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Avatars of the Seventh Article: Literature, Genre, and Autobiography in Virginia Woolf

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Using essays, diaries, letters and autobiography and the theories about these genres – particularly, but not exclusively, Virginia Woolf's – this study looks at the relationship between genre and literature in the writing of autobiography. Generic autobiography is defined by writers failing to question their dependence on key facets of their lives, which allows them to position themselves in relation to the rest of reality. Literary autobiography, on the other hand, is found where writers honour all elements of their lives.

Generic autobiography is the classical understanding of autobiography. And yet this study concludes with the realisation that it is not strictly speaking autobiographical because it can belong to anyone who reads it. An autobiography is ultimately defined by the impossibility of another deciphering its position, and this is more akin to what we find in literary autobiographies.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution; nor, to the best of my knowledge and belief, does it contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Mark Broadhead

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments for a thesis are usually divided between intellectual support and emotional support. That is to say, between the university and the candidate's friends, work colleagues, and family. But, of course, there is an overlap between the two camps. Supervisors are friends, albeit detached from one's everyday world; and friends, colleagues and family are ready interrogators of one's intellectual pursuits, even though their world is not based in the same ivory tower. I have been lucky enough to have supervisors, friends, colleagues, and family whom I find it difficult to separate neatly into the two camps.

Nevertheless, to begin with Monash University, I would like to thank my supervisors, who provided invaluable criticism during my candidature. Professor Terry Threadgold guided my research from the beginning, before leaving me in the learned hands of Professor Clive Probyn. Professor Kevin Hart also offered valuable suggestions. Any mistakes that remain in the thesis are mine not theirs.

Of friends, colleagues, and family the list is numerous. However, it would begin with my parents, Jim and Margaret, who may of questioned my arguments but never my decision to study. The list would continue with Matthew Pritchard, Imogen Young, Daniel Tatton, Stephen Brockway, Anissa Brockway, and Dr Frances Garner. They are a strikingly eclectic group of friends who, nevertheless, share a curiosity for all things, which is both infectious and delightful.

INTRODUCTION

I am at a party – the host introduces another guest to me. An introduction in this sense, as it is in a text, is understood to be preliminary to the main discussion, although sometimes there is no more than an introduction. The reasons for this interruption might be multiple. It may be that the introduction failed to work, the other remaining as unapproachable as ever. Or it may be because the introduction worked too well. In other words, I learn all the information I require from the introduction, or I discover that the main discussion was only an "introduction" to what I want to be discussed.

This thesis began in part because autobiography remained an introduction for me. Most investigations I had read neither satisfied me as to how a text's genre influences (the writing of) one's life, nor how genres are generated by their continuity or discontinuity with the autobiography of their authors.

For instance, the title of this page signals that it belongs to the genre of introductions. Of course, not everything bearing this title is an introduction. It might, for instance, be instead a fictional story about an introduction between two characters. Virginia Woolf herself wrote such a story, entitled "The Introduction," about a female university student, an essayist, being introduced to a male guest at a party.[1] This kind of complication, which is central rather than supplementary to the discussion of genres, is what I try to deal with in the following chapters in order to approach autobiography.

Each chapter investigates a different autobiographical genre, beginning with essays, then diaries, letters, and finally autobiographies themselves. The choice of whose essays, diaries, letters, and autobiographies to use as primary

texts for discussion was not difficult. It is for three main reasons that I chose the oeuvre of Virginia Woolf. The first reason being that with the almost complete publication of her extant essays, letters, diaries, and autobiographical pieces, her oeuvre is one of the most easily accessible and extensive in the English language. Second, as a so-called modernist writer, her texts consciously deal with the problems of writing, and these include genre classifications. Third, I have an admiration for her writing which only increases with repeated reading.

That being said, I only use Woolf to substantiate or lead my discussion where it is appropriate. If I find someone else more helpful to the investigation, as for example Jacques Derrida is on many occasions, then I feel there is no treachery in putting Woolf to one side. In other words, what follows this introduction is not strictly speaking a study of Virginia Woolf as one would normally expect, where, for instance, each of her novels (from *The Voyage Out* to *Between the Acts*) is discussed in chronological order. Rather, it is a theoretical study of the use, limit, and origin of autobiographical genres by reading a variety of texts, including Woolf's. In short, the study is an amalgamation or federation of genre theory, literary theory, autobiographical theory, and Woolf studies. No single discipline is allowed to dominate the others. Indeed, the thesis attempts to open the borders between the disciplines, rather than closing them off with restrictive approaches.

"Genre" and "literature" are the key terms used to approach my understanding of autobiography in the works of Woolf. I deliberately chose to begin the study using both terms in their broadest sense. Thus, "genre" is applicable to any sort of text, whether spoken, written, or visual, that can be said to belong to a set of texts of similar design or effect, although my focus here is

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[1] Virginia Woolf, "The Introduction," *The Complete Shorter Fiction*, ed. Susan Dick (London: Triad Grafton Books, 1991).

chiefly (though not exclusively) in the written text. This leaves "genre" somewhere between the classic and romantic uses of the term. As Tzvetan Todorov writes: "with the classics, [genre] was a norm invoked to condemn deviations; for the romantics, each work had its own genre, and the notion was thus deprived of all interest."[2] Likewise, "literature" has a broad range, which is not limited to so-called imaginative texts, as the word has been increasingly used since the eighteenth century.[3] More detailed definitions of "genre" and "literature" come to light in the following chapters as I test the relationship between the two terms.

The first chapter, entitled "Turning in Essays," approaches the definitions of the essay, and this leads to speculations on its relationship to literary fiction, especially the development of the novel. I at first find that the essay is a rarer entity than I have been led to believe, with most "essays" actually bereft of the autobiographical impulse that differentiates them from "articles." Yet I then realise that all *actual* essays by definition must fail in their attempt to be essays. Because of the problem of representing one's everyday experience, essays cannot both answer and question the autobiographical impulse at their origin. This leads me to investigate the relationship between autobiography and the everyday. Using Maurice Blanchot I discern two versions of the everyday, the ordinary and the inspired. This division is found named by Woolf in her novel *To the Lighthouse* as the Seventh Article. It defines the everyday interaction between her male and female characters: Women are engendered in peace-time by females questioning males, and in repayment they expect males to sacrifice themselves in times of danger. Because the Seventh Article does not encourage men to question the

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[2] Tzvetan Todorov, "Introduction: French Poetics," *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 6.
[3] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Flamingo, 1983) 187.

inspiration (the questioner) of their thoughts, women remain the limit of their own self-representation. The latter half of the chapter sees how the Seventh Article's division of duties is further criticised by Woolf in *Three Guineas* as actually encouraging times of danger; that is, war. To avoid this, Woolf creates a society of Outsiders where females can excuse themselves from the social engendering of the Seventh Article.

In the second chapter, entitled "Promising Diaries," the act of excusing oneself is related back to the generic everyday of the diary and the literary vocation. After making the distinction between *anticipatory excuses* and *belated excuses*, I then set out to prove the work of literature is in the former. I find anticipatory excuses undermining the accepted order of promises and, indeed, accepted orders in general, including the ordering of the everyday, such as Tuesday following Monday, etc. To keep a hold on the everyday, Woolf imposes a distorted version of the Seventh Article on Nelly Boxall, her domestic cook. By not questioning the reasons for Boxall's disquiet with her conditions, Boxall becomes the generic symbol of Woolf's everyday. This is confirmed by comparing Woolf's diary with her composition of the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse* during the General Strike of 1926. Moreover, in her dependence on Boxall remaining a generic example of her everyday I also perceive the limit of Woolf's professional institution, literature; for it obfuscates how Boxall's work frees Woolf to concentrate on writing. I found that Woolf's use of Boxall to limit the interrogation of her lifestyle is an excuse for not defining herself. It is an excuse which I relate to literature's freedom. The freedom of literary writers to say everything is founded upon the excuse from defining themselves. I trace this with the help of Paul de Man's reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had his own trouble with a cook.

This avoidance of certainty is pursued in the third chapter, entitled "Letters of Honour," using Woolf's letters, especially those to Vita Sackville-West, and her "suicide letters," together with several interpretations of letters fictional and real (or ambiguous) in order to see how the literariness of a text is determined by defamiliarising the everyday. In particular, I see how the literariness of texts is constrained when I look at how, contrary to Woolf's wishes, her undated suicide letters to her husband, Leonard, have been given a chronological order and then used to define her character with such generic attributes as Stoic or victim of circumstances, etc. Using Peggy Kamuf, these interpretations are seen as part of a patriarchal legacy of "masculine" honour. I understand "masculine" honour as the opposite of what I call literary honour, which I associate with an attempt to honour all one's experience without prejudice or privilege.

This literary honour is the subject of the fourth and final chapter, entitled "Literary Autobiography" where Martin Heidegger leads me to trace in broad strokes the origin and rise of generic autobiography from Plato to Descartes, and its challenge in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. A key text by Maurice Blanchot, entitled *La Folie du jour*, is put forward as honouring Nietzsche's legacy. And, indeed, Derrida uses Blanchot's text to undermine genre classifications. In particular, I consider the (Nietzschean) double affirmation Derrida notices in *La Folie du jour* as a way of understanding literary honour, and also what Woolf calls "moments of being" in her autobiographical piece, "A Sketch of the Past." Finally, this chapter is followed by a short conclusion.

CHAPTER 1

Turning in Essays

There is a code of behaviour she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behoves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected in her old-maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames. Then she thought, I should certainly expect Mr Tansley to get me out. But how would it be, she thought if neither of us did either of these things? So she sat there smiling.

– Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*[1]

This chapter approaches the genre of essays primarily by listening to its dialogue with fiction in the representation of the everyday. With the help of Maurice Blanchot I discern two versions of the everyday, the ordinary and the inspired. This allows me to expand the idea of the Seventh Article (in a passage from *To the Lighthouse* I have used as an epigraph) beyond the dinner table, seeing it as expressing the general division of the everyday between the genders: women inspire men to thought by questioning them about their everyday, and, as such, women are defined as the inscrutable origin of the representation of the world. As Lily Briscoe describes: "it behoves the woman, whatever her own occupation be, to go to the help of the young man opposite [her at the dinner table, in this case] so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself." The chapter concludes by looking at how Woolf responds to this definition of women in *Three Guineas* by envisaging a society of Outsiders.

Virginia Woolf had her first essays published when she was still Virginia Stephen. In fact they were published the year of her father's death, 1904. She began where Leslie Stephen had left off, for he was a renowned essayist, and had played a

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[1] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Grafton Books, 1977) 99. Subsequent page references will be included parenthetically within the body of the text

large part in her development as a writer.[2] I sum up this chapter with a discussion of the £2.7.6. paid to Virginia Stephen in January 1905 by *The Guardian* for her first three essays.[3] But first I meditate on the essay's influence on Woolf's writing, particularly her novels.

I began my first meditation on essay writing with my second-hand copy of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) on the table before me. Distracted, I picked it up and flicked through its pages. The novel is divided into three parts entitled, "The Window," "Time Passes," and "The Lighthouse." The first and final parts are separated by ten years. Both, however, take place on a single day. "The Window" opens with an answer: "'Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,' said Mrs Ramsay" (9). She is addressing her six-year-old son, James; and his missing question is glimpsed in the three words of the novel's title, for we are encouraged to presume that he asks whether he will be sailing *to the lighthouse* in the morning. When the light fails later, the lighthouse repeats the question with three beams: "first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke" (69). But now James's father dismisses his son's hopes. "'But,' said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, 'it won't be fine'" (10). And a guest, Charles Tansley, supplies the meteorological reason: "'It's due west,' said the atheist Tansley, holding his bony fingers spread so that the wind blew threw them [...]" (11).

It is well known that, although set on the Hebridean Isle of Skye, the novel is largely based on Woolf's memory of her family's summer-house in St. Ives, Cornwall. To some of her readers the change of setting was revealed by the

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[2] See Katherine C. Hill's "Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution," *PMLA* 96 (1981): 351-362.

[3] Woolf, *A Passionate Apprentice: The Early Journals: 1897-1909*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) 219.

incongruous flora and fauna. "Lord Olivier", Woolf writes to her sister, Vanessa Bell, on 22 May 1927, "writes that my horticulture and natural history is in every instance wrong: there are no rooks, elms, or dahlias in the Hebrides; my sparrows are wrong; so are my carnations".[4] These errors are made more notable by the presence in the narration of a botanist, William Bankes. Bankes is an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, characters Woolf modelled on her parents.[5] Someone (I could not tell if it was me) had marked the pages in my copy where Bankes interrupts Lily Briscoe from her painting of Mrs. Ramsay and James. Leaving the easel, William and Lily stroll towards the sea-view at the bottom of the garden, discussing, along the way, their host, the philosopher, Mr. Ramsay. Where I began reading, one of the walkers had just found it remarkable that Mr. Ramsay supported his eight children on philosophy (28). Then the widower, William, regrets that his old friend had become exorbitantly dependent on his family for praise (29).

> 'Oh but,' said Lily, 'think of his work!'
>
> Whenever she 'thought of his work' she always saw clearly before her a large kitchen table. It was Andrew's doing. She asked him what his father's books were about. 'Subject and object and the nature of reality,' Andrew had said. And when she said Heavens, she had no notion what that meant. 'Think of a kitchen table then,' he told her, 'when you're not there.'
>
> So she always saw, when she thought of Mr Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table. It lodged now in the fork of a pear tree, for they had reached the orchard. And with a painful effort of concentration, she focussed her mind, not upon the silver-bossed bark of the tree, or upon its fish-shaped leaves, but upon a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed

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[4] Woolf, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf Vol. III 1923-1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: Hogarth Press, 1994).

[5] Leslie Stephen also made an appearance in George Meredith's *The Egoist* (1879) as the character Vernon Whitford. See, Noel Annan's *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (New York: Random House,1984).

board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity, which stuck there, its four legs in air (29-30).

As I was saying, in the margin of the page in my copy someone had written, "See genius, page 41 – see Berkeley, Marx, on tables." Looking back to the title pages to see if the previous owner had written their name, I was strangely disturbed to find only my own signature written in the same style as the annotations. Turning to page forty-one for the famous definition of genius, I found it apposite for Lily's picture of Mr. Ramsay's table. It describes geniuses as being able to throw themselves, their experiences, their names, everything, into all the letters of thought (40-42). Mr. Ramsay, on the other hand, methodically plods through the alphabet of thoughts ("Locke, Hume, Berkeley..."(52)) only to get stuck at Q, which happens to be the letter before his surname's initial. (It is likely that Woolf is referring to the "R" of "Ramsay" because as a re-working of Leslie Stephen's life it relates to the work he did as a writer and editor for the Dictionary of National Biography.) "Meanwhile, he stuck at Q. On, then on to R" (42). Mr. Ramsay understands the truth as finitude, as Z. If what Andrew Ramsay tells Lily Briscoe is representative of his father's method, Mr. Ramsay believes that to reach Z he must think of it when he is not "there." In other words, his self (R) must remain outside the alphabet of his thought, and consequently outside of his writing. It is this self-erasure that perhaps inspires him to recite Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade." "Someone had blundered," Mr. Ramsay says wandering around the garden in a trance, quoting the poem's accusation (25).

This opposition between the recognised genius and the example of Mr. Ramsay as an anonymous *flaneur* is repeated by numerous writers on the essay pointing to the key difference between an *essay* and an *article* as the latter's blindness

to the presence of the thinking self. In this sense Mr. Ramsay is an article writer, reluctant or unable to write using the autobiographical self interrogation of the essay. Closing *To the Lighthouse*, I picked up a critical anthology. Essayists, Carl Klaus writes in "Essayists on the Essay" (1989), seek

> to convey the sense of a human presence, a human presence that is indisputably related to its author's deepest sense of self, but that is also a complete illusion of the self – an enactment of it as if it were both in the process of thought and in the process of sharing the outcomes of that thought with others. Considered in this light, the essay, rather than being the clear-cut, straight forward, and transparent form of discourse that it is usually considered to be, is itself a very problematic kind of writing. So it should not be confused with article-writing [...].[6]

Perversely, this means that most texts that seek to define the essay fail themselves to *be* essays; and this applies not least to the valuable collection edited by Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino on Woolf's essays.[7] And, more seriously, if Klaus is correct in defining the essay's major trait as the representation of the thinking self, then the contributors to *Virginia Woolf and the Essay* (1997) also fail to *talk* about essays. Woolf herself comments on this tendency in one of her earliest publications, "The Decay of Essay-writing" (1905): "The simple words 'I was born'", she writes,

> have somehow a charm beside which all the splendours of romance and fairy-tale turn to moonshine and tinsel. But though it seems thus easy enough to write of one's self, it's, as we know, a feat but seldom accomplished. [...] Confronted with the terrible spectre of themselves, the bravest are inclined to run away or shade their eyes.[8]

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[6] Carl H. Klaus, "Essayists on the Essay," *Literary Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy*, ed. Chris Anderson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989) 173.
[7] Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino, eds., *Virginia Woolf and the Essay* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997).
[8] Woolf, "The Decay of Essay-writing," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. I 1904-1912*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1995) 26.

This criticism of article writers is not far from her father's, who in "Thoughts on Criticism, by a Critic" (1876), characterises most of his contemporary critics as frightened to have their own opinion, or to commit to paper their own feeling, content instead to support the orthodoxy.[9] In doing this, Stephen's contemporaries go against the bohemian tendency of essays to challenge orthodox opinions. It is this tendency which leads Theodor Adorno (1954-58) to champion the genre as anti-ideology, that is, it questions the orthodox representations of the world, particularly the objective views of science. "Science", Adorno writes in imagery redolent of *To the Lighthouse*'s representation of Mr. Ramsay at dinner,

> needs the notion of the concept as a tabula rasa to consolidate its claim to authority, its claim to be the sole power to occupy the head of the table. In actuality, all concepts are already implicitly concretised through the language in which they stand. The essay starts with these meanings, and, being essentially language itself, takes them farther.[10]

"The Modern Essay" (1922) comes two decades after "The Decay of Essay-writing," but Woolf's opinions on the essay have not changed. She sees the answer to the problem of representing the writer's presence as coinciding with literature's search for "the triumph of style." "For", Woolf continues, "it is only by knowing how to write that you can make use in literature of yourself; that self which, while it is essential to literature, is also its most dangerous antagonist. Never to be yourself and yet always – that is the problem."[11] The *yet always* differentiates the problem from *never to be yourself* of the scientific method, which in his essay "On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper" (1911), Georg Lukács says gives

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[9] Leslie Stephen, "Thoughts on Criticism, by a Critic," *Men, Books, and Mountains*, ed. S. O. A. Ullman (London: Hogarth Press, 1956) 220.
[10] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," *Notes to Literature: Vol. One*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 12.
[11] Woolf, "The Modern Essay," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1925-1928*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1994) 221.

information, relationships, and facts; in short, an objective view of reality.[12] By contrast, the essay, as an art form, begins when the writer is overcome by his or her reality.

Consequently, if the representation of the "I" is the essayist's problem, it is not the problem of the essay: it is exactly what defines the essay. So in rushing to answer the Sphinx's problem ("What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three at dusk?") in non-essayistic terms Oedipus fails to see how the problem relates to himself: Oedipus answers the Sphinx with the general and scientific "Man," thus neglecting to question his true childhood identity – exactly that time when like a table he went on four legs. Georg Lukács says that if the life of Oedipus is the perfect subject for a tragedy, then the essay's ideal subject is Socrates, because he tried to answer problems with ironic self-consciousness.[13] In other words, where tragedies end with the realisation that my reality has always already prefigured my identity, it is this realisation of the ineluctable relationship between my reality and my identity that marks the point where the essay in theory begins.

To test this theory I went in search of this self-consciousness by investigating my enigmatic references to Berkeley and Marx in my marginalia. Picking up a copy of George Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), I looked for mention of tables. I didn't have far to read. In the third paragraph Berkeley argues: "That neither our thoughts nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist without the mind [...]. The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I

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[12]Georg Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper," *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974) 3.
[13] Lukács, 13-14.

might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it."[14] Here, then, is one of the legs of the essayist's table, it is a radical idealist's leg.

For Berkeley a table is a table because someone perceives it as such: essence is perception. And though I might easily imagine the table when I am not "there," as Andrew Ramsay says, or, as Berkeley says, "But say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them."[15] "But what is all this," Berkeley replies, "I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of anyone that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while?"[16]

But this is not the whole story. I had also mentioned Marx in my marginalia. Karl Marx, as Lenin famously said, turned idealism, such as Berkeley's, on its head. In the first chapter of Marx's *Capital* (written between 1864-1872), for example, he notes that the manner in which an object is perceived is problematised by its exchange-value. For Marx, once an object enters into the world as a commodity it can be used for purposes unimagined, secret relationships that unsettle the status quo between the subject and object. "It is absolutely clear", Marx writes in a passage strikingly consonant with Lily's table,

> that by his activity, man changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its

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[14] George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 53-54.
[15] Berkeley, 61.
[16] Berkeley, 61.

> head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.[17]

In an enigmatic footnote to this passage Marx goes on to say, "One may recall that China and the tables began to dance when the rest of the world appeared to be standing still – *pour encourager les autres*."[18] Someone goes on to orientate Marx's footnote as: "A reference to the simultaneous emergence in the 1850s of the Taiping revolt in China and the craze for spiritualism which swept over upper-class German society. The rest of the world was 'standing still' in the period of reaction immediately after the defeat of the 1848 Revolutions."[19]

So there are two opposed understandings of a table. At one end it is taken for granted that a table only exists because there is someone, ultimately God, to perceive it. This idealism guarantees the authority of the subject over the object. While with materialism, at the other end of the table, there is the belief that objects are more perceptive than the humans who labour over their construction. Marx, for instance, joked about how a mid-nineteenth-century table was more perceptive of change than its bourgeois owners.

The Ramsays' kitchen table, which Lily Briscoe imagines perched in a fork of tree, might indeed be a contender for the impersonal narrator of *To the Lighthouse* rather than, as J. Hillis Miller argues, August Carmichael, the cat-like poet, who is also the Ramsays' guest. "[A]ll the characters", Miller writes in "Mr Carmichael and Lily Briscoe: The Rhythm of Creativity in To the Lighthouse" (1990),

> participate without knowing it in the voice and mind of the narrator, according to the assumption Woolf notes in her diary that a 'tunnelling process' deep into the minds of all her

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[17] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 163-164.
[18] Marx, 163-164.
[19] Marx, 164.

> characters would reach a point where they all connect, all have the same or similar thoughts, all move to the same profound rhythm, which is the rhythm of that impersonal narrator's way of thinking. Might it not be that this impersonal, all-inclusive all-keeping, all-annihilating perspective is covertly embodied in the person of Augustus Carmichael?[20]

Why must the novel's narrator be a subject? Is it a coincidence that tables are the dominating presence in the novel, more so even than the deliberate importance given by Woolf to the lighthouse?

As is obvious, my meditations on essay writing could not dissociate the problem of the writing self and the table. Like Lily Briscoe thinking of Mr. Ramsay's work, whenever I now thought of essays I saw a tableau of Woolf stooped over her writing table, or "tablet" (for at times she used a portable writing block). Of course, she used the same tables whether writing her novels, letters, or diaries, dividing the working day chronographically with the different genres. In the morning she typically wrote her fiction or essays in longhand; after lunch she typed up the morning's drafts; half an hour after tea was set aside for her diary; and the time after dinner was ideally for correspondence.

The variety of each of these three genres is enough to disperse the thought of writers on Woolf. The essays, alone, are read as expressionistic, lyrical, biographical, formalist, polemical, philosophical, historical, or a combination of all these and more. Every mapping of this labyrinth is personal at best, and deluded at worst. Added to this delusion my table fixation did not at first seem to give much direction to my investigation. For, of all the numerous kinds of furnishings there is none perhaps more common than a table. A table is symbolic of all that goes under the rubric of the everyday. Tables are found everywhere, being used for everything. The first steps of

a child are often performed with the use of a table; walk into a darkened room and you'll bump your shin on a coffee table; take photos of sublime landscapes and in the bottom right-hand corner there is a picnic table. And yet I realised that this everydayness relates directly to the essay. In his *Mimesis* (1946), for instance, Erich Auerbach says that the essays of Montaigne appealed to the educated public of his time because he eschewed scholastic esotericism, and so he managed to formulate an everyday discourse for the middle- to upper-class dinner tables of Europe.[21]

Modern dinner conversation, then, perhaps owes more to Montaigne and Francis Bacon than to all the major philosophers put together. In his essay "On Experience" (1580), Montaigne says that "Philosophical inquiries and reflections serve only as food for our curiosity. The philosophers, very rightly, refer us to the laws of nature. But these have nothing to do with knowledge of this sublimity. The philosophers falsify them and present nature's face to us painted in over-bright colours and too sophisticated; [...] In the experience that I have of myself I find enough to make me wise".[22] With the intimacy of lay introspection, which Montaigne was the first to call an "essais," he privileges everyday language above esoteric jargon.

All this talk about the relationship between everyday speech and the essay reminded me of Tzvetan Todorov's claim in his *Genres in Discourse* (1978) that all "literary genres originate, quite simply, in human discourse".[23] Of course, this

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[20] J. Hillis Miller, "Mr Carmichael and Lily Briscoe: The Rhythm of Creativity in *To the Lighthouse*," *Tropes, Parables, Performatives: Essays on Twentieth Century Literature* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) 159-160.

[21] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 307.

[22] Michel de Montaigne, "On Experience," *Essays*, trans. J M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 354.

[23] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 26.

phonocentrism is problematised by the essay's influence on the manner of dinner conversation, which I have just found in Auerbach's review of Montaigne's popularity amongst the middle to upper classes. Woolf also falls for the idea that the (written) essay imitates a "natural way of speaking."[24] Its "natural" quality leads her to raise the essay above all other genres. In "The Decay of Essay-writing," she says: "The peculiar form of an essay implies a peculiar substance; you can say in this shape what you cannot with equal fitness say in any other."[25] Contradicting her earlier privilege of speech over writing, she also argues that this natural way of speaking is only possible after the gift of writing has been learnt.[26] Seventeen years later this position remains: "He [the essayist] must know – that is the first essential – how to write."[27] At the same time, she writes in her diary that her literary criticism may seem flimsy. "But there is no principle," she writes on 15 April 1924, "except to follow this whimsical brain implicitly, pare away the ill fitting, till I have the shape exact, & if thats [sic] no good, it is the fault of God, after all, it is he that has made us, not we ourselves."[28]

These attempts to define the origin of the essay's everyday language are assisted by the dinner scene in *To the Lighthouse*, which Woolf considered at the time to be the height of her literary ability. I will seek to demonstrate that this dinner scene is where she reveals the origin and limit of middle-class conversation and with it the limit of the essay's representation of the everyday. I am referring to the so-called Seventh Article quoted as the epigraph of this chapter.

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[24] Woolf, "The Decay of Essay-writing," 25.
[25] Woolf, "The Decay of Essay-writing," 25.
[26] Woolf, "The Decay of Essay-writing," 26.
[27] Woolf, "The Modern Essay," 221.
[28] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II 1920-1924*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

When the dinner gong is heard throughout the Ramsays' house the various family members and guests leave their individual tables, their "washing-tables," "dressing-tables," and "bed-tables" to collect around the dinner table (90-91). During dinner, Woolf uses the stream of consciousness of Lily Briscoe to show how the women diners are expected to follow the Seventh Article by flattering men with questions that allow them to essay their experience and knowledge of the everyday (99). (The Seventh Article demands of men, in return, that they help women, should they be caught in fires or other such disasters.) Lily at first resists the Seventh Article while she ponders her day's unfinished work. It is only after resolving the composition of her interrupted painting that Lily forsakes her work, obeying the Seventh Article with a gesture towards her work: "She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in the pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree [in the painting]" (93).

With the rise of sociology in the twentieth century everyday practises became important areas of interest. But ironically the most common limit to understanding the everyday is manifested in the everyday idea that the everyday itself is easily defined. This is because, other than relating its emergence to the rise of the bourgeoisie, little more can be written on the everyday with certainty. It is a mercurial subject which evades being pinned down as either this or that. For instance, the editors of a volume of *Yale French Studies* (1987) devoted to the everyday say quite clearly that it is "tied to two parallel developments: first, to the rise of a middle class and the demise of the great 'styles' formerly imposed in western societies by Church and Monarch; second, to the vast migration of those middle classes to urban centers, spaces where their everyday activities would become increasingly organized – hence

perceptible" [my italics].[29] But, contradicting this, one of the essays they include (by Maurice Blanchot) states that the everyday is the unperceived.[30]

Nevertheless, in the face of this contradiction, and in an attempt to do full justice to Woolf's insight into the Seventh Article's division of everyday social interaction, I will begin by considering what is not usually understood as everyday. I want to propose that thought is ordinarily counted as contrary to the everyday. When I say "thought" I do not mean a habitual way of responding to situations. Rather I am trying to name those events without precedent referred to as problem solving or philosophical speculation, characteristics which are not uncommon to the essay form.

In his case history of the Rat Man (1909), Freud gives an epistemological example of the disjunction between everyday habit and thought: "The waiters who used to serve Schopenhauer at his regular restaurant 'knew' him in a certain sense, at a time when, apart from that, he was not known either in Frankfurt or outside it; but they did not 'know' him in the sense we speak to-day of 'knowing' Schopenhauer."[31] Namely, the waiters did not know Schopenhauer's philosophical thought. Similarly, Lily Briscoe knows of Mr. Ramsay's philosophical work as distinct from his everyday role as father or husband sitting at the end of the dinner table childishly demanding praise. Indeed, how could she regard Mr. Ramsay's way of thinking "Subject and object and the nature of reality" as everyday? Mr. Ramsay is stuck at Q:

> The veins on his forehead bulged. The geranium in the urn became startling visible and, displayed among its leaves, he could see without wishing it, that old, that obvious distinction between the two classes of men; on the one hand the steady goers of superhuman strength

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[29] Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, "Introduction," *Yale French Studies: Everyday Life* 73 (1987): 2.
[30] Maurice Blanchot's essay "Everyday Speech" was originally collected in his *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993) 240.
[31] Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis (The 'Ratman') (1909)," *Penguin Freud Library: Vol. 9 Case Histories II*, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) 77.

who, plodding and persevering, repeat the whole alphabet in order, twenty-six letters in all, from start to finish; on the other the gifted, the inspired who, miraculously, lump all the letters together in one flash – the way of genius (41).

