista calls 'the chaos of contemporary history' by reviving a past that has always been the repository of safety and meaning. As it turns out, however, Miss LaTrobe not only brings the audience back from that dreamy excursion into the idyllic past to the nightmare of the present, but she does so by dispensing with the necessary mediations of art altogether: "she wanted to expose them, as it were, to douche them with present-time reality" (161). As one would expect, however, the experiment goes awry: "something was going wrong with the experiment. 'Reality too strong', she mattered" (161).

Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, while espousing Miss LaTrobe's view of reality and experience as 'something half known, half not', does nevertheless not allow what in Three Guineas she called 'history in the raw' to invade her writing. "To be comprehended", DiBattista observes, "history must be transmuted into text, dialogue, and symbolical gesture" (195). This is what Woolf seems to be doing, as she attempts to gain access to the historical referent while consistently keeping a safe distance from it. The war, which is arguably the chief concern in the book, is pushed to the background and is mostly referred to indirectly through the mediations of figures and metaphors. We have seen for instance how the word 'mud' functions as a recurring allusion to the dichotomy surface/depth that divides characters in the book between those who believe in the superficial harmony of things and those who can see through the depths into the 'medley' characteristic of reality; or to use Bart's own formulation, between the 'unifiers' and the 'separatists'. The mud, like the overcast sky, represents for Mrs Swithin those moments of religious uncertainty which paradoxically serve to strengthen her faith.

Thus, whether gazing at the variable sky or at the muddy waters of pond, Mrs Swithin invariably experiences a religious epiphany of sorts: "she saw God there, God on his throne" (21). What is striking here is the association God/mud which, although it might appear random at first, acquires more meaning in the context of the war. Wilfred Owen's famous line "I, too, saw God through mud" seems both an antecedent and a sarcastic rejoinder to Mrs Swithin's religious revelation. Owen had long represented for Woolf the tragic dimension of war, having been killed, like a number of other young poets, in the prime of his poetic career. In Three Guineas, she had called him one of 'the dissentients', and had quoted from his notes such ideas as: "[t]he unnaturalness of weapons…Inhumanity of war…The insupportability of war…Horrible beastliness of war…Foolishness of war" (8). This allusion to Owen, indirect though it might be, is indicative both of Woolf's indictment of war, as well as the traumatic condition of agonized suspense in which she lived as she was writing her book.

Another indirect reference to the war occurs in a dream that Mr Oliver has, and in which he is brought back to his youthful adventures in India. The striking aspect of the dream is its richness in details:

> But the master was not dead; only dreaming; drowsily, seeing as in a glass, its lustre spotted, himself, a young man helmeted; and a cascade falling. But no water; and the hills, like grey stuff pleated; and in the sand a hoop of ribs; a bullock maggot-eaten in the sun; and in the shadow of the rock, savages; and in his hand a gun. The dream hand clenched; the real hand lay on the chair arm, the veins swollen but only with a brownish fluid now. (16)

While the ostensible setting of the dream is India, the continuity between the clenched 'dream hand' and the swollen 'real hand' points to the continuity between

past and present, which in turn suggests that the ongoing war has no more ethical justification that the imperial wars of the 19th century. The Victorian imperialists were, if we adhere to Mrs Swithin's theory of history, no worse than the modern dictators "whether they speak English or German" (Three Guineas 53). The cascade with no water could, in this sense, be interpreted as symbolizing that intense period of waiting and suspense which preceded the outbreak of war and which came to be called 'the phony war'. Hermione Lee has rightly emphasized the "sense of incongruity, helplessness, and threat [which] filled their [the Woolfs'] lives through August and September" of 1939 (711). "We sit and watch", Woolf laconically wrote in her diary in reference to those difficult days; she also recorded feeling like 'a herd of sheep', passively waiting to taken to the slaughterhouse (Diary 5: 231).

Another instance of how war as a hidden signified repeatedly erupts through the text in various guises despite the latter's attempts at mastering its meaning, is a seemingly ordinary passage in which Mrs Swithin discusses the weather with her cook in the kitchen while cutting bread for dinner:

> 'Will it be fine?' Asked Mrs Swithin, her knife suspended. In the kitchen they humoured old Mother Swithin's fancies.
> 'Seems like it,' said Mrs Sands, giving her sharp look-out of the kitchen window.
> 'It wasn't last year,' said Mrs Swithin. Do you remember what a rush we had – when the train came – getting the chairs?' She cut again. Then she asked about Billy, Mrs Sands nephew, apprenticed to the butcher. (31)

This passage recalls the scene in 'The Shooting Party' where Miss Antonia "drew the carving knife across the pheasant's breast firmly" (251). Linden Peach takes this scene in the short story to be emblematic of the metaphorical pole of the story, and argues that "while the metonymic in the story suggests the public face of order,

the metaphorical foregrounds what violence threatens to destroy it" (196). I would argue that the same could be said of the passage in Between the Acts, where the sequence of words such as 'knife', 'sharp', 'cut', and 'butcher' calls to mind the carnage that was threatening to erupt in Europe. The violence signified by these words has already been anticipated by similar ominous signs in a passage that comes just before the exchange between Mrs Swithin and the cook, and in which we are told that "the cook's hand cut, cut, cut. Whereas Lucy, holding the loaf, held the knife up" (BTA 31).

Yet while the scene in the kitchen refers back to 'The Shooting Party', a story that had been published only three years before Between the Acts appeared, other motifs in the book look back to even earlier fictions for their metaphorical implications. There is for instance the recurring reference to the 'thigh bone' recovered from the lily pool and initially thought to belong to a lady who had drowned herself ten years ago. The mysterious death of the lady has ever since been a source of anxiety for the servants at Pointz Hall, who were scared that the lady's ghost would one day make a sudden, frightful appearance. As it turns out, however, the bone "was a sheep's, not a lady's. And sheep have no ghosts, for sheep have no souls" (40). This situation conjures up the opening of Jacob's Room, where the youthful Jacob comes across what at first he believes to be "perhaps a cow's skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it" (5), only to find out later that it is an "old sheep's skull without its jaw" (Jacob's Room 6). That Woolf should be thinking of Jacob's Room at this juncture – the Second World War – is interesting. Woolf's third novel is remembered especially for allowing the author to find "out how to

begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice (Diary *2*: 186). Woolf's discovery of her 'own voice' seems to coincide with the emergence of what I have previously called a historical consciousness: the primarily fictive economy of novels such early novels as the Voyage Out and Night and Day finally gave way to the urgent demands of contemporary history. Jacob's Room was written after the end of Great War, yet like Between the Acts, it is deliberately set before the war, in that period of transition between Edwardian innocence and post-war disillusionment. As Sue Roe observes, it is a novel "about thresholds [and] brinks…", a description that recalls Frank Kermode's remark that Between the Acts is "deliberately placed on the threshold between peace and war, between a known past and an unknown but probably appalling future" (Introduction xv).

It is this transitory quality, that is to say the consciousness that something is about to end and another is about to begin, that makes of both Jacob's Room and Between the Acts appropriate occasions for some work of memory. For Woolf, however, memory seems for the most part to be interwoven with sorrow, so that the activity of remembering is never entirely divorced from a mournful as well as therapeutic dimension. In reminiscing about the composition of To the Lighthouse, Woolf wrote in her memoir: "I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest" (MB 81). In *Jacob's Room*, too, a similar therapeutic process seems to be underway as Woolf, much like the child in Freud's *fort-da* game, stages both the burgeoning and sudden demise of her brother Thoby. The effect of this was that, unlike the deaths of her mother and half-sister, Thoby's death did not have to be covered in 'silence'. "I

remember", she says in her memoir, "when Thoby died, that Adrian and I agreed to talk about him. 'There are so many people that are dead now', we said" (MB 107). The year 1939, too, like the period in which she wrote Jacob's Room, was for Woolf a time to look back at the past and remember the dead. It was in that year that she started writing her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past', a move that was at least in part motivated by a desire to understand the present, "[f]or the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present which presses so close that you can feel nothing else" (MB 98).[25] In this memoir, Woolf recalls the impact of her earliest and probably most traumatic encounter with death – the death of her mother. A few months before, she had a dream where she saw her nephew Julian, killed in the Spanish Civil war, and "implored him not t go to Spain. He promised. Then I saw his wounds"; on another occasion she dreamed of her long time friend Roger Fry and 'the old relationship' is revived in her mind. "Perhaps it's easier to get this in dreams", she mused, "because one has dreamt away the fact of his death" (172).

Dreaming, Freud tells us, is another way of remembering, and as such it can acquire a healing dimension. This is probably why Woolf repeatedly resorted what might be termed a language of dreams to recover certain intense moments that seem to escape conventional language. This was especially the case with her short fiction, where she started to explore the possibilities of the genre by pushing the limits of her prose to lyrical extremes, in order to capture otherwise elusive moments of heightened consciousness. The purpose behind such an endeavour was, as I will argue in the next chapter, to recall sensations experienced during her

recurrent episodes of physical and mental breakdown, when the mundane perceptions of health gave way to the heightened and perplexing visions of illness. In her experimental short stories, Woolf had recourse to image "as unavoidable carrier of the unrepresentable" (Satzman, Rosenerg xii), with the result that the trauma of illness was preserved not only in affect it aroused, but also in the visual intensity of the experience .

# NOTES

[1] 'The Shooting Party' is narrated by the obscure Milly Masters, who bears a striking resemblance to Marlowe, the narrator in Conrad's Heart of darkness, especially in her aloofness and reticence. The setting, too, (a railway carriage) evokes Conrad's favorite theme of journeying. The story also seems to be looking back to Heart of Darkness for some its metaphorical implications, such as the passage about the uncanny fog, the theme of sepulchral atmosphere (which recalls Marlowe's description of Brussels as a 'sepulchral city'), and the more obvious metaphor of a 'rotten heart'. These Conradian echoes would be taken up more avowedly by Woolf in Between the Acts, especially in its concern with civilization and the threat of a regression to pre-history, and its severe pessimism. Interestingly, in Laura Marcus's book on Woolf, the chapter on Between the Acts is entitled 'Into the Heart of Darkness'. Laura Marcus, Virginia Woolf (Devon: Northcote Publishers, 1997).

[2] Miller's 'extrapolation' is his rejoinder to Geoffrey Hartman's argument in an essay on Woolf that for the novelist the main activity of the mind is a work of interpolation. Miller describes this process as follows: "there is a creative power in the mind which thrusts itself forward, in spite of obstacles and hesitations. This energy pushes out to fill in gaps and pauses, to weave a web which ties this to that, one thing to another, in the assertion of a continuous power of production" (213). However, Between the Acts is not as much about ties and connections as it is about 'orts, scraps, and fragments', and despite a few moments of unity and harmony, the dominating ethos of the book seems to be that of gaps and cacophony. Moreover, although there is what might be termed a thrust of unifying energy that runs through the book, there is little indication that whatever gaps there are have actually been bridged, because "[t]he gaps between units of text, as Miller argues, are not capable of being filled by some fluid medium, consciousness as a unifier...the gaps between words can only be filled with more words". That is why Miller suggests that in "place of Hartman's image of interpolation it might be better to put the image of extrapolation. This image is closer to both Woolf's activity of creation and the reader's activity of interpreting Between the Acts". J. Hillis Miller, Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 213-216.

[3] The language of testimony as such represents for Felman a 'discursive practice', to be distinguished from 'pure theory'. A testimony is discursive in the sense that it seeks to represent catastrophic events, to bear witness to them through language, discourse. The end product of this discourse, however, is "not a completed statement, a totalizabe account of those events", but "bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or resemblances, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition". This fragmentation, on the other hand, is our only access to such extreme events, which in turn illustrates the performative dimension of the language of testimony. Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York: Routledge, 1992) 5.

[4] Caruth devotes two chapters in her book Unclaimed Experience to the discussion of Moses and Monotheism. In 'Trauma and the Possibility of History', she sees in Freud's linking of Jewish history to trauma an attempt "to rethink the possibility of history, as well as our ethical and political relation to it" (12). In 'Traumatic Departures: Survival and History in Freud', Caruth returns to Moses and Monotheism, this time in order to draw structural parallels between Jewish history and the theory of trauma, especially in terms of their struggle with 'what cannot be grasped'.

[5] For Caruth, the notion of trauma imposes on us the task of reconsidering our conventional understanding of reference, with a view not to eliminating reference and history altogether, but "rather examin[ing] how to recognize it where it does not occur as *knowledge*". The 'rethinking of reference' and the possibility of an alternative kind of history are Caruth's introductory comments to the discussion of Freud's Moses and Monotheism in Unclaimed Experience. The issue of reference appears with an even more 'insistence' in her volume Critical Encounters. In the introduction to that volume, she defends poststructural criticism against the claim that by questioning reference, it attempts to deny history. She especially cites trauma narratives as an example of a text that "rather than assuring us of direct access to reference", or otherwise denying it altogether, they surprise us by "realigning reference with what is *not fully masterable by cognition*". Cathy Caruth, Critical

Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995) 3.

[6] W. B. Yeats, Selected Poetry, ed. Timothy Webb. London: Penguin, 1991. The notion of 'center' was becoming increasingly important for Woolf, as she faced the prospect of private and public chaos. In 1938, she wrote in her diary: "I have no circumference; only my inviolable centre" (183). And in 1940, she complained about the difficulty "to make oneself a centre after all the rings a visitor stirs in one…how difficult to draw all those wide ripples & be at home, central". She then added that she "tried to center by reading Freud" (299). In Between the Acts, too, a collective voice says: "what we need is a centre. Something to bring us all together" (178).

[7] Freud had already approached this in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, where he argued for the existence of what he called a 'death drive' or 'death instinct', defined as "*an urge inherent in organic life to restore to an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces". Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth P, 1961) 30.

[8] Woolf had long been interested in such glimpses of the prehistorical. Consider, for instance, the passage about the beggar-woman in Mrs Dalloway: "through all ages – when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise – the battered woman – for she wore a skirt – with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love – love which has lasted a million of years, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned with her in May". Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1996) 60.

[9] Far from being cast as a distant, ideal situation, The prehistoric in Woolf is often described as being contiguous and sometimes overlapping with the present which, as Laura Marcus argues, "cuts across any linear, progressivist narrative of the move from 'barbarism' to 'civilization'" (181). This same point is emphasized by Michael Whitworth, who observes that "Woolf's primeval glimpses do not provide a narrative, or even an interpretive framework. Rather, they function as interrogatives, questioning not only 'civilization' but also mythic modernism, without providing any answers". Michael Whitworth, "Virginia Woolf and Modernism", The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf, ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 156.

[10] Just before he commits suicide, Septimus is seized by a sudden love for life, and he hesitates for a moment before jumping out of the window: "he did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot". Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1996. p. 108.

[11] In his translation of Derrida's The Post Card, Alan Bass points to the play on *démarche*, the French equivalent for procedure. It comes from *marcher* (to walk, to work) and *dé-* as a prefix of negation, which implies that Freud's narrative does not progress or does not work.

[12] Another Derridean play on words: foots-tamping echoes both the repetitive sound made by footsteps and the idea of *démarche.*

[13] The idea of a 'stubborn' repetition that persists despite Freud's attempts at breaking the cycle is also echoed by Gilles Deleuze in his Difference and Repetition. Commenting on Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Deleuze argues that while apparently aiming at eliminating the model of a 'brute repetition', Freud only succeeds in maintaining it; so that "[e]ven beyond the pleasure principle, the form of a bare repetition persists, since Freud interprets the death instinct as a tendency to return to the state of inanimate matter, one which upholds the model of a wholly physical or material repetition". Gilles Deleuze, Difference and repetition, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 17.

[14] Esty's argument comes as a response to Hugh Kenner's A Sinking Island which he sees as providing a 'negative' and for the most part pessimistic account of English culture in the thirties. In place of Kenner's narrative of decline, Esty posits his own theory that the decline of Empire allowed English writers of the thirties to explore the possibilities of an 'inward reorientation'. "Shrinking back to its original island center", he says, "England would no longer be a world-historical nation, but it might recapture the humanist, aesthetic, and pastoral values that had been eroded or degraded by imperial capitalism". Jed Esty, A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2004) 39.

[15] Here Woolf seems to anticipate the Derridean concept of *différance.* Derrida has emphasized the crack at the heart of the linguistic sign: "[t]he hinge *[brisure]*, he says in the first section of

Of Grammatology, marks the impossibility that a sign, the unity of signifier and signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence". Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998) 41. Instead of this plenitude of presence, Derrida posits the movement of *différence*, whereby "each present element…is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element". Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982) 65.

[16] The image of actors opening their mouths but making no sounds recalls Kristeva's description of the speech of the depressed. In a passage that is strikingly applicable to the language of Between the Acts, Kristeva describes the speech of those suffering from depression as "repetitive and monotonous", adding that "faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill". Finally, yielding to the pressure of silence, "the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into the blankness of asymbolia or the excess of an unorderable cognitive chaos". Julia Kristeva, Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 33.

[17] Maria DiBattista considers the scene to be the novel's supreme 'moment of real violence', and interprets it as a metaphor for the 'undischarged emotion' and 'pandemic aggressiveness' that the war threatens to unleash. "Giles's act, she says, dramatically discharges the irresistible desire to destroy, to inflict pain, to draw blood that infects all those whose future is shadowed by the war" (198). For Gillian Beer, however, the scene is only one part of a violent streak in the novel, which also includes the approach of the war, the rape incident, and the terrorizing of the little boy George. Beer observes that this world of violence is one of two poles governing the book, the other being the world of 'play'. Gillian Beer, "Between the Acts", in. Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works, ed. Julia Briggs (London: Virago P, 1994) 414. The connection between the snake scene and that of terrorizing the child has also been suggested by Louise A. Poresky, who argues that they reveal "both Giles's and Bart's repressed savagery". Louise A. Poresky, The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1981) 248.

