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FROM VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE FICTION,  
THE REALITY, AND THE MYTH OF  
WAR. ED. MARK HUSSEY.  
SYRACUSE, NY: SYRACUSE UP, 1991.  
14-39.

## VIRGINIA WOOLF'S KEEN SENSITIVITY TO WAR

### Its Roots and Its Impact on Her Novels

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WAR INSPIRED HORROR IN VIRGINIA WOOLF. Her antipathy toward those who cause wars is evident in her two essays, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. The impact of war on her fiction expands from a portrayal of individuals as victims of war to a vision of war that encompasses the possible annihilation of civilization. *Between the Acts*, Woolf's final novel, is obviously an artistic response to the threat posed by World War II. However, a close examination of her works reveals, to a surprising degree, her early and persistent preoccupation with the consequences of war, a preoccupation that merely culminates in her final novel. To read Virginia Woolf's fiction intelligently, the reader must recognize fully the extent to which war shaped her vision and the reasons why it had such an impact. Her sensitivity to war is deeply rooted in her own experiences with death, her direct contact with patriarchal attitudes in the home, and her view of culture, particularly art, as the only immortality possible for human beings.

Virginia Woolf's response to war was intense and personal. Although, as a female, she did not have to face the possibility of dying in combat, by 1914 she had already known four times what it felt like to lose a loved one. She had lost her mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, in 1895, her half-sister Stella (who for two

years had assumed the role of her mother) in 1897, her father, Leslie Stephen, in 1904, and her brother Thoby in 1906. These painful events made her identify in a personal way with the families and friends of those who died in the wars. Furthermore, the deaths in her family had impressed upon her how precious and fragile life is, how easily it can be snuffed out. From her perspective, war was a chaotic nightmare that had no respect for that fragility.

*Jacob's Room* is the first novel in which she makes a close identification between her grief and that of the families and friends of those killed in war. On a personal level, *Jacob's Room* is a memorial for her brother Thoby who caught typhoid in Greece and died very shortly thereafter. The character of Jacob is modeled after her brother. Like Thoby, Jacob spent part of his childhood at the seashore, went to Cambridge University, lived in Bloomsbury, traveled to Greece, and died an early death. However, Woolf transforms her memorial for her brother into one for all the young men killed in World War I giving Jacob the last name of Flanders and having him die in the war.

We get to know the character, Jacob Flanders, much as we do real people—through sharing moments of his life and through hearing what others say about him. We have to piece together our own sense of him from the impressions we gather. Our knowledge of him remains incomplete and unsatisfactory. The reader experiences the imperfect knowledge and inadequate recall we have when we try to recapture the life of someone who dies. Moreover, Woolf makes the reader experience the shock, grief, and helplessness felt when a loved one is suddenly killed. She accomplishes this by withholding until the final paragraph the fact that Jacob is dead; not until then does she even make clear that he has been a soldier. Finally, in the closing lines of the book Woolf conveys the desperate sense of emptiness, unreality, and absurdity felt by the war-time mother who has lost her son. Jacob's mother, Betty Flanders, and his friend Bonamy have gone to Jacob's rooms to go through his effects.

"Such confusion everywhere!" exclaimed Betty Flanders, bursting open the bedroom door.

Bonamy turned away from the window.  
 "What am I to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?"  
 She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes. (176)

These final lines have a powerful impact on the reader who is still shocked at the news of Jacob's death. The shoes help to convey how his mother feels, namely, hollow and forlorn.

The ghostlike quality of Jacob, the cause of his death, and the emotional impact created by the "story" make this a war novel. It is a war novel from a mother's perspective—that of the person who has nurtured and loved deeply the son who dies. Basically, it is told from the perspective of the person most likely to question the cost of war as a way of settling differences. The mother's closeness to the individual contrasts starkly with the impersonal body counts one finds in the wartime news media or the statistics found in military records. In the only description of war in this "war story," Woolf parodies the kind of dehumanized point of view that makes war possible.