Genius is, of course, a term that has been readily used to describe Virginia Woolf. Her husband, Leonard Woolf, is one of many to see her genius in conflict with the ordinary experience of the everyday. "Virginia", he writes in his autobiography (1964), "had a great enjoyment of ordinary things, of eating, walking, desultory talking, shopping, playing bowls, reading. [...] In this day to day, everyday life and intercourse with other people she talked and thought and acted, to a great extent, no doubt, as other ordinary people, though it is a curious fact that there was about her something, some intangible aura, which made her very often seem strange to the 'ordinary' person."[32] Leonard goes on to say that as a self-defence complete strangers would laugh at her uncanny aura. "[I]n Barcelona or Stockholm", he says, "nine out of ten would stop and stare at Virginia. And not only in foreign towns; they would stop and stare and nudge one another – 'look at her' – even in England, in Piccadilly or Lewes High Street, where almost anyone is allowed to pass unnoticed."[33] He also says, that there are so few photographs of his wife as a result of the distress this attention caused her. Leonard associated the aura with her streak of genius.[34] In *Against Sainte-Beuve* (1908-09) Marcel Proust describes this perception of genius in others by turning to a line of poetry from Lemaire: "Even when the bird walks, one senses it has wings".[35] Like the ghost of old Hamlet, then, Virginia always

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[32] Leonard Woolf, *An Autobiography: Vol. II 1911-1969* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 15.
[33] Leonard Woolf, 15-16.
[34] Leonard Woolf, 16.
[35] Marcel Proust, *Against Saint-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. John Sturrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988) 40.

looked to be "thinking of something else," and this appearance made passers-by anxious.[36]

Leonard suggests that this thought of "something else" was undoubtedly literature. "I have never known", he writes, "any writer who thought, ruminated so continually over what she was writing, turning her problems over in her mind persistently while sitting in a chair in front of a winter fire or going for her daily walk along the bank of the Sussex Ouse."[37] In contrast, the everyday world of thoughtless habit, her continual thought of literature had an aura of detachment. Yet for Leonard, this aura is easily explained as an "everyday mental process" – albeit a higher order of the everyday.[38] He describes it as inspiration, giving the ancient example of Archimedes fortuitously discovering the answer to the king's problem while having a bath.[39] This he links with a quote from Virginia's diary:

> *Saturday, February 7th* [1931]
>
> Here in the few minutes remaining, I must record, heaven be praised, the end of *the Waves*. I wrote the words O Death fifteen minutes ago, having reeled across the last ten pages with some moments of such intensity and intoxication that I seemed to stumble after my own voice, or almost after some sort of speaker (as when I was mad) I was almost afraid, remembering the voices that used to fly ahead.[40]

Leonard explains that Virginia was inspired to write the last ten pages of *The Waves* (1931) only because, like Archimedes, she had already spent innumerable hours working upon the problem, whether "sitting in a chair in front of the fire or going for her daily walk." He shows two versions of Virginia's everyday: the

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[36] Leonard Woolf, 18.
[37] Leonard Woolf, 18.
[38] Leonard Woolf, 18.
[39] Leonard Woolf, 18.
[40] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1931-35*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) 10.

ordinary and the inspired. It is because she is continually plodding through the alphabet of thought that she occasionally takes flight, as she did when finishing the draft of *The Waves*. In "Two Versions of the Everyday" (1984), Kristin Ross gives a similar distinction of the two versions of the everyday in the thought of Maurice Blanchot.[41]

She explains the first version of the everyday as referential: it anchors the self in the perception of common time, answering the questions What happened? and When? *Saturday, February 7 1931*, for instance, the date of the diary entry just quoted, is something Woolf shares with the whole of Britain. What is more, she is certain that it will be followed by February 8th. Like Mr. Ramsay's logically ordered alphabet, this everyday furnishes the habitual thinking self with the certainty of one day cancelling out the one before it, just as B supersedes A.

However, as James Ramsay recognises, approaching the lighthouse for the first time in the last part of *To the Lighthouse*, logic also works the other way. Noticing everyday details about the lighthouse he has never perceived from afar, James asks, "So that was the Lighthouse, was it?" (201). And his answer is: "No, the other [seen from the shore] was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too" (201).

The recognition of this epistemological problematic is common in European modernism. For instance, in Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial* (1925), there is a similar acknowledgment of the inability to negate errors: "The right perception of any matter and a misunderstanding of the same matter do not wholly exclude each other."[42] In this I find the second version of the everyday, where the assuring habit of an orderly

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[41] Kristin Ross, "Two Versions of the Everyday," *L'Esprit Createur* Vol. xxiv, 3 Fall (1984) 30.

and linear progress has disappeared. As Ross points out, Blanchot's second version of the everyday, associated with the writing of literature and characterised by him as the unperceived, poses the additional question: To whom did these everyday things happen? This second version of the everyday – essentially the same as the essayist's problem – puts the humanist "I" into question, asking "Who am I?" Like Archimedes' bathtub, or Woolf's completion of *The Waves*, or Marx's German tables, everyday objects are able to inspire the self to creativity in unperceived ways.

Contrary to Mr. Ramsay's division of the "two classes of men," one plodding through the alphabet, the other lumping all the letters of the alphabet together in one flash, both Kristin Ross and Leonard Woolf acknowledge that these two versions (of the everyday) are indissociable.[43] There would be no inspired moment of genius without the ability, or *inability*, to plod through the whole alphabet. There is a connection between the ordinary and the inspired, and as such, there is also a link between the everyday and thought, as the Seventh Article demonstrates with women forced to inspire men.

As Woolf symbolises the link between the ordinary and the inspired versions of Mr. Ramsay's everyday with the Seventh Article and, more specifically, the unperceived and unattainable letter *R*, can I do the same with Woolf? In an autobiographical piece called "A Sketch of the Past" (1939-40) she contrasts the *ordinary* everyday with the *inspired* everyday. Or, in her terms, the *moments of non-being* and the *moments of being*.[44] The *moments of non-being* make up a larger portion of our lives; they are, she says, "the cotton wool" of daily life. On the other

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[42] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, and E. M. Butler (New York: Schocken, 1984) 216.
[43] Ross, 37.
[44] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (San

hand, a *moment of being* is rarer: "I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower."[45] It is in the instantaneous connection of all the parts of the flower, rather than an exclusively logical connection, that the *moment of being* is constituted.[46] In other words, it becomes in Woolf's terms a work of art. "From this", she says:

> I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; *we are the words* [emphasis added]; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. [47]

Taking Woolf at her word when she says, "we are the words," I see the pattern behind the cotton *wool* of everyday life symbolised by the letter *f*. *F* hides in front of and behind the flora and fauna of *flower* and *Woolf*. For the moment, though, I will leave *F*, like Woolf herself says in a letter to Roger Fry, on 27 May 1927, that she leaves the lighthouse, when he inquired as to its meaning:

> I meant nothing by The Lighthouse. One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit for their own emotions – which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another. I can't

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Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Co., 1985) 78.

[45] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 71.

[46] Morris Beja investigates Woolf's moments of being and other writers' revelatory moments in *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (London: Owen, 1971).

[47] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

manage Symbolism except in this vague, generalised way. Whether its [sic] right or wrong I don't know, but directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me.[48]

I set out to define the everyday by contrasting it to thought, only to find the everyday and inspiration linked at a fundamental level, with former leading to the latter. Moreover, I connected this to the Seventh Article, which translates the connection between the two terms into a social prejudice. Now I want to approach the essay by seeing how its use of the everyday is linked to fiction.

For Woolf the identity of the essayist opens the same problem as that in fiction: "never to be yourself yet always."[49] If there is a problem separating fiction and the essay, it is a problem at least as old as the origins of realist fiction. In other words, realist fiction and the essay share a common history because they share the same origin and limit; namely, the difference between the two versions of the everyday, which I have symbolised with the letter *E*.

A lot has been written on realist fiction's origins in the journalism of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England. Of this journalism, Leslie Stephen suggests in "The Essayists" (1881), that the early essays by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele relied on the intimacy of a limited circulation. They could afford to limit the flow of information, relationships and facts on what or whom they were talking about because their small readership knew it all from personal experience.[50] Addison, he writes, "would retire to his lodgings with a chosen friend [at the end of the day] and gradually thaw under the influence of his bottle and his pipe tobacco, till

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[48] Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. III 1923-1928*, ed.Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).
[49] Woolf, "The Modern Essay," 221.
[50] Leslie Stephen, "The Essayists," *Men, Books, and Mountains*, ed. S. O. A. Ullmann (London: Hogarth, 1956) 64-65.

he poured out his little speculations to his companion, or wrote them down for an audience which he knew as a country parson knows his congregation."[51]

At the same time, the realist novel is headed in the opposite direction, with the intimacy between novelists and their readers dependent upon making their common reality explicit. That is, writers such as Daniel Defoe give the characters in their novels everyday proper names and place them in actual city streets. All this, as I said, is well documented, particularly by Ian Watt (1957).[52] But it is rarely acknowledged that the essay later had recourse to this everyday of realist fiction.[53]

Woolf suggests that the essayist's turn to realist fiction is a consequence of the increase in the reading public destroying the intimacy known by Addison and Steele. She notes that the popularity of reading meant that the essayist in the nineteenth-century becomes increasingly impersonal. "Matthew Arnold was never to his readers Matt, nor Walter Pater affectionately abbreviated in a thousand homes to Wat."[54]

The scale of the literary audience began to be realised in 1802 with the launch of the quarterly *Edinburgh Review*. The more conservative *Quarterly Review* soon joined the *Edinburgh Review*, and by attracting the best writers with generous payment they achieved a combined readership estimated at over one hundred thousand.[55] These two journals, one partisan to the Whigs the other to the Tories,

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[51] Stephen, "The Essayists," 64-65.

[52] See, for instance, Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defore, Richardson and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

[53] However, Engels did admit that he learned more from Balzac's novels "than from all the professional historians, economists and statisticians of the [same] period together." Engels, letter to Margaret Harkness, April 1888, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 485.

[54] Woolf, "The Modern Essay," 220. See Perry Meisel's *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 1980) for an argument that Woolf did indeed consider Pater as a Wat.

[55] R. G. Cox, "The Reviews and Magazines," *The Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Dickens*

could afford to deal in politics and information because they borrowed the intimacy of what Benedict Anderson calls the imaginary community (1991).[56] That is, literary criticism restored some of the essay's intimacy by talking about something all readers knew, Dickensian London, for example, rather than the real London.

Before the rise of this national imaginary community, Anderson explains, there was something Walter Benjamin (1940) calls messianic time.[57] In his definition of messianic time each day is the end of time, and all history is a prefiguration of the present. Consequently each day is filled with expectation, and overflowing with signification. Anderson finds this messianic time in St. Paul's apocalyptic warning, "the day of the Lord cometh like a thief in the night."[58] Using Benjamin again, Anderson continues: "What has come to take the place of the medieval conception of [messianic] simultaneity-along-time is [...] an idea of 'homogeneous, empty time,' in which simultaneity is [...] marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calender."[59] Anderson calls this the temporality of the *meanwhile* because it acknowledges different perspectives: as in "meanwhile on the other side of town." He finds this *meanwhile* in the newspapers at the end of the seventeenth century and the realist novels of the early eighteenth century. Both made apparent a reality where individuals could live in the same town or street yet not know the neighbour they passed every day.

For, in an essay pre-dating Anderson's work, Emmanuel Levinas (1948) criticises the artistic image as constituting this everyday anonymity. In "Reality and

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to Hardy: Vol 6, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 189

[56] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[57] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on The Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992) 245-255.

[58] Anderson, 23.

[59] Anderson. 24.

its Shadow," Levinas writes: "The most elementary procedure of art consists in substituting for the object its image. Its image, and not its concept. A concept is the object *grasped*, the intelligible object."[60] Because art does not try to pin down elements of reality with concepts, Levinas calls it a lifeless life, fated to repeat the same instants.[61] Thus her suggests that artistic images have the passivity of a rhythm. "Rhythm", he says, "represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it."[62] He sees the artistic rhythm drawing the *reader* into an anonymous participation with reality. Like Anderson, he calls this quality the "meanwhile," illustrating it with the enigmatic smile of Mona Lisa which never broadens. Her smile is frozen in a moment with neither beginning nor end.

Levinas differentiates literature's *meanwhile* from philosophy's co-existence with concepts, which he relates to Heidegger's description of "being-in-the-world."[63] Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" is an authentic understanding of one's own finitude through death. To relate to death as if it were an anonymous passer-by in the street is to live inauthentically. For Heidegger, I begin to exist authentically when I accept the possibility of my own death, and seize the day. In the final part of *To the Lighthouse* Mr. Ramsay recognises the possibility of his own annihilation as he sails towards the lighthouse with his son and daughter, James and Cam. Ten years earlier he had inauthentically imagined his annihilation in terms of his books being unread. Since then he has lived with the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, their daughter, in motherhood, and Andrew, their son, in the war. The transition from an inauthentic to

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[60] Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow," trans. Alphonso Lingis, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 132.
[61] Levinas, 138.
[62] Levinas, 132-133

an authentic understanding of death is expressed in the novel with a line from a William Cowper poem repeated by Mr. Ramsay in the boat: "We perished, each alone" (180). For Levinas it is the task of literary criticism (read: philosophy) to anchor the imaginary to the authentic conception of "being-in-the-world."[64]

It is a task, however, which Deborah Esch (1987) sees being ridiculed by literature as impossible, particularly by *To the Lighthouse*'s parody of the philosophic use of examples.[65] Esch finds the question of the example to be the question of origin or primacy. An example like the kitchen table is chosen for its status as an exemplary everyday thing, which everyone can relate to. But this everydayness is not easily grasped by philosophical argument. An example of philosophy's difficulty is highlighted by a problem in the sequence of Levinas' argument: for the concept to anchor the imaginary in the world, Levinas must paradoxically give priority to the image over its conceptual anchoring in the world. As Leonard has Virginia anonymously plodding through the alphabet before she can reach the inspired moment of genius, so with Levinas he has the image preceding the concept.

In the imaginary, objects are first stripped of their conventional use. If it were a table, to take Andrew Ramsay's example of his father's work, it is upturned and lodged in a tree. At this point it cannot be used as a kitchen table; its working relationship with its user is taken away. It is then the work of thought to bring the image within the horizon of concepts. Tacitly acknowledging the philosophical concept's parasitical dependence on the image, Levinas finishes his essay qualifying all his preceding distinctions as elementary. He says, a more sophisticated

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[63] Levinas, 134.
[64] Levinas, 141.

investigation of the relationship between art and criticism (that is, the image and the concept) needs to take into account those modern texts where the authors are consciously trying to be both creator and revealer, both *artist* and *critic*. Interestingly, O. B. Hardison (1989) has situated the beginning of this self-consciousness in the late nineteenth-century, particularly in the prose poems of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Hardison calls the prose poem, "literature's revenge on the essay – an essay in which style has become substance."[66]

In other words, the challenge, which comes to fore in the nineteenth century is to understand the origin of inspiration, and I have characterised Woolf's interrogation of the Seventh Article as a continuation of this artistic-philosopher project. In *The Literary Absolute* (1978), Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy trace this artistic-philosopher back further, to the Jena romantics at the turn of the eighteenth century. "[R]omanticism", they say, "is neither mere 'literature' (they invent the concept) nor simply a 'theory of literature' (ancient and modern). Rather, it is *theory itself as literature* or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own theory."[67] The romantics rejected the humanist Enlightenment, turning instead to the sublime rhythm between an individual and nature. In the same manner, a century later, modernism was born out of a refusal to treat the everyday as information. It rejected the naturalist tendency to regard the everyday *as* everyday; that is, as the *meanwhile*. Instead, modernism heightens the *meanwhile* until it is closer to the inspired prefiguration of messianic time. Every element of the text has significance;

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[65] Deborah Esch, "'Think of a kitchen table': Hume, Woolf, and the Translation of Example," *Literature as Philosophy/Philosophy as Literature*, ed. Donald G. Marshall (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987).

[66] O. B. Hardison, "Binding Proteus: An Essay on the Essay," *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre*, ed. Alexander Butrym (Athens: University of Georgia, 1989) 25.

[67] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard (New York: SUNY Press, 1988) 12.

nothing is superfluous. The exemplary text for this is T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922); but there is also Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which equated Homer's *Odyssey* with one day in the life of a cuckolded Dubliner. Similarly, in *Jacob's Room* (1922), Woolf transposed Virgil's *Aeneid* to a British soldier in World War One. This modernist literary prefiguration owes a great deal to literary criticism. Indeed Woolf found the essay's grasp of reality far more helpful than the realism of the established English novelists.

There are several famous essays where Woolf theorises her modernist representation of reality, which throw light on the partnership between the essay and modernist fiction. In 1924, for instance, there is "Character in Fiction" and its extended version "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown"; both essays compare the representation of the self in Edwardian literature and Georgian literature.[68] In the writing of the Georgians (named as E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Lytton Strachey, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot) Woolf avers that a change in character can be discerned, and this change occurred "on or about December 1910."[69] She chooses 1910 most obviously because it marks the end of the Edwardian era with the death of King Edward VII and the coronation of George V. But also occurring during this year is the seminal exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" organised by Woolf's friend, Roger Fry. Yet the change occurred most markedly for Woolf not in artistic circles but in the kitchens of middle- to upper-class households. In "Character in Fiction" she writes: "The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; [in contrast] the Georgian cook is a creature

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[68] Woolf, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown," "Character in Fiction," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol III, 1919-1924*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1988) 384-389, 420-438.
[69] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 421.

of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat."[70]

Woolf wrote "Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown" as a polemic response to a review by the Edwardian writer Arnold Bennett of her third novel, *Jacob's Room*. Bennett attacked *Jacob's Room* as exemplary of the blindness to character in the new generation of novelists.[71] Woolf's response is to accuse the Edwardian generation of novelists (Bennett, John Galsworthy and H. G. Wells) of failing to provide the Georgians with techniques appropriate for representing the modern character. Woolf argues that the Edwardian writers side too much with the materiality of life.

She tells a story to highlight the difference between the Georgians and the Edwardians. The narrator of the essay takes a train from Richmond to Waterloo sitting opposite an elderly woman and a middle-aged man. She gives these two characters the inconspicuous names of Mrs. Brown and Mr. Smith. After presenting her thoughts on the connections between these two characters she says that "all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite. I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that is to express character – not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire[...]."[72] She agrees with Bennett that a novel's characters must be real for it to survive. But she asks, What is reality? Woolf argues that for Arnold Bennett, Mrs. Brown's reality begins with a description of the carriage decor, the passing scenery, and so on. She admits that in this Bennett is no different from the Georgians or any other novelist. To create an intimacy with their readers novelists use images of the everyday to set up what Woolf

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[70] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 422. For a study of Woolf's understanding of the Victorian cook, see Susan Dick, "Virginia Woolfs 'The Cook,'" *Woolf Studies Annual* 3 (1997): 122-141.

[71] Arnold Bennett, "Is the Novel Decaying?," *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) 112-114.

calls a "common ground."[73] However, Bennett never finishes with this common ground. Before he can let characters speak for themselves, some other facet of the everyday suggests itself for inclusion.[74] In the search for realism, little or nothing is said directly about the characters. *Meanwhile* Mrs. Brown sits waiting in the corner like an inanimate artist's model. Modernist literature's attempted solution, undoubtedly indebted to the essay's preoccupation with the representation of the thinking self, is to frame everyday objects through a character's stream of consciousness.

But in the Georgians' attempts to present the modern consciousness, their writing lost a certain force.[75] Reviewing *A Passage to India* (1924) in 1927, Woolf finds Forster failing to provide a key for uniting his characters' ordinary everyday with their inspired everyday. "For we doubt both things –", Woolf writes of *A Passage to India*, "the real and the symbolical: Mrs Moore, the nice old lady, and Mrs Moore, the sibyl."[76] The reader is unable to unite the two spheres of Forster's characterisation, one interrupts the other. "We feel", Woolf says, "that something has failed us at the critical moment; and instead of seeing, as we do in [Ibsen's] *The Master Builder*, one single whole we see two separate parts."[77]

Where in "The Novels of E. M. Forster" (1927) Woolf pauses before Forster's novels, earlier in the year she had paused before his literary criticism, detecting a

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[72] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 425.

[73] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 431.

[74] The accusation, then, is that Bennett's writing has more description than narration. Gérard Genette writes: "Every narrative in fact comprises two kinds of representations, which however are closely intermingled and in variable proportions: on the one hand, those of actions and events, which constitute the narration in the strict sense and, on the other hand, those of objects or characters that are the result of what we now call description." "Frontiers of Narrative," *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 133.

[75] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 435.

[76] Woolf, "The Novels of E. M. Forster," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol IV, 1925-1928*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1994) 496.

certain Edwardian influence. In "Is Fiction An Art?" (1927) she reviewed the publication of his Clark Lectures, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), pausing before Forster's capitalisation of "Life."[78] Woolf herself preferred the capitalisation of "Art." "Fiction", she says of the novel, "is treated as a parasite [by English critics] which draws sustenance from [ordinary everyday] life, and must, in gratitude, resemble life or perish. In poetry, in drama, words may excite and stimulate and deepen; but in [the novel there is the belief that] they must, first and foremost, hold themselves at the service of the teapot and a pug dog".[79] After Forster read her review they exchanged letters over each other's use of language.[80] Their disagreement is interesting because it is a refinement of her encounter with Bennett. Forster complained that Woolf's "Art" was no less obscure than his "Life." "Your article", he wrote to her, "inspires me to the happiest repartee. This vague truth about life. Exactly. But what of the talk about art? Each section [of *Aspects of the Novel*] leads to an exquisitely fashioned casket of which the key has unfortunately been mislaid and until you can find your bunch I shall cease to hunt very anxiously for my own."[81]

The origin of their argument might be traced to the dominant size of the novel, compared to other genres, for Woolf finds the novel's length distracting the reader from its artistic form. For instance, Forster's reader is unable to think the two versions of Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*.

Where the essay had helped to resolve the gap between a novel's characters and their surroundings with the stream of consciousness, she now turns to drama to

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[77] Woolf, "The Novels of E. M. Forster," 497.
[78] Woolf, "Is Fiction An Art?," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol IV, 1925-1928*, 457-465.
[79] Woolf, "Is Fiction An Art?," 462.
[80] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography: Vol II* (Frogmore, St Albans: Triad Palladin, 1976) 134-136.
[81] Bell, 134.

resolve the problem of the novel's cumbersome size. Drama, Woolf explains in "On Re-reading Novels" (1922), has conformed to the fact that five hours is the longest attention span of human beings.[82] This is not true of the novel. A person hesitates before re-reading George Meredith's novel *Harry Richmond*, for it is impossible to complete in one day. "Tonight *Harry Richmond* will not be ours. We shall have broken off a tantalising fragment; days may pass before we can add to it. *Meanwhile* the plan is lost" [italics added].[83] Woolf's modernism puts the onus on the writer to overcome the fragmenting *meanwhile* created by the novel's size. "The pressure", Woolf says, "of an audience will not reduce the novel to a play we can read through in the four hours between dinner and bedtime. But it will encourage the novelist to find out – and that is all we ask of him – what it is that he means and how best to show it us."[84]

To this end, Woolf states that: "[T]he 'book itself' is not form which you see," she says, "but emotion which you feel, and the more intense the writer's feeling the more exact without slip or chink its expressions in words."[85] Eric Warner has astutely situated Woolf's argument as the Aristotelian privilege of plot over life.[86] That is, where actions in tragic drama are organised like the day, with the completeness of a beginning, middle, and end. It is no matter to art if reality does not conform to this structure. For the greatest emotional effect the artist presents only those actions that comply with the unity of the plot.

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[82] Woolf, "On Re-reading Novels," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. III 1919-1924*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1988) 337.
[83] Woolf, "On Re-reading Novels," 336-337.
[84] Woolf, "On Re-reading Novels," 344. Italics added.
[85] Woolf, "On Re-reading Novels," 340.
[86] Eric Warner, *Virginia Woolf: The Waves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 87-88.

In "Modern Fiction" (1925), for instance, she makes it clear how much she wants to kill the "powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has [the writer] in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole".[87] If a writer, she continues, "could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe *in the accepted style*".[88]

During the twenties, then, Woolf conceives modernism as the foregrounding of feelings. It is a privilege antithetical to the classicism of Eliot's famous "objective correlative," which subjects the emotions to a correspondence with the demonstrable facts of the fictional characters' reality. "The only way", Eliot explains the "objective correlative" in 1919, "of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding [...] a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion".[89] Following this prescription Eliot is led to denigrate *Hamlet* because Shakespeare dramatises Hamlet with "an emotion which is inexpressible because it is an *excess* of the facts as they appear."[90]

By contrast, Woolf sides with the romantic notion of expression, understanding the emotions as determining artistic form. The early romantic, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, who pioneered the modern autobiography's concern for the personal emotions, contends that language was born out of the need to communicate emotions. And that these expressions were always excessive or figurative rather than literal. Again, meteorology comes into play, with Rousseau attributing a greater emotional range – and therefore more figurative and less

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[87] Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1925-1928*, 160

[88] Woolf, "Modern Fiction," 160. Italics added.

[89] T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," *Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 102.

[90] Eliot, "Hamlet," 102.

objective language – to the peoples of warmer climates.[91] "A savage," begins the often quoted passage from Rousseau's "Essay on the Origin of Languages,"

> upon meeting others, will at first have been frightened. His fright will have made him see these men as larger and stronger than himself; he will have called them *Giants*. After much experience he will have recognized that, since these supposed Giants are neither bigger nor stronger than he, their stature did not fit the idea he had initially attached to the word Giant. He will therefore invent another name common both to them and to himself, for example the name *man*, and he will restrict the name *Giant* to the false object that had struck him during his illusion. That is how the figurative word arises before the proper [or literal] word does, when passion holds our eyes spellbound and the first idea which it presents to us is not that of the truth.[92]

Of course, in the ideal modern society there would be no such ignorance. An age of Enlightenment supposedly establishes a reasoned literal representation of the world. But as the representation enlarges the appreciation of the world without the possibility of understanding the distinctiveness of each of its elements, the Enlightenment fills the world with strangers. For Woolf, art must challenge the anonymity of the everyday.

In her 1927 manifesto "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," Woolf predicts that the so-called novel of the future "will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play."[93] She goes on to imagine this utopian text expressing the modern emotions that poetry has baulked from expressing because it does not

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[91] The first encounter with meteorology was the west wind in *To the Lighthouse*.

[92] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses and Essay on the Origin of Languages*. trans. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 246-247. For a critique of Rouseau and a discussion of the dating of its composition, see Derrida's "Genesis and Structure of the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*," *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)165-268.

[93] Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," 435.

have the democratic humbleness of prose.[94] She points to the large psychological novels of Marcel Proust and Fyodor Dostoevsky, which follow the mind through the *ordinary* problems of personal intercourse, love, and making a living. What the novel has failed to do so far, Woolf argues, is follow the *inspirational* emotions that make up every day.[95] "We have come to forget", she writes, "that a large and important part of life consists in our emotions toward such things as roses and nightingales, the dawn, the sunset, life, death, and fate; we forget that we spend much time sleeping, dreaming, thinking, reading, alone".[96] And, to maintain the reader's attention, the new novel must be ordered like a drama, with the demands of the day, shifting its focus away from the *moments of non-being* and towards the day's inspired moments, the *moments of being*. In short, it must exclude most of the wool. "You cannot cross the narrow bridge of art carrying all its tools in your hands."[97] The essay is the cornerstone of this adjustment, because its concern is with representation of the thinking self.

In the second of Virginia Stephen's essays to be published, "Haworth, November, 1904," she is already concerned with returning to the subject its due, without losing the inspirational power of the everyday objects. It is on a snowy day that Virginia Stephen makes a pilgrimage to the home town of the Brontë sisters. What she writes of the museum might also apply to her understanding the reality she desired of her later novels. "The [Brontë] museum" she writes,

> is certainly rather a pallid and inanimate collection of objects. An effort ought to be made to keep things out of these mausoleums, but the choice often lies between them and destruction, so that we must be grateful for the care which has preserved much that is, under any

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[94] Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," 435.
[95] This view is, of course, hardly true of Proust.
[96] Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," 435.

circumstances, of deep interest. Here are many autographed letters, pencil drawings, and other documents. But the most touching case – so touching that one hardly feels reverent in one's gaze – is that which contains the little personal relics, the dresses and shoes of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer.[98]

For Woolf, at least in the nineteen-twenties, the modernist novel attempts to distil from the *meanwhile* an inspired connection of all of its parts. To do this she reaches for the essay's autobiographical "triumph of style," which she was to give equal importance to both subject and object.

I have reached the peroration prefigured in the opening paragraph on the sum of £2.7.6. While the preceding pages have acknowledged the importance of the essay to the development of the modernist novel, here I return to the autobiographical limitation of the essay which Woolf signalled with the Seventh Article.

It is thirty-three years later that Woolf's first wage (£2.7.6) returns with interest as *Three Guineas* (1938), the sequel to *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Woolf first returned to the subject of her first professional wage as an essayist in a lecture addressed to the National Society for Women's Service on 21 January 1931. "Professions for Women," as it was published later, inspired her failed *magnum opus*, *The Pargiters*, an experimental text alternating fiction with essay chapters, which Woolf eventually divided into her eighth novel *The Years* (1937), and *Three Guineas*. On 20 January 1931 she recorded in her diary the Archimedean moment from which "Professions for Women" (and subsequently *Three Guineas*) sprang: "I have this moment, while having a bath, conceived an entire new book – a sequel to a Room of

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[97] Woolf, "Poetry, Fiction and the Future," 438.

Ones Own – about the sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps – Lord how exciting! This sprang out of my paper to be read on Wednesday to Pippa's society."[99] By the time Woolf published *Three Guineas* in 1938 it bore little resemblance to the lecture delivered in 1931. Where the lecture was given to a women's society, *Three Guineas* is a letter ostensibly addressed to an imaginary male barrister.