[18] The Real is the most elusive part of Lacan's triadic topography of orders or registers, which also includes the Imaginary and the Symbolic. As Madan Sarup points out, Lacan's own definition of the concept is "always in terms of the impossible…The Real is that which is excluded, the impossible to bear". He also adds that "the Real is impossible to see, or to hear since, in any case, it is 'always-already-there'". Madan Sarup, Jacques Lacan (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992) 104. This elusiveness is in large part due to the fact that the real escapes language, or as Malcolm Bowie would have it, "it lies outside the symbolic process, and is to be found in the mental as well as in the material world: a trauma, for example, is as intractable and unsymbolizable as objects in their materiality". Malcolm Bowie, Lacan (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) 94.

[19] The association of rain and human suffering has already been suggested by Woolf in The Years in the following passage: "[t]he fine rain, the gentle rain, poured equally over the mitred and the bearheaded with an impartiality which suggested that the God of rain, if there were a God, was thinking Let it not be restricted to the very wise, the very great, but let all breathing kind, the munchers and the chewers, the ignorant, the unhappy, those who toil in the furnace making innumerable copies of the same pot, those who bear red hot minds through contorted letters, and also Mrs Jones in the alley, share my bounty". Virginia Woolf, The Years (London: Hogarth P, 1990) 40.

[20] Melba Cuddy-Keane compares this disembodied voice to the anonymous voice that cries "Alas Alas" in the short story 'The Fascination of the Pool'. The voice, she writes, "signifies the imagined consolation of continuity in the collective human unconscious". Melba Cuddy-Keane, Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 130.

[21] The killing of the father and its subsequent consequences had already been the subject of Freud's scrutiny in Totem and Taboo. In the final essay of the book, Freud combines Charles Darwin's hypotheses about the organization of primal societies with the theory of totemism as a sacrificial rite articulated by William Robertson Smith in The Religion of the Semites, to argue that the origins of the totem are to be found in a single event – the killing of the father by the primal horde. According to Darwin, the primal horde was organized around a violent father who keeps all the females for himself to the frustration of the growing sons. "One day", Freud writes, "the

expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly" (235). What is interesting about this account is the ways in which it anticipates the paradigm of repetition and return that would form the basis of the Freud's retelling of Jewish history in Moses and Monotheism. Just as the history of the Jews is made to revolve around an act of murder and its subsequent return, so does the killing of the primal father return in the form of the totem feast: "Now they accomplished their identification with him [the father] by devouring him and each acquired a part of his strength. The totem feast, which is perhaps mankind's first celebration, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began, social organization, moral restriction and religion" (236). Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics, trans. A. A. Brill (London: George Routledge, 1926).

[22] For a thorough account of influence of Moses and Monotheism on the writing of Between the Acts, see Elizabeth Abel, Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989).

[23] One such gap according to Caruth is the interval between the two prefaces to the third section of the book. Here, a little history of the composition of the book is in order. The first two parts of the book were published in 1937, while Freud was still in Austria. The publication of the third part, however, was withheld until 1938, that is after Freud had moved to England. In the middle of this third part, Freud inserted a section entitled "Summary and capitulation" in which he explains the peculiar history of the book's composition. What is also remarkable about the third section is the fact that Freud decided to append two prefaces to it, one subtitled "Before March 1938" and the other "June 1938", corresponding to his time in Vienna and London respectively. For Caruth, the space that separates the two prefaces marks the space of trauma, a trauma denoted not by the explicit references to the German invasion, but by Freud's laconic allusion to his departure from his home city – "the city which from early childhood, through seventy-eight years, had been home to me". Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism (New York: Alfred .A. Knopf, 1939) 88.

[24] Mrs Swithin's 'obsession' with the visual seems to recall Cathy Caruth's claim that certain models of historical writing are based on an obstinate conflation of reference with what is seen. Such models, she argues, "suggest that reference is 'seen' or grasped as outside the text [and] ultimately place limits on reference that [...] in fact constrict it rather than open it to the new: for anything that is not accessible as semantic content that can be 'seen' or understood cannot be recognized as real. What cannot be simply perceived or grasped, that is, becomes from this point of view a mere fiction". Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch, Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995) 3.

[25] This, again, seems to recall Ruth Leys' notion of the 'specular distance', which was to a large extent responsible for Woolf's difficulties in writing Mrs Dalloway. Woolf seems to suggest again that a certain distance temporal or otherwise is necessary for a better grasp on experience.

# CHAPTER 3

# IMAGES OF THE 'DARK CUPBOARD': ILLNESS AND EMBODIMENT IN WOOLF'S SHORT FICTION

> The outward sign I see and shall see for ever; but at the meaning of it I shall only guess.
>
> – Virginia Woolf, 'Sympathy'

In the chapter on The Voyage Out of her 1978 literary biography of Virginia Woolf Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf, Phyllis Rose underlines the 'enormous power' and vividness with which Woolf manages to convey the illness of Rachel Vinrace. The source of Woolf's power, Rose argues, lies in her having had a first hand experience of prolonged and perilous illness. Woolf, she says,

> knew [...] madness from the inside, and to portray Rachel's fevered delirium she had only to recreate the dislocations of her own mind in the two bouts of illness she had already suffered when she began to write The Voyage Out. She conveys superbly the visual distortions produced by Rachel's fever, the rapid changes of perception of temperature, the heightened sensitivity to all touch, as the sick girl grows by the day more and more cut off from any reality outside of her tormented body and brain. (71)

Rose's comments are indicative of the high level of attention that Virginia Woolf's illness has unremittingly received from students of her work. They also anticipate the degree to which the image of Virginia Woolf as an ill person – "the invalid lady of Bloomsbury"[1] as she was often called – has become a significant component of her image as a writer. Much like the famous G. C. Beresford photograph, and Edward Albee's over quoted title, the story of Woolf's illness and suicide are today equally embedded in the imagination of those who are familiar with her work. One has only to look at the sheer number of articles and books that are devoted to her illness to get a sense of how central this topic has become to the field of Woolf studies. Here, a quick survey of the major critical literature would be in order.

Approaches to Virgina Woolf's illness have traditionally followed two main paradigms, the psychoanalytic and the biomedical. Woolf's work has long held a strong attraction for psychoanalytic critics, and this despite her well-known ambivalence toward the psychoanalytic project. This ambivalence led Woolf to

ignore the new treatment methods announced by psychoanalysis which became available in London in 1913, and continue instead to adhere to the old-fashioned diagnosis of neurasthenia with its 'rest cure' treatment. With the publication of Woolf's diary and letters a few decades after her death, however, there was an abundance of biographical material, which in turn stirred interest in the author's life and led to the appearance of numerous psychobiographies. What these studies had in common, however, was a determined attempt to understand the nature and causes of Woolf's condition through a careful analysis not only of her work but also the new auto/biographical material that was becoming available. One such study, Alma Halbert Bond's Who Killed Virginia Woolf: A Psychobiography (1989) focuses on Woolf's notorious mood swings and other symptoms to argue that Woolf suffered from a severe case of manic-depression or bipolar disorder. Yet while she acknowledges that "the disease of manic-depression has an inherited, probably metabolic structure" (23), Bond unequivocally locates the causes of Woolf's pathology in the psychoanalytic concept of symbiosis with the mother. She also stresses the inaccuracy of certain Woolf scholars in foregrounding the image of Woolf as having always been surrounded by devoted and caring people. Instead, she points to what she calls a 'Woolf-Bell veil of secrecy', whereby Woolf's insanity was contained and Leonard's image as caretaker exalted in order to maintain the 'Woolf-Bell myth' (17). Woolf, too, according to Bond, seems to have internalized this strategy of concealment, which must have exacerbated her condition and led her to become emotionally dishonest. And it is this dishonesty

that makes it necessary to dig underneath the surface of her writings if we are to arrive to an adequate understanding of Woolf's illness and her suicide.

The predominance of myths surrounding Woolf's family life especially with regards to her marriage to Leonard , and their effects on her physical and mental condition, are also the subject of Irene Coates's Who's Afraid of Leonard Woolf? A Case for the Sanity of Virginia Woolf (2000). Coates takes issues with the prevalent "image of Leonard the 'good man', even of Leonard the 'saint' as he looks after his ailing genius of a wife" (18), to show that behind the apparent mask of dedication, Leonard was a domineering and manipulative husband, who knew "how important it was for him to believe that his wife was insane since this confirmed him in a sense of his own sanity and maleness" (22). Similarly, the long-celebrated affective and intellectual bond between the Woolfs is seen as no more than an outer shell for their radically divergent visions. In the end, Coates argues, Virginia came to the conclusion that "there was an unabridgeable difference between herself and Leonard", and so her suicide came as "the end-game of the conflict between the Woolf's two visions" (22).

Also operating within the psychoanalytic paradigm is Shirley Panken's intervention Virginia Woolf and the Lust of Creation: A Psychoanalytic Exploration (1987). In it, Panken proposes to demystify the aura surrounding Woolf's 'madness' as well as its alleged connections to her genius. Thus, although she dwells on the physical symptoms of Woolf's illness including her recurrent headaches, sleeplessness and reluctance to eat, Panken still stresses the psychosomatic nature of her condition. Using psychoanalytic terminology, she

argues that Woolf grappled with 'four major constellations' which included an uncompleted mourning process regarding her mother, a complex identification with her father, her ambivalence toward her sexual and personal identity, and her fundamental conception of herself as an outsider with regards to both the social and literary world.

All these psychological problems would seem to indicate that Woolf's adult issues had their inception during her childhood, a point that is particularly emphasized by Louise DeSalvo, who attributes Woolf's bouts of illness, her problems with food and her complex attitude to her body to childhood traumas. Drawing on Woolf's previously unpublished memoir Moments of Being, DeSalvo argues that the young Virginia was repeatedly molested by her half-brothers with traumatic consequences, and that her 'breakdowns' "might have been a desperate [if uncontrollable] attempt to stop the abuse, for [they] brought doctors into the household" (109). To discredit the label of 'madness' brought by scholars like Quentin Bell and Nigel Nicholson, and emphasize instead the effects of certain traumatic experiences on Woolf's life, is also the aim of Roger Poole in The Unknown Virginia Woolf (1990) and Stephen Trombley in All the Summer She was Mad: Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors (1982). Using Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodiment, Trombley conducts a phenomenological analysis at the level of the body in order to argue that at the center of Woolf's illness was what he calls "a problematical sense of embodiment" (10). "During all of Virginia's breakdowns", he says, "she had a peculiar relationship to her body. She felt that it was sordid; she

found eating repulsive; she felt as if her body was not the center of her 'self' – that she somehow existed at odds with it, or divorced from it" (10).

Yet despite their insights, these psychologically oriented approaches have recently come under attack for not keeping pace with recent discoveries about the biological basis of such mental illnesses as manic-depressive illness. Thomas C. Caramagno, for instance, has criticized Freudian academics for clinging to what he views as outmoded and simplistic models of the disorder, and for their bias toward the myth of the 'neurotic artist'. Woolf, according to him, suffered from a classic case of manic-depressive disorder, which means that her illness was periodic, that is to say there were times when she was not ill, and it was during such respites that she was able to reflect upon her illness and to learn from it. In this context, her bold experiments in fiction seem to fulfill a therapeutic function. It is this positive aspect of Woolf's illness, Caramagno adds, that has been systematically ignored by psychoanalytic critics, eager as they are to fit Woolf's life and work into their psychodynamic theories, and limit her achievement to the model of the 'archetypal neurotic female'.[2]

The perception of Woolf as 'a woman writer touched by fire' also forms the focus of a more recent study, Thomas Szasz's My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf (2006), in which the author proceeds to demystify what he calls 'the pseudomedical fable' of Woolf's madness and its 'alleged' connection to her genius. At different stages in her life, Szasz writes, Woolf was cast in various roles including that of the manic-depressive, the female-feminist, and the genius-writer. As a reaction to the environment that imposed these

roles on her, she proceeded to identify with, and use, these roles; thus, if she was considered mad, she would possess her madness and not be possessed by it. Woolf, Szasz conludes, was therefore, a victim of "neither mental illness, nor psychiatry, nor her husband – three ways she is regularly portrayed. Instead, she was an intelligent and self-assertive person, a moral agent who used mental illness, psychiatry, and her husband to fashion for herself a life of her own choosing" (13).

As is shown by this brief survey, discussions of Woolf's illness have mostly centred on the polarized possibilities of madness and sanity, and their effects on the author's work. Yet, in the heated debate between those who defend Woolf's sanity and those who see her genius as being closely connected to her madness, one's attention is constantly drawn away from the actual vicissitudes and the physical as well as mental suffering of Woolf's protracted illness.[3] That is to say, critics have for the most part attempted to provide diagnoses, reasons, and hint at possibilities, but the actual trauma of being ill is yet to be fully explored. And even Suzette Henke and David Eberly's recent Woolfian "catalogue of traumas" accords only a subordinate position to those "repeated episodes of psychical affliction" (1), since they emphasize the impact of such experiences as the death of her parents and the story of her sexual abuse. Also, while the authors do hint at "the impact of medical regiments that she [Woolf] endured as a powerless adolescent and young woman" in their collaborative introduction to the volume entitled Virginia Woolf and Trauma, none of the essays included in the volume specifically addresses this theme.

My purpose in this chapter is not to build on the discoveries of previous psychiatrically or biologically informed studies in order to bring forth yet another diagnosis of Woolf's illness, a task that will certainly be carried out by more studies to come. Instead, I will look at traces of the trauma of illness in Woolf's short fiction, that is to say how she proceeded to grapple with the impact of her long experience of illness through a constant process of narrative reformulation. Specifically, attention will be given to the deployment of therapeutic strategies at work in the stories, which calls to mind Suzette Henke's recent concept of scriptotherapy, defined as a "process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (Shattered Subjects xii). The purpose of scriptotherapy, Henke and Eberle observe, is

> the reformulation of traumatic memory as verbal narrative, either in talk therapy or through creative writing, [in order] to effect an abreaction or catharsis that restores to the human survivor a sense of agency and control. What scriptotherapy implements is a shift in the mind's fixation on pathological melancholia to a healthier abreaction consigning traumatic experience to a register of mourning, whereby disturbing life events can successfully be "worked through". (Virginia Woolf and Trauma 15)

The process of working through was not unfamiliar to Woolf, nor was she unaware of the therapeutic potential of her writing. Her life consisted of what Katherine Dalsimer aptly describes as "repeated sledgehammer blows" – successive traumatic events that often needed to be worked through. Not least of these were her repeated bouts of illness, which although sporadic, left a permanent imprint on her personality.[4] And while she could not record the terror of the experience of illness as it was happening, her diary and letters are interspersed with retroactive

descriptions of the intense moments that she had to go through. On August 8, 1921, she wrote in her diary:

> What a gap! How it would have astounded me to be told when I wrote the last word here, on June 7th, that within a week I shd be in bed, and not entirely out of it till the 6th of August - two whole months rubbed out - these this morning, the first words I have written – to call writing – for sixty days; and those days spent in wearisome headache, jumping pulse, aching back, frets, fidgets, lying awake, sleeping draughts, sedatives, digitalis, going for a little walk, and plunging back into bed again – all the horrors of the dark cupboard of illness once more displayed for my diversion. Let me make a vow that this shall never, never, happen again. (Diary 2: 125)

The person speaking through these lines is clearly a melancholy and bitter one. The physical strain and the acute symptoms sometimes brought her to the edge of despair, but they were only one part of the predicament; she also had to suffer concomitant psychological problems, mostly in the form of violent mood swings and severe bouts of depression. She wrote in 1937:

> I wish I could write out my sensations at this moment. They are so peculiar & so unpleasant. Partly T of L [Time of Life] I wonder. A physical feeling as if I were drumming slightly in the veins: very cold: impotent & terrified. As if I were exposed on a high ledge in full light. Very lonely...Very useless. No atmosphere round me. No words. Very apprehensive. As if something cold & horrible – a roar of laughter at my expense were about to happen...And this anxiety & nothingness surround me with a vacuum. (Diary 5: 63)

The word 'apprehensive', as Hermione Lee notes, is one that Woolf has learned to use frequently in her adulthood.[5] It is closely linked to her illness, as it became painfully obvious to her after the first few attacks that hers was to be a protracted illness, a continuous battle not only with the severe physical symptoms but also with the mental terrors of 'the dark underworld'. Thus, even during those times when she was relatively healthy, the possibility of another painful incursion into

'the dark cupboard of illness' was never completely absent from her mind. The only activity that seems to have helped her "to avoid these glooms" was the act of writing (Diary 3: 112). Accordingly, we find that whenever she rails against her illness and the set of curative and preventive restrictions that came with it, Woolf almost invariably evokes the frustration that arises from the inability to write.

The reason for this 'fixation' on the scene of writing is that Woolf was perfectly aware of the therapeutic dimension that her writing had acquired over the years. While working on To the Lighthouse, she expressed the need to keep "my imaginary people going. Not that they are people: what one imagines in a novel is a world. Then, when one has imagined this world, suddenly people come in – but I don't know why one does it, or why it should alleviate the misery of life" (Letters 3: 238-39). The healing but also preventive value of the act of writing would be repeatedly evoked in her diary and letters, as when she expresses the amount of frustration she experienced as a result of being away from her pen and papers while on holiday in France: "[m]ounting all the time steadily was my desire for words, till I envisaged a sheet of paper & pen & ink as something of a miraculous desirability – could even relish the scratch as if it were a divine relief to me" (Diary 3: 179). Writing was for her 'a divine relief', an activity that helped not only to 'alleviate' the pain of her repeated lapses into illness, but also to keep her mind from being invaded by the gloomy thoughts associated with the fragility of her healthy interludes. "What a born melancholic I am!", she once mused. "The only way I keep afloat is by working…Directly I stop working I feel that I am sinking down, down, down" (Diary 3: 235).