The battleships ray out over the North Sea, keeping their stations accurately apart. At a given signal all the guns are trained on a target which (the master gunner counts the seconds . . .) flames into splinters. With equal nonchalance a dozen young men in the prime of life descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together. Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save that, through field glasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of broken match-stick. (155–56)

Only from a great distance, through field glasses, could Jacob be a fragment "of broken match-stick." To his mother, he is Jacob—who is too precious, too fragile, too sacred to be sacrificed. Virginia Woolf believes in fighting tyranny, but she would "fight intellectually." She wrote in her memoir of her nephew Julian Bell, killed in the Spanish Civil War, "The moment force is used, it becomes meaningless & unreal to me" (Bell 2: 259).

In Woolf's first two novels, *The Voyage Out* and *Night and*

*Day*, the focus is on preserving the "life" of the female within marriage. Her third novel, *Jacob's Room*, focuses upon preserving the "life" of the male within the public sphere. In all three, there is a common concern for the individual. Undoubtedly Woolf felt the public loss in war at the deepest level of her being because she had known the domestic loss. Whatever the reason, the son or brother was dead. The grief was no less because the son or brother had died for a public cause. Woolf's intellectual heritage was pacifist in that her father loathed war and militarism. He cried when he looked at a picture of the Boer War (Annan 97), and he gave his sons permission to enter any profession except that of the military (*Collected Essays* 4: 79). However, Woolf opposed the horrors of war in her own right. Violence was never justified. Moreover, she condemned war not just as a sister who had known grief but also, more generally, as a female. Prue's death in *To the Lighthouse* (199) indicates Woolf's awareness of the physical risk women took to give birth; Mrs. Flanders's grief in *Jacob's Room* reveals Woolf's sensitivity to the emotional cost for mothers who had devoted eighteen years or more to raising their sons only to have them killed in a war.

Like *Jacob's Room*, the next novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, is a war novel. Here Woolf identifies even more directly with the victims of World War I. Septimus Smith is suffering from shell shock, a euphemism at the time for mental illness, a widespread and lasting consequence of the war (Tylee 61, 249). Woolf knew well what such traumatized individuals suffer, again because of personal experience. Her character's symptoms parallel her own. Psychologically, she too had been traumatized by death. Her first breakdown occurred when her mother died and her second one occurred after her stepsister Stella's death. Septimus's response to his friend Evans's death was similar to Woolf's response to her mother's (see Bazin 70–71). Like Woolf, Septimus at first felt "very little" (130). Subsequently experiencing guilt for his lack of grief (137), like Woolf (Rose 265) he was haunted by the dead person, seeing and talking with him during his periods of mental illness (105–6, 212). Septimus had drawn "the attention, indeed the affection" of Evans; "it was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug." The playfulness between Septimus and Evans (who was "undemonstra-

tive in the company of women") parallels Clarissa Dalloway's ecstasy when she is about to see Sally Seton (130, 51). The taboo surrounding homosexual attraction undoubtedly contributed to Septimus's ambivalent feelings about Evans—at first an absence of grief and later a sense of sin. "He had not cared when Evans was killed; *that was worst*; but all the other crimes raised their heads . . . how he had married his wife without loving her" (137) (emphasis added). Thus, although Septimus himself was not killed, like Jacob, in the war, the death of Evans ("They had to be together, share with each other") led to his madness and suicide. The trauma of a series of deaths, first of immediate family and later of friends, coupled with the horror of two world wars had a similar impact on Woolf. Wounds left by personal and societal tragedies caused pain for both Woolf and her character long after the events had occurred.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf demonstrates the cost of war not only through the suffering of Septimus and his wife but also through unhappy experiences of minor characters and through the memories and thoughts of all her characters. Woolf sets the tone of postwar English life in the first few pages of the novel. "The War was over, except for someone like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed . . . or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed" (5). Miss Kilman was another kind of war victim, fired from her teaching post because "she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains" (187). Being fired for this reason enraged her. Because of her bitterness, "all her soul rusted with that grievance sticking in it, her dismissal from school during the War—poor embittered unfortunate creature!" (16). Thus Woolf provides a glimpse into the scope of injuries inflicted by the war. She is also presenting the various ways war disrupts individual lives and the different ways people cope with this disruption.