A Room of One's Own argues that it is money that creates the calmness necessary for writing fiction. She finds anger and fear in the fiction of Charlotte Brontë distracting the novelist from an impersonal relationship with the thing itself.[100] Woolf argues that Brontë is angry because she did not have the money to experience (the value of) *this* or *that* in the world. And as a result she is afraid of *this* or *that* in the world. In particular Woolf points to the dark portrait of Rochester in *Jane Eyre* (1847). Although the comparison is crude, I might connect Brontë's fear of men to the ignorance attributed to the savage by Rousseau. More, however, than providing the experience to dispel these uninspired emotions, Woolf finds money providing a room safe from unexpected interruption.

Where the primary concern of *A Room of One's Own* is the relationship between space and money, *Three Guineas* turns its attention to the relationship between time and money. But distinct from the everyday expression "time is money," it is striking to find a total lack of urgency in *Three Guineas*. There are two signs of this equanimity. First, she is giving away money. Each of the guineas is a gift. Second, the essay is late. "Three years", she begins to say, "is a long time to leave a

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[98] Woolf, "Haworth, November, 1904," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. I 1904-1912*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1995) 7.
[99] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1931-1935*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

letter unanswered, and your letter has been lying without an answer even longer than that."[101] Two hopes are given by the essay as the excuse for this delay. First hope: that his letter would answer itself, and second "that other people would answer it" (117).[102] With these two hopes the narrator leaves the question open to history. But in waiting for history to produce the answer, the narrator of *Three Guineas* is allowing history to pass her by. For the unanswered letter is "perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence" (117). If the question is unique it is not because it has never been asked before. *Rather it would be unique because an educated man has never before posed the question to a woman: "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?"*

It was the question that Leonard Woolf was asked in 1915. He explains in his autobiography:

> I soon become involved in activities which were directed towards understanding the causes of the 1914 war and of war in general and of finding ways, if possible of making war less likely in the future. What started me on this was that in 1915 Sidney Webb asked me whether I would undertake a research into this vast question for the Fabian society and write a report on it[.][103]

This he did, and it was published in the following year as *International Government*. Several events mark the year Leonard wrote this publication. Early in the year Virginia began work on *Night and Day* (1919) and restarted diary-writing after many years of neglect, then in March both of these projects were curtailed by the onset of "madness"; in the same month the Woolf's moved into Hogarth House; and her first

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[100] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, ed. Michelle Barret (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993) 66-67.
[101] Woolf, *Three Guineas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993) 117. All subsequent page numbers will be included parenthetically with the body of the text.
[102] In content and form *Three Guineas* is similar to the open letters between Albert Einstein and Freud published in 1933 as "Why War?", trans. James Strachey, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. XXII* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968).

novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915) was published.[104] We will never know if Leonard, like the imaginary (?) correspondent in *Three Guineas*, asked Virginia how she thought war could be prevented. But it seems unlikely that he did. On January 18 of that year she records in her diary:

> The future is dark, which is on the whole, the best thing the future can be, I think. L.[eonard] went to the Webbs, & I came home – nor has anything happened since to be worth putting down save that, as I began this page, L. stated that he had determined to resign his commission to write a pamphlet about Arbitration – & now I shall stop this diary & discuss that piece of folly with him. It is partly due to my egotistical habit of always talking the argument of my book. I want to see what can be said *against* all forms of activity & thus dissuade L. from all his work, speaking really not in my own character but in Effie's. Of course it is absolutely essential that L. sh[oul]d. do a work which may be superbly good.[105]

The last sentence looks suspiciously like a retrospective addition when the result of Effie's interrogation is found in the next day's entry: "L.'s melancholy continues, so much so that he declared this morning he couldn't work." Woolf's interrogation of Leonard's arguments on the previous day, using Effie, destroys his confidence. And Virginia is unable to "unsay" the criticisms she used Effie to express: "[A]fter praising L's writing very sincerely for 5 minutes," she writes in diary on 19 January, "he says 'Stop'; whereupon I stop, & theres [sic] no more to be said." She tells her diary that because Leonard is less self-conscious and more practical than herself, his melancholy is deeper and less accessible to argument. He retreats from domestic discussion of his work. *And Virginia is not asked how she would suggest war is to be prevented?* When he returned to work on *International Government*, he took a

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[103] Leonard Woolf, 132.

[104] Much of the following is inspired by Peggy Kamuf's "Penelope at Work," *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[105] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol I 1915-1919*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

contrary position to his "highly intelligent" friends, feeling that the nineteenth century idea of arbitration was not the sole answer to the prevention of war.[106] Ironically he probably comes to this realisation after talking with Effie – Virginia *arbitrating*.

I am tempted to see Effie as a characterisation of Woolf's *E*, which I speculated might be the symbolic link between the generic and inspired. This temptation is encouraged when I read that Elizabeth Heine (1977) has traced the character Effie back to the manuscripts of *Night and Day*, where "Effie" is renamed "Katharine Hilbery" before the novel is published.[107] Interestingly the first reviewers of *Night and Day* criticised the novel for not dealing with the recently finished war. Perhaps for this reason Katherine Mansfield likens it to a Jane Austen novel – a writer who also neglected to mention the (Napoleonic) wars of her time. "We had thought", Mansfield concludes her review, "that this world was vanished for ever, that it was impossible to find in the great ocean of literature a ship that was unaware of what has been happening."[108] Is it not possible, and irresistible, to claim that with Effie's transformation into Katharine Hilbery the war also disappeared from the novel?

Heine's equally pertinent suggestion, however, is that the change of name from Effie to Katharine has more to do with Woolf remodelling her character to be more like her sister, Vanessa Bell, in a rebuttal of Leonard Woolf's earlier portrayal of Vanessa as *Katharine* Lawrence in his novel *The Wise Virgins* (1914).

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[106] Leonard Woolf, 132.

[107] Elizabeth Heine, "Postscript to the *Diary of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 1*: 'Effie's Story' and *Night and Day*," *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 9 (1977): 10. *The Oxford Book of Christian Names* says that Effie is a pet-name of Euphemia -- a Greek word meaning 'auspicious speech.'

[108] Katherine Mansfield in *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, eds. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (London: Routledge, 1975) 82.

Whichever is the case, after Mansfield's criticisms, the effect of the war on the lives of Virginia Woolf's characters was never again neglected, although her narratives never actually enter the battlefield. For instance, in her next novel, *Jacob's Room*, we are given a portrait of the formative years of the eponymous soldier killed in battle. While *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the following novel, concentrates on the after-effects of the war on Septimus Warren Smith, *To the Lighthouse*, on the other hand, is divided by the war, symbolised by the death of Andrew Ramsay at the front.

But it is not until *Three Guineas* that Effie returns, so to speak. She returns once the Seventh Article is overturned: a man asks a woman a question which allows her to essay her everyday knowledge. Or at least this is the approach I want to take to *Three Guineas*: as Effie's essay on the direct relationship between everyday life and war, which was stopped by Leonard Woolf in 1915. In particular I want to see how *Three Guineas* is an elucidation of the Seventh Article.

Each of the three guineas is given to advance a modern society. Effie's first guinea is given in the belief that "education makes a difference" (120). But she begins with a critique of gifts. Paternal gifts, the essay explains, received by instalment are not free gifts, for they do not have the disinterest of an independent income, because recipients must maintain an ideological link to the donor in order to secure sponsorship (132). Prior to 1919, educated men's daughters found little escape from these gifts, as they were legally excluded from public professions suitable to their class. Now that these daughters are entering these professions they are being armed with a speculative income. "The question that has next to be discussed," Effie says to her correspondent, "is how can she use this new weapon to help you prevent war? And it is immediately plain that if there is no difference between men who earn their livings in the professions and women who earn their livings, then this letter can end"

(132). But there are two prominent differences: what Effie calls the fact of education, and the fact of property. Men have "been educated at public schools and universities for five or six hundred years, [women] for sixty. [...Men] possess in its own right and not through marriage practically all the capital, all the land, all the valuables, and all the patronage in England" (132). Over the course of this dominance, men have accumulated outward signs of this privilege, replacing the show of arms with cultural capital. Signs such as the red and gold of army uniforms, which are kept to impress civilians rather than for use in battle, or the velvet, silk, fur and ermine worn by officials in courts and universities; these are excessive adornments serving "to advertise the social, professional, or intellectual standing of the wearer" (137). In donning such clothes or by adding honours to one's name, individuals arouse competition or jealousy in others. These are the divisive feelings that lead to war (138).

It is not enough then to encourage democratic education by supporting women's colleges. Like the paternal donor of a middle-class daughter, Effie can ask that her guinea be spent in accordance with her philosophy. She wants a modern college to teach the young to hate war (141). First she demands from the treasurer that the architecture of the college should be adventurous rather than traditional. On education: Effie argues against the traditional university teaching of literature. To be lectured on a book instead of reading it critically oneself is excusable only when a person cannot afford the books under study (286). As for the rest of the syllabus, the college:

> should teach the arts of human intercourse; the art of understanding other people's lives and minds, and the little arts of talk, of dress, of cookery that are allied with them. The aim of the new college, the cheap college, should be not to segregate and specialize, but to combine. It

should explore the ways in which mind and body can be made to co-operate; discover what new combinations make good wholes in human life (155).

She argues, then, against scholastic specialisation, and for an essayist's approach to reality. But when Effie comes to outline what should not be taught in this utopian university she realises there is a problem: the reality is that students must be taught to earn a living; and for this competition and jealousy needs to be encouraged (156). For without a living the daughters of educated men will remain under the charge of their fathers, without an economic influence of their own to discourage war. Universities cannot avoid teaching those feelings which encourage war. And, what is more, there is no avoiding education altogether, for the situation would be far worse if these daughters did not attend university, because then they would exert all their energy *consciously* or *unconsciously* in favour of war.

Consciously: because they would strive to fulfil the principal uneducated profession open to her: marriage. And to achieve the best marriage she will "use whatever charm or beauty she possessed to flatter and cajole the busy men, the soldiers, the lawyers, the ambassadors, the cabinet ministers who wanted recreation after their day's work. Consciously she must accept their views, and fall in with their decrees" (160).

Unconsciously: because she will desire any war to escape the private house "with its cruelty, its poverty, its hypocrisy, its immorality, its inanity" (161). "How else", Effie asks, "can we explain that amazing outburst in August 1914, when the daughters of educated men [...] rushed into hospitals,[...] drove lorries, worked in fields, and munition factories, and used all their charm, of sympathy, to persuade young men that to fight was heroic" (160). Woolf, then, establishes a link between the boredom of the fragmented *meanwhile* of the ordinary everyday and war.

Woolf's thesis can be extended: Not only does the uninspired everyday consciously and unconsciously incline women towards war, but men, associating the boredom of everyday life with the feminine, seek to assert their masculinity by escaping to the adventure of war. When, then, the university education of competition and jealousy is compared to the conscious and unconscious pressures, it becomes the lesser of two evils. Consequently Effie resolves to give the first symbolic guinea to the women's college unconditionally (161).

The second chapter then quickly begins with yet another letter from an honorary treasurer. This time it is from "[a society to help the daughters of educated men to obtain employment in the professions]" (163). Effie resolves to try again to bargain with the treasurer. She wants some return on her donation. As all the professions in the nineteenth-century, with the important exception of literature, battled successfully to exclude women, Effie fears that this siege mentality will be inherited by the women entering parliament, universities, civil service, operating theatres, and galleries (188). Each profession makes "the people who practise them possessive, jealous of any infringement of their rights, and highly combative if anyone dares dispute them" (191). Effie outlines the conditions for receipt of her guinea. Above all, she writes to the treasurer, "You shall have it [...] on the condition that you help all properly qualified people, of whatever sex, class or colour, to enter your profession" (205).

In the third and final chapter Effie returns to the barrister's letter. He is also an honorary treasurer of a society campaigning for the prevention of war by protecting individual rights, opposing the tyranny of Fascist states, and affirming democratic practices (226). "If those are your aims," Effie writes, "and if, as it is impossible to doubt, you mean to do all in your power to achieve them, the guinea is yours – would

that it were a million! The guinea is yours; and the guinea is a free gift, given freely" (226). Before going any further Effie seeks to define what she means by the word "free":

> It means here that no right or privilege is asked in return. The giver is not asking you to admit her to the priesthood of the Church of England; or to the Stock Exchange; or to the Diplomatic Service. The giver has no wish to be 'English' on the same terms that you yourself are 'English'. The giver does not claim in return for the gift admission to any profession; any honour, title, or medal; any professorship or lectureship; any seat upon any society, committee or board (226).

To celebrate this new sense of freedom she decides to destroy an old word: "Feminist" (227). She writes the word on a piece of paper and burns it. "The word 'feminist' is destroyed; the air is cleared; and in that clearer air what do we see? Men and women working together for the same cause" (227).

However, this destruction is immediately overridden when Effie answers the second request in the barrister's letter. It is the request that she become a member of his society. She hesitates. "What reason or what emotion can make us hesitate to become members of a society whose aims we approve, to whose funds we have contributed? It may be neither reason nor emotion, but something more profound and fundamental than either. It may be difference" (229). The difference, it is suggested, is perhaps the sexual difference. It is, of course, a difference in part maintained by the Seventh Article's gendering of duties – women ask polite questions for men to answer, and men defend women from danger – and now that the first part of the Article has been overturned by a man asking a woman how war may be prevented, the sexual difference needs to be maintained until women achieve socio-economic equality. To maintain that difference, the daughters of educated men shall form their

own society. It would be a society without funds or positions, without offices or meetings, and the name that it could be called is the Outsiders' Society (232).

Effie argues that the barrister's society must continue to be aware of the gendered difference of individuals. It should not fall into the tragedy of the Seven Article, which allows men to speak of themselves and keeps women as the inscrutable inspiration for their monologues. The Seventh Article is inaugurated, to take Sophocles' play, when the Sphinx poses to Oedipus her riddle. It is a gendered convention subsequently adopted by Oedipus because he later fails to ask Jocasta, his mother, to essay herself, and so he does not recognise how she is related to him.

Two weeks after the Archimedean inspiration for *Three Guineas*, Woolf is sitting at her writing table, finishing the last ten pages of *The Waves*. And to approach this moment I will read it using the society of Outsiders and the trope of apostrophe.[109]

In an authoritative essay on apostrophes Barbara Johnson puts forward Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" as the ultimate example of this rhetorical device.[110] In fact, Johnson understands the apostrophe to be the defining trait of lyricism, finding writers to be addressing mother nature in an attempt to reproduce a lost childhood, or to be re-animated.[111] "[T]he poet", she says of Shelley, "gives animation, gives the capacity of responsiveness, to the west wind, not in order to make it speak but in order to make it listen to him – in order to make it listen to him

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[109] The Oxford English Dictionary gives the etymology of the rhetorical term "apostrophe" as the conjunction of the two Greek words "apo" (meaning: from, away, un-, quite) and "strepho" (meaning: turn). It denotes: "A figure of speech, by which a speaker or writer suddenly stops in his discourse, and turns to address pointedly some person or thing, either present or absent".

[110] Barbara Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987) 187. I will not try to cover the explicate all the territory of Johnson's essay; instead I will concentrate on her main thesis.

[111] For a discussion of motherhood, see Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 144-180.

doing nothing but address *it*."[112] "If apostrophe is structured like de[illegible]nd" Johnson continues,

> and if demand articulates the primal relation to the mother as a relation to the Other, then lyric poetry itself – summed up in the figure of apostrophe – comes to look like the fantastically intricate history of endless elaborations and displacements of the single cry, 'Mama!'[113]

Early in her essay, Johnson finds the ultimate example of apostrophe encapsulated in the rhetorical question posed by a line in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind": "Be thou me." Using poems written by women on the subject of abortion Johnson tries to situate the question: how can one address the other without putting oneself in the position of a child? That is to say, how to speak as an adult? This is, of course, how Freud translated Oedipus' tragedy to the modern nuclear family.

For Woolf the problem of speaking as an adult always comes back to the writing of her dead parents. This is partly because *natural* adulthood is determined by a combination of the death of parents or having children oneself, so Woolf's childlessness stresses the importance of the death of her parents. Indeed, she famously told her diary on 28 November 1928 that "mercifully" her father was dead; for if he was living she would have found it impossible to write.[114] As for her mother, she writes in "A Sketch of the Past," that:

> It is perfectly true that she obsessed me, in spite of the fact that she died when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one *day* walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary rush.[....] I wrote the book very quickly; and when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what

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[112] Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," 187.
[113] Johnson, "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," 198-199.
[114] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. III 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest.[115]

Where the natural determinations of adulthood are found in birth and death, the same can also be said for the cultural determinations of adulthood. Marriage, for instance, gives legitimacy to procreation, while murdering an enemy is the traditional, and still remains the ultimate, initiation for young men to enter full manhood. Outside of official wars, this rite of passage has been traditionally reserved for the state, which asserted its authority with the sole the right to murder in the form of the death sentence.

The question of how to speak other than as a child, which amounts to how to address one's place in the world without appealing to some mother- or father-figure, is answered by understanding the childish dependence on others. My primary example of this dependence is how Woolf sees men dependent on women abiding by the Seventh Article.

In the last pages of *The Waves* I discover the aged Bernard deserted by that anonymous self he has depended upon to blind him to his childish dependence on the everyday order of events. "Something always", he says,

> has to be done next. Tuesday follows Monday; Wednesday, Tuesday. Each spreads the same ripple. The being grows rings, like a tree. Like a tree leaves fall. For one day as I leant over a gate that led into a field, the rhythm stopped: the rhymes and the hummings, the nonsense and the poetry. A space was cleared in my mind. I saw through the thick leaves of habit (217).

Without this rhythm of the everyday he finds it impossible to continue to describe objects (221). He invites an anonymous passer-by to dine with him (221). Nothing in what follows allows the reader to determine the sex of this dinner companion. Basically this anonymity makes the passer-by a symbol of the reader. But for reasons

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[115] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 81.

that will become apparent I want to suggest that Bernard's dinner companion is a woman, a woman cornered by a latter-day Ancient Mariner. In other words, Bernard quickly replaces his missing anonymous self with a figure of femininity. And his apostrophe is:

> I begin now to forget; I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, "Are you hard?" I have seen so many different things, have made so many different sentences. I have lost in the process of eating and drinking and rubbing my eyes along surfaces that thin, hard shell which cases the soul, which, in youth, shuts one in – hence the fierceness, and the tap, tap, tap of the remorseless beaks of the young. And now I ask, "Who am I?" (221-222).

Meanwhile his dinner companion is sitting opposite listening, waiting. Bernard's rhetorical question "Who am I?" defers addressing a question to her, to women in general. But now Bernard, without waiting for a response from Effie (I will call her), without hoping that his question might answer itself, his answer comes: that he can be everywhere and everything. But if his "I" is everywhere and everything it is also nothing. Like essayists described by Woolf as *never and yet always* themselves, Bernard realises that he cannot claim to know whether the "I" is something or nothing. He can only say that things pass, things fade as natural as the day. The essay form is trapped in this soliloquy. But is there a way of questioning everything? Later in *Three Guineas* Effie cannot find a way to escape patriarchy without first playing by its rules of jealousy and honour, so she resolves to give her three guineas unconditionally, and forms a society of Outsiders to maintain her difference. Similarly, Bernard's dinner companion maintains her difference, unlike Lily Briscoe at the Ramsays' dinner table, by unexpectedly getting up from the restaurant table, and leaving him to sit alone.

The following chapter will attempt to approach the act of excusing oneself. This excuse is necessary because autobiographical interrogation is possibly interminable. Woolf characterises this interminability as the problem of "never to be yourself yet always," which the essayist must perform. A personal essay must attempt to explain something *and* how the essayist came to know it. As I said, it is a process that could in theory go on interminably, but there is invariably a point where writers stop questioning their lives, even as they are telling it. In *To the Lighthouse* Woolf characterises this punctuation as the Seventh Article, and in the next chapter I will characterise the Seventh Article as an excuse.

CHAPTER 2

Promising Diaries

to accuse, requires lesse Eloquence [...] than to excuse. – Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*[1]

Haddock & sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage & haddock by writing them down. [...] Oh dear yes, I shall conquer this mood. Its [sic] a question of being open sleepy, wide eyed at present – letting things come one after another. – Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*[2]

In the preceding chapter I saw the autobiographical origin *and* limit of the essay in the division of the everyday into the ordinary and the inspired. I connected this division with Woolf's Seventh Article because it allows men to forget to question the inspiration of their thoughts – women – and, as such, makes women the limit of their representation of themselves. Moreover, I discerned Woolf excusing herself from the social engendering of the Seventh Article by instituting the society of Outsiders.

This chapter will pursue both the Seventh Article and the Outsiders' society using excuses, which I divide into the anticipatory and belated varieties. I pay particular attention to how the Woolfs' house cook, Nelly Boxall, is symbolic of Woolf's everyday. This I connect Blanchot's idea that the diary is used by writers to maintain their identity by having recourse to the temporal certainty of the diary's ordinary everyday, where Tuesday follows Monday. I define the ordinary everyday as an excuse from deep interpretation. This excuse is connected back to literary freedom, which is the freedom to write anything.

Because of the ease with which food is attained in an affluent society it is common to forget its importance. To counter this prejudice I could turn to a

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[1] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the matter, form, and power of a common-wealth ecclesiastical and civil* [1651] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) (II. Chapter 19. 97) 243.

[2] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. V 1936-1941*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 358. All subsequent diary entries will be dated within the body of the chapter. The references for the remaining volumes are as follows: *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol I 1915-1919*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II 1920-1924*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); *The Diary of Virginia*

philosopher whose works have dominated the twentieth century. That is to say, I might turn to *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels put eating and drinking at the top of a list of the fundamental conditions of history.[3] But this is an extravagant defence when there is ample evidence in Woolf's life and work pointing to the significance of food. As an example there is my second epigraph to this chapter, which is taken from her penultimate diary entry. Or I could listen to Leonard Woolf's autobiography (1964), which reveals how he struggled to institute a diet to prevent the onset of Virginia's bi-polar disorder. "In the worst period of the depressive stage," Leonard reports, "for weeks almost at every meal one had to sit, often for an hour or more, trying to induce her to eat a few mouth fulls."[4]

But if food was the remedy it could also be the poison that created the illness in the first place.[5] The dinner parties she loved to attend could exhaust her mentally and physically, contributing to a breakdown. This encouraged Leonard to limit the number of parties she attended, and to set a curfew. The idea of artistic taste shadows these dietary concerns, with Leonard in the next breath "quite sure that Virginia's genius was closely connected with what manifested itself as mental instability and insanity."[6] With all these factors, then, I begin to see how the everyday can be questioned using the culinary in Woolf's life.[7] I will

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Woolf: Vol. III 1925-1930, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982); *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1931-1935*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

[3] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Parts I and III* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1940) 16.

[4] Leonard Woolf, *An Autobiography: Vol. II 1911-1969* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 53.

[5] It is an ambiguity Derrida finds in the Greek word *pharmakon*. See, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 70.

[6] Leonard Woolf, 54.

[7] The food in Woolf's novels is studied by Harriet Blodgett, "Food for Thought in Virginia Woolf's Novels," *Woolf Studies Annual* 3 (1997): 45-59.

continue along this line of investigation with the help of the so-called Georgian cook.[8]

Originally cooking for Roger Fry, Nelly Boxall was engaged by the Woolfs as their cook in February 1916, and her employment was terminated in the spring of 1934. It is an epoch that coincides almost perfectly with the height of European modernism. In the middle of this period, Woolf wrote her essay "Character in Fiction" (1927), which I quoted in the previous chapter as saying: "The Victorian cook lived like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable; [in contrast] the Georgian cook is a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing room, now to borrow the *Daily Herald*, now to ask advice about a hat."[9] After reading Quentin Bell's biography (1972) of his aunt I cannot help picturing Nelly Boxall as the model for Woolf's Georgian cook. Bell mentions that:

> N 'y was to recall her first interview in 1916 when she came into the drawing-room at Hogarth House and found Virginia lying on the sofa in an old dressing-gown and thought her "so-sweet" and knew that she would like working for her. What she didn't know, poor Nelly, was that she would be so enchanted by Virginia and so aggravated by her that, for the next eighteen years, she could neither live with her nor live without her, nor that Virginia was to be so exasperated and at the same time so touched by her changing moods that she could neither endure her nor dismiss her.[10]

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[8] Before continuing any further I should say that William Handley's "The Housemaid and The Kitchen Table: Incorporating the Frame in *To the Lighthouse*" offers invaluable support to the textual focus of this chapter. Although not considering the diary as a genre, nevertheless his analysis of Mrs. McNab in *To the Lighthouse*, and the framing device of class consciousness, is instrumental to my understanding of the generic implications of the Georgian cook in Woolf's diary. For instance, he writes: "Woolf's novel [*To the Lighthouse*] examines the cognitive and aesthetic operations that obscure as much as they illuminate people, objects, and things, and reveals the limits of aesthetic representation". Willian R. Handley, "The Housemaid and The Kitchen Table: Incorporating the Frame in *To the Lighthouse*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 40 (1994): 18.

[9] Woolf, "Character in Fiction," 422. On the difference between these two cooks and the Stephen family see Susan Dick's "Virginia Woolf's 'The Cook,'" *Woolf Studies Annual* 3 (1997): 122-141.

[10] Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography: Vol. II Mrs. Woolf 1912-1941* (Frogmore: Triad Pallin, 1972) 57.

How in the space of a decade did the domestic cook evolve from an inscrutable leviathan into a modern companion and interlocutor?[11] In Boxall's case some credit has gone to her employers. Bell argues that the Bloomsbury group's political consciousness was ahead of its time, and, more practically, ahead of the domestic technology (such as electric heating and stoves, fridges, automatic washing machines, etc.) which made servants unnecessary in the middle-class household after World War II.[12] But there is more than a sense that new technology, like the water-closet, was breaking down social dependency.[13] The Bloomsbury group also had a desire to break with the attitudes of their Victorian upbringing.

Yet, it is this political precocity that Raymond Williams (1980) has indicted as "a matter of conscience" rather than solidarity with the working class.[14] This leads him to rename the Bloomsbury Group as the Bloomsbury Fraction, saying that they were "a true fraction of the existing English upper class [....] at once against its dominant ideas and values and still willingly in all immediate ways, part of it."[15] In calling them a Fraction he means that they extended rather than disrupted the traditional class system. But not satisfied with identifying them with the status quo of the upper class, Williams also accuses them of extending bourgeois values of individualism. So they are guilty of both censoring critics of the old social structures, *and* of breaking down the "idea of

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[11] It is worth noting that the etymology of companion is someone with whom one breaks bread.
[12] For an overview of responses to the Bloomsbury Group see S. P. Rosenbaum, ed., *The Bloomsbury Group: A Collection of Memoirs, Commentary and Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975) and Rosenbaum, *Victorian Bloomsbury: The Early History of the Bloomsbury Group, Vol I* (London: MacMillan, 1987).
[13] One negative to the technological revolution was that the common demand for these products brought with it new social constraints such as Taylorism.
[14] Raymond Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980) 155.
[15] Williams, 156.

the whole society" by encouraging individual noncensorship through candour and clarity.[16]

Later I will see how far Williams' seemingly contradictory accusations apply to the Woolfs during the General Strike of 1926. For now it is not difficult to accept that whether the Woolfs' relationship to the working class was a matter of conscience or solidarity they were ahead of their time, and consequently found it difficult to put theory into practice. This was especially so in the case of Boxall. As her employers they needed to maintain control, but without validating the old Victorian prejudice against the lower classes. This meant that Boxall was treated with both authority and intimacy. In other words, she was treated much as if she were their child. Boxall responded in kind, treating the Woolfs like selfish children. She complained about the mess made by the printing press; she didn't like working in the primitive facilities of their country residence in Sussex; she resented being hired out to Vanessa Bell; and she objected to the frequency of their dinner parties.

These domestic struggles were reflected in Woolf's diary entries. "If I were reading this diary," Woolf writes on 15 February 1929, "if it were a book that came my way, I think I should seize with greed upon the portrait of Nelly, & make a story – perhaps make the whole story revolve round that – it would amuse me. Her character – our efforts to be rid of her – our reconciliations." This chapter does indeed seize upon the portrait of Nelly Boxall to understand Woolf's writing of her diary and her fiction.

The analysis of Boxall's relationship to the Woolfs is assisted by turning to a school of genre theory which analyses the origin of literary genres in social discourse, or what J. L. Austin (1955) calls speech acts (oral and written). It is a

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[16] Williams, 165. A criticism of Williams here is that we have seen how this "whole society" is

literary approach that Mikhail Bakhtin was also using (1953).[17] In the last chapter I criticised this approach, as used by Todorov, because he concentrated on the influence of speech on writing without considering the effect writing, such as Montaigne's essays, has had in changing what and how oral discourse is practised.[18] Nevertheless this method is helpful for me here. For instance, I can pick up on the last word of Woolf's diary entry (just quoted) to examine the form of her diary through the possibility of reconciliation. It is a possibility linked to other words by the thesaurus: pardon, forgiveness, redemption, absolution, exoneration, remission, indulgence, pass over, apology, and excuse. While I have chosen to look at diaries, I could have chosen any written text to explicate these words.

Jacques Derrida expresses this condition of writing when he writes that "one always asks for pardon when one writes" (1991).[19] For unlike spoken exchanges, writers may be guilty, so to speak, of not being around (or even alive). In the act of writing one asks to be excused from what is written, because the text speaks for itself. "For the written text to be the written," Derrida writes in "Signature Event Context" (1971), "it must continue to 'act' and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, whether he is provisionally absent or if he is dead".[20] While, presumably, Derrida merely senses this an *anticipatory*

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partly aided by bourgeoisie culture – what Benedict Anderson (1983) refers to as an imagined community.

[17] Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern McGee and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

[18] See David Fishelov's *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory* (University Park: The Pennsylvannia State University Press, 1993) 119-125, for a review of this aspect of the speech act school.

[19] Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession: Fifty-nine periods and periphrases *written in a sort of internal margin, between Geoffrey Bennington's book and work in preparation (January 1989 – April 1990)*," trans. Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 46.