By 'working' Woolf meant of course a continuous process of narrative reformulation, what Henke and Eberly call a "re-scripting and mastering" of the traumatic experience of illness in narrative and fictional terms (5). Thus, her best achievements as a novelist rest mainly on the brilliance and vividness with which she manages to convey the post-traumatic suffering of characters who have undergone terrifying experiences that continue to haunt them for the rest of their lives. The character of Septimus in Mrs Dalloway can be seen in this context as Woolf's rewriting of the devastating impact of her own mental breakdowns, whereas the disjointed narratives of The Waves echo the ontological vicissitudes of the recurrent encounter with death.[6]

It is in the short stories, however, that Woolf in my opinion comes closest to capturing the essence of the experience of illness – its suffering but also its priceless insights. To see the connection between these stories and Woolf's illness, one has to go back to a text which represents Woolf's most direct engagement with illness – the 1930 essay 'On Being Ill'. It is surprising, considering the currency of the issue of Woolf's illness, to see how systematically overlooked this essay has been. In it, Woolf makes the case for the power of illness to change our perception of the visible world, and thus carry us to a terrain unknown to us in health. In illness, she argues, "we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright" (196), always restricted to the petty activities of daily life, as we momentarily inhabit a higher level of existence where everything "is discovered to be something so different" from the way it is usually perceived, and deeper truths are revealed. Most

importantly, Woolf conceptualized the experience of illness as "a state of mind which neither words can express nor the reason explain" (200).

Interestingly, most of the short stories from this period are nothing like conventional narratives since, as Susan Dick suggests, they read more like 'fictional reveries' – explorations of precisely such an elusive state of mind. In the story entitled 'A Simple Melody', the main character is in the middle of a party, but is unable to blend in with the rest of the guests because his attention is riveted to "a picture of a heath…a very beautiful picture" (195). Transfixed by the picture, the man is taken to a "happy and far more severe and exalted world, which, was also much simpler than this" (195). We already hear echoes from the kind of enchanted landscape that Woolf hints at in 'On Being Ill', and this will become clearer as the protagonist reflects on the mental excursion that he is going on:

> These states of mind when one is walking, in company, on a heath, produce a sense of similarity. On the other hand, social converse, when everyone wants to shine, and to enforce his own point of view, produces dissimilarity; and which is the more profound? (200)

What is striking about this passage is not only the obvious allusion to 'state of mind', but also the way it anticipates Woolf's argument, in 'On Being Ill', that only in illness does one achieve the kind vision in which petty details are smoothed out and we become fundamentally the same. Mr Carslake's concern in 'A Simple Melody' is the power of art to transcend difference and "produce a sense of similarity" (200). When Woolf takes up the issue again in 'On Being Ill', she seems to suggest that illness is capable of producing the same kind of heightened perception that has traditionally been ascribed to art.

Much like 'A Simple Melody', the stories that I propose to analyze in this chapter, 'The Mark on the Wall', 'Kew Gardens', and 'An Unwritten Novel', represent diverse exploration of various states of mind. In doing so, they seem to enact precisely the movement conceptualized in 'On Being Ill', that is, the transition from what the narrator in 'The Mark on the Wall' calls "the vast upheaval of matter" (83) toward another level of existence where profound "truths are blurted out" (196)[7]. In all three stories, plot and action are subordinated to the more important task of conveying the adventures of the mind as it explores states of perception similar to the one alluded to in the essay on illness. Thus, cryptic and unconventional, these arresting fictions seem to act out the solipsism of Woolf's complex illness. All this is rendered in a style that is lyrical and visual, thus anticipating Woolf's eventual turn from conventional narrative techniques to the experimental mode of her later writings. As a result of this lyricism as well as the imagistic techniques of precision and directness, each story appears more like a transcription of a dream than a narrative of events.[8] Yet, despite this richness in detail, the lingering impression is one of uncertainty and 'incomprehensibility' not unlike the one that Woolf evokes in 'On Being Ill'. What is the significance of the 'mark' on the wall? Why is there a snail in 'Kew Gardens'? And who is the Minnie Marsh of 'An Unwritten Novel'? To ask these question, I would suggest, is to confront a writing that works very much like a dream by displacement and distortion, as it attempts to bear an oblique witness to the trauma of illness. Thus, I would propose a close reading of the stories that pays attention to the economy of the image and the interplay of tropes of inwardness and exteriority, familiarity and

incomprehensibility, as they obliquely point to the experience that would form the focus of 'On Being Ill'. We know that in the context of Woolf's illness, the process of recovery was often accompanied by what might be termed an enhanced imagistic disposition, as is shown in this diary entry entitled "Returning Health", in which Woolf describes the recovery of her ability to write: "[t]his is shown by power to make images: the suggestive power of every sight & every word is enormously increased" (Diary 3: 104). A study of the way these images operate in the stories would not only reveal the ways in which Woolf lived and conceived of her illness, but also the latter's connection to her unique modernist aesthetic.

Owing to this imagistic disposition and the concomitant dreamlike quality of the sketches, it would be fruitful to analyze the stories as if they were in sense transcriptions of dreams, which would imply the task of distinguishing between a surface meaning and a hidden, underlying meaning, or to use Freud's terms, a manifest dream content and latent dream thoughts. Dream content, Freud tells us, is embedded in "a hieroglyphic script" that needs to be decoded by replacing "each image by a syllable or a word that may, by some link or other, be represented by the image" (Interpreting Dreams 294). This apparently simple task, however, is complicated by what Freud calls the 'dream work' – the various processes of condensation and displacement through which the raw material of the dream is transformed in order to produce the manifest dream content. My analysis will therefore not be based on a literal interpretation of the various images that repeatedly make their appearance in these dream-like tales, but will seek to make

associations and find concealed symbolism so as to attach meaning and significance to what might otherwise appear to be random detail.

It should be noted here that the choice of the three stories was not random; two factors have guided this choice: there is, to begin with, the critical consensus that these stories represent Woolf's best achievement in experimenting with the genre of the short story. Written between 1917 and 1920, they provided Woolf with a testing ground that would eventually allow her not only to find her own distinctive voice, but also to develop the set of innovative narrative techniques on which her reputation as a novelist rests today. Woolf was clearly aware of the possibilities that these stories were opening up for her. In 1920, after the publication of 'An Unwritten Novel', she declared having "arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another – as in An Unwritten Novel – only not for 10 pages but for 200 or so" (Diary 2:13). The new novel was to be Jacob's Room, and the new method was an allusion to the embryonic theory of a novel with 'no scaffolding' that she would continue to practise during the 1920s and 30s. The other reason for the choice of stories is a connection between them that was suggested by Woolf herself when she wrote: "conceive mark on the wall. K[ew] [G]ardens. & unwritten novel taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover: the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance 2 weeks ago" (Diary 2: 14). The 'theme', unknown to Woolf at the time, would become clearer as she continued to utilize and to develop modernist forms to capture such elusive life experiences as her illness. Modernism would become for

her not merely an aesthetic choice but the expression of the need for what Hermione Lee calls 'a private language' of illness.

Locating the achievements of Woolf's experimental short fiction in the author's life experience, in this case her illness, would seem to ground the argument of this chapter in a certain critical perspective that might be considered obsolete and at odds with our postmodern age. If anything, postmodernism generally defines itself in opposition to such humanist notions as subjectivity, authorship, intentionality, and totality, all deemed crucial concepts to the biographical. Yet, as William H. Epstein observes, "the deployment of certain postmodern tactics does not preclude or exclude the biographical or, for that matter, any 'contextualizing' discourse" (1). Epstein's argument emerges from a postmodern perspective that acknowledges the various problems that have beset the theory and practice of biography and biographical criticism, yet it maintains that these problems have been the driving force for, not an obstacle to, a constant rethinking of this category. The result of this constant reworking is that today biography, as the literal and figural 'inscription of life' remains a viable discursive formation with vital and therapeutic powers.[9] This view is endorsed by Stanley Fish, who emphasizes the fact that those postmodernist figures whom we traditionally associate with the 'death' of the author such as Foucault and Barthes, "have not done away with intention and biography but merely relocated them" (13). In other words, it does not matter whether the agent in question is an actual human consciousness or what Foucault calls "a transcendental anonymity" (208), since to read this anonymity is to endow it with intention and biography. The choice, therefore, as Fish adds

> is not between reading biographically and reading in some other way (there is no other way) but rather between different biographical readings that have their source in different specifications of the sources of agency. The only way to read unbiographically would be to refrain from construing meaning – to refrain, that is, from regarding the marks before you as manifestations of intentional behavior; but that would be not to read at all. (14)

Fish's comments seem particularly relevant within the field of Woolf studies. Woolf was known for her lifelong interest in the genre of auto/biography, and a large section of her published work can be grouped under the generic label of life-writing. The works included in this section range from essays, letters, diaries, memoirs, and fictional biographies, and have been a valuable asset in the critical interpretation of the novels. This was due in large part to what many critics perceive to be a 'continuum' which goes from the life through the autobiographical writings all the way to the novels. "[H]ow could it be possible in Virginia Woolf's case", asks Daniel Ferrer, "to separate the text and what is outside it, the writing and the life? Where could we draw the line in the vast quantity of *intermediate* writings [...] which occupy such an important place in her *oeuvre* and offer many points of contact with the novels, which they often precede or double" (94, author's italics).[10]

These comments echo the more recent position announced by trauma theorists who see a 'phenomenological link' between a writer's lived experiences and his/her work. Situated at the crossroad of a variety of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, trauma theory is grounded in the view of literary texts as a 'textual embodiment' replicating the impact of historical experiences on the psyche (Henke & Eberle).[11] In other words, these texts

> reflect, in some way, the author's own historically embodied consciousness. The writer's experiential horizons may be directly represented, sublimated, parodied, or inverted in a work of art. But whatever the history of an authorial subject, residues of personal biography subtly inform the fictional texts that the writer imagines and artistically (re)constructs. (8)

Woolf was a remarkable figure for those interested in the practice and theory of biography. For biographers, Woolf's recording of her life in diaries, letters, and memoirs has constituted both a rich material for their biographical research as well as a valuable companion to her fiction. This explains the large number of biographies that have taken Woolf as their subject matter. Starting with Aileen Pippet's 1953 The Moth and the Star, biographical interest in Woolf was revived with the publication in 1972 of Quentin Bell's controversial biography, which elicited a great deal of negative response for what scholars believed to be a set of uncritical assumptions about Woolf's illness and her politics. The response took the form of a wave of alternative biographies that have sought to reveal previously hidden facets of Woolf's personality and her work. Hermione Lee, for instance, has underlined the centrality of Woolf's feminism to her thought and work, while Roger Poole's, Stephen Trombley's, and DeSalvo's biographies have focused on revising certain assumptions about her illness.

The relevance of the genre of the biographical to Woolf studies[12] also rests on the fact that Woolf was not only a writer; she was a female and feminist writer, too. Recently, feminist critics have underlined the importance of biography for women as a response to what Alison Booth calls "the aesthetic of impersonality that devalues the feminine" (59). For Booth, as for Cheryl Walker and others, all feminist criticism is biographical in that it always refers to 'the specificity of female

experience'. "The feminine", Booth writes, "is never simply a writing effect, but also registers the living effects of human being" (58). Thus, while acknowledging the challenges of adhering to notions of biography and intention (especially within the context of postmodern claims of the death of the author), Booth still stresses what she calls "the burden of personality that arises when we modify 'author' with 'woman'" (59).

Woolf herself, while she had doubts about the relevance of biography to the criticism of the novel, nevertheless continued to emphasize the importance of material and ideological conditions in determining the careers of women writers. In the essay on George Eliot, for instance, Woolf expresses admiration for Eliot's tenacity and perseverance in the face of constraining material and cultural conditions, "how with every obstacle against her – sex and health and convention – she sought more knowledge and more freedom" (*CR* 172). Woolf also states that Eliot's struggles as a woman were clearly reflected in her fiction, where we discern

> traces of that troubled spirit, that exacting and questioning and baffled presence who was George Eliot herself. In Adam Bede there is a hint of her in Dinah. She shows herself far more openly and completely in Maggie in The Mill on the Floss. She is Janet in Janet's repentance, and Romola, and Dorothea seeking wisdom and finding one scarcely knows what in marriage with Ladislaw. (168)

This multiplicity of selves is at the core of Woolf's peculiar conception of auto/biography. Working within the confines of a genre that is predicated on the notions of the autonomy and the unity of the subject, Woolf rejects the stable "I" of traditional auto/biography in favour of what Sidonie Smith calls "a diffusive rather than unitary subjectivity" (87). The subject that emerges from of this theoretical position is not one with a fixed and stable identity, but rather a constellation of

identities: “I am not one and simple”, says Bernard in The Waves, “but complex and many” (56).

# AN 'INTOXICATING SENSE OF FREEDOM': ILLNESS AND MYSTICISM IN 'THE MARK ON THE WALL'

'The Mark on the Wall' was published in 1917, along with Leonard Woolf's short story 'Three Jews' in Two Stories, and marked Virginia Woolf's first attempt at experimental writing. It is an unusual story in which, in the narrator's own words, "[n]othing ever happens" ('MW' 83). The narrator in the story notices a mark on the wall, "a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece" (77). At first, the mark is thought to be a hole and then 'the head of a gigantic nail', and in the end turns out to be a snail. In between these guesses, the narrator embarks on a series of philosophical speculations that range from a metaphysical reflection on reality to the primacy of the impersonal world of nature. What is striking about this story, however, is the juxtaposition of two distinct worlds: an imaginative world and a real world, and the ways in which the boundaries of these two worlds repeatedly overlap. The first sight of the mark on the wall occurs as the narrator is smoking a cigarette: "I looked through the smoke of my cigarette", she says (77). The smoke of the cigarette becomes a metaphorical wall separating the world of fancy from the real world. Yet at the same time, it signifies the utter fragility of this wall, a hint perhaps that the two worlds will not remain entirely separate. Susan Sontag echoes the same geographical metaphor in her discussion of the figurative uses of illness. Illness, she says,

> is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer only the good passport,

> sooner or later each one of us is obliged, at least for a spell to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. (3)

Interestingly, Woolf seems to anticipate Sontag not only in 'The Mark on the Wall' but also in 'On Being Ill' when she marvels at "how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to view (193). For Woolf, then, the onset of illness brings about a shattering of the veil that limits our perception to the surface of things, thus allowing us to penetrate the depths toward another kind of reality. This is why we find the narrator in 'The Mark on the Wall' longing for a situation in which she can "slip easily from one thing to another, deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts" (79). The metaphor of sinking resonates with particular force in Woolf's writings, and, as Katherine Dalsimer notes, is an ambivalent one. It is at times used to denote what Woolf calls in her diary the "plunge into [the] deep waters" of illness, but is also her way of designating the process of diving into the activity of writing and 'discovering sea pearls of truth' (Dalsimer 194). In 'The Mark on the Wall', the act of seeing through the smoke of the cigarette occurs as displacement of the metaphor of sinking under the surface and, as such, it enables the narrator to leave behind the prosaic world of reality with its "vast upheaval of matter" (83), and plunges her, like Woolf's patient, into the much more diversified and creative world of fancy. A similar movement is enacted in the story 'The Fascination of the Pool', where the surface of the pool in question becomes, as Melba Cuddy-Keane suggests, "an entrance to deeper layers, as Woolf moves the mind of the viewer easily from reflected images to images in the depths" (128).

Yet, if the central theme in the story is the tension between what Dean Baldwin calls "the relation between imagination and fact", then how are does repetitive image of the mark on the wall fit in this scheme?[13] Obviously, on the surface, the mark on the wall becomes the occasion for the narrator's speculations. In other words, it is the narrator's gateway to the much coveted world of the imagination. But on a deeper level, the mark on the wall seems to operate as a gap in meaning, the symbol of an ever elusive signified. It is first described as a 'black' mark on a white wall, which emphasizes the otherness of the strange mark, as it does not seem to fit in with its background; then it is suggested that the mark may be a 'hole', which again conjures up the contrast between the disruptive mystery of the mark and the stable familiarity of it surrounding area. All these connotations would seem to recall the mysterious space at the heart of the traumatic experience, what Caruth calls "an inherent gap of knowing" (39). In the context of Woolf's illness, the mark on the wall seems to exemplify not only the feelings of utter solitude and vulnerability engendered by her repetitive bouts of illness, but also the unintelligibility and incomprehensibility of the visions that "the dark cupboard of illness" offered her.[14] It is therefore not surprising that when she finally recovered from a severe lapse into illness that lasted two months, Woolf's first words were: "what a gap!" she then adds

> [h]ow it would have astounded me to be told when I wrote the last word here, on June 7th, that within a week I sh[oul]d be in bed, and not entirely out of it till the 6th of August - two whole months rubbed out - these this morning, the first words I have written - to call writing - for sixty days; and those days spent in wearisome headache, jumping pulse, aching back, frets, fidgets, lying awake, sleeping draughts, sedatives, digitalis, going for a little walk, and plunging back into bed again. (Diary 2: 125)

It seems then that for Woolf, no matter how illuminating about the inner self the experience of illness might be, its impact on the self's relationship with the external world is absolutely shattering. It is conceived as a gap, a drawn out moment of 'non-being' that functions very much like a momentary death. Likewise, the narrator knows that the mark on the wall, for all its possibilities, might lead to a dark world where one is "helpless, speechless, unable to focus one's eyesight, groping at the roots of the grass, at the toes of the Giants" (78).