[20] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982) 316. That is, *if I read Derrida correctly* – but this is exactly

excuse, it is not difficult to find instances where anticipatory excuses are staged in texts. I can find examples in the most renowned piece of English literature. Looking to *Hamlet* I find Laertes pleading to be excused from court now that he has helped celebrate its restoration, addressing King Claudius as "My dread lord," and begging:

> Your leave and favour to return to France,
>
> From whence though willingly I came to Denmark
>
> To show my duty in your coronation,
>
> Yet now I must confess, that duty done,
>
> My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France,
>
> And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon. (*Hamlet*, 1.2.50-56)

After acknowledging this request, Claudius turns to Laertes' father, Polonius, to ask if his son has his blessing to leave. When Polonius returns an affirmative, Claudius pardons Laertes, then turns to Hamlet to refuse him excusing himself. Like James Ramsay's question opening *To the Lighthouse*, the reader of *Hamlet* does not witness Hamlet's excuse – whether oral, written, or otherwise (it is always possible that Claudius interprets Hamlet's unseemly mournful body language as an excuse to leave the coronation celebrations).

Of course, I need not look to literature to find *anticipatory excuses*, everyday discourse is littered with examples. Pertinent to my culinary line of inquiry is the example of excusing oneself from the dinner table. The previous chapter found an abrupt example of this in the conclusion of *The Waves*.

While I have taken examples from *Hamlet* and dinner tables, it was the diary that attracted me to the reconciliations between the Woolfs and Nelly

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the problem – writers ask to be pardoned for not being at hand to clear up the ambiguities of their language every time that someone reads them. In other words, because writers cannot anticipate every context, every ambiguity of expression in their writing, because, in short, they cannot anticipate every reader's difficulty, they apologise in advance to their readers for their absence.

Boxall, and in particular there is Boxall's resignation on 30 April 1926. Woolf recalls the holiday she took with Leonard in the West Country of England:

> And then it was horror: Nelly; faced her going; was firm yet desolate; on Tuesday she stopped me on the landing said "Please ma'am may I apologise?" & this time we had been so resolute & implicitly believed her that I had written 6 letters. No cooks however came; & I had enough look into the 'servant question' to be glad to be safe again with Nelly. Now I vow come what may, never never to believe her again. "I am too fond of you ever to be happy with anyone else" she said. Talking of compliments, this is perhaps the greatest I could have. But my mind is wandering. It is a question of clothes. This is what humiliates me – talking of compliments – to walk in Regent St, Bond Str &c: & be notably less well dressed than other people.
>
> Yesterday I finished the first part of To the Lighthouse, & today began the second. I cannot make it out – here is the most difficult abstract piece of writing – I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to [...].

It is difficult to keep up with the stream of Woolf's emotions in this passage. Unlike an essay, the "I" of the diary need not attempt to connect emotions, it is enough that they are entered under the same date. Yet this tendency towards fragmentation is exacerbated in this entry by the fact that although dated 30 April it begins with the events of 18 April. So this diary entry carries the weight of thirteen days. Moreover, these are not ordinary days; there are emotional highs and lows during this period: the Woolfs' holiday is followed by Boxall's resignation, then Boxall's apology and compliment, then the question of clothes followed by the joy of finishing "The Window" part of *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and the confusion of writing "Time Passes." Therefore it is difficult for the reader to reconcile the avowed refusal to believe Boxall's resignations any more, and her complete faith in Boxall's confession of happiness: "'I am too fond of you to ever to be happy with anyone else.'"

If these examples of excuses anticipate and try to prevent guilt, the dominant understanding of excuses by contrast is that they are belated. *I do something inappropriate and then I apologise.* In the oral tradition, *belated excuses* are perhaps more dominant because there has been an assumption of innocence. That is to say, and contrary to writing, in a traditional oral exchange the speaker and listener are both before each other in person, so neither make excuses in advance. This phonocentric assumption of the presence of both interlocutors determines that the dominant expectation is that excuses come after accusations. An example of the *belated excuse* is found in Boxall apologising to Woolf after letting her believe that she would leave her. "Please ma'am may I apologise?" This order (of accusation *then* excuse) is accepted as standard by even the most interesting investigators of excuses, J. L. Austin. "When are excuses proffered?" he asks in his essay "Plea for Excuses" (1956).[21] "In general," he answers himself, "the situation is one where someone is accused of having done something, or (if that will keep it any cleaner) where someone is said to have done something which is bad, wrong, inept, unwelcome, or in some other of the numerous possible ways untoward."[22]

With these definitions of *belated* and *anticipatory excuses* I will question how Nelly Boxall's representation in Woolf's diary is related to her writing profession.

On 20 April 1919 Woolf stops to question, "What sort of diary should I like mine to be?" Her answer is torn between form and content. First, the diary's form should not anticipate its content, because this censors the spontaneity of her writing. But its form should not be determined entirely by content either, for then

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[21] J. L. Austin, "Plea for Excuses," *Philosophical Papers*, eds. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 176

[22] Austin, "Plea for Excuses," 176.

"looseness quickly becomes slovenly [....] slack and untidy". (Coincidentally, a table becomes a metaphor to describe the attributes of her ideal diary: "I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all".)

Woolf's concern for an ideal diary intimates that writers, more than others, are dependent on the diary. In her essay "Two Parsons" (1927), Woolf went to so far as to express the wish "that the psycho-analysts would go into the question of diary-keeping. For often it is the one mysterious fact in a life otherwise as clear as the sky and as candid as the dawn."[23] While he is not the psychoanalyst Woolf hoped for, but a fellow writer, Maurice Blanchot offers a cogent explanation for why Woolf, and writers in general, rely on diaries.

Literature is defined in Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* as an impersonal space where writers are overcome by the "fascination of time's absence." The absence of time in literature might be explained using Erich Auerbach's interpretation of *To the Lighthouse* in his *Mimesis* (1946). His reading of the novel concentrates on a passage that begins with Mrs. Ramsay using her son's leg to measure a stocking she is knitting for the lighthouse-keeper's son. At this point the narrative follows her mind's wanderings, fascinated by every turn her consciousness takes, so that when the narrative returns to her measurement of the stocking only a short period has elapsed, a few seconds, which is in stark contrast to the time taken to read the passage.[24] This temporality is what I found in the previous chapter being described by Benedict Anderson as the *meanwhile*. Here the *meanwhile* is between the measurement of the stocking and Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness. "Virginia Woolf's peculiar technique," Auerbach writes, "[...] consists in the fact that the exterior objective reality of the

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[23] Woolf, "Two Parsons," *The Common Reader: Second Series*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986) 93.

[24] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princetom University Press, 1991) 537.

momentary present which the author directly reports and which appears as established fact – in our instance the measuring of the stocking – is nothing but an occasion (although not an entirely accidental one). The stress is placed entirely on what the occasion releases, things which are not seen directly but by reflection, which are not tied to the present of the framing occurrence which releases them."[25]

Blanchot links the experience in literature of the absence of time to an essential solitude, which differs from the practical notion of solitude that Woolf focuses on in *A Room of One's Own* as necessary for writers to devote all their attention to the work of literature.[26] On the contrary, Blanchot's solitude is created by the work of literature itself stripping writers of their everyday relationship to their world. "Where I am alone," Blanchot writes, "I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside, as that which prevents, precedes, and dissolves the possibility of any personal relation."[27]

This essential solitude was encountered in the last chapter when Woolf took the fictional position of her character Effie to interrogate Leonard's position on international government. The encounter took away Leonard's confidence and left Virginia Woolf isolated. In her diary entry for 29 September 1926 Woolf describes this form of solitude as a depression "which does not come from something definite, but from nothing." Of course, the absence of time is more acute for a writer such as Woolf, for her modernist fiction pushes the temporal envelope much further than the traditional realist writers do.

In fact, the temporal difference between her modernist novels and her diary impress Thomas Mallon (1984) as the same as that between reading a

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[25] Auerbach, 541.
[26] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989) 30.
[27] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 31.

modernist novel and a realist novel.[28] "Eschewing chronology", he writes, "for the more convulsive sweep in which our minds receive and recall events, it [the modern novel] dispatched ordinary clock-time just as it banished the calmly consistent voice of the narrator."[29] "To our surprise", he continues, instead of the inner life of her novels, in her diaries "we find something much more in the manner of Jane Austen: chronicles of the daily, the here and the now caught in all their palpability by a sharp eye and ear."[30]

This stark difference between Woolf's novels and her diaries is not accidental. For Blanchot, literary writers seek out the diary's ordered days to regain their temporal existence. "The journal", Blanchot writes, "[...] is a memorial. What must the writer remember? Himself: who he is when he isn't writing, when he lives daily life, when he is alive and true, not dying and bereft of truth."[31] On 12 September 1933 Woolf calls these daily activities "the dear old repetitions": "L.[eonard]; Pinka [their dog]; dinner; tea; papers; music". Blanchot argues that the essential purpose of a writer's diary is not to anticipate a published autobiography, even though this may be its intended use. Rather, it is a remembrance of the writer's identity in the world, when that identity has been problematised by writing, especially fictional writing.[32]

The question still remains, however, why Woolf sees Nelly Boxall's character as the figure of most interest in her diary rather than Leonard, for instance. One way of approaching this question is to compare it to other times

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[28] H. Porter Abbott (1996) finds the meandering of Woolf's diary writing leading to her development of her modernist narrative (e.g. the stream of consciousness). H. Porter Abbott, "Old Virginia and the Night Writer: The Origins of Woolfs Narrative Meander," *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, eds. Suzanne L. Bunkers & Cynthia A.Huff (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

[29] Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984) 29.

[30] Mallon, 29.

[31] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 29.

when the so-called everyday world is as equally alienating, as equally fascinating as the absence of time, where literature dissolves the difference between subject and object, moving us, as Blanchot says, "from the region of the real where we hold ourselves at a distance from things the better to order and use them into that region where the distance holds us".[33] In these flashpoints, like literary fiction, no detail seems unimportant. It is common to regard these periods as turning points in history or even the making of history. In Woolf's life, the two world wars are the obvious examples of these periods. But another instance occurs in the spring of 1926, when a General Strike was called – at the same time Woolf is struggling to write the middle part of *To the Lighthouse*, "Time Passes," where she is attempting to think like Mr. Ramsay. *She is trying to think of a table, etc., when the Ramsays and their guests are not there.* As I already signalled, the Woolfs' response to this strike will help me assess the justice of Raymond Williams' accusations levelled at the Bloomsbury Group.

The General Strike began at midnight on 2 May, called in solidarity with the coal-miners' strike begun the previous Friday, 30 April 1926.[34] The coal-miners had stopped work over government suspension of coal subsidies. Subsidies had become necessary with the return of the German coal industry to full production two years earlier. Coal production, having expanded in the previous decade to accommodate the war economies, now outstripped peace-time demand, making prices fall. Government subsidies were instigated to protect "uneconomical" pits, and (consequently) colliers working for piece-work. The

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[32] Lyndall Gordon has a similar argument, see *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 173-175. As does Cinthia Gannett, *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse* (Albany: SUNY, 1992) 145-147.

[33] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 261. For my investigation of the General Strike that follows I am indebted to the inspiration of Ross's essay, which looks at the reprieve in 1938.

[34] An extensive review of Woolf's actions during the strike is in Kate Flint's "Virginia Woolf and the General Strike," *Essays in Criticism* 36 (1986) 319-334. This paragraph's synopsis of the strike does not, of course, do justice to the complexity of its causes.

subsidies were withdrawn by the Conservative government, led by a cautious prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, and an eager chancellor of the exchequer, Winston Churchill.

Woolf's record of the strike began on 5 May 1926 when she decided that an "exact diary of the Strike would be interesting." It is not difficult to discern that for her the interesting thing about the strike is that it may be history repeating or completing itself ("history" here designating the history that had begun in Russia in 1917).[35] Leonard writes in his autobiography (1967) that: "When it comes to the practice of politics, anyone writing about his life in the years 1924-39 must answer the crucial question: 'What did you do in the General Strike?'"[36] Perhaps it is part of the paradoxical *work* of a strike to do nothing that, although professing to be entirely on the side of the strikers, Leonard confesses that there was nothing he could *do*.[37] Helplessly he "watched appalled [at] the incompetence of those who had called and were conducting the strike."[38]

Being at a loss for what to do was not uncommon among the Woolfs' friends and acquaintances. Virginia Woolf noted in her diary on 6 May that the common refrain punctuating everyone's speech was, "Well, I don't know." She adds: "According to L.[eonard] this open state of mind is due to the lack of [news]papers [i.e. one of what she calls her 'dear old repetitions']. It feels like deadlock, on both sides; as if we could keep fixed like this for weeks. What one prays for is God: the King or God; some impartial person to say kiss & be friends – as apparently we all desire."

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[35] Woolf deomstrates a keen interest in the Russian revolution in her review of a memoir by a witness to the events. See her "A View of the Russian Revolution," (1918) *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II 1912-1918*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (San Diego: Harcourt Brace &Jovanovich, 1990) 338-340.

[36] Leonard Woolf, 348.

[37] The essential work of a strike is necessarily no work.

[38] Leonard Woolf, 348.

"I cannot make it out –", she writes in her diary on 30 April 1926, the same day the miners walked out, "here is the most difficult abstract piece of writing – I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to". Inexplicably, Gillian Beer (1996) sees Woolf solving the problem she had set herself in "Time Passes" by perceiving "the object through time, and to use a discourse which points to a human absence".[39] Since this *is* the problem it cannot be the solution. Another writer, J. Hillis Miller (1990), more convincingly, argues that in the absence of characters, Woolf's language unavoidably anthropomorphises the environment.[40]

Both interpretations, then, are blind to the presence of Mrs. McNab. That is to say, the problem of representing human absence in "Time Passes" is not solved but avoided by Woolf when she introduces the working-class character of Mrs. McNab, the house cleaner.[41] William Handley is one reader to notice the presence of Mrs. McNab. The blindness to her, which I have just found in Beer's and Miller's readings of "Time Passes," supports Handley's analysis of the screens dividing class consciousness. But I cannot agree with his generous conviction that Woolf's use of Mrs. McNab is a deliberate criticism of her own class consciousness.

Unlike the other characters in Woolf's novel, Mrs. McNab is ignorant of such questions as "Who am I?" or "What is this?" Close to seventy, she has a consciousness Woolf likens to a fish "carving its way through the sun-lanced waters", conscious only of the practical concern for what can be done, what can

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[39] Gillian Beer, "Hume, Stephen, and the Elegy in *To the Lighthouse*," *Virginian Woolf: The Common Ground* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) 42.

[40] Miller's term is prosopopoeia not anthropomorphism, see J. Hillis Miller, "Mr Carmichael and Lily Briscoe: The Rhythm of Creativity in To the Lighthouse," *Tropes, Parables, Performatives: Essays on Twentieth Century Literature* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990) 162-163.

[41] Willian R. Handley, "The Housemaid and The Kitchen Table: Incorporating the Frame in *To the Lighthouse*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 40 (1994): 35.

be said (145). In other words, she is in the same mould as the Victorian cook – an inscrutable leviathan to her employers because they know her only by her work. Thus *To the Lighthouse* reveals Woolf's attachment to, even a nostalgia for, the Victorian conception of household servants at the same time as a general strike. Georgian servants (such as Nelly Boxall) do not offer the same security as their Victorian predecessors because they are more likely to question the authority of their employers. Thus the "servant question," a phrase frequently used in Woolf's letters, which is usually read as the problem of finding good employees or perhaps, in light of Raymond Williams' criticisms, as evidence of her conflict between a matter of necessity and solidarity, may also be read quite literally as how Georgian servants such as Boxall question their role as the dumb leviathans of the everyday, which was passed on to them from their Victorian forebears.[42]

Even though she questions her role as the leviathan of the everyday, Boxall nevertheless remains a leviathan, just as much as the Victorian cook, because Woolf's diary does not question Boxall as to her reasons for submitting her resignations. Consequently there is a version of the Seventh Article between Woolf and Boxall, a distorted version of that between herself and Leonard, which I suggested as the possible origin of *Three Guineas* (1938) when he does not ask for Virginia's opinion on how to prevent war.

There is evidence in Leonard Woolf's autobiography suggesting the importance given in the Woolf household to the everyday when he contests the veracity of one detail recorded in Virginia Woolf's diary. In the entry for 18 September 1918 she records that one of the Fabians who commissioned Leonard to write on the prevention of war, Beatrice Webb, as saying to her that, "Marriage

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[42] The phrase can be traced to Woolf's mother, Julia Stephen, who, Noel Annan, reports in his biography of Leslie Stephen, wrote an essay entitled "The Servant Question," the manuscript of which resides, unpublished, in the Washington State University Library. Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (New York: Random House, 1984).

was necessary as a waste pipe for emotion, as security in old age when personal attractiveness fails, & as a help to work."[43] Decades later, Woolf's pedantic husband and widower, not inclined perhaps to be remembered as Woolf's W.C., remembers Webb as describing marriage as a: "waste paper basket of the emotions."[44] As Woolf refrains from putting Beatrice Webb's contended phrase in quotation marks, it may suggest that Leonard's correction is appropriate. Nevertheless, somewhat confirming our theory of the transference of the Seventh Article from Leonard and Virginia to Virginia and Boxall, she does *quote* Webb as concluding with: "'Yes, I daresay an old family servant would do as well [as the waste pipe of emotions].'"[45]

I have found little evidence to defend the Woolfs against Raymond Williams' charges. As a matter of conscience Virginia Woolf is all for the miners' individual rights, although she hints that their problem is the lamentable result of society losing its traditional leaders, whose rule was previously un-questioned by the working class. She seems to idolise this image of a subdued working class in the character of Mrs. McNab, for it maintains her own identity as the middle-class employer. As mentioned above, Blanchot points out that writers remember themselves in their diaries by returning to its temporality of the ordinary

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[43] Clive Bell, her brother-in-law, has also contested the truth of some of her diary entries. See *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Joan Russell Noble (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). These challenges are refuted by his son, Quentin Bell, writing an introduction for the editor of the diary, Anne Olivier Bell (his wife): "but although she [Woolf] is biassed and at times misinformed or careless, she does not consciously tell lies to herself, or even for the benefit of some future reader. The editor has frequently had occasion to correct her upon points of detail but never, I think, has she discovered a complete fabrication." *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Vol. I 1915-1919* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) xiv.

[44] Leonard Woolf, 83.

[45] Woolf writes an essay in April of this year on Samuel Pepys. She considers the mass of public affairs recorded by Pepys in his diary the result of not being able to converse on such matters with his wife who, like all English women, did not receive a university education. "Happily for us, Mrs Pepys was an imperfect confidante. There were other matters besides those naturally unfit for a wife's ear that Pepys brought home from the office and liked to deliver to himself upon in private. And thus comes about that the diary runs naturally from affairs of State and the characters of ministers to affairs of the heart and the characters of servant girls". Woolf, "Papers on Pepys," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II 1912-1918*, 234.

everyday. It is my suggestion that the ordinary everyday is founded on writers excusing themselves from interrogating certain pertinent aspects of their reality.

As Blanchot notes, this has the benefit of clearing one's mind, cleansing a conscience or consciousness of some thought or feeling. It is as though, somehow, as Dostoevsky's narrator of *Notes from Underground* (1864) says of an oppressive memory, that "once it were written down, it would vanish for ever."[46] "Why is life so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss," Woolf asks her diary on 25 October 1920. "I look down;" she continues, "I feel guilty; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end. But why do I feel this? Now that I say it I don't feel it. [...] Melancholy diminishes as I write." This is the simplification of what actually occurs. It is how she writes that that alleviates her mood.

When she is writing to forget something, such as her criticism of Forster's capitalisation of life over art, it is not enough to tell her diary what happened, where and when; her excuse is found in reducing herself to the status of an object by forgetting the way she has thought, even that she has had the power of decisive thought at all. "An odd incident, psychologically," she writes in the entry for 10 September 1927,

> has been Morgan's [Forster] serious concern about my article on him. Did I care a straw what he said about me? Was it more laudatory? Yet here is this self-possessed, aloof man taking every word to heart, cast down to the depths, apparently, because I do not give him superlative rank, & writing again & again to ask about it, or suggest about it, anxious that it shall be published in England, & also that more space shall be given to the Passage to India. Had I been asked, I should have said that of all writers he would be the most indifferent & cool under criticism. And he minds a dozen times more than I do, who have the opposite reputation.

While actively choosing to ignore Forster's proposals (he asked that her review of his works concentrate on his magnum opus, *A Passage to India* (1924)) Woolf

still manages to find her excuse in blaming the order of events as circumstances beyond her control. To excuse herself she forgets that she had the possibility of interrogating all the aspects of Forster's work. Moreover, she sees the order of events unavoidably leading to misconceptions of both herself and Forster as more or less sensitive than they really are.

This argument is similar to Rousseau's explanation of the origin of language with the stranger being described as a giant out of fear, because there is, as T. S. Eliot would say, no "objective correlative" between the events and their characters' emotional responses to those events. It is this disjunction between appearances and actual feelings which allows Woolf to excuse her actions. By forgetting her autonomy, she ends up portraying herself and Forster as leviathans (or giants) just as inscrutable as Mrs. McNab. Her excuse is that without an "objective correlative" it is impossible to anticipate Forster's response to her criticisms.

Obviously, this excuse from fully interrogating Forster the person, stopping instead at his work, is redolent of Woolf's treatment of Boxall, only now there is no class antagonism. Both Forster and Woolf are of the same class, even the same profession. Her argument seems to be that, because there is no certainty in predicting others' responses to her actions, she is innocent of any indiscretion she might perform. But is it permissible to excuse oneself in this way?

This is the question posed by the final chapter of Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading* (1979) entitled "Excuses (*Confessions*)". De Man's chapter begins with a close reading of Rousseau's autobiography, *The Confessions* (1781-88) particularly an episode in Book II where Rousseau accuses a fellow employee in a

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[46] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (Vermont: Everyman, 1994) 36.

Turin household of stealing a ribbon he himself stole. In this episode de Man notices a difference between confessions and excuses.

De Man writes: "it does not suffice to tell all. It is not enough to *confess*, one also has to *excuse*".[47] There is a difference for de Man between the confession's category of truth and the excuse's category of truth. The truths of confessions are verifiable facts (I stole a ribbon on a certain day in 1728, and soon after accused another of it), whereas what are called excuses demand that the person perform unverifiable interior feelings through language. Here is Rousseau's excuse in *The Confessions*:

> [V]iciousness was never further from me than at this cruel moment, and when I accused the hapless girl [Marion], it is bizarre but it is true that my friendship for her was the cause of my accusation. She was present in my mind, I excused myself on the first thing that offered itself.[48]

De Man explains how Rousseau's enunciation of "Marion" might be understood as an excuse. "If", de Man says, "the essential non-signification of the statement had been properly interpreted, if Rousseau's accusers had realized that Marion's name was ['the first thing that offered itself'], then they would have understood his lack of guilt as well as Marion's innocence. And the excuse would have extended from the slander to the theft itself, which was equally unmotivated".[49] The guilt is neither Rousseau's nor Marion's, but belongs to the everyday. That is to say, Rousseau argues that Marion, the house cook, was so much associated with his ordinary everyday that her name is the first thing to come to his lips when he has to excuse himself for the theft.

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[47] Paul de Man, "Excuses (*Confessions*)," *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 280.
[48] Quoted in de Man, 284 and 288.
[49] de Man, 292-293.

But de Man finds an anacoluthon in the excuse, an anacoluthon that plagues all excuses.[50] Erasmus describes the anacoluthon as when a metaphor is non-reciprocal. He says: "We can call a 'summit' a 'crown' but not vice versa."[51] So whereas it is quite logical to call excuses accusations, it does not follow that accusations are excuses. For example, it is not appropriate to call a self-accusation (like "I stole a ribbon from Mlle Pontal") an excuse, but it is always possible to call an excuse an accusation. This is for the simple reason that it is always possible that an excuse may be more incriminating than the original accusation, as in the notorious case of the jester who, prompted to produce an excuse worse than the crime, pinched the king's rear, then gave as his excuse that the assault was intended for the queen (1858).[52] Thus De Man explains the anacoluthon of excuses as being between its performative and its cognition. There is no reciprocal relationship between the thought and the action of an excuse, because each time I attempt to excuse myself by *performing* my feelings I cannot simultaneously *think* all the implications of this performance.

Contrary to de Man, Immanuel Kant believed that cognition could precede or catch up with the performance of actions. He named this promise of moral behaviour the categorical imperative. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), Kant describes the categorical imperative as, "I should never act in such a way that I could not also will that my maxim should be a universal law [*ich soll niemals anders verfahren, als so, daß ich auch wollen könne, meine Maxime solle ein allgemeines Gesetz werden*]."[53] In other words, the categorical

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[50] de Man, 300.
[51] Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. D. B. King and H. D. Rix (Milwaukee: 1963) 28.
[52] Dr Doran, *The History of Court Fools* (London: Richard Bentley, 1858) 70.
[53] Quoted in J. Hillis Miller, "Reading Telling: Kant," *Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

imperative demands I think of what would happen if everything I do became everyday to everybody else in the world.

As I have indicated, this is not how Woolf thinks about domestic labour. In fact, she does all she can to avoid thinking about domestic labour at all. Specifically, she understands literary freedom in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) being predicated on the possession of sufficient money (£500 a year) to free writers from thinking and performing such things as domestic labour. And, of course, the freedom money gives her from such labour is dependent on Boxall having no such autonomy herself. Thus Woolf's literary freedom is in conflict with the categorical imperative, because her actions cannot be made into a universal law.

However, Rousseau finds that to the able practitioner of the literary vocation there is always an eloquent excuse for such accusations. In his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782) Rousseau writes that:

> To lie to one's advantage is an imposture, to lie to the advantage of others is a fraud, and to lie to the detriment of others is a slander – this is the worst kind of lie. To lie without intent and without harm to oneself or to others is not to lie: it is not a lie but a fiction.[54]

Rousseau further explains the fictional lie by retelling a non-fictional lie he told during a dinner conversation. The Seventh Article is seen in play here because Rousseau, the reluctant socialite, is asked a question at a dinner party by a woman, "who had recently been married and was expecting a child," whether he himself had any children. "Blushing all over my face, I replied that I had not had that happiness. She smiled maliciously at the company; none of this was particularly obscure even to me."[55] At this point Rousseau's editor adds a footnote to say that it was well known that as a young man, Rousseau had left his

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[54] Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 69.

illegitimate children at a Foundlings' Home in Paris and never recovered them. Rousseau continues:

> Two minutes later the answer I should have given suddenly came to me: "That is an indiscreet question from a young woman to a man who remained a bachelor until his old age." By this answer, without telling a lie or having to make an embarrassing confession, I would have had the laugh on my side and taught her a little lesson which would naturally have made her somewhat less inclined to ask me impertinent questions.[56]

Contrary to Rousseau's acceptance of these so-called fictional lies, Kant judges any form of lie as being universally the enemy of the Enlightenment. "Although telling a certain lie", Kant writes in "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives," "I do not actually do anyone a wrong, I formally but not materially violate the principle of right with respect to all unavoidably necessary utterances."[57] As Gilles Deleuze finds in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), there is a contradiction in making mendacity a universal law. He interprets Kant as saying that "if everyone told lies, [all] promises would destroy themselves since it would be contradictory for anyone to believe them."[58]

In "Reading Telling: Kant" (1987) J. Hillis Miller criticises Kant's argument against lying for failing to recognise that promises are themselves lies.[59] Like de Man's description of excuses, Miller looks at how promises are linguistic acts which are in themselves unverifiable. "The keeping of a promise is a matter of time or of temporality, the matching of one time, the time of the promising, with another time, the time of the keeping of the promise."[60] Consequently, I am lying when I make a promise because there is no way I can guarantee that I will

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[55] Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 75

[56] Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 75.

[57] Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives," trans. Lewis White Beck, in Sissela Bok's *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Vintage, 1979) 290.

[58] Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1984) 33.

[59] Miller 36.

even be alive to fulfil the promise. So an anacoluthon resides in the fact that while Kant is correct in saying that a lie cannot be made into a promise, nevertheless, when I make a promise it is a lie because I cannot guarantee to honour that promise.

It might be argued that the daily lies – such as Raymond Williams correctly finds in the "Bloomsbury Fraction's" relationship to the working class – can be avoided when social conditions have become more egalitarian. But Miller understands de Man's chapter on Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762) in his *Allegories of Reading* as saying that:

> The act of establishing a state is so subversive an act, it makes so clean a break with the past, that the lawgiver regularly and by a seemingly inevitable necessity claims divine or transcendent authority for the law he lays down, even though he has clearly demonstrated the nonexistence or unavailability of that authority in his first act of rebellion in order to justify his new beginning.[61]

Moreover, for de Man, false promises are unavoidable because they are the very condition of language.[62] Miller writes:

> As de Man says at the end of his essay on the *Social Contract*, in a brilliant subversive alteration of Heidegger's formulation, *Die Sprache spricht* [Language speaks]: "The reintroduction of the promise, despite the fact that its impossibility has been established [...] does not occur at the discretion of the writer. [...]This model is a fact of language over which Rousseau himself has no control. Just as any other reader, he is bound to misread his text as a promise of political change. The error is not within the reader;

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[60] Miller, 32.

[61] Miller, 34.

[62] For a reading of this chapter in light of Paul de Man's World War II journalism see Peggy Kamuf, "Impositions: A Violent Dawn at *Le Soir*," *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, eds. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). See also in the same volume, Derrida, "The Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War."

language itself dissociates the cognition from the act. *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)* [Language promises (itself)]".[63]

The promise of language can be found in Woolf's promise to write an autobiography using her diaries as reference. On 9 March 1920 she imagines "old Virginia, putting on her spectacles to read March 1920." "Greetings! my dear ghost;" she continues, "& take heed that I dont [sic] think 50 a very great age. Several good books can be written still; & here's the bricks for a fine one". From the moment that her promise is made each diary entry becomes in effect a promise of the autobiography to come. And yet the daily promises actually excuse her indefinitely from fulfilling her promise. Each entry is only a re-affirmation of the promise, not its fulfilment. On 17 September 1937, five years after her fiftieth birthday, she asks her diary, "Do I ever write, even here, for my own eyes?" She died in 1941 aged fifty-nine, having never used her diaries for autobiographical purposes. (Most of the autobiographical pieces she did write, which are collected in *Moments of Being*, deal with her childhood, old Bloomsbury, or an attitude: topics that either happened before she began her diaries or whose foundation is independent of her diaries.)