Paradoxically, however, it is this incomprehensibility at the heart of the experience of illness that both Woolf in 'On Being Ill' and the narrator in 'The Mark on the Wall' seem to valorize. In the essay, Woolf justifies this by a sense of being suffocated by meaning, a situation that indulges our intelligence, it is true, but it also smothers our senses. "In health", she says, "meaning has encroached upon sound. Our intelligence domineers over our senses" (200). In illness, on the other hand,

> With the police of duty off, we creep beneath some obscure poem by Mallarme or Donne, some phrase in Latin or Greek, and the words give out their scent and distil their flavour, and then, if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer odour. (200)

Thus, instead of a hermeneutics of meaning, Woolf, anticipating Barthes, advocates an erotics of meaning, what Dalsimer describes as an enhanced experience of language in which "the meaning of words recede, [and] and their sensory qualities are heightened. Words become sound, and scent, and taste" (176). Moreover, the theoretical movement of interpretation delineated in the essay is *enacted* in the story, as the narrator's attempt to attach meaning to the central signified in the text

– the mark on the wall – procures her the pleasure of play characteristic of all signification. It does not matter in the end that the mark on the wall turns out to be a mere snail since, as Baldwin observes, "the prosaic fact of the snail is far less interesting than the speculations it provokes" (14).

The ability to view things in a new light that reveals their otherwise hidden core is bound up in Woolf's mind with a quality of mysticism. In the essay, Woolf repeatedly uses religious imagery to delineate the kind of horizons that are opened up to us in illness. Thus, the patient regaining consciousness after a tooth extraction confuses the dentist's first words "with the greeting of the Deity stooping from the floor of Heaven to welcome [him]" (193). Also, illness is represented as 'the great confessional' by virtue of its pristine outspokenness; in illness, Woolf says, "things are said, truths blurted out, which the cautious respectability of heath conceals" (196). Nor was it unusual for Woolf to see her own illness in the light of a spiritual revelation. In a letter to Vita Sackville-West, dated August 15, 1929, Woolf described her recurrent headaches as follows:

> These headaches leave one like sand which a wave has uncovered – I believe they have a mystic purpose. Indeed, I'm not sure that there isn't some religious cause at the back of them – I see my own worthlessness and failure so clearly; and lie gazing into the depths of the misery of human life; and then one gets up and everything begins again and is all covered over. (Letters 4: 78)

Yet if illness is here equated with some sort of spiritual experience, it is hardly in the orthodox sense of Christian religion. Woolf, who at no point in her life could be described as religious, points instead to a vague state of mysticism that results from the inadequacy of the available human systems of thought to account for the unique experience of illness. To study the 'great wars' that the body wages with illness and

the attendant feelings of solitude, suffering, and melancholia, Woolf says, would be to look horror in the face. Thus, in the absence of a conceptual understanding of the trauma of illness, "this monster, the body, this miracle, its pain, will soon make us taper into mysticism, or rise, with rapid beats of the wings, into the ruptures of transcendentalism" (194).

It is a variation on this transcendental movement of consciousness that seems to be taking place in 'The Mark in the Wall'. After all, the narrator, too, like Woolf, seems persistently drawn toward an alternative world beyond. Consider, for instance, her reflection on the afterlife, where she imagines herself being reborn into eternal life, a child playing "at the toes of the Giants", surrounded by "spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour – which will, as time goes on, become more definite…" (78). The portrait of this paradisiacal place becomes more definite as the story moves toward its conclusion, when the narrator refocuses her eyes on the mark on the wall and, in doing so, is confronted with a vision that strikes her as "something definite, something real" (82). The Deity that seems to unveil itself to her is the one that inhabits the 'impersonal world' of nature, of objects, of the chest of drawers and the tree whence it came". The tree, which functions as a central symbol in Woolf's fiction in general, is invested here with a healing power that derives from its sheer indifference: "[f]or years and years, Woolf says, they grow, and without paying any attention to us, in meadows, in forests, and by the side of rivers – all things one likes to think about" (82). Years later, when she wrote 'On Being Ill', Woolf would echo again what she views as the healing effect of the

obliviousness of natural elements: "[i]t is in their indifference that they are comforting. That snowfield of the mind, where man has not trodden, is visited by the cloud, kissed by the falling petal" (198). Likewise, if artists such as Milton and Pope achieved the kind of greatness that has rendered them immortal in our collective memory, it is mainly because they cultivated a consolatory quality of 'forgetfulness'.

The triumph of the elemental forces of nature over the human is also a central theme in To the Lighthouse, and provides a key feature of Woolf's modernism. In the middle section of the book entitled 'Time Passes', Woolf brackets off historical events such as the European War and the successive deaths in the Ramsay family, and dwells instead on the larger rhythms of nature with their greater cycles of destruction and restoration. The result of this exercise is a *tour de force* of experimental writing that combines the lyricism of poetry with the visual precision of painting, and would set the tone for the modernist style of The Waves. The opening of the section is a prime example of this innovative writing, as well as of the indomitable nature of the forces that Woolf attempts to describe, in this case the darkness of the night:

> With the lights all put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into the bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body of mind by which one could say, "this is he" or "this is she". Sometimes a hand was raised as if to clutch something or ward off something, or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed aloud as if sharing a joke with nothingness. (189-90)

The slow and smooth advent of darkness, however, seems to be the prelude to a less peaceful scene:

> Night after night, summer and winter, the torments of the storms, the arrow-like stillness of fine weather, held their court without interference. Listening (had there been any one to listen) from the upper rooms of the empty house only gigantic chaos streaked with lightening could have been heard tumbling and tossing, as the winds and waves disported themselves like amorphous bulks of leviathans whose brows are pierced by no light of reason, and mounted one o top of another, and lunged and plunged in the darkness or the daylight (for night and day, month and year ran shapelessly together) in idiot games, until it seemed as if the universe were battling and tumbling, in brute confusion and wanton lust aimlessly by itself. (202-3)

I have quoted at length here because it is my opinion that these and similar passages from To the Lighthouse represent the crux of Woolf's achievement as a modernist, as they set apart her brand of modernism from the kind of modernism presided over by the major male writers of her generation. Instead of looking back to some past historical period or geographical location for inspiration, Woolf seems instead to be constantly aware of a force in nature that is "working; something not highly conscious; something that leered; something that lurched" (TLH 209). This odd poetics tends to dissolve the conceptual boundary between space and time, and as such it renders more profound Woolf's experiments with narrative consciousness and time. One might also add that Woolf's emphasis on the enormous and destructive forces of nature in 'Time Passes' lends itself to a Freudian reading, in that it conjures up Freud's concept of the death drive which he postulates in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. And we can see the germs of this method and the quasi-pantheistic disposition in 'The Mark on the Wall', as the narrator's thoughts are constantly drawn to the still but profound life of natural objects: "there are a

million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, when men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes. It's full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree" (83).

This is a dazzling and awe-inspiring world to be sure, far more interesting than the 'real' world as symbolized by Whitaker's Almanack and the Table of Precendcy, and worthier of the novelist's attention. Accordingly, the narrator's reflections develop into a metafictional commentary on the 'proper stuff of fiction', which clearly anticipates the argument that Woolf would push forward in the essay on 'Modern Fiction'. Novelists, the narrator says, should leave "the description of reality more and more out of their stories", and focus instead on 'the depths' and 'phantoms' of the "thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation" ('MW' 80). In 'On Being Ill', Woolf would theorize this world of 'standard things' in more concrete terms by locating it within the imagination of the recumbent, and would therefore express puzzlement that "illness has not taken its taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature" ('OBI' 193).

Yet while in 1917 Woolf seemed to imply that novelists should explore the valuable visions made accessible in illness, by the time she was working on 'On Being Ill', she appeared less convinced of the novel's aptitude to convey such an elusive experience. Engaging "all our faculties...our reason...our judgement [and] our command" at once, the novel form, she suggests, is hardly fitted for conveying such a mystic and sensual experience as that of illness, and so "it is to the poets that we turn" (199). This meant for Woolf not so much starting to write poetry *per se*, as

it signalled the necessity of finding a 'brand new word' – a new language that is "more primitive, more sensual, more obscene" ('OBI', 194-5). She would even consider an instantaneous transcription of her thoughts as they occur using conventional language: "suppose one could catch them [her thoughts] before they became 'works of art'? Catch them hot and sudden as they rise in the mind…of course one cannot; for the process of language is slow and deluding" (Diary 3: 103). The so-called 'primitive' and 'sensual' language Woolf would find in the kind of writing that she embarked on when she started composing 'The Mark on the Wall', a writing style that relies on images in order to convey the complex of thoughts and sensations experienced during illness. The effect of this is that the experience of reading becomes very much like contemplating a painting. Consider for instance the following passage:

> The cows swish their tails beneath them on hot afternoons; they paint rivers so green that when a moorhen dives one expects to see its feathers all green when it comes up again. I like to think of the fish balanced against the stream like flags blown out; and of water-beetles slowing rising domes of mud upon the bed of the river. (82)

We get the impression that we are looking at a painting in which several creatures have been captured in a frozen moment of time: a cow in green meadow, a moorhen taking a dive, fish in a stream, and water-beetles on a river bed. The act of painting is not only conjured up by the reference to 'paint rivers', but is *enacted* by the movement of the moorhen as it dives into the green water, much as a painter dips his/her brush into colors.

Moreover, the components of this still picture establish a web of intertexual allusions not only to the other stories but to Woolf's work at large. The image of

the fish, for instance, links up with the narrator's longing for "a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin" ('MW' 81), an allusion perhaps to the world of thought opened up by illness. The image of a fin 'slicing' water would become a central motif in Woolf's work and especially in The Waves, where it embodies Bernard's impressionistic view of reality.

> Leaning over this parapet I see far out a waste of water. A fin turns. This bare visual impression is unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visual impressions often communicate thus briefly statements that we shall in time uncover and coax into words. (134)

Thus in The Waves, as in 'The Mark on the Wall', Woolf seems to suggest the primacy of the visual over words in conveying certain thoughts and emotions. This is implied in the use of words like 'uncover' and coax' which emphasize the various processes of mediation that take place when language is involved.

The image of the cow, too, is a remarkable one, not least because it would be used again in An Unwritten Novel, as Minnie Marsh, the reticent protagonist, cryptically exclaims: "Oh, that cow!" The narrator then adds: "[s]he broke off nervously, as though the green wooden cow in the meadow had shocked her and saved her from some indiscretion" ('UN' 107). Now this seemingly random image acquires significance when seen in the context of Woolf's illness. When ill, Woolf was often forced into a state of physical and intellectual idleness that often made her feel heavy and dull just like a cow, as suggested in this diary entry in which she attempted to describe what she called 'a nervous breakdown in miniature': "sank into a chair, could scarcely rise; everything insipid; tasteless, colorless. Enormous desire for rest...Mind a blank. Slept in my chair. Thursday. No pleasure in life

whatsoever...Read automatically, like a cow chewing cud" (Diary 3: 103). The image of the cow could also be seen as an indirect allusion to the harsh medical measures that she was forced to follow during illness, with their combination of rest and milk drinking, and which she often described in bitter terms, as shown in this letter: "think – not one moment's freedom from doctor discipline – perfectly strange – conventional men; 'you shall lie still and drink milk' – for 6 months" (Letters 4: 180).

Thus, by combing multiple indirect references to the situation of being ill, the word 'cow', just like an image in a dream, seems to act as a composite idea, as does the word 'snail', which occurs at the very end of the story. In Freud's theory of dreams, condensation operates by compressing multiple elements into one, as exemplified by the dream of the botanical monograph which is analyzed in the chapter on the dream-work. In this case, the word 'snail' calls to mind 'nail', which coincides with the narrator's second guess as to the identity of the mysterious mark on the wall. In its anatomical meaning, moreover, nail conjures up 'finger' and 'toe', as in 'Kew Gardens', where a central image in the story is a "shoe with a square silver buckle at the toe" ('KG' 84). Interestingly, both finger nails and toes seem to be central motifs in Woolf's fictional representations of illness, as in the passage in which she describes a dream that Rachel had prior to her fatal illness. In this nightmarish dream, Rachel is appalled by the sight of "a little deformed man who squatted on the floor gibbering, with long nails" (VO 77). This dream prefigures the hallucinatory visions that Rachel will experience at the height of her illness, with the slight difference that the 'little deformed man' has now become

"little deformed women sitting in archways playing cards" (331). What is even more arresting is that the earlier image of the nail has now been superseded by the insisting image of a toe: "why, there's a toe all the way down here!" the woman said, proceeding to tuck in the bedclothes. Rachel did not realize that the toe was hers" (331). Several years later, Woolf would describe the invalid Mrs Pargiter in The Years in a way that recalls the earlier patient: "Bare of all rings save her wedding ring, her fingers alone seemed to indicate that she had entered the private world of illness" (21).

Woolf's metaphor for the entry into "the private world of illness" is a fall "into a deep pool of sticky water", a metaphor that once again borrows one of the attributes of the snail (TY 341). The same thing could be said about that image of a "shell of a person" which appears early in the story as the antithesis of an earlier image of a "romantic figure with the green of forest depth all about it" ('MW' 79). 'Shell' and 'snail' will be combined into one striking image in the opening of 'Kew Gardens', where the narrator describes the effect of light as it falls on "the shell of a snail with its brown circular veins" (84).

It would perhaps not be inaccurate to describe 'The Mark on the Wall' as a story of beginnings for Virginia Woolf. For with it began not only her publishing career (the story was the first publication of the Hogarth Press), but also the experimental phase of her work. And although written "all in a flash, as if flying", the story would contain the seeds for most of the themes and techniques that she would continue to develop in later years. More importantly, 'The Mark on the Wall exemplified for Woolf the therapeutic dimension of experimental writing, a feature

that she would explore more fully in her novels of the twenties. Also, by obliquely bearing witness to the experience of illness, the story would set the tone not only for the other stories of the period but also for the essay on illness in terms of their exploration of the power of art to organize the chaos of lived experience, as well as the valuable insights that could be reached during illness. "I shall never forget the day I wrote The Mark on the Wall", Woolf wrote in a letter to Ethyl Smith (Letters 4: 231). Nor will readers in my opinion forget the day they first read the story.

# 'LIGHT-ILLUMINATED MOMENTS': IMAGES OF ILLNESS AND EMBODIMENT IN 'KEW GARDENS'

'Kew Gardens' opens with the image of an 'oval-shaped flower bed'. One after the other, four couples walk past the flower bed. Simon and Eleanor, a married couple, remember each a defining moment of their past that occurred in the garden. For Simon, it is a marriage proposal that he made fifteen years ago to a girl named Lily. For Eleanor, it is a kiss she received on the back of her neck from a grey-haired woman, "the mother of all my kisses" (85). Next, come two men, one young and reticent, the other old and effusive. The old man's wild disposition and shaky gestures suggest 'a disordered brain', and he has to be restrained by his calm, younger companion. The two men are followed by two elderly middle class women who engage in an unintelligible conversation. Like the men before them, the two women have contrasting appearances, one being "stout and ponderous, the other rosy-cheeked and nimble" (87). The last couple to walk by are two lovers in the prime of youth. They stand for the while on the edge of the flower bed before the young man decides that they should look for a place to have tea with other people. In the interval separating the departure of one couple and the arrival of another, narrative attention is focused on the slow progress of a snail inside the flower bed, as it laboriously attempts to circumvent several obstacles in its way.

'Kew Gardens' is Woolf's most widely read short story, and the one story that has received the largest critical attention. As Alice Stavely remarks, the story is well suited to anthologies and syllabi of undergraduate English courses, and as such has provided a "useful pedagogical introduction to Woolf's more 'complex' works"

(42). Written after the publication of her second novel Night and Day, 'Kew Gardens' is widely believed to have effected Woolf's break with the traditional narrative style of that novel, and her entry into the high modernism of novels of the 1920s. In his autobiography Downhill All the Way, Leonard Woolf suggested that 'Kew Gardens' was "a microcosm of all [Woolf's] then unwritten novels, from Jacob's Room to Between the Acts" (60). I would agree with Leonard that 'Kew Gardens' does in fact contain the germs for most of the techniques and themes that Woolf would later develop in the novels, but I am particularly interested in how the story anticipates Mrs Dalloway and Between the Acts in its concern with mental illness and the inadequacy of art to represent it.

Like the two other stories, 'Kew Gardens' is cast as a reverie, the events of which take place in a garden with a flower bed in it, an environment that would provide the basic material for the scene in Mrs Dalloway in which Septimus and his wife Rezia go to the park on their way to see Doctor Bradshaw. The first group of people we encounter, the married couple, are also evocative of Septimus and Rezia especially in terms of their preoccupation with the past, a preoccupation that seems to verge on fixation. "Doesn't one always think about the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees", asks Eleanor in an elegiac tone not unlike the one that pervades Mrs Dalloway. Simon's own intrusive moment from the past is a scene in which he asked Lily to marry him, with the dragon-fly circling around them. For some reason, he thought that if the dragon-fly settled on a leaf, "she would say 'Yes' at once. But the dragon-fly went round and round: it never settled anywhere" (85), and in the image of that circular, inconclusive movement, the

marriage proposal would lead nowhere. Simon's confession ultimately elicits a similar declaration from his wife. She recalls a crucial moment in her past when she was kissed by an old lady on the back of the neck as she sat before her easel. Like the kiss which Jinny leaves on Lewis's nape in The Waves, and which would haunt Susan's thoughts, this would prove a decisive moment for Eleanor: "my hand shook all the afternoon so that I couldn't paint. I took out my watch and marked the hour when I would allow myself to think of the kiss...it was so precious...the mother of all my kisses all my life" (85).