On 5 August 1929, in her forty-eighth year, she even recognises that she is no longer addressing her future self as autobiographer. She stops to question her present self: "whom do I tell when I tell a blank page?" Noticing insecure diary entries, Maurice Blanchot conjectures she is addressing what he calls the demon of vocations. He detects signs of a struggle between her literary freedom and the demon who demands that all vocations have an "exclusive purpose, an

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[63] Miller, 34-35. It is this same structure that Morson sees in literature, particularly Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer*: "That is, I examine Dostoevsky's literary experiment as one of a number of works in which utopia *and* its parody enter into an inconclusive dialogue." See Gary Saul Morson, *The Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's* Diary of a Writer *and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981) xii.

increasingly definite goal."[64] This demon of vocations asks her to believe in something *as if* it is necessary for her salvation. Contrary to this demon, the literature demands that she have "the freedom to say everything," and this is achieved by writing without a definite or achievable goal.[65]

In Woolf's diary, Blanchot senses her disbelief that she had achieved this freedom. He contrasts this insecurity with Goethe's security. "Goethe", Blanchot writes, "loved his demon [of vocations] who helped him to achieve a 'happy end'. Virginia Woolf struggled all her life against the demon who protected her [....] What is peculiar about such struggles is that they are against security – the kind of security which is a betrayal of the self through overcaution and overjudiciousness."[66] Woolf's insecurity takes two forms. If the public neglects or abuses her work she becomes uncertain of her writing ability. On 12 April 1921 she writes: "What I feared was that I was dismissed as negligible" This diffidence is well known, both to her and her readers. She witnessed it in Forster's response to her criticism, and later in *A Room of One's Own* she found the symptom in Keats. But her insecurity takes another form unknown to Keats, or even Forster. Blanchot notes that even in 1934, after the public success of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* (1931), Woolf continues to be unsure about her literary gifts. She equates the critical success and the significant popularity of her books as the failure of being too conventional; that is, her writing is following the generic expectations of her readers. So, whether neglected or applauded, insecurity remains. This insecurity is sustained by literature's demand, in the name of freedom, that she push beyond her most recent

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[64] Maurice Blanchot, "Outwitting the Demon – A Vocation," trans. Sacha Rabinovitch, *The Sirens' Song: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot*, ed. Gabriel Josipovici (Brighton: Harvester, 1982) 92

[65] Blanchot, "Outwitting the Demon – A Vocation," 92.

[66] Maurice Blanchot, "Outwitting the Demon – A Vocation," 87.

work.[67] And if she is unable to push forward, then like a shark she feels herself sinking towards some inner truth. On 23 June 1929 she writes:

> The only way I keep afloat is by working. A note for summer I must take more work that I can possibly get done. <I am> – no, I don't know what it comes from. Directly I stop working I feel that I am sinking down, down. And as usual, I feel that if I sink further I shall reach the truth.

It is a descent I feel Woolf is unwilling to undergo, not because she is afraid of the truth, but perhaps because she is afraid that the truth at "the bottom of the vessel" will answer the autobiographical question "Who am I?" So the daily promises of Woolf's diary not only assist her anticipatory excuse from the interrogation of her dependence on her house cook, they are part of a larger excuse from defining herself. This anticipatory excuse from establishing any secure foundation is how she protects literature's freedom.

Blanchot finds her insecurity about literature so exasperating and yet a sign of a *true* literary writer. Perhaps inevitably, then, Blanchot interprets her suicide as an affirmation of unconventionality; an unconventionality not foreign to literature's freedom. She outwits the demon of vocations by descending towards her truth, but without the possibility of writing of this truth. For, as Woolf proudly told Vita Sackville-West on 23 November 1926, her own death is the only experience she would never describe. Death is the big excuse of writing, as Derrida explains when I tried to define anticipatory excuses. First, because writing does not need the writer to remain alive in order to work. Second, because no one – including Woolf – can write of this last descent, so literature retains its freedom.

In the same diary entry that Woolf recorded her admission to Sackville-West that her own death was the one experience she would never describe, she

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[67] See Woolf's diary entry for 17 October 1934.

also realises that the narrative method she has perfected in *To the Lighthouse* allows her to say what she likes. She comes to this conclusion when it did not throw up new problems for later works. Her writing, that is to say, has avoided making promises. She writes: "My present opinion is that it is easily the best of my books [...]. It is freer & subtler [sic] I think. Yet I have no idea of any other to follow it: which may mean that I have made my method perfect, & it will now stay like this, & serve whatever use I wish to put it to." Or, at least, this is her first thought. But Woolf finds something still haunting her. Could this be her demon? her leviathan-like Nelly Boxall? her Effie? "[...] I am now & then", she writes on 23 November 1926, "haunted by some semi mystic very profound life of woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident – say the fall of a flower – might contain it. My theory being that the actual event practically does not exist – nor time either."

CHAPTER 3

Letters of Honour

> *Falstaff*: Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? a word. What is that word, honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who have it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. It is insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it: honour is a mere scutcheon; and so ends my catechism. – William Shakespeare, *Henry IV (Part 1, Act V, Scene 1)*.

In the previous chapter I examined how Woolf's diary excused her from interrogating her everyday. The excuse was especially found in Woolf's relationship to Nelly Boxall. By defining Boxall as her ordinary everyday, Woolf avoids defining herself as *this* or *that*. I connected this avoidance of certainty with literature's freedom to say everything. This chapter's concern is for this literary freedom, specifically how this freedom distinguishes a literary text from other texts by defamiliarising the everyday. With the correspondence of Woolf, particularly her suicide letters and their interpretation, and the interpretations of the *Portuguese Letters* and Poe's short story, "The Purloined Letter," I am able to discern two manners of honouring. The standard manner creates a hierarchy of ridicule. The chapter concludes by finding the second manner in the way literature's freedom allows it to honour all elements of reality.

The popular appeal of crime and romance genres of fiction is their treatment of everyday concerns. Primary amongst these is the ennui of the everyday itself, from which they offer an exciting escape. On top of this boredom with everyday existence, crime fiction also addresses concerns about personal security; while the stock in trade of romance fiction is the desire for desire. In their tendency to pander to these concerns, rather than challenging them, popular genres reinforce a limited view of

reality. Much the same as Woolf does not question Nelly Boxall beyond her role as a domestic servant, crime fiction readers are not encouraged to question their role in the social injustices which lead people to commit crimes. In "Clues" (1983) Franco Moretti asks, "What indeed does detective fiction do?" His answer: "It create's [sic] a problem, a 'concrete effect' – the crime – and declares a sole cause relevant: the criminal. It slights other causes (why is the criminal such?) and dispels the doubt that every choice is partial and subjective.[...] In finding one solution that is valid for all – detective fiction does not present alternative readings – society posits its unity, and, again, declares itself innocent."[1]

And yet, as I saw in the previous chapter, literary freedom is based on a similar excuse from interrogating one's everyday situation. It is possible to find the apotheosis of this excuse in the modernist demand that artists continually create new literary appetites rather than repeat familiar genres for their readers. That is to say, modernism promises an excuse from the accepted certainties. In *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (1902), Benedetto Croce gives an often quoted expression of literature's uncertainty: "Every true work of art has violated some established class and upset the ideas of the critics, who have thus been obliged to enlarge the number of classes, until finally even this enlargement has proved too narrow, owing to the appearance of new works of art, which are naturally followed by new scandals, new upsettings, and – new enlargements."[2]

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[1] Franco Moretti, "Clues," trans. Susan Fischer, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso & NLB, 1983) 144.
[2] Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (London: Macmillan, 1909) 65.

In this light, the "true work of art" should be ultimately unclassifiable.[3] Literature's goal is contra generic fiction, even if it has the same excuse at its origin. As Heather Dubrow notes, if genres work to *familiarise* the reader as to how to comprehend a text, then literature is the process of *defamiliarisation*.[4] This task of defamiliarisation is necessary because one's understanding of the world becomes so familiar, so everyday, becomes, in short, so generic that one no longer finds any pleasure in it. There is only the generic pleasure of predicting what will happen, as Woolf explains in this opening passage from her essay "Philosophy in Fiction" (1918):

> After one has heard the first few bars of a tune upon a barrel organ the further course of the tune is instinctively foretold by the mind and any deviation from that pattern is received with reluctance and discomfort. A thousand tunes of the same sort have grooved a road in our minds and we insist that the next tune we hear shall flow smoothly down the same channels; nor are we often disobeyed. That is also the case with the usual run of stories. From the first few pages you can at least half-consciously foretell the drift of what is to follow, and certainly a part of the impulse which drives us to read to the end comes from the desire to match our foreboding with the fact. It is not strange then that the finished product is much what we expected it to be, and bears no likeness, should we compare it with reality, to what we feel for ourselves. For loudly though we talk of the advance of realism and boldly though we assert that life finds its mirror in fiction, the material of life is so difficult to handle and has to be limited and abstracted to such an extent before it can be dealt with by words that a small pinch of it only is made use of by the lesser novelist. He spends his time moulding and

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[3] Likewise the same can be said for "literature." Peggy Kamuf points out that "literature" was only used to describe language-based works of art in the early 1800s. And even then it describes: "[the] interminability of what is (or is not) literature, of what properly belongs to the set called literature, [that] is not a contingent condition but a necessary one of continuing to call 'literature' by that name." Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature, or, The University in Deconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 6. Furthermore: Jonathan Culler looks at how high modernist and postmodernist texts such as *Finnegans Wake* can only be classified as yet as non-generic. See, "Towards a Theory of Non-Genre Literature," *Surfiction: Fiction Now...and Tomorrow*, ed. Raymond Federman (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1975) 255-262.

[4] Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982) 12-14.

> remoulding what has been supplied him by the efforts of original genius perhaps a generation or two ago. The moulds are by this time so firmly set, and require such effort to break them, that the public is seldom disturbed by explosion in that direction.[5]

One member of the group of literary theorists known as the Russian Formalists, Viktor Shklovsky, puts it more succinctly, but less eloquently, when he writes in "Art as Device" (1917): "[I]n order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. [...] By [defamiliarising] objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious'."[6] I also find the concept of defamiliarisation in Reader-Response criticism. One of its major contributors, Wolfgang Iser, writes that the "efficacy of a literary text is brought about by the apparent evocation and subsequent negation of the familiar."[7]

I wish to locate this process of defamiliarisation with the help of Woolf's letters. To begin with I propose a comparison between Woolf's letters and her diary. While in Woolf's diary I perceived the conflict between Bloomsbury lifestyle and Bloomsbury politics centred around Nelly Boxall, the difficulty is now in how the members of the Bloomsbury Group relate to the aristocracy. So where Nelly Boxall poses the "servant question" in Woolf's diary, I now take Vita Sackville-West as posing the "aristocratic question" for her correspondence.[8] I will attempt to show that

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[5] Woolf, "Philosophy in Fiction," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II*, 208.
[6] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device," *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, Il: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990) 6.
[7] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," [1974] *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tomkins (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 64. See also, Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," trans. Elizabeth Benzinger, *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).
[8] "The Sackville family went back to William the Conqueror; they were made Earls of Dorset in the sixteenth century, and granted the vast Kentish house of Knole by Elizabeth I. They were parliamentarians, ambassadors, royalists; Charles Sackville, 6th Earl of Dorset, was a poet and literary patron. Then there was the great house, built over four acres, like a gigantic, palatial Oxford college, with (legend had it) seven courts, fifty-two staircases, and 365 rooms. Knole was Vita's first passion

where "Nelly Boxall" was her unquestioning attachment, the "aristocratic question" detaches Woolf from the ordinary everyday; where Boxall is used as a familiarisation, Sackville-West defamiliarises.

These class associations can be explained in broad strokes: both the working class and the aristocracy are often defined by their relationship to changes of circumstances. For instance, the economic vulnerability of the working class inclines it to resist change. The final straw for the Woolfs was Boxall's refusal to let them install an electric stove. This resistance to change encouraged Woolf to see cooks as symbolic of her ordinary everyday. The comical view of the aristocracy, on the other hand, is its indifference to the need for change, or if they are aware of changes happening around them, then they are confident these will not alter their character. Thus, in her essay "Maturity and Immaturity" (1919), Woolf refers to the aristocratic character as childish: "One must learn to speak of one's feelings; one must learn to do it beautifully. But the aristocrat appears never to learn anything. He seems condemned to remain a gifted and instinctive child. The delightful talents never mature; the park is mistaken for the world, the family for the human race; and the smiles of the Muse are solicited with a pocket full of sweets."[9]

P. G. Wodehouse played on the different consciousness of the upper and lower classes in his characterisation of Bertie Wooster and his butler, Jeeves.[10] While Woolf also mocked the aristocracy's ignorance, like Wodehouse, she too was at the

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(she grew up there) and her greatest love (she could not inherit, as she was a woman). The first gift Virginia received from Vita after their first meeting was a copy of *Knole & the Sackvilles*." Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996) 487.

[9] Woolf, "Maturity and Immaturity," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Vol. III 1919-1924*, 128.

[10] Woof relates a similar relationship between Lady Bath and her butler, Middleton: "Once I remember the word 'marl' cropped up in conversation. 'What's marl, Middleton?' Lady Bath asked. 'A mixture of earth and carbonate of lime, my lady', Middleton informed." See Woolf's "Am I a Snob?," *Moments of Being*, 207. For an excellent essay on P. G. Wodehouse, see Stephen Medcalf's "The Innocence of P. G. Wodehouse," *The Modern English Novel: The Reader, The Writer and the Work*, ed. Gabriel Josipovici (London: Open Books, 1976).

same time impressed by its innocence. "[...] I felt", she writes in "Am I a Snob?" (1936), "these people don't care a snap what anyone thinks. Here is human nature in its uncropped, unpruned, natural state."[11] In her relationship with Sackville-West this envy of aristocratic fearlessness is mixed with (or transformed into) sexual attraction. James Gindin has noted that Woolf named the relationship between Sackville-West and herself, the "precipice marked V".[12] To cross this precipice she had to part with the familiar vista of her marriage to Leonard. "Talking to Lytton [Strachey] the other night", she writes to Sackville-West on 23 March 1927,

> he suddenly asked me to advise him in love – whether to go on, over the precipice, or to stop short at the top. Stop, stop! I cried, thinking instantly of you. Now what would happen if I let myself go over? Answer me that. Over what? you'll say. A precipice marked V[...][13]

Woolf's correspondence with Sackville-West began unsteadily, each daring the other to step closer to that precipice. On 6 July 1924, before Sackville-West left for a holiday in Italy, Woolf accused her of not writing personal letters (which are otherwise referred to as "familiar letters"). Sackville-West replied while climbing in the Dolomites and writing *Seducers in Ecuador* for the Hogarth Press. "You said ," she wrote on July 16:

> I wrote letters of impersonal frigidity. I told you once I would rather go to Spain with you than with anyone, and you looked confused, and I felt I had made a gaffe, – been too personal, in fact – but still the statement remains a true one, and I shan't be really satisfied till I have enticed you away. Will you come next year to the place where the gipsies of all nations

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[11] Woolf, "Am I a Snob?," *Moments of Being*, 208.
[12] James Gindin, "A Precipice Marked V," *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979): 82.
[13] Woolf, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. III 1923-1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann Banks (London: Hogarth Press, 1994) 352. Subsequent references to her letters will quote the addressee and date in the body of the text. The bibliographic details for the other volumes are: *The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. I 1888-1912* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993); *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II 1912-1922* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980); *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1929-1931* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981); *The Sickle Side of the Moon: The*

> make an annual pilgrimage to some Madonna or other? I forget its name. But it is a place somewhere near the Basque provinces, that I have always wanted to go to, and next year I AM GOING. I think you had better come too. Look on it, if you like, as copy, – as I believe you look upon everything, human relationships included. Oh yes, you like people through the brain, rather than through the heart.[14]

From this last sentence I can sense that Sackville-West considers Woolf's intelligence as a major hindrance to the development of their relationship. Her insecurity before Woolf's "brain" is also evident in a letter from the previous year. On 8 April 1923 she writes to Woolf: "I don't suppose this letter will ever reach you. It seems quite incredible anyway that any letter should reach its destination. But I seem to remember that you have already said – or, rather, written – all that there is to be said about letters. So I won't compete." Sackville-West actually holds her own here against Woolf's extensive review of letters, which rarely become theoretical about the genre. Indeed, Sackville-West's consciousness of the problem of letters arriving at their destination is exactly how in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* Derrida analyses the genre as revealing the uncertainty constituting all communication. In particular, he criticises Jacques Lacan's nineteen-fifties seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter" (1844) with the comment: "a letter can always not arrive at its destination."[15]

Unlike Derrida, Sackville-West still believes that the full presence of both Woolf and herself can overcome the difficulties of communication by defamiliarising their surroundings. Her letter of 16 July 1924 argues that they need to excuse themselves from the familiar in order to achieve familiarity:

Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. V 1932-1935 (London: H ogarth Press, 1994); *Leave the Letters Till we're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol VI 1936-1941* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983).

[14] Sackville-West, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, eds. Louis DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985).

> I don't believe one ever knows people in their own surroundings; one only knows them away, divorced from all the little strings and cobwebs of habit. Long Barn, Knole, Richmond, and Bloomsbury. All too familiar and entrapping. Either *I* am at home, and you are strange; or *you* are at home, and I am strange; so neither is the real essential person, and confusion results. But in the Basque provinces, among a horde of zingaro [gypsies], we should be equally strange and equally real.

However, Woolf and Sackville-West never travelled together to the Basque provinces.[16] In 1928 they travelled to Burgundy, in eastern France. The trip was a failure, with Woolf's thoughts never far from her disgruntled husband at home, and Sackville-West fluent in French while Woolf rarely used her limited knowledge of the language.[17] So they never tested Sackville-West's idea of democratic space, where they could be both "equally strange and equally real."

Nevertheless, if I keep in mind the conception of literature as a process of defamiliarisation, then reading Woolf I am always travelling towards a place "equally strange and equally real." Woolf substitutes the Basque provinces with her sixth novel, *Orlando* (1928), which is commonly regarded as her love-letter to Sackville-West. This substitution is not unexpected, for Woolf felt that literature, although in essence public property, was also the core of her private life. Literature is what she is always thinking of and feeling for; it is what she is always throwing herself towards.

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[15] Derrida, "Le facteur de la vérité," *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 444.

[16] Sackville-West writes to her husband in Tehran on 17 August 1926: "I don't want to get landed in an affair which might get beyond my control before I knew where I was. Besides, Virginia is not the sort of person one thinks of in that way. There is something incongruous and almost indecent in the idea. I *have* gone to bed with her (twice), but that's all. Now you know all about it, and I hope I haven't shocked you." Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage* (London Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990) 188-189.

[17] Sackville-West writes: "One note I will add to show once more how human she was. Her French wasn't good, although she could read it easily and had walked round and round Tavistock Square, practising aloud the conversation she was learning by gramophone records. In France with me she had refused to utter a word, and the only phrase I ever heard came to my ears when it wasn't meant to. It was on the boat as we put out from Dieppe to Newhaven. Rather apprehensively she had approached a

More than any geographical destination, literature is her undiscovered country, and Woolf's fiction continually sets off towards this country.

I can see her defining the boundaries of this country in her correspondence with Jacques Raverat during 1924 after he had complained that a single word, "Neo-Pagan," had personal meanings its written context could not express.[18] The word struck his mind, he explains, creating "splashes in the outer air in every direction and under the surface waves that follow one another into dark and forgotten corners."[19] For this very reason, Woolf herself had trouble being understood by Raverat. When she tells him on 4 September 1924 that at her time of life she found private relations boring, he took her to mean all relations, including their own, when she was in fact referring to the mediocrity of sexual relationship. Looking at the context of Woolf's sentence, there is no doubt that that was exactly what she meant. But Raverat had perhaps confused the other times in the letter where she had used the word. In particular, she writes in the letter of 4 September 1924: "And I don't like my own letters. I don't like the falsity of the relationship [sic] – one has to spray an atmosphere around one; yet I *do* like yours and seem to be able to pierce through your spray, so may you through mine."

If Raverat did confuse the contexts of "relationship" with "relations" then he not only proved that he did have trouble piercing Woolf's spray, but he also proved, as Woolf argues in her next letter to him on 3 October 1924, that words do not run on

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sailor: 'Est-ce que la mer est brusque?'" Sackville-West, "Vita Sackville-West," *Recollections of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Joan Russell Noble (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 166-167.

[18] Mark Hussey explains that Neo-Pagan was a "term used by Woolf, Vanessa Bell and other Bloomsbury Group members to describe a young generation of friends, most of whom had been at Cambridge University, and which included Rupert Brooke, Katherine Cox, Rachel and Karin Costelloe, Gwen Raverat (née Darwin), Geoffrey Keynes, Gerald Shove and others." Mark Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A to Z: A Comprehensive Reference for Students, Teachers and Common Readers to Her Life, Work and Critical Reception* (New York: Facts on File, 1995) 181.

[19] Quoted in footnote of Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. III*, 136.

"a formal railway line of sentence" as the Edwardian writers, such as Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, represented them being used. By representing words like "relationship" or "Neo-Pagan" in the same way that they are used to create meaning, inspire, and confuse, a novel's sequential splashes can be concentrated into radiating ripples of meaning. The same is also true when it came to letter writing. She told Raverat that she wanted to "have done with the superfluities," by which she meant the unreal personalities, "and form words precisely on top of the waves of my mind." The problem with these "unreal personalities," which she also calls masks, is that they fix the relations between correspondents, much as Sackville-West had argued a few months earlier in reference to the "little stings and cobwebs of habit," which were "Long Barn, Knole, Richmond and Bloomsbury."

Letters, of course, are tied to this habitual communication by the inescapable fact that they must be addressed – to Long Barn, Richmond, etc. Moreover, letters are usually written in certain knowledge of their audience. That is, letters are usually written when they are owed to someone or other. Or, more accurately, letters are written because there is a debt of familiarity with a specific audience. Although the receipt of a letter is typically the reminder of the promise to maintain familiarity, in more general terms the debt itself can be understood as any change of circumstance. Travellers, for instance, are expected to write to those they leave behind, because they are constantly changing their surroundings. Other changes of circumstances include births, marriages, physical illnesses, emotions, deaths, anniversaries, weather, change of jobs, and, of course, change of home address. In correspondence Woolf herself calls the changes of circumstance "the question of things happening".[20]

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[20] Her epistolary editors, Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks, borrow the phrase for the title of the second volume of Woolf's letters.

Of course, it is no surprise that there is also a "question of things happening" to letters themselves. Woolf's essay "Modern Letters" (1930) interrogates the notorious diagnosis made by her contemporary, John Bailey, that the art of letter writing died in the twentieth century. She points out that this nostalgia for the letters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is biased towards an earlier practice of letter writing, which was more public than personal. "Sir Horace Mann or West or Gray did not," Woolf writes, "one guesses, break the seals of [Horace] Walpole's thick packets in a hurry. One can imagine they waited for a good fire, and a bottle of wine, and a group of friends and then read the witty and delightful pages aloud, in perfect confidence that nothing was going to be said that was too private for another ear – indeed the very opposite was the case – such wit, such polish, such a budget of news was too good for a single person and demanded to be shared with others."[21]

Scholars have traced the origins of the public bias (in letters) to before the second millennium, when there was no publicly acceptable method for expressing personal feelings. Not only was there no Shakespeare or Montaigne at this time, but there was not even Dante to lead the way. "[T]he Southern poets ", Paul Zumthor says,

> at the end of the eleventh century managed to overcome this inertia. They created, in a patchwork fashion, the rational frame that love needed in order finally to assert itself as a cultural value. This frame was the courtly topos and rhetoric. Thanks to them, the relation between the sexes ceased to be either a simple biological function or a spiritual disorder.[22]

Meanwhile, Judith Rice Henderson notices, there was the influence of the classical world in determining a letter writer's public face:

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[21] Woolf, "Modern Letters," *Collected Essays: Vol. II* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966) 259.
[22] Paul Zumthor, "Heloise et Abelard," *Revue des sciences humaines* 91 (1958) 316. Trans. Peggy Kamuf in her *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

> Founded in the 1080s by Alberic of Monte Cassino, the *ars dictaminis* came of age at Bologna in the first half of the twelfth century and by the end of that century had spread to France, Germany, and England. Essentially, the *ars dictaminis* applied classical rhetoric to letter-writing, which, with the demise of the classical institutions that had bred orators, had become the political skill most in demand in the Middle Ages.[23]

But, as Henderson also notes, the supremacy of the public persona over the private identity was maintained by letter handbooks stressing the importance of using the correct salutation to open and close a letter, with each form of address dependent on the public status of both the sender and the addressee. In other words, the letter handbooks demand that honour be shown where honour is due.

In the seventeenth century the proliferation of these letter handbooks cut short the freedom of expression encouraged by the Renaissance writers, such as Erasmas and Montaigne. Janet Gurkin Altman analyses the rise of this public bias in the letters of the literary writers of seventeenth century France, noting their appeal to the fatherland, the aristocracy, and royalty. The letters she looks at were written with the intention of being published in the lifetime of their writers so that they could benefit from their display of sycophancy. "By the seventeenth century," Altman writes, "public space will have been narrowly codified to exclude the domestic, personal, politically dissident, and familiar, which are henceforth relegated to the margins of discourse. Published letters – even posthumously published ones – reinforce this definition of a public space where all activity – literary, social, erotic – is conducted according to prescribed codes and under the surveillance of recognized social,

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[23] Judith Rice Henderson, "Erasmus on the Art of Letter-Writing," *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 332-333.

literary, and political leaders."[24] "The dominant mode", Altman continues, "of guaranteeing the letter books value throughout the seventeenth century had been the courtly eulogy – essentially a system of letters of recommendation, in which the value of the letters was guaranteed by the aristocratic status of the writer's correspondents and patron."[25]

Although Altman does not say as much, this sycophancy is snobbery. It is what Woolf self-mockingly discovers in herself, describing it as the desire to impress other people. "The snob", she writes in "Am I a Snob?" (1936), "is a flutter-brained, hare-brained creature so little satisfied with his or her own standing that in order to consolidate it he or she is always flourishing a title or an honour in other people's faces so that they may believe, and help him to believe what he does not really believe – that he or she is somehow a person of importance."[26] Altman dates the rise of this sycophantic patronage amongst French writers to the founding of the Académie Française in 1635. She names Guez de Balzac as a member of the Académie who succumbed to this snobbish fawning, along with Faret, Boisrobert, Conrart, Gombauld, Voiture, Maynard, Furetière, and Bussy.[27]

A patron of the arts is the concretisation of a work's addressee. And until the twentieth century, literary writers' choice of patron was limited by the times in which they lived. In her essay "The Patron and the Crocus" (1924), Woolf writes: "The Elizabethans, to speak roughly, chose the aristocracy to write for and the playhouse public. The eighteenth-century patron was a combination of coffee-house wit and Grub Street bookseller. In the nineteenth century the great writers wrote for the half-

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[24] Janet Gurkin Altman, "The Letter Book as a Literary Institution 1539-1789: Toward a Cultural History of Published Correspondence in France," *Yale French Studies* 71 (1986): 41.
[25] Altman, 41.
[26] Woolf, "Am I a Snob?", 206.
[27] Altman, 39.

crown magazines and the leisured classes."[28] The patron, then, was usually a member of society's ruling or rising class.[29]

While Guez de Balzac and other writers in seventeenth century France were attracted to the patronage of the aristocracy because, along with financial support, it privileged their letters and lives, I will also speculate that they were attracted to an idealised picture of the aristocracy, who are raised above the competition to distinguish themselves from others. This idealisation arises from the fact that the aristocratic position in society is assured, so they are not troubled by the need to assert their mastery over others. With nothing to prove, they remain in a natural state of childish innocence.

In defiance of this snobbery, the publication of familiar letters has its second renaissance in the eighteenth century France, especially after the publication of Mme de Sévigné's letters. This return to the humanism encouraged by the early examples of Erasmus and Montaigne can be followed in the rise of newspapers from the seventeenth century onwards, with newspapers themselves connected to letter writing. As Maude Hansche argues, prior to the rise of the bourgeoisie, the transmission of public affairs was typically the province of letter writing.

> The first English journalists or writers were originally the dependents of great men. They were employed to keep their masters or patrons well informed, during their absence from court, of all that transpired there. The duty grew at length into a calling. The writer had his periodical subscription list, and, instead of a single letter, wrote as many letters as he had customers.[30]

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[28] Woolf, "The Patron and the Crocus," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1925-1928*, 212.
[29] It is a similar argument to that of her father's. See, Leslie Stephen, *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century* [1903] (London: Duckworth & Co, 1920) 113-132.
[30] Maude Bingham Hansche, *The Formative Period of English Familiar Letter-writers and their Contribution to the English Essay* (Philadelphia: 1902) 58.

However, even as the rise of newspaper journalism continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, private letters still continued to carry public affairs. If Woolf feels this is no longer the case in the early twentieth century, it is because, as she points out, newspapers have now almost completely monopolised the transmission of public affairs. But, just as photography releases modern painting from the burden of realism, the development of journalism and literacy allows the modern correspondent to fulfil the letter's untapped potential for familiarity. "If the art of letter-writing", Woolf writes,

> consists in exciting the emotions, in bringing back the past, in reviving a day, a moment, nay a very second, of past time, then these obscure [twentieth century] correspondents, with their hasty haphazard ways, their gibes and flings, their irreverence and mockery, their careful totting up of days and dates, their general absorption in the moment and entire carelessness of what posterity will think of them, beat Cowper, Walpole, and Edward Fitzgerald hollow.[31]

Contrary to John Bailey, then, Woolf argues for the birth of letter writing in the twentieth century, not its death. Ironically, however, this birth results in the death of their publication. Woolf's conclusion: "The question remains, for as one reads it becomes perfectly plain that the art of letter writing has now reached a stage, thanks to the penny post and telephone, where it is not dead – that is the last word to apply to it – but so much alive as to be quite unprintable."[32] By "alive" she means that letters have too much freedom of expression.

In "The Patron and the Crocus" Woolf notes a similar freedom developing for the modern literary writer with the increase in the number and variety of patrons. If one public arena is opposed to the writer's self-expression, then there are plenty of other outlets to choose from. "There is the daily Press, the weekly Press, the monthly

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[31] Woolf, "Modern Letters," 262.
[32] Woolf, "Modern Letters," 262.

Press; the English public and the American public, the best-seller public and the worst-seller public; the high-brow public and the red-blood public; all now organised self-conscious entities capable through their various mouthpieces of making their needs known and their approval or displeasure felt. Thus the writer who has been moved by the sight of the first crocus in Kensington Gardens has, before he sets pen to paper, to choose from a crowd of competitors the particular patron who suits him best."[33]

As Woolf suggests that modern letters are unprintable when there is too much freedom of expression, so there is also reason to doubt whether literature benefits from writers having an unlimited choice of patrons. Which is to say that literature dies without writers excusing themselves from a too familiar addressee. This confirms the previous chapter's interpretation of Woolf's insecurity (about her literary gifts) as the fear that her literary freedom would be undermined if she defined herself. Thus, the over-familiarity of modernity is the death of literature. For when society allows a spade to be called a spade with impunity, there is no need for eloquence.[34]

Unfortunately, many of Woolf's readers have become more assumed familiar than the evidence allows. They do not interrogate her writing beyond their opinions on such contentious issues as feminism, madness, bisexuality, and suicide. So Woolf's oeuvre is repeatedly reduced to one aspect of her life, such as her congenital

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[33] Woolf, "The Patron and the Crocus," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1925-1928*, 213.
[34] Gary Saul Morson connects censorship to eloquence in his *Boundaries of Genre*, 102-103: "The point I would like to make here is that in Russia (and probably elsewhere) the [state] censorship has functioned not only as a literary distortion but also as a "literary fact" itself. The censor became a conventional implied reader, in much the same way that the romantic young lady and dissolute young gentleman were conventional implied readers. [...] There are, it seems, works that open publication can actually spoil."

"madness." This is especially so with her suicide, which is largely read through her letters.

Quentin Bell, Woolf's nephew, sets the precedent when his two volume biography of Woolf gives just two pages to his aunt's suicide, dismissing her actions on her final days as recalcitrant and childish. His cursory analysis of Woolf's end supposes that all three of her suicide letters were written on the day of her suicide, Friday 28 March, 1941. But this does not stop him from concluding that one of the two letters to Leonard merely dated "Tuesday" is her last word. Bell's need to impose a narrative form, no matter how cursorily, upon the letters, is similar to Woolf's recourse to the certainty of the ordinary everyday's ordered days, which her diary offers her. Where, in her diary, Woolf retreats from literature's absence of time, Bell retreats from thinking of suicide.

In time, Bell's ordering of the suicide letters was contested. The first to do so were Woolf's epistolary editors, Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks. In the publication of the three suicide letters, the "Tuesday" letter is placed first, a chronology that has since been contested by two scholars who agree with Bell's placement of the "Tuesday" letter as her last word, although unlike him they offer arguments (or sorts) for this order.

After first criticising Woolf's epistolary editors for a general lack of imagination and humour, Phyllis Rose (1986) turns to their tragic insensitivity in dating the suicide letters addressed to Leonard. "[A]t issue", she writes,

> is whether her suicide was a final act of discipline and will in the face of returning madness – a Roman death – or whether it was an Ophelia-like act of disintegration and letting go. The

> editors consider the matter in an appendix but conclude the collection wrongly, I think, with the less coherent of the two suicide notes.[35]

Rose sees the suicide as a case of either/or. That is to say, Woolf's death is reduced to the proposition that *either* she chose her destiny (Roman) *or* succumbed to it (Ophelia-like). In the opinion of Rose it is the former, with Woolf's suicide "a Roman death," and this is misrepresented when the supposedly "coherent" "Tuesday" letter is not placed last.[36] Placing the "Tuesday" letter last somehow erases the fact that the "Roman" Woolf also wrote the less coherent "Ophelia" letter.

In *Art and Affection* (1996), Panthea Reid disagrees with the sequence the editors give the letters addressed to Leonard, but although she arrives at the same order as Rose, contrary to Rose she finds it representing Woolf's ending as Ophelia-like. Reid's critical biography of Woolf concentrates on the ancient antagonism between the visual arts and the literary arts. It is an antagonism she locates in the modern world with Leonardo da Vinci, although it can be taken further back to the Mosaic proscription of graven images. Using this antagonism, Reid gives greater importance than most biographers to Woolf's relationships with the painters Vanessa Bell, and her sister's one-time lover, Roger Fry. Reid stresses two events leading to Woolf's suicide. First, researching Roger Fry's biography, Woolf discovered how her sister had ridiculed her. And second, World War Two had promoted the importance of Leonard Woolf's political publications, making her own works seem relatively worthless.

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[35] Phyllis Rose, *Writing of Women: Essays in Renaissance* (Middleston, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1986) 95.

[36] It is more accurate to call "a Roman death," Stoic. When Stoicism lost favour in the second century A.D. Rome, so did suicide. See, George Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) 45-46.

If the critiques given by Rose or Reid of the published order of the letters seem important they are also unusual. The remainder of Woolf scholars are generally unconcerned or uncritical of Nicolson and Trautmann Banks' co-editing of her letters. They give the date of March 18 for the "Tuesday" letter addressed to Leonard (this is the letter Bell, Rose, and Reid place last):

> Tuesday
>
> Dearest,
>
> I feel certain that I am going mad again: I feel we cant [sic] go through another of those terrible times. And I shant [sic] recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and cant concentrate. So I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness. You have been in every way all that anyone could be. I dont think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I cant fight it any longer, I know that I am spoiling your life, that without me you could work. And you will I know. You see I cant even write this properly. I cant read. What I want to say is that I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that – everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I cant go on spoiling your life any longer.
>
> I dont think two people could have been happier than we have been.
>
> V.
>
> [Letter#3702]

On the reverse of the "Tuesday" letter Leonard has noted that he found it on the table in the upstairs sitting room of Monks House. However, as Panthea Reid points out, in Leonard's autobiography "he remembers finding it 'on the sitting-room mantelpiece.'"[37] If it is possible to trust Leonard's testament after this inconsistency, then Tuesday 18 March is the same day that he says he became aware that she was not well. It was also the day he suspected she had failed in an attempted suicide. "She

went for a walk in the water-meadows in pouring rain and I went, as I often did to meet her. She came back across the meadows soaking wet, looking ill and shaken. She said that she had slipped and fallen into one of the dykes."[38] This evidence leads the epistolary editors suspect that the "Tuesday" letter was written just prior to this suicide attempt.

The "Sunday" letter is addressed to Vanessa Bell, and the editors date it as Sunday March 23, "mainly", they say, "because of its first sentence, 'You cant think how I loved your letter'. We know that Vanessa wrote to Virginia on Thursday 20 March [...] and this is probably Virginia's reply to it". "The letter chosen to end the collection", they write, "is the shortest of the three:"

> Dearest,
>
> I want to tell you that you have given me complete happiness. No one could have done more than you have done. Please believe that.
>
> But I know that I shall never get over this and I am wasting your life. It is this madness. Nothing anyone says can persuade me. You can work, and you will be much better without me. You can see I cant write this even, which shows I am right. All I want to say is that until this disease came on we were perfectly happy. It was all due to you. No one could have been so good as you have been, from the very first day till now. Everyone knows that.
>
> V.[39]
>
> You will find Roger's letters to the Maurons in the writing table drawer in the lodge. Will you destroy all my papers. [Letter#3710]

The editors give their reasons for leaving this letter till last:

> Leonard says that he found it on the writing-pad in Virginia's garden-hut ('lodge') soon after he found the other two letters in the house. He implies in his near-contemporary note and his

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[37] Panthea Reid, *Art and Affection: A Life of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 475.
[38] Leonard Woolf, *Autobiography: Vol. 2 1911-1969*, 433-434
[39] Nigel Nicolson and Jeanne Trautmann Banks, "Appendix A," *The Letters of Virgina Woolf: Vol. VI 1936-41*, 490.

> autobiography that he saw her writing it in her hut at about 11 a.m. on the day of her suicide, 28 March. It has the ring of a final testament ['Will you destroy all my papers'].[40]

There is no certainty in the editors' explanation for the order of the three suicide letters. In all three incidences they suggest the probability of the sequence, and the improbability of dating them otherwise. But ultimately how they order the suicide letters depends upon which letter is considered the most probable ending, and the most probable ending is considered that which is most consistent with the change of circumstances in her life. In a strange way, this is contrary to Woolf's desire. She argues in her shortest suicide letter to Leonard that her ending cannot be explained by her life, or rather, her life up to her last days does not explain her coming "madness". "Nothing anyone says can persuade me. [...] All I want to say is that until this disease came on we were perfectly happy."

In other words, she is unable or unwilling to find a connection between the *I that was happy* and the *I that is going mad*. As a consequence, she excuses the circumstances of her life, including those close to her, of any part in her "madness". When readers go against her decision, and attempt to find psychological evidence in the order of the circumstances, there is the situation where two critics, Rose and Reid, have agreed on the same ordering of the letters, but for completely opposite reasons. With little or no evidence, Rose turns her into a Roman warrior, while Reid suggests she was tormented Ophelia-like by her sister. It is obvious that this form of character analysis might suffice for a soap-opera character, but does no justice to a real person, and especially not a person with as complex a life as Woolf. Like the savage in Rousseau's parable of the origin of language, Rose and Reid would rather see Woolf as something as rashly defined as a giant than have any doubts about her life.

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[40] Nicolson and Trautmann Banks, "Appendix D," 489-490.

I undermined my own temptation to do the same in the essay chapter when I searched for the secret limit to Woolf's eloquence. As Mr. Ramsay is limited by the *R* of "Ramsay," I played with defining the symbolic *F* of "Woolf" (e.g. the *F* was sought in "Effie" and "Flower"). Later, in the diary chapter, I speculated that the *F* referred to "Fiction" or the definition of the "Feminine", which would arrive with the fall of a "Flower." In her interpretation of divergent readings of an epistolary text, the *Portuguese Letters* (1669), Peggy Kamuf's "Writing Like a Woman" (1980) offers a way of approaching the cultural origins of the need to limit and, consequently, to generically familiarise experience to one thing.[41]

Questions of cultural propriety and property are central to the seventeenth century text known as the *Portuguese Letters*. It was originally introduced as a French translation of the (Portuguese) letters of a nun named Mariana to her anonymous French lover. Later (1810) public identities were found for the two characters. "[T]the nun's name was Mariana Alcaforuda and [...], while she was a nun at Beja in Portugal, she wrote the letters to the comte de Chamilly, also called the comte de Saint-Leger."[42] However, in 1926 doubts surfaced over the authenticity of these identities when an Englishman, F. C. Green, found historical inconsistencies between the biographies of these two persons and the circumstances of the characters detailed in the letters.[43] Added to this, the original letters were never recovered, nor was the name of the French translator, although the publisher had registered them under the name of Guilleragues, a male Parisian. Certain critics took this to be the

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[41] Peggy Kamuf, "Writing Like a Woman," *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, eds. Sally McConnell-Ginet, et al (New York: Praeger, 1980). See also the second chapter of Kamuf's *Fictions of Feminine Desire*.
[42] Kamuf, 287.
[43] Kamuf, 288.

letters' author, so that a recently published English translation of the letters attributes authorship to Gabriel de Lavergue, Vicomte de Guilleragues.[44]

Kamuf is not convinced that the man Guilleragues is the author, and for her purposes the ambiguous gender of the letters' author helps readers to move beyond the impatient theoretical definitions of women's writing as simply that which is written by women. The ridiculousness of this tautology is apparent, Kamuf argues, when it is applied to a woman, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who writes of her similarities with men rather than her difference. "[W]hat if", Kamuf asks, "one were to take an anonymous work, that is, a work which, in the absence of a signature, must be read blind, as if no known subject had written it? Perhaps, only perhaps, thus blinded, one has a chance to see what has become a blind spot in our enlightened culture."[45] This text is, of course, the *Portuguese Letters*, and Kamuf's essay then goes on to highlight the blind spots of some of its twentieth century readers, which also helps me understand how the contradictory opinions of Rose and Reid arose.

The dominant reading of the letters, before Green found inconsistencies in the circumstances of the letters, was to attribute them to an authentic Portuguese woman expressing her *spontaneous* effusion of ingenuous emotions. But if the reader believes Green's suspicions are sufficient to throw doubt on the letters' authenticity, so that their author becomes Guilleragues (or some other man), then the letters are classified as a work of art written with a *deliberate* choice of effect. Thus, *deliberation* versus *spontaneity*. Leo Spitzer is one critic to argue for deliberation, saying that the five letters follow the neo-classical artistic rule of "unity of conception

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[44] Gabriel de Lavergue, Vicomte de Guilleragues, *The Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, trans. Guido Waldman (London: Harvill Press, 1996). Meanwhile, Andrew McNeillie, in editing Woolf's essays, refers to the author of the letters as "Mariana Alcofcorado (1640-1723)". See *The Essays of Virginia Woolf Vol. II*, 322.

[45] Kamuf, 286.

and execution," disproving (how, he doesn't say) any possibility that they could ha' been written by a Portuguese nun.[46]

The artistic rule Spitzer finds being applied in the letters, prescribes the dramatic unity of time, place and action. The rule reached the apex of its influence in the works of Corneille and Racine. That Guilleragues was in correspondence with Racine only confirms for Spitzer that the *Portuguese Letters* deliberately follows the rule of artistic unity. I noted in the essay chapter, the rule of unity is derived from Aristotle's analysis of tragic drama in the *Poetics*. However, as Paul Ricoeur points out in *Time and Narrative* (1983), unlike the neo-classicists, Aristotle himself does not consider in his *Poetics* whether the unity of plot is created deliberately or spontaneously.[47] But he does side with deliberation in his *Physics*, stating that "Art has its failures, where it endeavours after an end but fails to reach it."[48] There is also evidence in his *Rhetoric* that he supports the importance of deliberation when he refers to it as the rhetorical discourse appropriate to politics and ethics.[49] If ethical deliberation is manifest in his *Poetics*, it is in the choice the dramatist makes between writing tragedy or comedy; tragedy being determined by the depiction of high moral examples, whereas comedy represents base characters. Nevertheless, it is still possible that Aristotle believed that tragedy or comedy are *spontaneously* determined by circumstances beyond the dramatist's *deliberate* conception or execution.

But neo-classicists, such as Spitzer, blind themselves to these ambiguities in Aristotle. After deciding that the author must be a man, Spitzer only wishes to

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[46] Leo Spitzer, The *Lettres Portugaises*," *Essays on Seventeenth-Century French Literature*, trans. David Bellows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 256.
[47] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Vol. I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 31.
[48] Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) 199a.
[49] Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) 83-110.

discover evidence for artistic deliberation, to the point where in his analysis of the *Portuguese Letters* Spitzer applies the neo-classical "unity of conception and execution" to such extremes he argues against himself. First, to affirm its French neo-classical genealogy he describes the *Portuguese Letters* as an epistolary *drama*, rather than an epistolary *novel*. But, more comically, he goes on to dismiss another scholar, Maurice Paléologue, for re-ordering the letters into a more consistent unity. Instead, Spitzer explains the evident temporal and geographical inconsistencies in the original order of the letters as deliberately symbolic of the nun's internal (emotional) confusion: "The five letters are like five condensed acts of a drama respecting the classical unities, with little variation in the situation, without external events determining the internal movement".[50] So, as soon as the letters are attributed to a man nothing will distract a critic like Spitzer from seeing its design as the deliberate product of genius. Kamuf quotes Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) as a canonical example of this sexism: "The poet who writes creatively rather than deliberately is not the father of his poem. He is at best a midwife, or more accurately still, the womb of mother nature herself."[51]

Kamuf's essay was greeted with disapproval by a fellow American. In "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions" (1982) Nancy K. Miller responded to Kamuf's essay by criticising her method. She is opposed to interpreting works with authors of ambiguous gender, believing that the best way to counter patriarchy is not to look for blind spots such as the *Portuguese Letters*, but to continue to study texts unequivocally written by women. Miller regards the sexual pseudonymity of the great nineteenth century novelists, Currer Bell (Charlotte

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[50] Spitzer, 256.
[51] Kamuf, 284.

Brontë), George Eliot and George Sand, as veils unveiling an authentic female experience of "the anxiety of a genderized and sexualized body".[52] On the other hand, she reads the anonymity of the *Portuguese Letters* as a "male (at least masculine) desire" to reduce *his* anxiety "about destination and reception" by binding feminine desire to a masochistic trope of dying of love.[53] In other words, Miller sees the male author of the *Portuguese Letters* writing anonymously to mask his anxiety of failure. He writes as a woman, therefore, because patriarchy expects women's spontaneity to fail to reach the status of literature; that is, fail to achieve the deliberate unity desired by the neo-classicists. This is already demonstrated by Kamuf in her reading of the interpretations of the letters. The essential difference between Kamuf and Miller is that Miller argues against herself. For Miller avoids texts with ambiguous authorship, and by choosing to avoid ambiguous texts Miller reduces *her* anxiety about destination and reception. So, ironically, in her own terms, she herself is reading (and writing) as a man.

Here, then, are two types of response. The "masculine" response, such as shown by Miller and Spitzer, is to reduce anxiety by hiding behind some established limit. Miller's: *I am interested in reading women*; and Spitzer's: *I am interested in neo-classicism.*[54] The other response, as demonstrated by Kamuf, finds the "masculine" response to be the problem. The two responses have distinct ways of honouring. The former by familiarisation, the latter by defamiliarisation. These two

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[52] Nancy K. Miller, "The Text's Heroine: A Feminist Critic and Her Fictions," *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990) 116.
[53] Miller, 116. Obviously, the content of Miller's parentheses undoes her argument.
[54] Likewise, Diana Royer (1999) is self-critical that she might have "overread" Woolf's texts to find instances of eating disorders so that she can feel a special connection between herself (who had an eating disorder) and Woolf. See, Diana Royer, "Remaking Virginia: A Caution for Readers," *Virginia Woolf & Communities: Selected Papers from the Eighth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, eds. Jeanette McVicker & Laura Davis (New York: Pace University Press, 1999).

honour systems come head to head in *To the Lighthouse*, just after Mr. Bankes has asked Lily Briscoe what her painting represents:

> It was Mrs Ramsay reading to James, she said. She knew his objection – that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said. For what reason had she introduced them then? he asked. Why indeed? – except that if there in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness. Simple, obvious, commonplace, as it was, Mr Bankes was interested. Mother and child – objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty – might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence.
>
> But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form, if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute.[55]

Likewise, and much later *Three Guineas* criticises patriarchal systems of honour, especially the honour born of jealousy and competition. But in the shadow of patriarchal honour it is possible to perceive another sense of honour, or tribute, as Lily Briscoe calls it. It is this alternative honour, a literary honour, that Woolf reaches for in *Three Guineas*: "What could be of greater help to a writer than to discuss the art of writing with people who were not thinking of examinations or degrees or of what honour or profit they could make literature give them but of the art itself."[56]

This difference between the two honour systems (and their relationship to the perception of deliberation and spontaneity) can be further analysed in Derrida's response to Jacques Lacan's reading of Poe's "The Purloined Letter." For our purposes Derrida's response to Lacan can be limited to his criticism of Lacan's statement that "Truth inhabits fiction". Derrida writes that:

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[55] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 60.
[56] Woolf, *Three Guineas*, 155-156.

> Lacan never asks what distinguishes one literary fiction from another. Even if every fiction were founded in or made possible by truth, perhaps one would have to ask from what kind of fiction something like literature, here *The Purloined Letter*, derives, and what effects this might have on that very thing which appears to make it possible.[57]

That is to say, Lacan limits his discussion of "The Purloined Letter" to the trajectory of the fictional letter rather than the genre of short stories or even crime fiction. Derrida's accusation, however, rings hollow when he himself leaves this investigation to a companion piece, "Envois," included in the same volume, and instead of finding Poe there or, better still, the genre of short stories, I find him seemingly using everyone other than Poe. This is unfortunate when Poe is a seminal genre theorist.

In 1842, two years prior to the composition of "The Purloined Letter," Poe twice reviews Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, a collection of essays and short stories. In the second review, Poe gives himself room to expound on the different kinds of fiction favourable to genius. As to be expected, there is a natural favourite: "a rhymed poem, not to exceed in length what might be perused in an hour."[58] Next to a poem, however, he finds genius being best served by the "prose tale, as Mr. Hawthorne has here exemplified it".[59] Poe finds the dominant characteristic of the short story to be truth, whereas poetry's highest ideal is the beautiful, which it attains by the aid of rhythm. So the short story is best suited to the representation of the writer's thoughts.[60] In line with the neo-classical argument, Poe believes this is achieved by the short story writer deliberating on a singular intention prior to writing. The writer, Poe says, does "not fashion his thoughts to accommodate

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[57] Derrida, "Le facteur de la vérité," 427.
[58] Edgar Allan Poe, "[Reviews of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*: (May)]," *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. I*, eds. Nina Baym, et al (New York: Norton, 1989) 1455.
[59] Poe, "[Reviews of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*: (May)]," 1455.
[60] Poe, "[Reviews of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*: (May)]," 1456.

his [story's] incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents".[61]

The inevitable question, therefore, is what single effect did Poe have in mind before writing "The Purloined Letter"? Or, in other words, what truth did he destine the story to tell? If I follow Lacan's interpretation, the story's intended effect, and consequently its truth, is ridicule. Because, Lacan argues, the mystery story, with all of its genre expectations had been inaugurated only recently in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the suspense of "The Purloined Letter" is not its denouement, but the pleasurable presentiment that everyone is destined to be ridiculed.[62] But where this may be the story's truth, he implies that this was not Poe's deliberate intention. This truth "inhabits" the story without belonging to its author. It is Derrida's criticism to notice that instead the truth of the story is made to confirm what psychoanalysis has already found, as if the truth of "The Purloined Letter" is only found with psychoanalysis. That is, Lacan does not explain where the presentiment that everyone is destined to be ridiculed comes from, other than that it confirms an earlier definition that *he* proposed for the modern hero, "'whom ludicrous exploits exalt in circumstances of utter confusion.'"[63] Thus, Derrida sees Poe ridiculed by Lacan, because he takes away the truth of the story from him.

Derrida's critique of Lacan's statement that the "Truth inhabits fiction" is to ask whether Lacan's presentiment of ridicule is a similar conceit to that seen in Poe's character, Dupin, who believes he is himself above ridicule. Dupin bets the police in "The Purloined Letter" that he can recover the letter taken from the Queen by a

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[61] Poe, "[Reviews of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*: (May)]," 1455-1456.
[62] Jacques Lacan, "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) 33.
[63] Lacan, 33.

government Minister. Although the police know the letter *inhabits* the Minister's apartment, they cannot find it. Dupin enters the Minister's apartment and locates the letter hidden in the most obvious place: a letter-rack. He takes the letter at the next opportunity and replaces it with a letter bearing a note which the Minister might recognise as his handwriting. By leaving his "signature" Dupin wishes to let the Minister know who is master of the truth. So, for Derrida, Lacan is like Dupin for he finds it necessary to exhibit his mastery of the truth, a truth he feels is only accidentally (rather than deliberately) inhabiting "The Purloined Letter." Like Dupin, by deliberation Lacan finds (the meaning of) the letter, "The Purloined Letter," where he expects to find it. He honours himself by saying that he knew what it was going to say. This honour that Lacan gives himself is an honour based on ridiculing another by showing his mastery over them, as Dupin cannot resist doing to the Minister.[64] It is no honour in and of itself; it is dependent on showing the other to be in inferior control of their circumstances. This, then, is the same "masculine" honour which Woolf criticises in *Three Guineas* as based on jealousy and competition.

This "masculine" honour is dependent upon the opposition between the deliberate and the accidental (spontaneous). It was also used by Phyllis Rose to characterise Woolf's "Roman" suicide. She ridicules Woolf's epistolary editors because they supposedly do not correctly represent Woolf as *deliberately* choosing suicide. Like Spitzer's mastery in finding the so-called mastery evident in the *Portuguese Letters* which others have overlooked, Rose displays her mastery over the so-called mastery she finds in Woolf's "Tuesday" letter. In both instances they are asserting their mastery of genres. Spitzer considers himself the master of neo-

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[64] Barbara Johnson analyses the injustices of Derrida's interpretation in her "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*

classical genres, defining the "letters" as a drama, and Rose thinks she is master of Woolf's ending, reading the order of the letters as confirming her character. And yet they do not demonstrate this so-called mastery. Instead they honour their readings by ridiculing others as incompetent. Spitzer ridicules the interpretations that find a woman could have written the *Portuguese Letters*, and Rose ridicules the acumen of Woolf's epistolary editors without herself demonstrating how her ordering of the letters is more credible.

Kamuf's essay on the *Portuguese Letters* illustrates how this "masculine" form of honour has worked against female artists. Male readers are less likely to consider a text to be a work of art if they know it to be written by a woman. Woolf offers Judith Shakespeare as the arch-victim of this prejudice. *A Room of One's Own* (1929) says that Judith Shakespeare's artistic career was frustrated by the patriarchal conventions of society and, despairing of her unfulfilled destiny, killed herself.[65]

As Judith Shakespeare is the patron of feminine writing, so the Common Reader is Woolf's patron of literature. Woolf is attracted to this naive patron of literary honour, naming two collections of her essays after this aesthetic ideal. She takes the Common Reader from Samuel Johnson's judgement of literary honour (1779): "[...] I rejoice to concur with the common reader", Johnson writes of Thomas Gray's *Elegy Wrote in a Country Church-yard* (1751), "for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours."[66] Johnson considers Gray's poem to be original, and yet abounding "with images

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(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
[65] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 42-44.
[66] Quoted in Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series* (San Diego: Harvest, 1984) 1.

which find a mirrour [sic] in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo."

Harold Bloom is not so convinced that the poem should be honoured. He finds Gray repeating numerous works: "Swift, Pope's *Odyssey*, Milton's *Belial*, Lucretius, Ovid, and Petrarch are all among Gray's precursors here, for as an immensely learned poet, Gray rarely wrote without deliberately relating himself to nearly every possible ancestor."[67] What, Bloom asks, could have blinded Johnson to such a rich heritage? Bloom suggests that Johnson is diverted by the fact that Gray's poem expresses Johnson's own fear of oblivion, when it is more obvious to suggest that Johnson might be doing what he says he is doing; that is, being a Common Reader who avoids "literary prejudices" and "the dogmatism of learning," which demands that everything be positioned within a familiar hierarchy (*this* comes before *that*, or *that* is better than *this*) as Bloom demonstrates.

Blanchot offers me a way of appreciating how literature honours without prejudice or dogmatism. He understands literary honour arising from a calm relation to death. This Orphic space, as he calls it, is opposed to the Hegelian self-mastery he discerns in Mallarmé. Mallarmé's poetry, he says, "retains the decisiveness that makes of absence something active".[68] Like Woolf's attraction to the natural, instinctive state of the aristocracy, Blanchot honours the poetic event found in an animal's gaze or the sleepless petals of a flower. In contrast to what Blanchot finds in Mallarmé's decisiveness, there is no self-mastery in these events; they have honour because they blindly honour everything. "If [art] starts then, from things, it starts from all things without distinction. It does not choose, it takes its point of departure in

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[67] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 149.
[68] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 158.

the very refusal to choose."[69] Blanchot identifies Orpheus in the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, quoting his "The Poet Speaks of Praising":

> O tell me, poet, what you do. – I praise.
> But the mortal and monstrous,
> how do you endure it, welcome it? – I praise.
> But the nameless, the anonymous,
> how, poet, do you invoke it? – I praise.
> Where do you derive the right to be true
> in all disguises, beneath every mask? – I praise.
> And how does silence know you, and furor,
> as well as the star and the tempest? – Because I praise.[70]

What happens when I consider all things to be praiseworthy? They immediately lose their familiar aspect; there is no inherent hierarchical order to things; everything has equal importance. Rather than existing in a state where prejudice and dogmatism determine the worth of my reality, I am returned to the state of amazement idealised in an animal's gaze. This also explains the nostalgia most people have for their childhood, because then they were ignorant of history, or, at least the history which they felt relevant to their identity. In this sense, the childhood consciousness is similar to Sackville-West's proposal (to Woolf) that they need to escape their relevant habitats before they would be able to become familiar.

In my everyday world I occasionally recall the childhood way of approaching the world. I recall the awe I endowed a toy, or the wonder at seeing a plane, a bird, a star. It is knowing *what* is there, before knowing *how* it is there. The blue of the sky is clouded over when as an adult I can actually explain why it is not green. It is not surprising that two of Woolf's most accomplished and powerful novels – *To the*

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[69] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 152.

Lighthouse and *The Waves* – are populated with children's consciousness. Their state of rapture is literature's undiscovered country; a destination which is equal parts real and strange.

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[70] Quoted by Blanchot in *The Space of Literature*, 158-159.

CHAPTER 4

Literary Autobiography

This récit *that buries the dead and saves the saved or exceptional as immortal is not* auto-*biographical for the reason one commonly understands, that is, because the signatory tells the story of his life or the return of his past life as life and not death. Rather, it is because he tells* himself *this life and he is the narration's first, if not its only, addressee and destination – within the text.* – Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other.*[1]

It is late, but I have a confession. What culminated in the last three chapters as the appraisal of praise in Woolf's suicide letters to Leonard – and in what I interpreted as Blanchot's definition of literary honour – was perhaps set off long ago by my desire to understand Jacques Derrida's "The Law of Genre" (1980).[2] This essay by Derrida is to my thesis as Nelly Boxall is to Woolf's diary, for it has sustained my narrative until now by my refusal to question it properly. What chiefly interested me about this essay is that Derrida reads a text by Blanchot, entitled *La Folie du jour* (1973), in which the protagonist seems to be intent on escaping telling stories, specifically stories that are autobiographical. Its last line reads: "A story [*récit*]? No stories, never again."[3] I felt it necessary to approach this text, and Derrida's reading of it, by the longest of detours, taking my itinerary from what I considered the nexus of both genre and autobiography, that is, essays, diaries, and letters, for which I found exemplary texts in Virginia Woolf's oeuvre. Parenthetically, I can understand why David Fishelov (1993) finds a difficulty appreciating the relevance of "The Law of Genre," because I find it necessary to approach it from outside of genre theory, and specifically from the standpoint of autobiography.[4] At this point, having written three chapters, one for each of the genres, it remains for me to apply the insights I have collected on my excursions and see if they can unlock "The Law of Genre" and those varied

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[1] Derrida, "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," trans. Avital Ronell, *The Ear of the Other* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) 13.
[2] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronnell, *Glyph* 7 (1980): 202-232.

texts which are deemed autobiographical, especially the collection of autobiographical pieces by Woolf in *Moments of Being*.