Another way in which the couple prefigure Septimus and Rezia is the way in which they seem to inhabit their own separate worlds. For although they talk openly about their past, they nevertheless seem to be divided by it. Simon is obviously too possessed by the memory of "the woman [he] might have married" to be able to have a stable married life with Eleanor. Lily becomes for him an implacable spirit from the past, just as Evan would haunt Septimus's mind in Mrs Dalloway. The parallel between the two characters is also evident in the figurative way in which Simon recalls his once beloved Lily: "all the time I spoke I saw her shoe and when it moved impatiently I knew without looking up what she was going to say: the whole of her seemed to be in her shoe" (85). Here, while the image of shoe seems to look ahead to Jacob's Room, the trope of metonymy anticipates rather Septimus's strikingly metonymic view of the world.

As the figures of Simon and Eleanor slowly start to disappear, the narrative shifts toward the movement of the snail inside the flower-bed, a movement that is interrupted by the arrival of other human beings. Once again, the narrator uses what

Nina Skrbic calls the cinematographic "method of quick dissolve" to introduce the new-comers – the two men (19). Again, we see hints of Septimus, not only in the character of the reticent and meditative young man, but also that of his shaky elder companion. The latter's first words support the connection: "[h]eaven was known to the ancients as Thessaly", he says to William, "and now, with this war, the spirit matter is rolling between the hills like to the theme of war trauma that Woolf would explore more thoroughly in Mrs Dalloway. The old man, whose name is not mentioned in the story, behaves in an odd way, and like Septimus he sees things and hears voices, as when his attention is seized by a flower: "[a]fter looking at it for a moment in some confusion the old man bent his ear to it and seemed to answer a voice speaking from it" (86). Nameless and eccentric, he exemplifies Woolf's emerging interest in the fate of the scores of anonymous soldiers who came home from the Great War both physically and mentally maimed.

Like most of the stories of the period, 'Kew Gardens' reads like a dream in which the reader is immersed in the author's pensive world. This imaginative world unfolds like an impressionistic tableau in which color and light constantly change, thus enhancing the story's visual effect. Nor is this surprising, the visual element being a key component in Woolf's style. As Joanne Trautmann Banks notes, Woolf's artistic environment played an important role in shaping her polyvalent talents. Woolf, she says, "lived among painters and knew well the technique of impressionistic pointillism. She adapted it perfectly to her philosophy that reality appears to us in light-illuminated moments rather than in big slabs of uninterrupted truth" (22). It is one such 'light-illuminated moments' that Woolf offers her readers

in 'Kew Gardens'. Woolf's visual style is also predicated on her recurrent use of images which often provide points of departure for the narrative. In doing so, she seems to follow the basic principles of the imagist movement such as directness of representation and economy of language.

One of the central images in the story is that of the flower-bed. It is described as containing "perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface" (84). Just as the mysterious black mark on the wall in the story of the same title functions as an axis linking the various meditations, so do flowers in 'Kew Gardens' act like vortex in which all the characters move. As readers, our field of vision is restricted to the area around the flower-bed. Characters acquire shape and voice as they approach this area and begin dissolve as they walk away from it. In a way, the character's constant flux is repeatedly measured against the stillness of the flowers, much as the sprawling movement of the wilderness is contrasted to the immobility of the jar in Wallace Stevens's poem 'Anecdote of the Jar'.[15] In 'On being Ill', Woolf makes the same comparison as she examines the rose, and celebrates the way "it stands, still and steady, throughout an entire afternoon in the earth" (197). And while the flowers remain detachedly 'disdainful', human beings go about their petty activities: "Mrs. Jones catches her train. Mr. Smith mends his motor. The cows are driven home to be milked. Men thatch the roof. The dogs bark" (198). It is only the recumbent, Woolf goes on to say, those who have not been completely vanquished by 'the wave of life', "who know what, after all, nature is at no pains to conceal –

that she in the end will conquer" (198). Again, Woolf seems to imply that the road to that alternative mood of heightened perception, what in her memoir she calls 'moments of being' goes through the observation of natural objects. In 'A Sketch of the Past', Woolf recalls a childhood memory that took place in the family's garden at St Ives. She was going down to the beach, when she stopped to look at the flowers:

> The gardens gave off a murmur of bees; the apples were red and gold; there were also pink flowers; and grey and silver leaves. The buzz, the croon, the smell, all seemed to press voluptuously against some membrane; not to burst it; but to hum round one such a complete rapture of pleasure that I stopped, smelt; looked. But again I cannot describe the rapture. It was rapture rather than ecstasy. (66)

The flowers, the bees, and the colours of this early memory would all inspire the atmosphere of 'Kew Gardens', as would the sounds (the buzz, the croon) and the smells. In commenting on the St Ives memory, Woolf uses the word 'picture' but quickly catches herself up because "sight was then so much mixed with sound that picture is not the right word" (67). Similarly, the flowers at Kew are not only a treat for the eye, but also for the ear, as demonstrated by the hallucinating old man who, on seeing a flower, "bent his ear to it and seemed to answer a voice speaking from it" (86).[16]

In 'On Being Ill', Woolf suggests that it would be a mistake to ascribe to flowers with the kind of meaning that they have traditionally been made to symbolize. They are not there to signify people's "passions, decorate their festivals, and lie (as if *they* know sorrow) upon the pillows of the dead" (198, author's italics). In fact, Woolf seems to hint, there is a sinister shade to their indifferent beauty – theirs is a 'terrible beauty', to use Yeats's famous oxymoron. This is so

partly because flowers seem to activate an alternative state of mind, a hypnotic trance of sorts that is not altogether without its dangers. In Woolf's case, they are often associated with the hallucinations of her illness, and seem to symbolize what she calls her repetitive brushes with death. In September of 1930, for instance, Woolf had a dramatic attack of illness that left her unconscious. Later, she related the incident in her diary as follows:

> I was walking down the path with Lydia. If this don't stop, I said, referring to the bitter taste in my mouth and the pressure like a wire cage of sound over my head, then I am ill: yes, very likely I am destroyed, diseased, dead. Damn it! Here I fell down -saying "How strange – flowers". In scraps I felt and knew myself carried into the sitting room by Maynard, saw L look v frightened; said I will go upstairs, the drumming of my heart, the pain, the effort got violent at the doorstep; overcame me, like gas; I was unconscious; then the wall and the picture returned to my eyes; I saw life again. Strange I said, and so lay, gradually recovering ...But this brush with death was instructive and odd. (Diary 3: 315)

Septimus, too, whose experience is in many ways based on Woolf's own illness, frequently sees flowers during his hallucinations. During one of his worst delusions, which occurred prior to his visit to Dr Homes, Septimus thinks that he "lay very high on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head" (MD 51); And as the vision intensifies, the flowers become roses: "[n]ow he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him – the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself" (51). The combination of snow and red roses suggest the idea of death, thus indicating the sinister connotations of flowers in Septimus's raving mind.

Another arresting image in the story is that of the shoe, which occurs as Simon's most vivid memory of his former beloved Lily – a "shoe with the silver square buckle at the toe" (*KG* 84). As Nena Skrbic points out, the precision with which the image of the shoe is presented contrasts overtly with the lack of focus that characterizes the narrative, "producing a tension between stasis and flight" (19). Yet while this tension seems indeed to be one of the effects of this sharp image, it does not answer the question of the possible meaning(s) underlying the image. To answer this question, an intertextual study of the uses of the image of shoes in Woolf's other fictions would be helpful by putting things in perspective. For the shoe motif is not peculiar to 'Kew Gardens', but is used in various ways in several other texts. The first example to come to mind would be Jacob's Room, where Jacob's shoes occupy a central position in the narrative, and are the sharpest image to emerge from the final section. In this elegiac novel, shoes seem to symbolize death. Jacob's empty shoes at the end of the book are in the words of Alice Stavely an "emblem of a life wasted, literally blown off its feet, on the battlefield of the war" (53). In the equally elegiac To the Lighthouse, shoes are a recurrent motif, as in this passage where Mr Ramsay's boots stand as a striking image:

> [r]emarkable boots they were, Lily thought, looking down at them: sculptured; colossal; like everything that Mr. Ramsay wore, from his frayed tie to his half-buttoned waistcoat, his own indisputably. She could see them walking to his room of their own accord, expressive of his absence of ethos, surliness, ill-temper, charm. "What beautiful boots", she exclaimed! (228-29)

In this passage, the intertextual reference to the shoe in 'Kew Gardens' is reinforced by the combination of the name "Lily" and the trope of metonymy which

governs the relationship between Mr. Ramsay and his boots. Later on, another image involving a shoe occurs, that of Mr. Ramsay "stooping over her shoe". The 'her' refers to Lily who, after taking time to observe Mr. Ramsay's boots, now has her own shoes inspected. What is remarkable, however, is the way in which Lily reacts to Mr. Ramsay's gesture, for she feels "so tormented with sympathy for him that, as she stooped too, the blood rushed to her face" (230). Lily's feelings of sympathy are stirred by Mr. Ramsay's concern with shoes, which for some peculiar reason transforms him in her eyes into "a figure of infinite pathos. He tied knots. He bought boots"; and then comes an interesting statement: "[t]here was no helping Mr. Ramsay on the journey he was going" (230). Just like the Lily in 'Kew Gardens' and the narrative consciousness in Jacob's Room, the Lily of To the Lighthouse seems to associate shoes with a tragic but ineluctable fate. In 'Kew Gardens' the connection between shoes and fate is suggested by Simon when he says: "[a]ll the time I spoke to her I saw her shoe and when it moved impatiently I knew without looking up what she was going to say" (84-5).

Moreover, there is an indication in Jacob's Room that the protagonist's death comes as the result of the struggle that he leads against the various oppressive forces that require him to conform to their standards. The empty shoes in this case are there not only there to prefigure his death, but as William Handley notes, "they suggest what the narrator has to combat throughout the novel: the ways in which militarized society robs human beings of bodies and voices for its own violent ends" (Quoted in Staveley 53). Yet while this militarized society is to blame for the scores of young men who, like William's old companion, have incurred lasting

damage to the war, it operates primarily as a metaphor for the larger patriarchal order that seeks to crush all its recalcitrant elements. With this in mind, the shoes acquire significance as an embodiment of what Stavely calls "the clash between individual freedom and societal constraints" (53). Seen in this light, Lily's shoes in 'Kew Gardens' become the emblem not only of her resistance to Simon's advances, but they also metonymically signal the course of action that she will take: "to walk out of the marriage plot that he, with the help of another fictional format, might have had her walk into" (Stavely 53). Moreover, Lily's predicament is evocative of Woolf's own problems with the patriarchal establishment of her time. Woolf was ill for many periods in her life, and therefore she knew what it meant to cease to be a soldier in "the army of the upright" (OBI 196). Yet, as Hermione Lee notes, it was not long before Woolf realized that to be a woman did not help her situation either. The treatment of mental patients, Lee writes

> is intimately bound up with question of human rights. There is no doubt that the development of [Woolf's] political position, her intellectual resistance to tyranny and conventionality, derived to a great extent from her experiences as a woman patient. And even before a politics of resistance had been devised, she was very angry and distressed by her treatment. (184)

If 'Kew Gardens' anticipates Jacob's Room and Mrs Dalloway in its elegiac mood and its concern with mental illness, its emphasis on language prefigures Woolf's growing preoccupation with modes of transmitting experience which was reflected in such late writings as 'On Being Ill', The Waves and her last novel Between the Acts. The view of language that emerges from 'Kew Gardens' as basically a system incapable of conveying full meaning is one that would shape

Woolf's last writings. During the exchange between the two lovers toward the end of the story, words are said to have

> short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them and were to the inexperienced touch so massive: but who knows (so they thought as they pressed the parasol into the earth) what precipices aren't concealed in them, or what slopes of ice don't shine in the sun on the other side? Who knows? Who has ever seen this before? (88)

Edward L. Bishop has drawn attention to the way in which the passage quoted above invites the reader to participate in the process of conveying meaning through the act of reading. Words in this passage acquire physicality so that "the reader becomes conscious of moving among words just as characters do" (Bishop 112). I would add that the movement indicated in this passage seems to refer back to the periodic movement of the snail inside the flower-bed. It would seem that Woolf is drawing a parallel between the confusing world of signs and the snail's world of gaps and obstacles. This is at least the impression one gets from statements such as the following: "[e]ven when she wondered what sort of tea they gave you at Kew, he felt that something loomed up behind her words, and stood vast and solid behind them" (88).

Woolf's notion of the inadequacy of language to fully account for human experience was in large part due to the unmanageable and oftentimes inexpressible nature of her repeated attacks of illness. In 'On Being Ill', Woolf complains about the 'poverty' of the English language, "which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, [but] has no words for the shiver and the headache" (194). As a result, she set out to create her own private language, a language that would

incorporate both the patient's incoherence and the author's endeavour at narrative control. Consider for instance the "complicated dialogue" that takes place between the two elderly women:

> 'Nell, Bert, Lot, Cess, Phil, Pa, he says, I says, she says, I says, I says, I says –'
> My Bert, Sis, Bill, Grandad, the old man, sugar,
> Sugar, flour, kippers, greens
> Sugar, sugar, sugar'. (87)

Cryptic and apparently incoherent passages like this would reappear frequently in Woolf's mature fiction and especially in Mrs Dalloway, where they alternately take the form of delirium in Septimus's case, or the enigmatic words sung by the beggar woman. Woolf, who despite her aversion to psychoanalysis believed in the therapeutic effect of writing, was probably attempting to master the confusion of her own hallucination and therefore eradicate what Hermione Lee calls "the fear of incomprehensibility" – "the horror of not being able to make sense to others" (195).

We have seen that in 'The Mark on the Wall' as well as in 'On Being Ill' Woolf celebrates objects, which through their sheer indifference to human beings paradoxically provide us with comfort and relief. This comforting power derives partly from the constancy of things, the way in which even in the middle of chaos they preserve "a demeanour of perfect dignity and self-possession" (OBI 197). Yet, as Peter Schwenger argues, the primary function of objects with regard to us lies in the fact they provide us with sense of our own 'embodied experience'. Drawing on Maurice Merlau-Ponty theories in Phenomenology of Perception, Schwenger explains that as "the body 'moves toward' a thing with all the instruments of its embodied perception... [it ends up] embodying itself through that perception" (3)[17].

Melau-Ponty's theory places this sense of embodiment at the heart of the subject's experience of the world: "it is only by means of our bodies", says Stephen Trombley, "that we are able to have a world at all, to have any conception of time and space. Our bodies connect us with the world and with other people" (23). Once we begin to grasp the importance of the body to subjective experience, we will cease to be surprised by the traumatic consequences that a rupture of the connection between the body and the world might have.

Now we know that Woolf had a peculiar relationship to her body, as is frequently shown in her writings. She often reacted against the social conventions of her time, which prescribed the ways in which women were expected to experience their bodies. Physical features were for her not a ticket for a vibrant social life as they were as a hindrance to the life of intellect that she was so eager to live. This was of course complicated by her illness, which had the effect of reinforcing her conception of her own body as a source of predicament. It is in this context that Trombley proposes what he calls a 'problematical sense of embodiment' as the key to an adequate understanding of Woolf's illness. Far from having their origins in purely psychical factors, he argues, Woolf's breakdowns were almost invariably connected in some way or another with the ways in which she experienced her body. Woolf would indeed emerge from her successive episodes of illness with a profound sense of shame regarding her body, and with a deep aversion to body-related activities including that of eating.

It is true that the problem of embodiment is a recurrent theme in Woolf's fiction. Both Rachel Vinrace in The Voyage Out and Miss Kilman in Mrs Dalloway

manage to convey troubled relationships with their bodies. The passages that describe Rachel's perception of the world prior to, and during, her illness reveal a state of detachment and anaesthesia that is indicative of a problematical sense of embodiment. An illustration of this would be the scene with the nurse, which has already been mentioned, and in which Rachel experiences a part of her body (in this case a toe) as being completely alien to, and separate from, her. It is in this sense that her illness acquires significance: the body has ceased to operate as a mediator between the self and the world, and has become instead the seat of illness. In Miss Kilman's case, she seems to exist at odds with her body as if her 'self' and her body were entirely separate. She talks about her bodily needs as one would about a lurking danger: "it was the flesh she must control...But she had not triumphed; she had not mastered the flesh (MD 94). She also complains about what she calls "the infliction of her unlovable body which people could not bear to see", an attitude that reflects to a certain extent Woolf's own perception of her body (94).

Both Rachel and Miss Kilman have been victims of actions that they experienced as harrowing, actions that in Trombley's words were a 'violation of the person', and resulted in a divorce between the self and the body. This process of disembodiment was nothing new to Woolf, who on many occasions was forced to disown her own body, as when she was horrified to look in the mirror after she had been sexually abused by her half-brother.[18] Yet while biographical sources site several such traumatic events as the cause of this state of disembodiment, I would argue that the latter is closely bound up with Woolf's illness. Images of rupture and severance are common in Woolf's biographical and fiction accounts of her illness.

In a 1932 letter to Ethel Smyth, for instance, Woolf describes a sudden attack of illness that left her unconscious. As she started to regain consciousness, she says, she "became sleepy and comfortable, only afraid to move, as if all my limbs were separate" (Letters 5: 94). Similarly, one is struck by the persistence of the image of amputation in The Voyage Out, an image which also recurs in various forms in Mrs Dalloway, whether in Septimus's obsessive visions of men cutting down trees, or in the intrusive image of Peter Walsh's pocket knife.