In his review of contemporary theories of autobiography Robert Smith (1995) finds some theorists critical of other theorists for becoming autobiographical when talking about autobiography – just as I have done in the preceding paragraph and, much earlier, in the chapter on essays.[5] Smith names Louis Renza and E. S. Burt in this group who, like Mr. Ramsay, are reluctant to acknowledge or include themselves in their investigations. In effect, they ask for articles on autobiography rather than essays. As Smith understands it, Renza and Burt prefer a scientific approach, where the subject and object remain distinct. H. Porter Abbott (1988) is another to question the appropriateness of autobiography's theorists becoming autobiographical: "Were I, for example, to start introducing more and more references to myself in this essay, there would come a point at which your attention would shift from my argument to myself, from the truth or falsity of these contentions about literary attributes to my character and my motives for writing these things."[6]

Abbott, Renza and Burt share an aversion to autobiographic studies of autobiography because, to introduce oneself into an analysis of autobiography, investigators find themselves in an abyss that questions the existence of anything other than autobiography. Then again, perhaps asking if there is any writing that is not autobiographical is the correct way to question autobiography.

The correct question then becomes: can I escape autobiography as Abbott, Renza and Burt request I do. After all, it is hardly controversial to say that even

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[3] Maurice Blanchot, *The Madness of the Day*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Station Hill Press, 1981) 18

[4] Fishelov, *Metaphors of Genre*, 13.

[5] Robert Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 51.

[6] H. Porter Abbott, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories," *New Literary History* 19 (Spring 1988): 612.

the most objective piece of writing may reveal the subjective circumstances of its writer. If you knew, for instance, that I had worked for that most sterile of biographies, the White Pages, typing in names and addresses during 2001, even then you would have some understanding of my social circumstances. So while a biography is commonly understood as other than autobiography, it is easy to agree with Derrida's argument in *The Truth in Painting* (1978) that even when someone is attributing a biographical trait to another it is an autobiographical desire to appropriate the world as their own.[7] "Let us posit as an axiom", Derrida writes, "that the desire for attribution is a desire for appropriation. In matters of art as it is everywhere else. To say: this (this painting or these shoes) is due to X, comes down to saying: it is due to me, via the detour of the 'it is due to (a) me.'"[8]

He finds the "desire for appropriation" in two interpretations of Van Gogh's paintings of shoes: Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" (Lectures: 1935-36) attributes the shoes to an anonymous female peasant; Schapiro (1968) to an urban man, namely Van Gogh himself. Derrida reads both of these interpretations as the shortest detour back to the authority of each interpreter. In other words, to say of Van Gogh's painting, "He is depicting a peasant woman's shoes" becomes "*I say* they are a peasant woman's shoes." By careful phrasing I can align this with the "masculine" honour I discredited in the previous chapter as a system of mastery inspired by jealousy and competition: Heidegger and Schapiro *attribute* the shoes to someone other than themselves only to pay *tribute* to themselves. In other words, they affirm their own identity by

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[7] On the supposed opposition between biography and autobiography, see Philippe Lejeune: "two of the conditions [of autobiography] are all or nothing, and they are of course that oppose autobiography (but at the same time other types of personal literature) to biography and the personal novel: these are [the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical] and [the narrator and the principal character are identical]." Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," *On Autobiography*, trans. John Paul Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995) 4-5.

[8] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington & Ian McLeod (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) 260.

stripping Van Gogh's paintings of their literary (or, more accurately, artistic) honour.

I have encountered many examples of literary honour. One example was found in the way Woolf treats the lighthouse in *To the Lighthouse*. When asked by Roger Fry to say what she meant by the lighthouse, Woolf was reticent to attribute any meaning to it at all, and suggesting that if the lighthouse's meaning belonged to her rather than her novel, she would hate it. Another example of literary honour, and its appreciation, this time in the visual arts, so I should again refer to it as *artistic* honour, is found in Woolf's diary entry for 18 April 1918, where she comments on a Paul Cézanne painting: "There are 6 apples in the Cézanne picture. What can 6 apples *not* be? I began to wonder. Theres [sic] their relationship to each other, & their colour; & their solidity."

Fry, Heidegger, and Schapiro each desire an autobiographical certainty to art which its honour does not offer them. Blanchot even saw this desire for autobiographical certainty surfacing in literary writers, when they resort to the diary to restore their identity in the everyday world of repetitious orders. But it has been suggested that this autobiographical certainty has not always been a person's dominant relationship to reality. "Throughout most of human history," Georges Gusdorf writes (1956), "the individual does not oppose himself to all others; he does not feel himself to exist outside of others; and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community."[9] So the literary honour of Woolf's lighthouse is more akin to the attitudes of any period other than the Modern Age. This might explain the confusion that Woolf writes of in her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" (1925), where she says of Sophocles' characterisation of Electra:

> [s]he perplexes us again with the insoluble question of poetry and its nature, and why, as she speaks thus, her words put on the assurance of immortality. For they are Greek; we cannot tell how they sounded; they ignore the obvious sources of excitement; they owe nothing of their effect to any extravagances of expression, and certainly they throw no light upon the speaker's character or the writer's.[10]

In the chapter on essays we discovered a similar problem with Oedipus' answer to the Sphinx, which seemed to modern readers, as Woolf also says of Electra's speech, to "lapse from the particular to the general".[11] That is to say, I have the feeling that the Greeks avoid autobiography. In my analysis of essays I approached this historical difference between pre-Modern and the Modern Age in the temporal consciousness Benedict Anderson takes from Walter Benjamin's conception of the subject in pre-Modern Age as perceiving events through messianic time. Heidegger is another to notice the historical difference between pre-Modern and Modern *subjectivity*. In "The Age of the World Picture" (1951) he looks at the culture of ancient Greece, specifically at how the word *hypokeimenon* is used to define a person's relationship to their reality. "The word", he writes, "names that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything on to itself. This metaphysical meaning of the concept of subject has first of all no special relationship to man and none at all to the I."[12] Heidegger traces the origin of the certainty of modern autobiography (which, by the way, I just saw Derrida accusing Heidegger of doing in interpreting Van Gogh's paintings) to two factors: Plato's determination of reality as a picture in his concept of the word *eidos*, and to the subsequent Latin translation of *hypokeimenon* as *subjectum*:

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[9] Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," trans. James Olney, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 29.
[10]Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1925-1928*, 42-43
[11]Woolf, "On Not Knowing Greek," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV 1925-1928*, 43.

> A Greek man is as the one who apprehends that which is, and this is why in the age of the Greeks the world cannot become picture. Yet, on the other hand, that the beingness of whatever is, is defined for Plato as eidos is the presupposition, destined far in advance and long ruling indirectly in concealment, for the world's having to become picture.[13]

Heidegger's research is ruled indirectly by Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which points to the demise of the highest form of art (tragedy) in the rise of the idea (*eidos*), which comes with Plato's Socrates.

The rise of the idea may have sown the seeds of the decline of art, and the rise of the "masculine" form of honour, but throughout the Middle Ages thought remained only loosely connected to personal identity. This explains the modernity of the word autobiography itself. For it is taken for granted that the term "autobiography" has an ancient history, when in fact it first appears in eighteenth century Germany. Ironically, it is unknown who first coined the term, although evidence points to Johann Herder, who was involved in a seminal collection entitled "Self-biographies of Famous Men."[14] The word's English etymology is also circumstantial. "The great Oxford Dictionary", Georg Misch writes in *History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (1907), "gives as the earliest known use of the term a sentence of Robert Southey in the first volume of the *Quarterly Review* (1809). In his article Southey gives a general sketch of Portuguese literature, and in the course of it he refers to a long-forgotten book by a Portuguese painter on his own life, and describes it as a 'very amusing and unique specimen of auto-biography'".[15]

Reading *The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson* (1830), James Cox (1978) reminds us that prior to "autobiography" the common name for the genre

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[12] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," trans. William Lovit, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) 128.
[13] Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," 131. On *eidos* also see appendix 8 of "The Age of the World Picture," 143-147.
[14] Georg Misch, *History of Autobiography in Antiquity: Vol I*, trans. Georg Misch and E. W. Dickes (London: Greenwood Press, 1973) 5.

was "Memoir" or "Confession." Indeed, on its first publication after the death of Jefferson, his autobiography was first entitled *Memoir*.[16] It is only later that it has been renamed his autobiography. Marlene Kadar (1992) also points out that another term used in English prior to "autobiography" was "life-writing," which vaguely named a conglomeration of texts now called biography, autobiography, letters, and diaries.[17]

Thus it was only in the Modern Age that Plato's *eidos* came to the fore, particularly from the moment Descartes' (1641) idealism takes the *subject* of his thoughts to be his *subjectivity*.[18] He expressed this in the modern statement par excellence: *I think therefore I am.* It is the ease with which the "subject" (of a thought) equals the "subjectivity" (of personal identity) that belies its Greek origin (in the word *hypokeimenon*). Heidegger calls this Modern subjectivity a "world view." A world view promotes my belief that the world is destined to return my idea of it. Thus, Woolf (1908) describes the "world view" of Sarah Berhardt's autobiography: "All the vast unconscious forces of the world, the width of the sky and the immensity of the sea, she crinkles together in to some effective scenery for her solitary figure."[19] In contrast to this, *A Room of One's Own* recalls that Coleridge says that a great mind is androgynous, meaning, "perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that is transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided."[20] The "world view" is particularly found in writing dominated by the letter "I". "[A]fter

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[15]Misch, 5.
[16] James Cox, "Recovering Literature's Lost Ground Through Autobiography," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical & Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 123.
[17] Marlene Kadar, "Coming to Terms: Life Writing – From Genre to Critical Practice," *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. Marlene Kadar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 4. Kadar does not include essays, but we can assume that they were also covered by the term.
[18] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, trans. F. E. Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).
[19] Woolf, "The Memoirs of Sarah Bernhardt," *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol. I*, 168.
[20] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 89.

reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, shaped something like the letter 'I'. One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking I was not quite sure. Back one was always hailed to the letter 'I.'"[21] Consequently Woolf's narrator becomes bored:

> But why was I bored? Partly because of the dominance of the letter 'I', and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade. Nothing will grow there. And partly for some more obscure reason. There seemed to be some obstacle, some impediment in Mr A's mind which blocked the fountain of creative energy and shored it within narrow limits.[22]

My study has been replete with examples of the *subject*'s "world view," from Heidegger's own idea that Van Gogh's painting is a painting of a peasant woman's shoes to Phyllis Rose's idea of Woolf dying a Roman death and Spitzer's idea that the author of the *Portuguese Letters* was a man.

I have used Heidegger to ascertain that the metaphysical framework of autobiography in the Modern era can be traced back as far as Plato. After what I saw happening when Heidegger, Schapiro and Fry encountered literary honour, it comes as no surprise to discover that the autobiographical "world view" raises its head by criticising art. The tenth book of Plato's *Republic* (c. 370s B. C.) has Socrates criticising the *mimesis* of poets in favour of *simple diegesis*. When Plato refers to *mimesis* here he is usually understood to be criticising the Sophistic teaching method that was dominant in Greece at this time. The Sophists, Eric Havelock writes (1971), "it is argued, had sought to use the poets artificially as a source of instruction in all useful subjects, and had pushed these claims to absurdity." However, Havelock continues, it is not usually noticed "that Plato's argument [in *The Republic*] counts [the Sophists] not as his enemies but as his

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[21] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 90.

[philosophic] allies in the educational battle he is waging against the poets."[23] (In any case, to criticise the Sophists at this point would have been contradictory while he is himself using art to define philosophy's true relation to reality. It is the same dependence on art I found in Levinas' definition of philosophy.) Rather, Plato's criticism is reserved solely for the arts because they are "two generations away from reality."[24]

Plato's "reality" is not how a magistrate would use the term. For Plato, reality is constructed of singular *eidos*, which an omniscient being creates, such as *the real* bed or *the real* table. When carpenters manufacture a plurality of beds and tables they are one generation away from the original and ideal reality. Meanwhile the artist creates a representation of the carpenter's beds and tables, and they are consequently two generations away from reality. Plato explains that the artist's low status in relation to reality is generally overlooked because artists can in theory represent all things in the world, leading people ("children or stupid adults") to assume that artists are omniscient, when in fact they know next to nothing about how to make a table, etc.[25] Together with this practical ignorance, art also leaves the reader ethically ignorant as to whether artists agree with what their characters say or do. In short, then, Plato wants artists to avoid these two blind spots by expressing themselves using such *simple diegesis* as: *I consider this to be a good table, and here is how it is made....*

Here I might notice that Plato's argument for *simple diegesis* in the tenth book of the *Republic* is in contradiction with itself. For, rather than a *simple diegesis* of himself speaking, Plato constructs the *Republic* as a dialogue between his teacher, Socrates, and the latter's brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, amongst

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[22] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 90.
[23] Eric A. Havelock, "Plato on Poetry," *Aesthetics and Problems of Education*, ed. Ralph A. Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971) 11-12.
[24] Plato, 597e.

others. However, my perception of a contradiction is merely a misunderstanding. Earlier I find Socrates encouraging good men to use *simple diegesis* when reporting on degenerate characters, but there is no harm in "representing [mimetically] a good man who is acting reliably and in full possession of his senses".[26] And there is no doubt that Plato believes the honourable epithet of "a good man" applies equally to Socrates and to his brothers.[27] Poets, however, are not so particular about who is represented, frequently giving so-called bad characters excessive representation. This leads Plato to argue that poets should be expelled from his utopian republic. "[T]he only poems we can admit into our community are hymns to the gods and eulogies of virtuous men."[28]

Plato's disaffection for mimesis arises in part, then, because by avoiding defining exactly what or who they identify with, poets distract affections from their rightful destination: virtuous men. Virtuous men are those who mean what they say and say what they mean. A modern adherent of this Platonic sense of propriety is found in Philippe Lejeune (1973). His early definition of autobiography resembles a pre-nuptial agreement, what he calls the "autobiographical pact" between the autobiographer and the reader. The reader, he argues, has the right to understand that the character being constructed in the narrative is the same as the proper name of the author on the title page. "The autobiographical pact", he writes, "comes in very diverse forms; but all of them demonstrate their intention to honor his/her *signature*. The reader might be able to

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[25] Plato 598c.
[26] Plato, 396.
[27] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe seems to miss this proviso when he writes: "[...]Plato does not respect the law that he decrees, not only because an other, Socrates (who speaks in *his* name, in the first person) represents him and speaks in "his" name, not even simply because this entire pedagogical program, in which the question of mimesis and of fiction is debated, is itself presented as a myth, but because in reality Plato – and this is the height of the paradox – does not speak one word of the *philosophical discourse itself*." Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Echo of the Subject," *Typography: Memesis, Philosophy, Politics*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 134-135.
[28] Plato, 607a

quibble over resemblance, but never over identity."[29] Autobiographies, or at least what Lejeune calls "classical autobiographies," avoid the tragedy of mis-identification.[30]

I can sense a challenge to this Platonic idealism and to classical autobiographies when in his autobiography, *Ecce Homo* (1908), Nietzsche affirms the tragedy (fate) of his life: "The good fortune of my existence," Nietzsche writes, "its uniqueness perhaps, lies in its fatality: I am, to express it in the form of a riddle, already dead as my father, while as my mother, I am still living and becoming old."[31] In this riddle, father and mother are affirmed; past and future; death and life.

Before reconsidering the relationship between this double affirmation and our conception of literary honour, and before considering the importance of this double affirmation in Nietzsche's philosophy, let me consider its expression in Blanchot's *La Folie du jour* (translated as *The Madness of the Day*) and Derrida's reading of its relation to genre theory. At the heart of Derrida's "The Law of Genre," I come upon this paragraph:

> As first word and surely most impossible word of *La Folie du jour*, "I" presents itself as self (*moi*), me, a man. Grammatical law leaves no doubt about this subject. The first sentence, phrased in French in the masculine (["I am neither learned nor ignorant"]) says, with regard to knowledge, nothing but a double negation (neither ...nor). Thus, no glint of self-presentation. But the double negation gives passage to a double affirmation (yes, yes) that enters into alignment or alliance with itself. Forging an alliance or marriage

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[29] Philippe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact," 14. Gary Morson gives a similar definition in *The Boundaries of Genres* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981) 47.

[30] Tragedies are particularly anathema to Plato, for they cloud the mind and the public arena with emotions, which make it harder for persons to grasp reality. He does allow, however, that there might be a rational argument for including the art of mimesis into his utopia. It is well known that Aristotle took up this challenge in his *Poetics* by appreciating how tragedies re-direct the spectator's emotions.

[31] Quoted by Derrida, "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Prop[illegible] Name," 15.

> bond ("hymen") with itself, this boundless double affirmation utters a measureless, excessive, immense *yes*: both to life and to death[.][32]

If I get an inkling of Nietzsche in this double affirmation, then it is further enhanced by the quotation Derrida subsequently takes from *La Folie du jour*:

> Men would like to escape death, bizarre species that they are. And some cry out, "die, die," because they would like to escape life. "What a life! I'll kill myself, I'll surrender!" This is pitiful and strange; it is in error. But I have encountered beings who never told life to be quiet or death to go away – *usually* women, beautiful creatures. As for men, terror besieges them....[italics added][33]

For Blanchot's narrator, women usually say both yes to life *and* yes to death. The "usually" in this argument interests Derrida. It points out that those beautiful beings who live the double affirmative are not always women. And this is confirmed by the fact that the narrator aligns *himself* with those beings. The narrator's masculinity is put in question by this alliance with the "usual" femininity of the double affirmation. Moreover, because in French the word "genre" denotes both literary classifications and genders, Derrida finds this "usually" in *La Folie du jour* upsetting the so-called law of genre, particularly the genre *La Folie du jour* aligns itself with, the *récit.*[34]

"As soon as the word 'genre' is sounded," Derrida writes, "as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: 'Do,' 'Do not' says 'genre,' the figure, the voice, or the law of genre."[35] Extreme examples of the "Do" and the "Do not" are given by Heather Dubrow and André Gide, respectively. "The structuralists," Dubrow writes in *Genre*, "have suggested that

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[32] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 222.
[33] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 223.
[34] Avital Ronnell (the translator of "The Law of Genre") writes: "With the word *récit*,I have had to enter another area of linguistic turbulence, for English does not contain a term that would correspond exactly to the French, although 'story,' 'narration' and 'account' all capture the basic drift of the word. In keeping with the text, its acute sense of nuance and unfolding, I have decided to retain the *récit* until the time came to cross over to 'account.'" "The Law of Genre," 231.

one of the most illuminating ways to analyze plots is to enumerate some of the events that cannot happen in them; the same point might be made about analyzing genres."[36] By contrast, Edouard, a novelist in Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1925), says:

> I should like to strip the novel of every element that does not specifically belong to the novel. Just as photography in the past freed painting from its concern for a sort of accuracy, so the phonograph will eventually no doubt rid the novel of the kind of dialogue which is drawn from the life and which realists take so much pride in. Outward events, accidents, traumatisms, belong to the cinema. The novel should leave them to it. Even the description of the characters does not seem to me properly to belong to the *genre*. No; this does not seem to me the business of the *pure* novel (and in art, as in everything else, purity is the only thing I care about).[37]

To translate these two examples, then, the first says that I can define the genre of the novel when I ask, "What cannot happen in a novel?", whereas the second asks, "What can only happen in a novel?"

The law of genre, as is customary for laws, offers me control over my reality. It asserts mastery, as I saw Woolf doing with Nelly Boxall as her symbol of the everyday. And in copying the marks that set a text off as being such-and-such a genre, one is abiding by the law of genre that demands that I not mix genres or genders. It demands an end, or, rather, a certain border that defines where a story begins and ends. Classically, the border is drawn between nature (*physis*) and its opposites, which Derrida lists as *techne*, *nomos*, *thesis*, spirit, society, freedom, history, etc. For instance, in the last chapter I saw this opposition in the biographical interpretations of the author of the *Portuguese Letters* being expressed using gender.

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[35] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 203.
[36] Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982) 32.
[37] André Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) 70-71.

Patriarchy has *usually* defined women as spontaneous, or closer to *nature* than men, who are supposedly *technically* deliberate. The belief is that men are in control of their creations, whereas women's creations are of lesser value because they have been a product of their circumstances or their emotions. Peggy Kamuf (1980) recalls Freud's interpretation of this difference in his *Moses and Monotheism* (1939):

> The turning point from the mother to the father [the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchy] points ... to a victory of intellectuality over sensuality – that is, an advance in civilization, since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is an hypothesis, based on an inference and a promise.[38]

Freud calls this move from the sensuous to the intellectual a "momentous step". The gendered character of this step is clearer if I return once again to the case history of the Rat Man (1909), where Freud writes:

> As Lichtenberg says, 'An astronomer knows whether the moon is inhabited or not with about as much certainty as he knows who was his father, but not with so much certainty as he knows who was his mother'. A great advance was made in civilization when men decided to put their inferences upon a level with the testimony of their senses and to make the step from matriarchy to patriarchy.[39]

Actually, in practice, the "senses" become secondary to what Freud calls "inferences" (and Plato calls ideas). Freud acknowledges that this so-called "advance" in civilisation is a masculine desire to reduce anxiety about their own legitimacy and the legitimacy of their offspring. For while both male and female participation in the conception of a foetus is a case of hit or miss, it is obvious that pregnancy leaves less doubt about the identity of the child's mother. For male legitimacy, then, patriarchy demands that feminine testimony be superseded. This step is clear in cultures that demand legitimate children bear their father's surname. I could even approach this legality as the origin of the Seventh Article,

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[38] Quoted by Kamuf, "Writing Like a Woman," 289.

with men avoiding doubts about the legitimacy of their offspring by perhaps choosing to remain ignorant of their partner's comings and goings. In other words, men advance beyond the sensual by not questioning women's response to other men's "advances".

In "The Law of Genre" Derrida calls the undoing of this advance *the law* of the law of genre. Very succinctly, this law says that the "re-mark of belonging does not belong."[40] The double affirmation, for instance, that re-marks Blanchot's narrator as feminine, does not belong to him. Nor, for that matter, does it belong to women. As soon as something is brought to light – is engendered – it *belongs without belonging* because once it is *out in the open* it can in theory be copied by anyone – male or female. And, similarly, as a critique of the patronymic I mentioned in the last paragraph, which Lejeune bases his theory of autobiography, I could quote Derrida writing on proper names in *Of Grammatology* (1967): "When within *consciousness*, the name *is called* proper, it is already classified and is obliterated in *being named*. It is already no more than a *so-called* proper name."[41] So, once something is brought into the light of day, the madness of the day/law begins. Thus, Derrida plays on Blanchot's confusion to the ear (in French) between day (*jour*) and law (*jure*) in *La Folie du jour*.[42]

I have already witnessed this madness in the desire to pin down ambiguity. For several instances of this madness there are the interpretations of the *Portuguese Letters* and the readings of Woolf's suicide letters. It comes as a surprise, then, to find H. Porter Abbott underestimating the power of *mimesis*

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[39] Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis (The 'Rat Man')," 113.
[40] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 212.
[41] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 109. Similarly, see Paul de Man's criticism of Lejeune in "Autobiography as De-Facement," *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 71-72. See also, Lejeune's later self-criticism of "The Autobiographical Pact," entitled "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)," *On Autobiography*, trans. John Paul Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995).
[42] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 227.

when he tries to separate autobiography from fiction. The difference, he writes, is that a "fictional narrative ends with the last event in the story" whereas an "autobiographical narrative (autobiography) ends with the writing of the narrative itself. In effect, an autobiography is its own conclusion."[43] To demonstrate this, Abbott sees this end present everywhere in an autobiography such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1874). He writes of Douglass' autobiography: "The exactitude and lean, declarative strength of [his opening] sentences is a proclamation of the control and self-assurance which is [indicative of] the present Frederick Douglass" who has escaped slavery and been educated.[44]

I can counter Abbott's argument by facing him up against Jean Starobinski's "The Style of Autobiogaphy" (1971) where he writes: "'pseudo-memoirs' and 'pseudo-biographies' exploit the possibilities of narrating purely imaginary tales in the first person. [...] [T]he *I* of such a text cannot be distinguished from the *I* of a 'sincere' autobiograpical narrative."[45] As Starobinski points out, this is not only because a fictional autobiography can copy an authentic autobiography to a *t* (and a capital *I*), but also because autobiographies frequently adopt the narrative methods of fiction. There is a fluid exchange between fiction and autobiography, as I attempted to demonstrate with the novel and the essay in the essay chapter.

However, there is further evidence in *La Folie du jour* to suggest why Abbott's distinction between autobiography and fiction cannot be sustained. Blanchot's narrator achieves what I have found Woolf calling the essay's "triumph of style" or the androgyny of a great literary mind, which puts into

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[43] Abbott, "Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories," 598.
[44] Abbott, 602.

question Abbott's theory of autobiography by offering an narrative that avoids both coming to a conclusion or presenting a last event. While the representatives of the law only want to hear the story of his eye accident, which brought him to them, the narrator gives them his life in its entirety, until they no longer see him. "I was shrinking into them, I was held entirely in their view and when, finally, I no longer had anything but my perfect nullity present and no longer had anything to see, they, too, ceased to see me."[46] Thus, when the presence of the autobiographer is everywhere, it is nowhere. For example, he is both learned *and* ignorant. As a consequence, they lose sight of him, because he does not limit his story to *this* or *that* as, for instance, Woolf does in her diary by using Nelly Boxall as the limit of her everyday, or as Frederick Douglass does by asserting his learning (literacy) over his ignorance. To recap, the narrator of *La Folie du jour* positions himself as both *this* and *that* side of all accepted borders. For instance, the borders between masculinity and femininity, between learning and ignorance. Quite logically, he acts as if everything that he has experienced has informed his identity. As I hinted earlier, this double affirmation, this literary honour, which abides by *the law* of the law of genre, can be understood using Nietzsche's philosophy, specifically what he calls the Eternal Return.

There are innumerable ways of reading Nietzsche's Eternal Return. I will be considering interpretations from a group of Nietzsche readers which Allan Bloom has called the "Nietzscheanized left" because they soften Nietzsche's callousness.[47] In *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (1985) Alexander Nehamas

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[45] Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," trans. Seymour Chatman, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical & Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 75.
[46] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 224.
[47] Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) 217ff, quoted by John Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to the Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 50.

connects the Will to Power with the Eternal Return.[48] (Again, there are innumerable ways of understanding what Nietzsche meant by the Will to Power.) He understands Nietzsche's Will to Power as saying that everything is connected. This is to say, as structuralist linguistics discovered in the early twentieth-century, meaning cannot inhere in things themselves. Very simply, "man," for instance, acquires meaning through its *difference* from "woman," "boy," etc., and vice versa. In this sense, Nietzsche's affirmation (in *Ecce Homo*) of his life and death, mother and father, is an expression of the Will to Power. For if Nietzsche were to deny the existence of even one event in his story, he would be denying meaning to all the rest. Nehamas takes this to mean that Nietzsche says that to want any part of our lives to be different is to want everything to be different – it is to want, in other words, to be someone else.

To extend my understanding of the Eternal Return I will take Gilles Deleuze's influential reading in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962). The difference between Nehamas' reading of Nietzsche and Deleuze's can be abbreviated: Nehamas sees the Eternal Return as affirming that *nothing could be different* in one's life, whereas Deleuze sees the Eternal Return affirming *everything as difference*. This is quite distinct from the yes of the Eternal Return Nehamas reads as affirming everything in one's life. Yet Nehamas does not say yes to everything in Nietzsche. He particularly avoids the fact that Nietzsche, for instance, said no to the human, all too human, attributes of bad conscience and *ressentiment*. ("Bad conscience" is when I accuse myself of all my inadequacies: "I am guilty." "*Ressentiment*" is where I accuse others of my predicament: "They are guilty.") "[T]he yes", Deleuze writes, "which does not know how to say no (the yes of the ass) is a caricature of affirmation. This is precisely because it says yes to

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[48] Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

everything which is no, because it puts up with nihilism it continues to serve the power of denying".[49] How, then, does the Eternal Return say no?

This seems a strange question when I have spent the last two paragraphs confirming that the Eternal Return is the epitome of affirmation. In effect, I am now asking how yes says no. While I have encountered a practical answer to this riddle in Woolf's feminism, particularly in our analysis of *Three Guineas* when she says yes to patriarchy's jealousy and competition in order for women to advance to a stage where they have the freedom to say no to those same methods of advancement, I can now approach the riddle anew by considering the no of *La Folie du jour* with which I opened this chapter: "A story [*récit*]? No stories, never again." At face value this seems to be a simple negation, or what Abbott might refer to as a last event. The narrator says no to telling his story to the representatives of the law. Furthermore, I have already noted that this no is the last line of the story, so it sounds like a resolution. And yet I am looking at this line out of context. Derrida steps back to the preceding paragraph where Blanchot's narrator recounts that the doctors had asked him to tell them exactly what happened: "A story? I began: I am neither learned nor ignorant."[50] This line, then, has the same question as the last line in the text, "A story?", but it also repeats the so-called opening line of *La Folie du jour*: "I am neither learned nor ignorant." What does this repetition signify? For Derrida it dissolves all the customary borders which constitute a traditional text. "The 'account' [*recit*]", he writes, "which he claims is beginning at the end, and by requisition, is none other than the one that has begun from the beginning of *La Folie du jour* and in which, therefore, he gets around to saying that he begins, etc."[51] The borders of the story

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[49] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) 185.
[50] Blanchot, quoted by Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 216.
[51] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 217.

dissolve, not because there are none, but because the story is continually beginning. "For if 'I' or 'he' [in *La Folie du jour*] continued to tell what he has told, he would end up endlessly returning to this point and beginning again to begin, that is to say, to begin with an end that precedes the beginning."[52]

In Derrida's terms Blanchot's text deconstructs the possibility of the narrative demanded by the law of genre.[53] This is why I began this chapter, indeed this thesis; feeling that Blanchot's unnamed narrator is trying to escape autobiography. In fact, he is not trying to escape autobiography to achieve mastery of his material, such as Abbott, Renza and Burt attempt, but rather he is trying to say no to a classical autobiography by saying yes to the life of writing. The genre expectation of all classical autobiographies is that I will get to know the writer. I will get to know the writer's place in the world, their relationship to me. I want them to explain how they work, just as Plato wants all writers to do this with *simple diegesis*. But, rather than a *simple diegesis*, which a proponent of classical autobiographies such as Lejeune would see being promised by the proper name of the writer, *La Folie du jour*'s narrative instead folds in on itself to affirm its own life, a life that lives beyond the life of the writer, or any other limit. Likewise, in *The Space of Literature*, Blanchot talks of how Kafka was enchanted by the step into literature being achieved by substituting "he" (or "she") wherever "I" occurred.[54] Elsewhere ("The Narrative Voice (The 'he', the neutral)"), he goes on to talk of the writer's narrative voice in language redolent of the Eternal Return. He speaks of narrative as a circle constituted by its relationship to life. "[N]arrative would be a circle neutralizing life, which does not mean without any

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[52] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 217.
[53] In fact deconstruction is Derrida's own form of double affirmation. The no of deconstruction is created by the texts he reads, not by himself. He affirms the logic of a text's argument until the end, until, that is, it reveals that its arguments are not as definitive or pure as it itself demands, until, that is, it says no to its own arguments.
[54] Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 27.

relation to it, but that its relation to life would be neutral. [...] Like a speech that does not illuminate and does not obscure."[55] This is also Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, which I have used as an epigraph for this chapter. He sees Nietzsche's autobiography rejecting classical autobiographies by turning in on itself.