In Kew Gardens, too, (dis)embodiment operates as a master trope, as the narrative vacillates between two opposed movements, one of solidification and the other of disintegration and dissolution. In the opening paragraph, for instance, the description of the light makes it almost acquire substance and corporeality. The light, we are told, "fell either upon the smooth grey back of a pebble, or the shell of a snail with its brown circular veins, or, falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue, and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear" (84). One can almost feel the *impact* of the collision between the light and the various objects it falls upon. Half way through the story, another kind of fall occurs and, with it, a similar process of embodiment. This time, it is the words spoken by the nimble old lady to her stout and ponderous companion, who "stood there letting the words fall over her, swaying the top part of her body slowly backwards and forwards, looking at the flowers" (87). Again, we are made to feel as if they lady's swaying movement were the result of the physical contact with words. Later on, as the last couple in the story make their appearance, the physicality of words will become more obvious. The lovers only have to

exchange a few sentences before they are overcome by the inadequacy of words to express the subtle feelings that they experienced, the elusive "it" that formed the topic of their short conversation. Having reached this conclusion, they too will stand and watch as "words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far [...] alighted awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them and were to their inexperienced touch so massive" (88).

Yet it seems that in the ethereal world of 'Kew Gardens' when non corporeal things acquire physicality, this happens at the expanse of otherwise physical entities that end up losing their bodily existence. In other words, the process of embodiment seems to take place alongside a parallel movement of disembodiment. Consider, for instance, the recurrent metaphor of dissolution that accompanies the disappearance of every couple in the narrative. Thus, as Simon and Eleanor walk away from the flower-bed, they "diminished in size among the trees and looked half transparent as the sunlight and shade swam over their backs large trembling irregular patches" (85). Interestingly, the image of transparency is one that Woolf would later use in the essay on illness to criticize the neglect of the body in Western literature, a neglect that she ascribes to the conventional view of the body as "a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear" (193). Disembodiment and transparency, moreover, are not restricted to Simon and Eleanor but seem to be the fate of all the people in the Gardens on that hot day":

> One couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green-blue vapour, in which first their bodies had substance

> and a dash of color, but later both substance and color dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere. (89)

It is in the final paragraph, however, that the metaphor of disembodiment registers with particular force, as the narrator has all the 'bodies' present at the scene dissolve in the implacable crucible of the Gardens, leaving in their wake only voices that continue to reverberate in the blazing atmosphere:

> men, women and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue. It seemed as if all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down in the heat motionless and lay huddled upon the ground, but their voices went wavering from them (89).

If 'The Mark on the Wall', with what might be termed its poetics of impersonality anticipates the grand style of To the Lighthouse, 'Kew Gardens' is more aligned with the sketch-like narrative of Jacob's Room. In it, the image stands supreme as the vehicle for conveying complex thoughts and emotions, as does metaphor exemplified by the recurrent trope of (dis)embodiment. Both trope and image seem to have provided Woolf with the means of abreacting certain feelings about her illness through indirect statement, just as Jacob's Room would function as an outlet for her grief over the death of her brother Thoby. Initially sceptic about the value of the experiment, Woolf was later stunned by the sheer praise that the story brought her.[19] It is no surprise therefore that she would further explore the possibilities of the image in the other stories and especially in 'An Unwritten Novel'.

# THE DANCE OF THE MOTH: ILLNESS AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS IN 'AN UNWRITTEN NOVEL'

'An Unwritten Novel' is a reverie inspired by an unknown old woman whom the narrator meets on a train bound to Eastbourne. The setting, a train compartment, recalls that of the essay "Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown", and the woman, Minnie Marsh, strikes a clear resemblance to the elusive Mrs Brown. From the beginning, the narrator is aware of "an expression of unhappiness" on Minnie Marsh's face, and this leads her to suspect that she must have gone through a great deal of sorrows. This impression is confirmed when, after all the passengers have left, leaving the narrator and Minnie Marsh alone, the latter complains about her sister-in-law in a voice that is "like lemon on cold steel" (107). Following this hint, the narrator dubs the sister-in-law Hilda and sets off to construct an imaginary story around the character of her 'interlocutor'. The incompetent and spinsterish Minnie is shown to suffer not only from Hilda's overbearing and condescending attitude, but also from a deep sense of guilt for having caused the death of a child. Further complicating her situation is a relationship with a married man, James Moggridge, a button salesman whose shallow personality and gruff behaviour only accentuate Minnie's drab existence. At some point during the ride, the narrator stops and wonders whether she is accurate in her musings, but seeing Minnie reach into her handbag and take a hard boiled egg somehow confirms her in her guesses, and she therefore proceeds with her imaginative tale. The crux of the story occurs when Minnie arrives at her station and, instead of the patronizing Hilda, is greeted by her compassionate son. The two walk away from the station leaving the narrator utterly

'confounded': "[w]ell, my world is done for! What do I stand on? What do I know?" (115). The ending of the story, however, carries a more cheerful tone, as the narrator acknowledges the impossibility of absolute knowledge and embraces the undecidability at the heart of human experience: "it's you, unknown figures, you I adore; if I open my arms, it's you I embrace, you I draw to me – adorable world" (115).

Written in 1920, 'An Unwritten Novel' marks the definitive transition in Woolf's style to the experimentalism that would characterize her writings of the twenties. As Hermione Lee observes, the story unquestionably "turned Virginia Woolf into a modernist [and] raised for her all the perils of modernism" (417). A quintessential modernist text, the story dramatizes the difficulties of writing a contemporary (hi)story using conventional narrative patterns. In other words it raises questions about the possibility of bearing witness to certain experiences by inscribing them within a narrative structure. The unexpected turn that events take right at the end of the story stand as an example of the failure of fiction to organize the chaos of contemporary experience, yet at the same time it still maintains at the therapeutic value of the act of writing.

As we have seen, 'The Mark on the Wall' and 'Kew Gardens' are primarily concerned with those heightened states of perception that for Woolf are a precondition for arriving at deeper levels of consciousness. These states occur "when the lights of health go down" and we are transported into that region of illness which is best described, using Woolf's words from an essay on James, as a "half light in which [we] see[...] most, and see[...] furthest" (Collected Essays 1:

270). In 'An Unwritten Novel', however, the accent falls not so much on the achieved knowledge itself as it does on the therapeutic dimension of these mental excursions as inscribed in a narrative frame. This effect is achieved in an oblique way, as the story seems to gesture toward the opposite direction; that is to say, it seems to foreground precisely the importance of knowledge and its role in determining the value, the necessity even, of the act of writing. To put things differently, the narrator seems to imply that, had Minnie's life conformed to the mould which she has concocted for her, her story would not have remained uninscribed, and the narrator's novel 'unwritten'.

There are many indications in the story that the narrator is in search of some kind of hidden truth, and that she seems pretty confident of her ability to find this truth. This is reflected in her 'obsession' with what she calls knowledge: looking at the five passengers in the train compartment, she sees "five mature faces – and the knowledge in each face" (106). She also reads the reticence expressed by these faces as the proof that "each one of the five [is] doing something to hide or stultify his knowledge" (106). Yet, despite this reticence, she still believes in the possibility of absolute knowledge: "I know the whole business" she silently reassures the apprehensive Minnie Marsh, "[w]e all know – *The Times* knows – but we pretend we don't" (106). And despite this knowledge, despite what she calls her "great reservoir of life", which includes "births, deaths, marriages, Court Circular, the habits of birds, Leonardo da Vinci, the Sandhills murder, high wages and cost of living", she still wants more. Thus, armed with the conviction that "everything has meaning"(110), she sets off to decode the various signs that she sees, from

Minnie's facial expressions, to her body language, her words as well as her silences. Her language is accordingly characterized by the frequent use of words like 'reading', 'message', 'deciphering', and 'secret'.

Moreover, the narrator's thoughts of mastery and control are set against Minnie's own incompetence and insecurities. She seems to derive pleasure from measuring herself against the timid Minnie, as this confirms her own superiority. This frequent comparison is reflected in the text through a series of binary oppositions: hope/illusion, building/crumbling, stability/unsteadiness, communication/concealment, you/I, black/white, life/death and so on. The effect of these opposed pairs is to suggest that the choice underlying all action in the narrative is one of either/or: Minnie will either talk or remain silent about her life; her life is either full of suffering and unhappiness or rich with love and compassion; the narrator is either right in her guess ("[h]ave I read right?") or she is completely in the wrong ("I'm confounded").

The subtext of the narrative, however, works to deconstruct these polarized possibilities, suggesting instead a more nuanced approach to resolve this tension. Thus, although black and white are mentioned, the dominant color in the text is grey: the winter landscape, for instance, is said to consist only of "greys and purples" (106); God is "washed over as with a painter's brush of liquid grey" (110); "the waves are grey" and "there is nothing but grey in the sky" (110); Minnie is described as "threading the grey wool, running it in and out" (114); and as if to close the circle, the narrator returns to the landscape, declaring toward the end: "[g]rey is the landscape" (117). Also, although Minnie does have problems in her

life (she indeed complains about her sister-in-law), she can still find meaning and value in her life (she has a loving son); and while the sight of mother and son walking off together destroys the narrator's fictional world, it opens up other narrative possibilities.

The crux of the text's deconstructive movement occurs toward the end of the story, as the narrator's language of mastery gradually gives way to uncertainty and undecidability. "[h]ave I read you right?", she asks after she has stopped in the middle of her musings. And although she quickly catches herself up and resumes her assemblage of Minnie's life story, her mode of narration will henceforward be inexorably tentative:

> Are you down, too, you in the corner, what's your name – woman – Minnie Marsh; some such name as that? There she is, tight to her blossom; opening her hand-bag, from which she takes a hollow shell – an egg – who was saying that eggs were cheaper? You or I? oh, it was you who said it on the way home, you remember, when the old gentleman, suddenly opening his umbrella – or sneezing was it? (111)

The narrator, it seems, has lost track of her thoughts, and the narrative, now out of control seems to go in all directions, so much so that the narrator has to make an effort in order to stop her digressive thoughts and return, but "return…[t]o what, to where" (111).

To say that 'An Unknown Novel' is a reflection upon the creative vision that is induced by illness is to imply that there is a connection between the story and Woolf's experience of illness. It is true that at first sight, the story appears to have no connection to its author, and much less to her health problems. A close reading of the text, however, reveals that it does point in various ways to Woolf's illness, and is as such related to the other two stories. Now these references are in

no way direct, but work much like images from a dream in an oblique fashion. Consider for instance the image of the moth, which recurs several times, although in different forms. The first instance of this image occurs when Minnie meets her sister-in-law Hilda, and is compared by the latter to a grasshopper: "[p]oor Minnie, more of a grasshopper than ever" (108). When Minnie is sitting by the window at her brother's house, she looks out over the zigzagging roofs of Eastbourne, which strike her as resembling "the spines of caterpillars" (108). Minnie herself is described as repeatedly making an "awkward angular movement", which links her to the "singular high-stepping angular green insect" in 'Kew Gardens' (KG 85). Halfway through the story, the narrator silently looks at Minnie's eyes and describes what she sees as follows: "in the human eye – how d' you define it? – there's a break – a division – so that when you've grasped the stem the butterfly's off – the moth that hangs in the evening over the yellow flower – move, raise your hand, off, high, way" (111). Now we know that the Stephen children had the habit of collecting moths and butterflies, an occupation which, Quentin Bell tells us, they kept up "until they were quite grown up" (33). Interestingly, the image of the insect would evolve to become a central image in Woolf's illness, as is shown in this letter in which she describes a "nervous exhaustion headache":

> One's back seems to be made of a membrane, like a bat's wing: this should be stretched tight, in order to deal adequately with the flight of existence; but suddenly it flops, and becomes (I imagine) like a veil (do you remember the veils of our youth?) which has fallen into a cup of tea. So I am lying on the sofa, in my nightgown, picking at a book or two, and dropping them on the floor. I see nobody partly because I have nothing to say except oh! Shall I ever have anything to say except oh! (Letters 3:272)

Both the bat (a nocturnal and hybrid animal) and the veil (larva) seem to point to different stages in the life of a moth, just as the moth seems to signal for Woolf that state of extreme excitation that accompanies the onset of illness. Woolf would evoke again the association between moth and her experience of illness in an arresting essay entitled 'The Death of the Moth', in which she describes what she calls 'the strangeness' of the sight of a moth fighting with death. The essay recounts a scene in which a moth hovers around a window pane in an attempt to cross to the outside world:

> Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvellous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zig–zagging to show us the true nature of life. Thus displayed one could not get over the strangeness of it. One is apt to forget all about life, seeing it humped and bossed and garnished and cumbered so that it has to move with the greatest circumspection and dignity. Again, the thought of all that life might have been had he been born in any other shape caused one to view his simple activities with a kind of pity. (Collected Essays 1: 360)

The moth, being "a tiny bead of pure life" recalls Minnie Marsh's constant contemplation of 'life', as does the composite feeling of the 'marvellous' and the 'pathetic' which it provokes. Also, being "hybrid creatures, neither gay like butterflies nor sombre like their own species", moths seem to point to that differential region of consciousness characteristic of psychosis, where "the landscape of life lies remote and fair, like the shore seen from a ship far out at sea" ('OBI', 195).

Yet while the still image of the moth seems to be equated with the state of lethargy that often accompanies illness, the figure of the moth shaking its wings is often used by Woolf as metaphor for the upsurge in creative energy which occurs toward the end of illness and provides the trigger for the process of scriptotherapy. The parallel is made evident in a diary entry in which Woolf reflects on the mystical nature of her illness:

> I believe these illnesses are in my case – how shall I express it? – partly mystical. Something happens in my mind. It becomes a chrysalis…then suddenly something springs…& this is I believe the moth shaking its wings in me. I then begin to make up my story whatever it is; ideas rush in me. Often though this is before I can control my mind or pen. It is no use trying to write at this stage". (Diary 3: 287)

The connection between illness as symbolized by the moth and aesthetic creativity is also evoked in another entry written as Woolf was working on The Waves:

> These curious intervals in life – I've had many – are the most fruitful artistically – one becomes fertilized – think of my madness at Hogarth – & all the little illnesses – that before I wrote To the Lighthouse for instance. Six weeks in bed would make a masterpiece of Moths. (Diary 3: 254)

The masterpiece referred to in the last sentence is ostensibly The Waves, whose working title was The Moths; but the sentence might just as well be referring to the figurative moths that were shaking their wings inside Woolf's mind at the time, signalling the formation of untold stories – unwritten novels that demanded to be inscribed.

Equally striking in the story is the metaphor of losing one's skin, which recurs in various forms in the text. Minnie, for instance, is said to fidget "as though the skin on her back were a plucked fowl's in a poulterer's shop-window" (107).

Later, the same image will be used, this time to describe no other character than the narrator herself: "My skin, too, felt like a damp chicken skin in a poulterer's shop-window" (108). The same metaphor of being stripped of an outer covering also occurs when Minnie takes an egg out of its shell, and culminates in that striking image at the end of the story of "[l]ife bear as a bone" (115). Interestingly, Woolf used the same image to characterize her illness, as when she wrote in a letter "I am, like my father, 'skinless': oversensitive and nervously irritable" (Letters 5: 408). In another letter, she declared: "These headaches leave one like sand which a wave has uncovered" (Letters 4: 78). What is implied here is that illness leaves one utterly exposed by depriving one of one's protective shields. But exposed to what? Precisely to those moments of intense vision when the truth of things is unveiled and is too stark to leave one unaffected. This is in keeping with Woolf's characteristic uneasiness when talking about the 'truth' that her illness brought, and the violent terms in which she usually describes the kind of enlightenment that she experienced during her breakdowns. "One goes down into the well & nothing protects one from the assault of truth", she once said reflecting on her illness (Diary 3: 112). As Dalsimer observes, the "word 'assault' has an edge of violence… painful as they are, unprotected as she feels, she finds in these periods of illness some deeper truth" (188). This explains why Woolf would emerge battered and shaken from these assaults, as she describes in a letter: "[i]ndeed I was almost crippled when I came back to the world, unable to move a foot in terror, after this discipline" (Letters 4:180). This would also explain the narrator's 'obsession' with images of shields and defences, as when she says of Minnie that "The Times was

no protection against her sorrows" (106); or else when she declares that the "best thing to do against life was to fold the paper so that it made a perfect square, crisp, thick, impervious even to life" (107); she then adds: "[t]his done, I glanced up quickly, armed with a shield of my own. She pierced through my shield" (107).

Still, Woolf insists, "the dark underworld has its fascinations as well as its terrors" (Diary 2: 126). The pain, solitude, and vulnerability of illness seem to activate a process of self-knowledge that often leads to unexpected truths about the self. "[T]he six months...that I lay in bed", she wrote in 1930, "have taught me a great deal about what is called oneself" (Letters 4: 180). A similar process of self-discovery is at the heart of 'An Unwritten Novel', as the narrator comes to understand who she really is through the uncomfortable encounter with Minnie. The ending of the story might well be a reflection not only on the 'unwritten novel' but on the other 'written' stories as well. Elements from the other two stories reappear and merge in that final scene where the landscape is grey and "the water murmurs and moves" (115). Thus, from 'Kew Gardens' we have "the white light splutters and pours"; from 'The Mark on the Wall', "plate-glass windows" and "milk carts at the door"; and from 'An Unwritten novel' "mothers and sons" are the major elements of the new landscape. Unknown and mysterious, these figures are all the narrator has, and therefore she embraces them as part of an "adorable world". The same process of acceptance and celebration was at work as far as Woolf's relationship with her illness was concerned. Acceptance, of course, derived from the fact that her illness was like fate to her, and there was no escaping this fate. And celebration came after she had realized the wealth of ideas and visions

that became accessible to her through illness. That is why whenever she complained of the restrictions that her illness imposed on her (which was frequent), she would almost invariably evoke the inspirational side of her condition. The following passage from a 1922 letter to E. M. Forsters is a clear example of this nuanced position:

> I should like to growl to you about all this damned lying in bed and doing nothing, and getting up and writing a half-page and going to bed again. I've wasted 5 whole years (I count) doing it; so you must call me 35 – not 40 – and expect rather less from me. Not that I haven't picked up from my insanities and all the rest. Indeed, I suspect they've done instead of religion. (Letters 2: 498)

It is obvious from these words that Woolf has finally come far in reconciling herself with her condition. There is resignation in her tone as she describes her illness, it is true, but there is also a touch of affection. One could almost detect a sense of possessiveness in her tone when she talks about 'my insanities', or elsewhere when she light-heartedly explains a relapse in a letter to Katherine Cox saying that it "was a touch of my usual disease, in the head you know" (Letters 1: 488).

# NOTES

[1] The phrase was first used by E. M. Forster in his eulogy of Woolf; quoted in Phyllis Rose, Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978) xi.

[2] The connection between Woolf's modernism and her illness has also been suggested by Hermione Lee in her biography of Woolf, and Kimberly Coates in "Exposing the 'Nerves of Language':
Virginia Woolf, Charles Mauron, and the Affinity Between Aesthetics and Illness".

[3] An exception should perhaps be made of Hermione Lee's biography, which balances a diagnostic approach with a phenomenological analysis of illness as conceived by Woolf herself. Thus, while declaring Woolf's illness to be "attributable to genetic, environmental, and biological factors", Lee still avoids the temptation of 'diagnostic labels' as well as the myths of sanity/insanity and focuses instead on how the experience of illness affected Woolf's life and her performance as a writer and as a feminist. Virginia Woolf, she says, "was a sane woman who had an illness. She was often a patient, but she was not a victim. She was not weak, or hysterical, or self-deluding, or guilty or oppressed. On the contrary, she was a person of exceptional courage, intelligence and stoicism, who made the best use she could, and who came to the deepest understanding possible to her, of her own condition" (175).

[4] Woolf's illness was periodic and recurrent. She experienced five major 'breakdowns', during some of which (possibly all, says Hermione Lee), she tried to commit suicide. The first of these onslaughts of illness occurred in 1895 when she was 13, and was in large part precipitated by the traumatic death of her mother. Quentin Bell notes that for the Stephen children, "the real horror of Julia's death came in the morning for her" (40). In the notes for her 1939 memoir A Sketch of the Past, Woolf recalls that her mother's death "brought on, naturally my first 'breakdown'. It was found that I had a pulse that raced. It beat so quick I could hardly bear it" (178). The second major breakdown took place shortly after her father's death in February 22, 1904. One day after she had returned from a trip to Italy, Woolf found herself in the middle of another bout of illness in which she heard voices and experienced delusions. She was subsequently taken to Violet Dickinson's house at Burnham, where she attempted to kill herself by jumping out of a window. It was also here that, according to Bell, "she lay in bed, listening to the birds singing in Greek and imagining that King Edward II lurked in the azaleas using the foulest possible language" (90). George Savage, Virginia's specialist and an old friend of the family, was called for, and he recommended a quiet life away from London. Nine years later, in 1913, the ordeal would be repeated, as Woolf was preparing to publish her first novel The Voyage Out. She was very anxious about the critical reception of her book, and this resulted in sleepless nights and intense headaches. This time, symptoms included depression and an aversion to food. Dr Savage was consulted again and he prescribed a few weeks in bed in Jean Thomas's Twinckenham nursing home. This stay would prove disastrous when, in August, Woolf leaves Twickenham extremely shaken and suicidal, forcing Leonard to seek the advice of other specialists. In the meantime, Virginia's condition deteriorated so much that, in September, she tried to kill herself again by taking a mortal dose of veronal. The fourth breakdown occurred in 1921, and like the previous one, seems to have been precipitated in large part by anxiety over the fate of a book to be published. This time, the book was Jacob's Room and, as early as June 1921, Woolf was already very sick, and would not regain her health and with it the ability to write until August. On August 8, she wrote in her diary: "these, this morning, the first words I have written – to call writing – for 60 days; and those days spent in wearisome headache, jumping pulse, aching back, frets, fidgets, lying awake, sleeping draughts, sedatives, digitalis, going for a little walk, and plunging back into bed again – all the horrors of the dark cupboard of illness once more displayed for my diversion. Let me make a vow that this shall never, never, happen again" (Diary 2: 125). Unfortunately for her, however, she would have to go through yet another major breakdown. On August 1925, Woolf collapsed in the middle of a party, and would spend an entire year in recoveries and lapses, until she completely recovered.

[5] This is an interesting word because, although apprehension is one of the symptoms of trauma, it seems, as Clifford Wulfman observes, to be at odds with it. As Caruth and other trauma theorists have pointed out, psychic trauma occurs precisely due to the lack of anticipation of the event. Also,

the term 'apprehend' is a paradoxical one, for it means both to understand, to grasp the meaning of, and to anticipate. "For the victim of trauma", Wulfman writes, "to apprehend is precisely to fail to understand, to misplace the meaning of an occurance, either in the present or in the future" Clifford Wulfman, "Woolf and the Discourse of Trauma: the Little Language of The Waves. *Virginia* Woolf and Trauma: Embodies Texts. Eds, Suzette Henke and David Eberly (New York: Pace UP, 2007) 176.

[6] For more on The Waves as an existential trauma, see Suzette Henke, *The Waves* as Ontological Trauma Narrative: The Anxiety of a Death (Un)forseen, in Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts (New York: Pace UP, 2007).

[7] Suzan Dick sees the development of Woolf's fiction in terms of a shift from interest in the ordinary world toward an exploration of 'the reality behind appearances'. Thus, while the "earlier books are narrated from the perspective of the ordinary world", in the later books, especially The Waves, characters "are continually open to this other reality". Suzan Dick, "Literary Realism in Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, and The Waves". The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 66.

[8] When Woolf was working on the stories, imagism was a fully-fledged movement. The movement originated in 1909 when a group of intellectuals calling themselves the 'Secession Club', which included among others T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, and Ezra Pound, started to meet at the Eiffel Tower restaurant in London's Soho with the aim of reforming contemporary poetry. In 1911, Pound introduced two other poets to the Eiffel Tower group, his ex-fiancée Hilda Doolittle (who would later sign her work H.D.) and her future husband Richard Aldington. In a significant move that occurred a year later during a meeting in the British Museum, Pound declared the two poets to be 'imagistes' and appended the signature H.D. imagiste to Hilda Doolittle's poems. Pound then undertook to publicize the movement using his connection with Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine, for which he acted as a foreign editor. Accordingly, the March issue of *Poetry* contained Pound's *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste* and Flint's *Imagisme*, which included a statement of the group's manifesto. The latter called for "direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective", "to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation", and "as regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome". Imagism had the distinction of being the first English language literary movement in the history of modernism, and must have been especially interesting for Woolf for suggesting what Peter Nicholls describes as "a way of suspending the linear drive of narrative and of achieving an unusual intensity of experience". Peter Nicholls, Modernisms (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995) 171.

[9] The therapeutic dimension of auto/biographical writing has been explored by Suzette Henke in her Shattered Subjects. The genre, she says, allows the narrator to stage 'a drama of self-revelation' in which s/he plays analyst and analysand, with a view to restoring a sense of agency to the fragmented self: "Through the artistic replication of a coherent subject-position, the life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporally restores the fragmented self to en empowered position of psychological agency. The tenuous subject-in-process, the Lacanian *moi* contingent on the production of meaningful testimony, is valorized and reflected back in the implicit gaze of an auditor-reader who stands in for the mother of the early mirror stage". Suzette Henke, Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing (New York: St. Martin's P, 1998) xvi.

[10] Many critics agree on the continuity between Woolf's life experiences and her work. John Mepham, for instance, notes in his Virginia Woolf: A Literary life that it is impossible to separate Woolf's literary life from what he calls "all her other lives": "the story of her life as a writer, he says, intersects at innumerable points with the stories of her mental health and her breakdowns, of the sexual abuse to which she was subjected as a child and then again as a young woman, of her passions, loves and marriage, of the traumas she suffered when so many people on whom she depended died, of her friendships and social life as a member of the Bloomsbury Group, and of convictions as a feminist and critic of society". John Mepham, Virginia Woolf: A Literary life (London: Macmillan P, 1991) xiii.

[11] Despite having to deal primarily with texts that often raise problems of interpretations, as well as the poststructuralist moment in contemporary theory, trauma theorists do not deny the link between text and reality. In 'The Insistence of Reference', Cathy Caruth has argued that acknowledging the metaphorical bases and indirect modes of expression of such 'problematic' texts

as survivor narratives and literary texts, does not preclude their referential value. Thus, trauma theory, while informed by poststructuralist and deconstructive thought, seeks not "to eliminate the referential power of texts, but rather to offer a rethinking of the terms in which we have conceived it" (2). "It may indeed be in those moments that are less assimilable to understanding", she says, "that a referential dimension can be said to emerge". Cathy Caruth, "The Insistence of reference". Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Criticism, eds. Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995) 3.

[12] For a survey of biographical interpretations of Woolf, see Mark Hussey, 'Biographical Approaches' in Virginia Woolf Studies, ed. Anna Snaith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[13] The notion of an unidentifiable 'mark' runs like a thread in Woolf's short fiction. It is a 'mark on the wall' in the story of the same title, "a small round mark, black upon the while wall" (77). In the opening of 'Solid Objects, the narrator sees a "small black spot" moving on the beach (96). In 'An Unwritten Novel', the mark alternately appears as "some spot between the shoulders" (107), "a spot on the window pane" (107), or "a little speck on the glass" (108).

[14] For Woolf, the experience of illness is all the more intense as it is lived in solitude. In her diary and letters, she emphasized what Dalsimer calls the sense of utter 'aloneness' that she experienced during her repetitive breakdowns. It seems, however, that this sense of solitude derives less from any social instincts than it does from a sense of vulnerability to the stark truths that are revealed during illness. This explains why in 'On Being Ill', Woolf effects a complete reversal of John Donne's famous geographical metaphor in Meditation XVII, by emphasizing the salutary effects of solitude. "Human beings, she says, do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown. Here we go alone, and like it better so. Always to have sympathy, always to be accompanied, always to be understood would be intolerable (196). For a comparative study of Woolf's and Donne's approaches to illness, see Diane F. Gillespie, 'Metaphors of Illness and Wellness: John Donne, Virginia Woolf, and Suzan Sontag' in Virginia Woolf, Turning the centuries: Selected Papers from the Ninth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, ed. Ann Ardis& Bonnie Kime scott (New York: Pace UP, 2000).

[15] In Stevens's poem, the continuous movement of nature underscores the stillness of the jar: "The wilderness rose up to it/ And sprawled around, no longer wild/ The jar was round upon the ground". Wallace Stevens, Collected Poetry and Prose (New York: Library of America, 1997)60-1.

[16] The abundance of sensory detail and Woolf's insistence on the combination of visual, auditory, and olfactory effects in this memory makes it act more like a flashback, a non-narrative memory in which the vividness of images and sensations takes precedence over language. Flashbacks, as Marian MacCurdy observes, "are disjointed fragments of memory replete with sensory detail, which includes sounds and smells as well as visual and auditory sensations. Survivors often feel thrown back to the time of the time of the traumatic event, even smelling original smells and feeling temperatures or pains that they felt at the moment of trauma". Marian MacCurdy, The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing about Trauma (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2007) 22.

[17] For Merleau-Ponty, the presence of objects is important not only in so far as they provide the subject with a structure of perception, but also for their comforting power. Through their familiarity and long association with us, says Schwenger, "they seem to partake in our lives; they are domesticated, part of our routine and so of us" (3). Yet for all these powers, a certain distance from objects must be kept if the subject is to keep his grasp on reality and remain insane. Thus anticipating Ruth Leys's recent spatial conceptualization of the experience of trauma as a lack of a necessary 'specular distance' from the event, Merleau-Ponty warns against what he calls 'the overwhelming proximity of the object'. "What protects the sane man against delirium or hallucination", he says, "is not his critical powers, but the structure of his space: objects remain before him, keeping their distance and, as Malebranche said speaking of Adam, touching him only with respect. What brings about both hallucinations and myth is a shrinkage in the space directly experienced, a rooting of things in our body, the overwhelming proximity of the object, the oneness of man and the world, which is, not indeed abolished, but repressed by everyday perception or by objective thought, and which philosophical consciousness rediscovers. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962) 291.

[18] This mirror phobia, what Woolf calls 'the looking glass shame' would last all her life. In her memoir 'A Sketch of the Past', she describes how it would affect her relationship to her body: "I cannot now powder my nose in public. Everything to do with dress – to be fitted, to come into a room wearing a new dress – still frightens me; at least makes me shy, self-conscious, uncomfortable" (68).

[19] When the story was published by the Hogarth Press along with J. Middleton Murry's The critic in Judgement and T. S. Eliot's Poems on 12 May 1919, Woolf experienced the usual unease at being "in the hands of the public this morning". On reading a bound copy of the story, she records feeling that it was "slight & short; I don't see how the reading of it impressed Leonard" (271). Four days after its appearance, the story starts to elicit praise from Woolf's circle of friends, especially Roger Fry, which made the author feel that "I'm still safe, though no longer greeted with such exciting raptures" (273). The book was indeed not selling very well at the time, and as it was her custom, Woolf was always able to balance a personal eagerness for praise and acknowledgement with a more practical concern for the commercial success of her books. Success, however, was not late to come. Following an enthusiastic review of the book by Harold Child for the Times Literary Supplement, the Woolfs arrived home on June 10 "to find the hall table stacked, littered with orders for Kew Gardens. They strewed the sofa, & we opened them intermittently though dinner & quarrelled, I am sorry to say, because we were both excited, & opposite tides of excitement coursed in us, & they were blown to waves by the critical blast of Charleston. All these orders – 150 about, from shops & private people [...] And 10 days ago I was stoically facing complete failure! (280).

# CONCLUSION

In an essay on Proust, Walter Benjamin distinguishes between willed, intentional memory and involuntary memory which he calls forgetting. The first kind of memory constructs a lucid and sequential narrative of life events, in a manner analogous to what Miller calls a "dry historical recital of facts" (Fiction 7). The second kind of memory is more creative in that it constructs an imaginary account of life, "lived life." The originality of Benjamin's insight lies, according to Miller, in "his recognition of the constructive, fictive, and falsifying aspect of Proust's involuntary memory (7). In Proust's work, Benjamin writes, what is described is not

> life as it actually was, but life as it was remembered by the one who had lived it. And yet even this statement is imprecise and far too crude. For the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, the Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involonatire*, much closer to forgetting that what is usually called memory? ("The Image of Proust" 202)

What interests me in this passage is Benjamin's equation of involuntary memory with forgetting, and the tension that results from this equation, between the opposed activities of remembering and forgetting. I take this tension to be at the heart of Virginia Woolf's work as exemplified by the texts that I have examined. One might say that Woolf's own *mémoire involontaire*, in this case, the evocation of a set of intense experiences that incessantly intruded on her consciousness, was in fact a Penelope work of forgetting, or at least an attempt to exorcise these implacable phantoms from the past. Whether grounded in personal loss, ontological anxiety, or embodiment, these experiences transgress the boundaries of 'normal' memory and, like dreams, they create what Miller calls a "strangely powerful affective 'memory'" of things that may or may not have actually happened. The power of these affective memories resonate everywhere in Woolf's work, and with it the supposition that, regardless of their actuality and their devastating effect, these experiences need to be constantly remembered (or forgotten), being far more significant than ordinary events. "These are the true cycles", says Bernard in The Waves, "these are the true events" (141).

Benjamin's emphasis on the complexity of the negative work of forgetting as apposed to voluntary memory might be said to prefigure contemporary theory's preoccupation with remembering experiences that have escaped the ordinary mechanisms of cognition and memorization. As a theory that relates to what Hartman calls "the negative moment in experience" (540), trauma theory challenges progressivist narratives of the history of the subject, and focuses instead on what returns, repetitively, to haunt a traumatized subject, a subject that, in Lacanian terms, is originally constituted by a traumatic experience of loss. The idea is explained by Caruth in lucid terms:

> The pathology cannot be defined by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally – nor can it be defined in terms of a *distortion* of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. (Trauma 4-5, author's italics)

This passage contains many of the fundamental principles of the contemporary narratological model of trauma. To be traumatized for Caruth, is "to be possessed by an *image* or *event*" (My italics). Image and repetition become therefore recognizable symptoms of a writing that engages with an experience of trauma. We have seen, for instance, how Woolf's glimpses of the most intense moments of her illness were conveyed primarily through images. Septimus's predicament, on the other hand, takes the form of a return, "an eternal repetition, the eternal restoration of the original", to use Benjamin's formulation ("The Image of Proust" 204). In addition, Caruth's spectrographic terms (haunting, possession) emphasize precisely the uncanny nature of this return: what returns are both historical and textual ghosts that name repressed material that has never been properly mourned.