Coincidentally, at this point, like *La Folie du jour*, my narrative is returning to itself; that is, I am repeating the work I have done on Woolf's signature in the essay chapter:

> As Woolf symbolises Mr. Ramsay's second version of the everyday with the unperceived and unattainable letter *R*. can I do the same with Virginia Woolf? In an autobiographical piece called "A Sketch of the Past" she contrasts the *ordinary* everyday with the *inspired* everyday. Or, in her terms, the *moments of non-being* and the *moments of being*.[56] The *moments of non-being* make up a larger portion of our lives; they are, she says, "the cotton wool" of daily life. On the other hand, a *moment of being* is rarer: "I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower."[57] It is in the instantaneous connection of all the parts of the flower, rather than an exclusively logical connection, that the *moment of being* is constituted. In other words, it becomes in Woolf's terms a work of art. "From this", she says:
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> > I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; *we are the words* [emphasis added]; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock. [58]

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[55] Blanchot, "The Narrative Voice (The 'he', the neutral)," *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993) 379-380.
[56] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 78.
[57] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 71.
[58] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72.

> Taking Woolf at her word when she says, "we are the words," I see the pattern behind the cotton *wool* of everyday life symbolised by the letter *f*. *F* hides in front of and behind the flora and fauna of *flower* and *Woolf*.

Here I can notice Woolf's *moment of being*, her philosophy of art, saying no to the ordinary everyday by saying yes to all of the everyday. It says no to a limited connection of elements of reality, such as I find in a classical autobiography's dependence on the "I," by saying yes to the life of her writing, which exists beyond her death: "Only after the writer is dead", Woolf writes in "Craftmanship" (1937), "do his words *to some extent* become disinfected, purified of the accidents of the living body."[59] The "accidents of the living body" are the everyday accidents, which "suggest the writer; his character, his appearance, his life, his family, his house - even the cat on the hearthrug. Why words do this, how they do it, how to prevent them from doing it nobody knows. They do it without the writer's will; often against his will."[60] I have highlighted "to some extent" in Woolf's sentence, for it emphasises that it is still unlikely or unprovable that I can possess Woolf's writing. The double possessive in this last sentence – "*possess Woolf's* writing" – points towards the impossibility of ownership. How can I own something for someone else like, for example, Schapiro or Heidegger attempt do for Van Gogh? The mark of ownership is a mark of belonging that could never belong to me *or* to Woolf. Even those who live after her death cannot claim (to finish with) her words. The only end I can offer at this moment is endlessness. For to end I must possess her words by returning their meaning to her once she is dead. And yet this is the impossible task that a classical autobiography sets itself. Under the distant tutelage of Plato's idealism, which can be aligned with Freud's step of patriarchy, a classical autobiography promises an end.

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[59] Woolf, "Craftmanship," *The Death of the Moth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) 172.
[60] Woolf, "Craftmanship," 173.

Woolf's feminism, no less than her literature, is founded on noticing the inappropriateness of this step. For it is in fact a "step *not* beyond," to use a phrase from Blanchot (1973).[61] I first saw the "step *not* beyond" in James Ramsay's thoughts upon finally reaching the lighthouse: "So that was the lighthouse was it? No, the other [seen from the shore] was also the lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing."[62] While it is the goal of literature to express this "step *not* beyond," it cannot be admitted as such. When Fry asks Woolf to tell him what the lighthouse means, she pulls the *wool* over his eyes by saying that it wasn't intended simply to mean one thing. She is pulling the wool over his eyes for, *paradoxically*, the lighthouse *does* have an overriding meaning in Woolf's novel, and that is the denial that it or anything else can mean simply one thing, one goal.

As I saw with Poe's "The Purloined Letter," the more a text applies this literary honour, the more tempting it then becomes for others to make it their own by claiming mastery over it. This is a fate familiar to the texts of "Virginia Woolf." Her proper name has been taken as signing all manner of argument: "Like the Bible," Rachel Bowlby writes, "Woolf's texts provide ample support for almost any position: she is taken to hold the key to the meaning of life and the proper nature of woman; she is the object of both veneration and vehement hatred; and like the Bible too, she is sometimes merely treated as 'literature.'"[63]

I cannot be certain, but let me assume that Bowlby's use of quotation marks around the word literature is to designate the status others have given literature, not herself. As I have seen, the low status of literature dates back at least as far as Plato's expulsion of the poets from his utopian republic. It is a status based on its supposed lack of seriousness, its irresponsibility, in short, its

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[61] Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. [of *Le pas au-dela* (1973)] Lycette Nelson (Albany: SUNY, 1992).
[62] Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 201.

supposed distance from reality. Bowlby presumes that I will understand this use of the word literature. She expects her readers to know her language. In another encounter with a Blanchot text, Derrida finds this presumption to be a condition of autobiography. In *Demeure* (1998) he calls it the "implications of the 'we'".[64] When *I* give testimony, *I* am not only bearing witness for myself, *I* am also testifying that there is another who can understand *me* at least to some degree. In other words, the letter ("I") always has a destination (addressee). This thesis, for instance, has called upon the name of "Virginia Woolf," and although there is perhaps no possibility of a definitive identity being assigned to that proper name (like the lighthouse, she is both *this* and *that*), we nevertheless understand each other, we agree in general what or who that name refers to. It is easy, then, to recognise the "implications of the 'we'" as describing the work of classical autobiographies, and also the work of genres; for genres are based on a mutual understanding. For example, I know when writers are using the novel rather than a sonnet to tell a story.

Just as the law of genre has the *law* of the law of genre for its shadow, so the "implications of the 'we'" has its own shadow, for Derrida detects that the very possibility of a testimony is founded upon the impossibility of fully understanding the testimony of another. This is in accord with what I originally found in her diary, where in the interests of her literary freedom Woolf excuses herself from defining herself as either this or that. Likewise, for there to be testimony, in the broadest autobiographical sense of the term, the autobiographer's identity must ultimately remain secret. Like the lighthouse, which James Ramsay realises he will never be able to reduce to just one

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[63] Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations: and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) 13.
[64] Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 35.

lighthouse, a testimony must not be either *this* or *that*, but be both *this* and *that*. That is to say, it must be paradoxically both comprehensible and incomprehensible at the same time. For autobiographies to remain the testimony of their lives, writers must avoid calling a spade a spade, as Plato would have them do with *simple diegesis*. Derrida writes:

> I can only testify, in the strict sense of the word, from the instant when no one can, in my place, testify to what I do. What I testify to is, at that very instant, my secret; it remains reserved for me. *I must be able to keep secret precisely what I testify to*; it is the condition of testimony in a strict sense.[65]

To take just one example of this incomprehension, there is the incomprehension of the sentence from *La Folie du jour* I have quoted many times already: "I am neither learned nor ignorant." As Derrida remarked, there is no self-representation in this statement. I am left with nothing to grasp the narrator's character. Or, rather, this statement has too much self-representation. It is as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy say of dialogue (and the fragment): it "does not properly constitute a genre."[66] "That the dialogue is not a genre", they continue, "means first of all [...] not that the dialogue is somehow inadequate with respect to genre, but rather that it is by definition capable of gathering all genres within itself. Dialogue is the 'non-genre' or the 'genre' of the mixture of genres."[67]

In *Demeure*, Derrida reads another similarly slippery text by Blanchot, entitled *L'instant de ma mort*, which has been translated as *The Instant of My Death* (1994). What is ultimately indecipherable in this story is the so-called death advertised in the title, which the protagonist experiences without in fact dying. It is a death without death. This Dostoevskian experience is even perhaps the same

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[65] Derrida, *Demeure*, 30. Italics added.
[66] Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 85.
[67] Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 85.

one alluded to in *La Folie du jour*: "Shortly afterwards, the madness of the world broke out. I was made to stand against the wall like many others. Why? For no reason. The guns did not go off. I said to myself, God, what are you doing? At that point I stopped being insane. The world hesitated then regained its equilibrium."[68]

The strange logic of death without death, which Derrida abbreviates as "X without X," is becoming familiar to me. I have encountered it in one form or another in each chapter I have devoted to the genres of essay, diary, and letters. And only recently it returned again with Derrida's *law* of the law of genre offering a reason for this logic as the mark that re-marks a text as *belonging* (to a genre) *without belonging*. Even more recently, I have re-defined the lighthouse as the secret without secret.

I have been led to suspect that literary fiction is connected, even perhaps dependent on, the problems of genre and autobiography. The distance that Plato dislikes between poets and the world of their poems is similar, if not the same, as that which must exist between autobiographers and their autobiographies. This distance is simply represented in the relationship between "I" and "We." Gail Griffin brilliantly analyses this distance in "Braving the Mirror: Virginia Woolf as Autobiographer" (1981).[69] The knot she untangles is how Woolf could start "A Sketch of the Past" by complaining of autobiographers who do not introduce themselves before they detail what happened to them, and yet she herself seemingly goes on to do the same thing. Woolf writes: "Here I come to one of the memoir writer's difficulties – one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is difficult to describe any human being. So they say: 'This is what

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[68] Blanchot, *The Madness of the Day*, 6

[69] Gail Griffin, "Braving the Mirror: Virginia Woolf as Autobiographer," *Biography* 4 (1981): 108-118.

happened,' but they do not say what the person was like to whom it happened."[70] As Griffin notes, this is the same complaint she levelled at Arnold Bennett and the Edwardian novelists twenty years earlier. It is also how Kristin Ross explains the first version of the everyday she finds in Blanchot. The second version of the everyday is inaugurated by the attempt to describe who *I* am. Although Woolf begins to describe who she is, this is short-lived. Instead, Griffin finds her, "floating behind accounts of impressions and of the people who figured largely in her life."[71]

Griffin locates this tendency in the Victorian response to the Romantics. "To the Victorian mind," Griffin writes, "the untrammeled, assertive Romantic ego was both arrogant and dangerous. [...] The literature of the Victorian foresees the evolution of Romantic 'uniqueness' into modern alienation and responds by molding and tempering individuality through integration in the larger social organism."[72] Griffin gives John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill as examples of Victorian autobiographers who acknowledge the debt their identity owes to "external figures, forces, and circumstances."[73] She connects this with Woolf's *moments of being* where, for instance, the flower is defined by the soil it is embedded in, the light that shines on it, etc. "Consider", Woolf writes in "A Sketch of the Past," "what immense forces society brings to play upon each of us, how that society changes from decade to decade; and also from class to class; well, if we cannot analyse these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place, but cannot describe the stream."[74] This leads Griffin to connect the methodology of "A Sketch of the Past" with the

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[70] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 65.
[71] Griffin, 109.
[72] Griffin, 110.
[73] Griffin, 110.

narrative of *The Waves*. "Like [the character of] Bernard [in *The Waves*]," Griffin writes, "Woolf must tell the group story to tell her own. Accordingly, the voice in much of the memoirs is very like the voice in *The Waves*, not an 'I' but a 'we' that includes the four offspring of Julian Jackson's second marriage [to Leslie Stephen]."[75] In a letter written on 27 October 1931, Woolf said of *The Waves*: "The six characters were supposed to be one. I'm getting old myself – I shall be fifty next year; and I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect myself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia in whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feelings."[76] Her signature or *I* emerges by submerging into the stream of the *we* – the people who have participated in her life.

The difference between the autobiographical method in "A Sketch of the Past" and generic autobiography is slight but important. Where I found Heidegger, for instance, writing the autobiography of Van Gogh's shoes with his own autobiographical concerns, notably his nostalgia for the pre-Modern way of life by interpreting Van Gogh depicting the shoes as belonging to a peasant woman (just as Woolf has a nostalgia for the Victorian cook), in contrast, in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf is conscious of how her writing (biography) of others is itself an autobiography.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger considers artistic genius clarifying the consciousness of its age. But he dismisses the suggestion that the origin of the artwork is autobiographical.[77] Instead of autobiography, Heidegger approaches the artwork using art and equipmentality. As I have seen, approaching art with equipment is itself an old piece of equipment. Heidegger, however,

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[74] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 80.
[75] Griffin, 111.
[76] Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. IV*.

handles the equipment in his own particular way. Where Plato believes art conceals the equipmentality of equipment, Heidegger sees the artwork unconcealing equipmentality. The equipmentality of tools is hidden from me until they breakdown, or they are misplaced, like Lily Briscoe's inverted table in a tree. And, basically, this is what art does to equipment. Art makes me aware of how I rely on equipment, and the reliability of equipment.

In "The Law of Genre," just as in *Demeure*, Derrida expands the relationship between ourselves and the representation of our experiences beyond the generic, whether that be gender, race, class, nationality, contemporaneousness, etc. Instead, it is a question of the relationship between identity and textutality.[78] For Derrida there is a question of ownership when someone writes (or implies) that "This is my story." Derrida approaches this problem through the textual death of the author as a *death without death*. He finds this in Blanchot's *The Instant of My Death* when its narrator says of his missing manuscript: "All that remains is the feeling of lightness that is death itself or, to put it more precisely, the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance."[79] Blanchot's narrator realises that his death itself will, by definition, never be experienced by his living self. But, nevertheless, this realisation becomes the proxy experience of death. Meaning, death's experience can only ever be the realisation that death is never experienced. Likewise, James Ramsay realises that the lighthouse can only be experienced through the realisation that it is never experienced in its totality.

So the key to understanding the *law* of the law of genres, which can be expressed as "X without X," is that any given system is missing an authoritative end. Meaning, any limit (that is, law) imposed upon a narrative is a like a

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[77] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1994) 143.
[78] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 226.
[79] Derrida, *Demeure*, 101.

cuckoo's egg, not rightly belonging to that narrative. For if a trait can be comprehended, it is immediately, in theory, a law because it can be transferred to another narrative, and consequently it can *belong* to that narrative as well. When this law of comprehension, this law of genre, this "implication of the 'we,'" is avoided, as Woolf does with the literary honour of the lighthouse, then the concept of temporal completion is undermined, upsetting the experience of time itself. It is an end without end. Thus, the absence of time is experienced when autobiographers avoid imposing an external limit, such as "Nelly Boxall" offered for Woolf's diary, and instead appreciate their experience of experience, or even, their experience without experience, as it is understood by both James Ramsay and Blanchot's narrator of *The Instant of My Death*.[80]

Woolf praised Thomas De Quincey as the master of this form of autobiography. "His enemy," she writes in "'Impassioned Prose'" (1926), "the hard fact, became cloud-like and supple under his hands. He has no obligation to recite 'the old hackneyed roll-call, chronologically arranged, of inevitable facts in a man's life.' It was his object to record impressions, to render states of mind without particularising the features of the precise person who had experienced them."[81] Paradoxically, when writers do not claim the particular as their own (as Woolf and James Ramsay do not do with the lighthouse) it becomes theirs in another way. Like the rapture of the idealised childish consciousness I described in the previous chapter, Woolf and James Ramsay belong to the lighthouse as

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[80] Karl Weintraub calls it the difference between memoir and autobiography. And when the autobiographical impulse to represent an inner experience is taken to its extreme it becomes what both Weintraub and Michel Beaujour call a "literary self-portrait." Weintraub writes: "When the urge predominates to uncover the nature, the very structure of the personality, the author is easily driven toward a form of self-portraiture rather than autobiography." Karl Weintraub, "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (June 1975): 823, 828. See Beaujour's, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, trans. Yara Milos (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

[81] Woolf, "'Impassioned Prose,'" *The Essays of Virginia Woolf: Vol IV 1925-1928*, 365.

much as it belongs to them. They are unable to escape their experiences because there is an absence of a one-way ownership.

The one-way ownership of experiences is exactly the failure Woolf finds in autobiographies, which Griffin notes she corrected by using the biography of others as her autobiography. Without the Modern subject's one-way ownership of its experiences there is an absence of time, which Shari Benstock (1988) notices in Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past." "Woolf's memories," she writes in "Authorizing the Autobiographical," "do not announce their sequence; their timing always contradicts the logical sequence of conscious thought and action, escaping the dating of calendars and clocks."[82] Benstock analyses several examples of this literary time in "A Sketch of the Past." The most telling example is when Woolf recalls her first memory. She says her first memory is of sitting on her mother's lap during a train or bus ride. This memory then leads her to another early memory, "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". But rather than choose which memory came first (the memory of sitting on her mother's lap *or* hearing the waves break), she says that the second memory of the waves "also seems to be my first memory."[83] Thus, Benstock argues that the classical autobiography becomes suspect. "Every exercise in memory recall that Woolf tries in these autobiographical efforts demonstrates the futility and failure of life writing. [T]he 'two strong memories' that initiate 'A Sketch of the Past,' Woolf comments, 'I am hardly aware of myself, but only of the sensation. I am only the container of the feeling of ecstasy, of the feeling of rapture.'"[84]

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[82] Shari Benstock, "Authorizing the Autobiographical," *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 13.
[83] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 64.
[84] Benstock, 27.

Much earlier – in the essay chapter – I recognised the absence of time as being described by two writers as a *meanwhile*. Emmanuel Levinas speaks of the *meanwhile* of the artistic image, and Benedict Anderson writes of both the literary and social *meanwhile* which arrives with the large city and nation-state during the Modern Age. With my definition of non-classical (or generic) autobiography in mind, it comes as no surprise to discover James Olney (1980), while commenting on the rise of theoretical writings on autobiography, imagining a *meanwhile* between theoreticians of autobiography themselves, particularly between himself and Georges Gusdorf:

> It is my assumption that many critics of the autobiographical mode have had experiences very much like my own – that is to say, they worked out ideas about autobiography and then found themselves both anticipated and confirmed in Gusdorf (or Misch or Dilthey), but there is one more later detail in this complex of anticipation, confirmation, and interrelationship that I would like to mention. In 1975 Gusdorf published a second, long essay [...] in which not only the ideas and the general argument but even specific details, examples, and turns of phrase are identical to those that I deployed in *Metaphors of Self*, but I know for a certainty that Professor Gusdorf was entirely unaware of my book in 1975 – as unaware as I was of his essay in 1969.[85]

This heightened sense of *meanwhile* is perhaps indicative of the beginning of the end of the Modern Age, a transition which is currently referred to as globalisation. Having spent the last four hundred years systematically cataloguing the world, Modern humanity is beginning to run out of borders to cross, nature to conquer. Perhaps this is what Hegel sensed in the nineteenth century which he called the end of history. But just when humanity thought things were going to get simpler, it comes face to face with the problem of defining itself. As Heidegger alerted me earlier, the problem is that the bridge connecting the Modern subject

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[85] James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 10-11.

and the catalogued world was built on uncertain ground. The Modern subject increasingly presumes that there is a one-way street between itself and the ownership of the world. Examples of this presumption are in the methodology of Abbott, Renza and Burt's approach to analysing autobiography at the opening of this chapter. And in the letters chapter 1 defined the "masculine" honour of Lacan, Spitzer, *et al*, as finding all of their experiences confirming their identity. But the relationship of the self to its world is in fact a two-way street. This two-way street can in theory go on forever connecting all things. This is what frightened Plato about art. He curtailed the enormity of its *meanwhile* by setting a limit with the help of generic examples or, rather, ideals, such as *the* table. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf subverts this law of genre by presenting the conflicting ideals tables are used for, from the philosopher's table to the kitchen table, thus giving the perimeter of her novel the elasticity of an essay, and highlighting the perspectival nature of existence. This use (along with the other modernist writers) of the stream of consciousness allowed her to reach the apotheosis of the *meanwhile*.

The *meanwhile* that is shared by autobiography and literary fiction can be understood as an opening. When I begin a piece of literature I sense an immense opening before me. It is created by the feeling that literature can write about anything whatsoever, and possibly also connect everything together in untold ways. Great literature can sustain this freedom of expression throughout its narrative. But all writing cannot do without a limit. That is, it needs generic laws. In the case of this thesis, I set myself a limit by saying I was writing about autobiography, literature and genre. In writing that is the antithesis of literature, such as scientific writing, the closure of this opening is the goal from the beginning. Autobiography, however, like literature, is dependent on remaining sceptical about such goals. First of all, this is because to be writing an

autobiography, one's life story is always open-ended, for one is still alive. Also, autobiographers are perhaps reluctant to pin themselves down. Even if I have been a domestic servant all my life, I might not consider this activity to reveal my true personality. But most of all, it is open because of the uncertainty of the two-way street of one's experience.

In the essay chapter, two tables were raised for discussion, Berkeley's table and Marx's table. Berkeley has it that his table's identity is informed by him experiencing it, whereas Marx finds the table's experience informing his identity. In both cases the table is a one-way street. I have come to the conclusion that it is not a case of choosing which one of these arguments is correct, rather that *both* of these arguments are correct. I "write" my experiences, and my experiences "write" me. There is a dialogue between myself and the world, not a monologue.[86]

As a peroration to this chapter I will illustrate how autobiography and literary fiction are travelling companions along this two-way street by comparing two passages, one from *The Waves*, the other from Woolf's autobiography "A Sketch of the Past". The first is attributed to the character Rhoda, the second to Virginia Woolf herself. My interpretation of these puddles will not be the final word on *what* they mean or even *how* they mean something at all.

> I came to a puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather. I was wafted down tunnels. Then very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into my body over the grey, cadaverous space of the puddle.[87]

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[86] Makiko Minow-Pinkney uses the theories of Julia Kristeva to illustrate how Woolf's feminism and modernism are united in undermining patriarchal subjectivity. She concludes with: "Does the 'call of the mother', then, only generate 'voices', 'madness', 'hallucinations', as Kristeva claims? If this is indeed so in the case of our present mode of subjectivity, then it is all the more urgent to pursue the project of forging a new kind of subjectivity for which the call of the mother and the call of the paternal order would *not* mean its foundering." See, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987) 196.

[87] Woolf, *The Waves*, 47.

> There was the moment of the puddle in the path; when for no reason I could discover, everything suddenly became unreal; I was suspended; I could not step across the puddle; I tried to touch something...the whole world became unreal.[88]

There are many ways to approach these two passages, but an obvious way to begin is with a thematic comparison. It is easy enough to recognise that both passages involve a person stopped in their tracks by a puddle. I will assume that both Rhoda and Virginia could physically cross the puddle without any trouble. With this assumption I would need to ask why the encounter with a puddle leads to the character of Rhoda in *The Waves* losing her identity, and the young Virginia Woolf to find the whole world unreal. It would be a mistake to immediately assume that both puddles signify something other than themselves. That is to say, I cannot dismiss the possibility that each puddle before Rhoda and Virginia does in fact signify a puddle for them.

How is a puddle significant as a puddle? It is helpful to remember that the puddle from "A Sketch of the Past" is given as an example of a *moment of being*. As I have learnt from Woolf, everything in her immediate experience becomes connected during the shock of her *moments of being*, and this was also how I defined literary honour. Literary honour does not impose a hierarchy of one thing over another, as happens in the everyday understanding of honouring something or someone as better than this thing or better than that person. The literary, like a *moment of being*, honours everything on the same level, for the simple reason that everything *is* connected.

This literariness compels the common-place statement by English teachers to their students that nothing in a literary work is without significance, everything contributes to the experience of the work. Is this also how Rhonda and Virginia approach their puddles? If so, why would it lead Rhoda and Virginia to the loss of

[88] Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 78.

identity, or to find the world unreal? To understand what Woolf means by "unreal" I could return to the work I have done in the essay chapter on Woolf's discussion of the unreality of Edwardian writers privileging objects over character or, alternatively, I could return to the discussion of the diary chapter that discerned that *reality* was merely the accepted and promised order of things. To take the latter: the diarist discerned the *unreal* as literature's breakdown of the promised order, such as Monday promising that Tuesday will follow it. Lejeune defines classic autobiography with this promise. He finds autobiography to be saying, *here I am signing my name as a promise that what follows refers to it.* This is like Plato putting the ideal table as the promised *reality* referred to by the carpenters' tables, when in fact the carpenters' tables are (also) the *promise* of the ideal table. Likewise, Jean-Marie Schaeffer criticises genre classification when it defines texts with: *A* is a novel. This order, she argues, "presupposes that we can know what the text is with the help of the notion 'novel,' whereas in the vast majority of cases, and in spite of all we can say on the subject of the horizon of expectation, it is the opposite that takes place. We know more about the text than we know about the genre, even if we are theorists of the genre. In fact our knowledge goes from texts to genres much more than from genres to text."[89]

It might be in this double promise, therefore, that the world becomes *unreal* for Virginia when she encounters the puddle. She realises that meaning is a two-way street. The puddle is informed by her perception of it, and her perception is informed by the puddle. The lighthouse is not merely the lighthouse seen from close up but also from the shore; and the woman who is obliged by the Seventh Article to ask a question of her male dinner companions must also be questioned if one is to attempt to answer her properly. Unlike Mr. Ramsay's inertia before

[89] Jean-Marie Schaeffer, "Literary Genres and Textual Genericity," trans. Alice Otis, *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989) 176.

one element of reality ("stuck at Q"), or Woolf's political inertia before the "servant question," the young Virginia is stuck before her puddle because she finds it to be a condensation of every element of reality. Her *unreal* stems from the fact that this is not the accepted generic way of viewing the world, rather it is a stroke of genius, where she is both questioned by and questioning her reality.

I will conclude by saying that when Woolf writes her fiction she is offering me questions: "Here is a lighthouse, how do I experience it? How do men or women or children experience it, or give it meaning by experiencing it?" That is to say, she is asking how I use different genres of context to give the lighthouse meaning. To honour this question properly I should reply with a question about how the relationships between different genres give meaning to the same object in the world and to each other, like the genres of the distant gaze and the close gaze for James. When I compare genres in this way I am practicing the literary, I am even perhaps engaged in writing a literary autobiography.

CONCLUSION

I will conclude by saying that the literary has perhaps always been in partnership with the generic. The literary has relied on the generic to define itself as other, and the generic has relied on the literary to extend its boundaries. The literary seeks new experiences by being open to the experience of all experiences, whereas the generic wants to contain this flood by defining the order and the way I experience things.

My definition of the generic, then, is very simple; it might even be a generic definition of genres. It says that the generic is when I stop questioning my reality. In order to stop, or to go forward with something else, I say, "Yes, this is my understanding of the lighthouse before me," or in an effort to define literature I say, "I believe this theory of genre to be true." This is not unusual; especially not in genre theory. For example, in *The Architext*, Gérard Genette finds most modern genre theorists have relied on a generic reading of Aristotle's *Poetics* and Plato's *Republic*, because it is has been falsely concluded that these ancients distributed poetics into the so-called three major genres of lyric, epic, and dramatic.[1]

All genres are in some sense a genre of conclusions, even if they are not labelled as such, like this piece of writing. This definition of the generic is central to understanding how autobiographies are written. In the last chapter I myself concluded that a generic autobiography is where experiences are expressed using the generic language of supposedly unambiguous examples. I perceived the limitation of such autobiographies in the essay as the Seventh Article, and in the diary as the promise of language. Derrida argument about the nature of testimony led me to suspect that such "autobiographies" are not worthy of the name, because

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[1] Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

the recorded experiences would no longer belong to their writer. They would be generic experiences, belonging to everyone who read them.

Consequently, am I to conclude, then, that an autobiography to be worthy of the name must be what I have defined as a literary autobiography? If it is so, then autobiographies are those texts whose experiential perspective remains a secret to the reader, perhaps even the writer. I have explained that this secrecy can be approached as the double affirmation, which does not take sides in the generic way of saying *this is good, that is bad.* The different readings of Woolf's "suicide letters" are witness to the confusion of the double affirmation. But, paradoxically, despite the secrecy of literary autobiographies I am still able to define what a literary autobiography does, so it remains a genre, albeit a strange one. It is the genre of the non-genre. It is the genre that questions genres. It is the genre that says no to genres by saying yes to all genres.

This is not an abstract concern. It has its concrete examples in postmodernist art, architecture, etc., and globalisation, which are slowly infusing every avenue of the everyday. The question that remains is whether this postmodern culture is a transitional phase which the Modern subject will overcome, using it to expand its grasp of experience and then go on in the same manner it has done for at least several centuries, or, more interestingly, if it is rather the transformation of the Modern subject into something other than itself. Michel Foucault suggests the possibility of the latter in *The Order of Things* (1966): "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end."[2]

It is obvious, but rarely touched upon, to find genres similar to personalities. "Like different personalities," Heather Dubrow writes, "different

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[2] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [trans. not named] (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) 387.

genres are distinguished from one another by which characteristics predominate: almost all poetic forms have predilections for certain prosodic patterns, just as almost all human beings have some urge to aggression, but the extent to which tendencies are realised and their role in the total pattern of the psyche or the form in question varies."[3] If literary autobiography bears resemblance to a personality, it might be the character of Pinocchio. The power of the parable of Pinocchio is the fact that in his wish to be a real boy, he is more human than *real* boys, who unduly take their humanity for granted. Perhaps, likewise, the foundation of literary autobiography's dissatisfaction with genres is not a desire to dispense with the human, but rather a desire to be humane.

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[3] Dubrow, *Genre*, 7.

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