The question of haunting could allow us, moreover, to move to a broader conception of the relevance of trauma theory to contemporary debates about literary modernism. Woolf's engagement with those lingering spirits from the past could be seen in this sense as symptomatic of what Jean-Michel Rabaté calls a "spectral modernity", a modernity that, as Habermas observed, remains an 'unfinished project'. Central to Rabaté's conception of modernism is the view that, contrary to the widespread assumption of the modernists' radical rupture with the past and total identification with the 'new', modernism "is systematically haunted by voices from the past", and thus it demonstrates "in an exemplary way the ineluctability of spectral returns (The Ghosts of Modernity xvi). Rabaté thereby suggests the necessity of rewriting the history of modernism in ways that acknowledge the centrality of its various historical and textual spectres:

> In most recently produced histories of the concept of modernity, the return of the past is too often overlooked because the declaration of the "new" is taken at face value. If indeed the main thrust of modernism – as launched by Yeats, Hulme, Wyndham Lewis, Pound, and Eliot in the frantic London years just before World War I – has been to link the wish to "make it new" with an awareness of the primitive nature of ritual, then their modernity can no more escape the return of the repressed than preempt its unforeseeable effects. (3-4)

Yet while Rabatté's argument is primarily concerned with the ghosts of literary history, that is to say with the archival impulse that we see in a number of modernist writers, it is still illuminating about the kind of autobiographical ghosts of personal past to which Woolf, like Proust, gave distinctive and innovative literary representation. This is so because Woolf's acts of remembering, limited as they are to her personal history, are inflected through the poetics of fictional composition, and as such they cannot be separated from her modernist aesthetic. It is within this literary context that the kind of narratological trauma theory sponsored by Caruth comes to occupy a crucial position alongside other accounts of modernist innovation or narrative theory. As this dissertation has shown, Woolf's work brings this literary trauma theory into a crucial dialogue with a large body of modernist theory, and doing so, it takes Caruth's project further by enacting not only the

anxiety that results from the failure of language to account for experience, but also the subject's persistence in the face of such a failure, and his repeated attempt to seek, as Bernard says in The Waves, "among phrases and fragments something unbroken" (205).

The notion of 'fragments' is yet another area where trauma theory can help account for another aspect of the modernist sensibility, namely its profoundly melancholy and elegiac dimension, and this through the key notion of identification. Identification, as Ruth Leys has pointed out, does not occur with the onslaught of a major catastrophe but is something that precedes the very constitution of the subject. It is a most archaic affective bond "that can never be remembered by the subject because it precedes the very distinction between self and other on which the possibility of representation and hence recollection depends" (Leys 32). "It follows", Leys adds, "that the origin is not present to the subject but is on the contrary the condition of the latter's 'birth'" (32). In other words, the subject is born already carrying traces of this traumatic "genesis-moment that [will] start a fatal chain reaction and manacle[...] both body and mind" (Hartman 538). This explains the persistent and otherwise inexplicable way in which the subject *incorporates* and repeats the trauma as if possessed by an irresistible volition to self-destruct. In literary terms, this is often translated into what might be termed a poetics of disintegration, whereby a writer rehearses in fictional terms the process of degeneration that starts with the birth of the subject. Thus Woolf's 'orts, scraps, and fragments', much like Eliot's 'these fragments I have shored against my ruin', is a powerful expression of the elegiac aspect of the modernist project as the contemplation of the writer's own ruin.

# WORKS CITED

Abel, Elizabeth. Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.

Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy. Trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986.

Adorno, Theodor. Prisms. Trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.

Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.

Baldwin, Dean. Virginia Woolf: A Study of the Short Fiction. Boston: Twayne, 1989.

Banks, Joanne Trautmann. Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf. London: Hogarth P, 1989.

Beer, Gillian. "Between the Acts." Virginia Woolf: Introductions to the Major Works. Ed. Julia Briggs. London: Virago P, 1994.

Beja, Morris. "Text and Counter-Text: Trying to Recover Mrs Dalloway." Editing Virginia Woolf, Interpreting the Modernist Text. Ed. James M. Haule and J. H. Stape. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Bell, Quentin. Virginia Woolf: A Biography. New York: Quality Paper Book Club, 1992.

Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Fontana, 1992.

Bishop, Edward. "Pursuing 'It' Through 'Kew Gardens'." Virginia Woolf: A Study of the Short Fiction. Ed. Dean Baldwin. Boston: Twayne, 1989.

Blackstone, Bernard. Virginia Woolf: a Commentary. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.

Blanchot, Maurice. The Writing of Disaster. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986.

Bond, Alma Halbert. Who Killed Virginia Woolf? : A Psychobiography. New York: Human Sciences P, 1989.

Booth, Alison. Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992.

Booth, Allyson. "The Architecture of Loss: Teaching Jacob's Room as a War Novel." Re: Reading, Re: Writing, Re: Teaching Virginia Woolf: Selected Papers from the Fourth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf. New York: Pace UP, 1995.

Bowie, Malcolm. Lacan. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.

Bradbury, Malcolm. The Modern British Novel. London: Penguin, 1993.

Brault, Pascale-Anne, and Michael Naas, eds. The Work of Mourning. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.

Briggs, Julia. Reading Virginia Woolf. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2006.

---. Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life. London: Allen Lane, 2005.

Brooks, Peter. Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative. New York: Alfred A. Knope, 1984.

Brown, Bill. A Sense of Things : the Object Matter of American Literature. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003.

Butler, Judith. Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. New York: Verso, 2004.

Caramagno, Thomas C. The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-depressive Illness. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.

Caruth, Cathy, and Deborah Esch, eds. Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995.

---. "Parting words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival." Acts of Narrative. Ed. Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

---. "The Insistence of Reference." Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing. Ed. Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995.

---, ed. Trauma: Explorations in Memory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

---. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Castricano, Jodey. Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2001.

Cuddy-Keane, Melba. Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

Culbertson, Roberta. "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self." New Literary History 26 (1995): 169-97.

Coates, Irene. Who's Afraid of Leonard Woolf? : A Case for the Sanity of Virginia Woolf. New York: Soho, 2000.

Coates, Kimberly. "Exposing the 'Nerves of Language': Virginia Woolf, Charles Mauron, and the Affinity Between Aesthetics and Illness." Literature and Medicine 21.2 (2002): 242-263.

Conrad. Joseph. Heart of Darkness. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.

Dalsimer, Katherine. Virginia Woolf: Becoming a Writer. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.

De Man, Paul. The Resistance to Theory. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986.

---. The Rhetoric of Romanticism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles. Difference and Repetition. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia UP, 1994.

DeMeester, Karen. "Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway." Modern Fiction Studies 44.3 (1998): 649-673.

Derrida, Jacques. Glas. Trans. John P. Leavy, Jr and Richard Rand. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986.

---. Margins of Philosophy. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.

---. Memoirs for Paul de Man. New York: Columbia UP, 1986.

---. Of Grammatology. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998.

---. Politics of Friendship. Trans. George Collins. London: Verso, 1997.

---. The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

---. The Work of Mourning. Ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.

DeSalvo, Louise. Virginia Woolf: the Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work. Boston: Beacon P, 1989.

DiBattista, Maria. Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: the Fables of Anon. New Haven: Yale U P, 1980.

Dick, Susan. "Literary Realism in Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando, and The Waves." The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

---, ed. The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf. London: Hogarth P, 1985.

Eliot, T. S. "Ulysses Order and Myth". The Dial, LXXV (1923): 480-83.

---. The Waste Land and Other Poems. Florida: Harcourt Brace, 1934.

Ellenberger, H.F. The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry. New York: Basic Books, 1970.

Epstein, William H., ed. Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism. Indiana: Purdue UP, 1991.

Esty, Jed. A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2004.

Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub, eds. Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History. New York: Routledge, 1992.

---. The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002.

Ferrer, Daniel. Virginia Woolf and the Madness of Language. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. London: Routledge, 1990.

Figley, Charles R. Trauma and its Wake: The Study and Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1985.

Fish, Stanley. "Biography and Intention." Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism. Ed. William H. Epstein. Indiana: Purdue UP, 1991.

Foucault, Michel. "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault: Esthetics, Method, and Epistemology. Ed. James D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: New Press, 1998.

Fourla, Christine. Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-garde: War, Civilization, Modernity. New York: Columbia UP, 2005.

Freedman, Ariela. Death, Men, and Modernism: Trauma and Narrative in British Fiction from Hardy to Woolf. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Freud, Sigmund, and Josef Breuer. Studies in Hysteria. Trans. Nicola Luckhurst. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

---. Beyond the Pleasure Principle. London: Hogarth P, 1961.

---. Civilization and its Discontents. London: Penguin, 2004.

---. "Fixation to Traumas." The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth P, 1955.

---. Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Bantam Books, 1965.

---. Interpreting Dreams. Trans. J. A. Underwood. London: Penguin Books, 2006.

---. "Mourning and Melancholia." The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth P, 1955.

---. Moses and Monotheism. New York: Alfred .A. Knopf, 1939.

---. "The Case of the Wolf-Man: From the History of an Infantile Neurosis." The Wolf-Man by the Wolf-Man. Ed. Muriel Gardiner. New York: Basic Books, 1971.

---. Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics. Trans. A. A. Brill. London: George Routledge, 1926.

Gillespie, Diane F. "Metaphors of Illness and Wellness: John Donne, Virginia Woolf, and Suzan Sontag." Virginia Woolf, Turning the Centuries: Selected Papers from the Ninth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf. Ed. Ann Ardis and Bonnie Kime Scott. New York: Pace UP, 2000.

Gordon, Lyndall. Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984.

Granofsky, Ronald. The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster. New York: P. Lang, 1995.

Habermas, Jürgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures. Cambridge: Polity P, 1987.

Hacking, Ian. "Memory Sciences, Memory Politics." Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. Ed. Paul Antze & Michael Lambek. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Hartman, Geoffrey. "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies." New Literary History 26.3 (1995): 537-563.

Heidegger, Martin. Poetry, Language, Thought. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971.

Henke, Suzette, and David Eberly, eds. Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts. New York: Pace UP, 2007.

---. Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing. New York: St. Martin's P, 1998.

---. "The Waves as Ontological Trauma Narrative: The Anxiety of a Death (Un)Forseen." Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts. Ed. Suzette Henke and David Eberly. New York: Pace UP, 2007.

---. "Virginia Woolf and Post-traumatic Subjectivity." Virginia Woolf, Turning the Centuries: Selected Papers from the Ninth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf. Ed. Ann Ardis and Bonnie Kime Scott. New York: Pace UP, 2000.

Herman, Judith. Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Hussey, Mark. "Biographical Approaches." Virginia Woolf Studies. Ed. Anna Snaith. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

---. Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1991.

Jakobson, Roman and Morris Halle. Fundamentals of language. The Hague: Mouton, 1971.

J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis. The Language of Psychoanalysis. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973.

Johnson, Barbara. The Wake of Deconstruction. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994.

Kafka, Frantz. Letters to Friends Family, and Editors. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Schocken Books, 1978.

Kahane, Claire. "Of Snakes, Toads, and Duckweed: Traumatic Acts and Historical Actions in Between the Acts." Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodied Texts. Ed. Suzette Henke and David Eberly New York: Pace UP, 2007.

Kenner, Hugh. A Sinking Island: the Modern English Writers. New York: Knopf, 1988.

Kenny, Micheal G. "Trauma, Time, Illness, and Culture: an Anthropological Approach to Traumatic Memory." Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. Ed. Paul Antze and Michael Lambek. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Kermode, Frank. "Introduction." Between the Acts. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

---. The sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction. New York: Oxford UP, 1967.

Kristeva, Julia. The Black Sun. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.

Lacan, Jacques. "Tuché and Automaton." The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1978.

LaCapra, Dominick. Writing History, Writing Trauma. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001.

Laub, Dori. "Truth and Testimony: the Process and the Scourge." Trauma: Explorations in Memory. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Leaska, Mitchell. Granite and Rainbow: the Hidden Life of Virginia Woolf. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.

Lee, Hermione. Virginia Woolf. London: Chatto & Windus, 1996.

Leitch, Vincent B. Deconstructive Criticism: an Advanced Introduction. New York: Columbia UP, 1983.

Levenback, Karen. Virginia Woolf and the Great War. Syracuse: Syracuse U P, 1999.

Lewis, Wyndham. Men without Art. London: Cassell, 1934.

Leys, Ruth. Trauma: A Genealogy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Lifton, Robert Jay. The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Lilenfeld, Jane. "Accident, Incident, and Meaning: Traces of Trauma in Virginia Woolf's Narrativity." Virginia Woolf, Turning the Centuries: Selected Papers from the Ninth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf. Ed. Ann Ardis and Bonnie Kime Scott. New York: Pace UP, 2000.

Lodge, David. "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy." Modernism: 1890–1930. Ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

Lukacher, Ned. Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Differend: Phrases in Dispute. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.

MacCurdy, Marian. The Mind's Eye: Image and Memory in Writing about Trauma. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2007.

Mao, Douglas. Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1998.

Marder, Herbert. The Measure of Life: Virginia Woolf's Last Years. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000.

Marcus, Laura. Virginia Woolf. Devon: Northcote Publishers, 1997.

McGarry, Lisa Coughlin. Orts, Scraps, and Fragments: the Elusive Search for Meaning in Virginia Woolf's Fiction. Lanham: UP of America, 2007.

Mepham, John. Virginia Woolf: A Literary life. London: Macmillan P, 1991.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Phenomenology of Perception. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 1962.

Miller, J. Hillis. Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.

---. "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure." Theory Now and Then. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

---. Tropes, Parables, Performatives: Essays on Twentieth-Century Literature. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject. Brighton: Harvester, 1987.

Moglan, Seth. Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007.

Moran, Patricia. Virginia Woolf, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Trauma. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Newmark, Kevin. "Nietzsche and Deconstruction." Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing. Ed. Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1995.

Nicholls, Peter. Modernisms: A Literary Guide. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1995.

Nicolson, Nigel. Virginia Woolf: A Penguin Life. New York: Viking, 2000.

Owen, Wilfred. Wilfred Owen: Selected Poetry and Prose. Ed. Jennifer Breen. New York: Routledge, 1988.

Panken, Shirley. Virginia Woolf and the "Lust of Creation": A Psychoanalytic Exploration. Albany: State U of New York P, 1987.

Peach, Linden. Virginia Woolf. New York: St. Martin's P, 2000.

Pippett, Aileen. The Moth and the Star: a Biography of Virginia Woolf. Boston: Little Brown, 1955.

Poole, Roger. The Unknown Virginia Woolf. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Poresky, Louise A. The Elusive Self: Psyche and Spirit in Virginia Woolf's Novels. Newark: University of Delaware P, 1981.

Rabaté, Jean-Michel. The Ghosts of Modernity. Miami: UP of Florida, 1996.

Ricciardi, Alesssia. The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

Roe, Sue. "The impact of post-impressionism." The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf. Ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Rogers, Annie. The Unsayable: the Hidden Language of Trauma. New York: Random House, 2006.

Rose, Phyllis. Woman of Letters: A Life of Virginia Woolf. New York: Oxford UP, 1978.

Saltzman, Lisa, and Eric Rosenberg, eds. Trauma and Visuality in Modernity. Hanover: UP of New England, 2006.

Sarup, Madan. Jacques Lacan. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.

Schwenger, Peter. The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006.

Silver, Brenda. Virginia Woolf Icon. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1999.

Skrbic, Nina. Wild Outbursts of Freedom: Reading Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction. Westport: Praeger, 2004.

Smith, Sidonie. Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.

Snaith, Anna, ed. Palgrave Advances in Virginia Woolf Studies. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Solomon, Andrew. The Noonday Demon: an Atlas of Depression. New York: Scribner, 2001.

Sontag, Susan. Illness as Metaphor. New York: Vintage, 1979.

Stavely, Alice. "Conversations at Kew: Reading Woolf's Feminist Narratology." Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction. Ed. Kathryn N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Stevens, Wallace. The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954.

Szasz, Thomas. "My Madness Saved me": The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006.

Trombley, Stephen. All that Summer she was Mad: Virginia Woolf and her Doctors. London: Junction Books, 1981.

Van Alphen, Ernst. "Touching Death." Death and Representation. Ed. Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen. Maryland: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.

White, Hayden. Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

Whitehead, Anne. Trauma Fiction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004.

Whitworth, Michael. "Virginia Woolf and Modernism." The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf. Ed. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Williams, William Carlos. William Carlos Williams: Selected Poems. Ed. Charles Tomlinson. New York: New Directions, 1985)

Wilson, Jean Moorcroft. Virginia Woolf, Life and London: A Biography of Place. London: Woolf, 1987.

Woolf, Leonard. Downhill all the Way: an Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939. London: Hogarth P, 1967.

Woolf, Virginia. "An Introduction to Mrs Dalloway." The Mrs Dalloway Reader. Ed. Francine Prose. Florida: Harcourt, 2003.

---. Between the Acts. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

---. Collected Essays. London: Hogarth, 1967.

---. "Henry James: The Old Order." Collected Essays. London: Hogarth, 1966.

---. Jacob's Room. London: Penguin, 1996.

---. Moments of Being. Sussex: U of Sussex P, 1976.

---. Mrs Dalloway. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1996.

---. "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street." The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf. Ed. Susan Dick. London: Hogarth, 1985.

--. The Common Reader. Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

---. The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.

---. The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Ed. Nigel Nicolson. London: Hogarth, 1975.

---. The Years. London: Hogarth, 1990.

---. The Waves. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

---. Three Guineas. San Diego: Harcourt, 1938.

---. To the Lighthouse. New York: Harcourt, 1955.

Wulfman, Clifford. "Woolf and the Discourse of Trauma: the Little Language of The Waves." Virginia Woolf and Trauma: Embodies Texts. Ed. Suzette Henke and David Eberly. New York: Pace UP, 2007.

Yeats, W. B. Selected Poetry. Ed. Timothy Webb. London: Penguin, 1991.

Žižek, Slavoj, The Metatastes of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality. New York: Verso, 1994.