Furthermore, just because the war is over does not mean people cease to think about it. For example, as Richard Dalloway hurries home with flowers for his wife, Clarissa, he is "thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten" (174). While

shopping, Clarissa remembers her uncle who "had turned on his bed one morning in the middle of the War," saying "'I have had enough'" (15). Septimus's wife, Rezia, recalls his employer's "geraniums ruined in the War—his cook's nerves destroyed" (135). Obviously the stress created by the war continues to mar the daily lives of Woolf's characters long after the battles have ended. Such examples also reflect how World War I continued to impinge on Woolf's consciousness long after it was over.

In Woolf's next novel, *To the Lighthouse*, she begins to link patriarchal attitudes, as embodied by Mr. Ramsay, with the causes of war. Mr. Ramsay's success in life depends upon feeling superior to women and heroic in protecting them. Through reciting lines from Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Mr. Ramsay reveals the link in his mind between the role of the husband-hero and that of the soldier-hero. Woolf thereby connects the patriarchal husband with the male defender of the patriarchal nation. Both take risks in order to protect women and children. The philosopher Mr. Ramsay protects them through his heroic—and necessarily dangerous—pursuit of truth. Ultimately, he expects to fail in his quest, to face defeat as surely as did the troops at Balaklava. This expectation that his risk taking will fail to produce results sufficient to ensure his immortality fills him with self-pity. During a typical moment of despair, feeling embattled, he startles his wife with "a loud cry . . . something about 'Stormed at with shot and shell'" (29). Pacing about in a state of anguish, he also startles painter Lily Briscoe; "he almost knocked her easel over, coming down upon her with his hands waving and shouting out, 'Boldly we rode and well,' but, mercifully, he turned sharp, and rode off, to die gloriously she supposed upon the heights of Balaklava" (29–30). This use of war imagery connects domestic and public politics within a patriarchy. Carrying this analysis of male domination a step further in *A Room of One's Own*, an essay published two years after *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf clarifies how sexism and its concomitant behavior can provide a foundation for either heroism (which can be admirable) or fascism (which is deplorable). By assuming a subordinate role and invariably (without reciprocation) mirroring a man as being twice his actual size, a woman may consciously or unconsciously encourage him to take actions involv-

ing risk (35–36). When such actions are done to further civilization or knowledge, all is well. Sometimes, however, a man's inflated ego makes him overly self-confident, pompous, and dictatorial; his behavior then becomes fascistic. He imposes his will on others, by force if necessary.

However, Virginia Woolf's emphasis in *To the Lighthouse* is still primarily psychological rather than sociological or political. She continues to link her personal trauma of a series of family deaths with the trauma created by World War I. She connects the effect of a mother's death on the outlook of her family and the effect of a brutal war—and its countless deaths—on the outlook of a nation. The mood in part 3 of *To the Lighthouse* differs considerably from that in part 1. What has occurred in between in part 2 is the death of a Victorian mother (the era and philosophy of life she represents) and the world war that killed her son.

The primary image in part 2 is that of a childhood summer home, unused for ten years, being destroyed by time and nature. As Minow-Pinkney says, "What is literally destroying the house is rain, rats and wind, but what is figuratively destroying it is the First World War" (99). Woolf describes the deterioration with subtle references to the war.

But slumber and sleep though it [the house] might there came later in the summer *ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt, which, with their repeat shocks* still further loosened the shawl and cracked the tea-cups. Now and again some glass tinkled in the cupboard *as if a giant voice had shrieked so loud in its agony* that tumblers stood inside a cupboard vibrated too. Then again silence fell; and then, night after night, and sometimes in plain mid-day when the roses were bright . . . *there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling.* (200–201) (emphasis added)

Woolf integrates the concept of nature as destroyer and man as destroyer by asking, "Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacency she saw his misery, his meanness, and his torture" (201–2).

In terms of the two ways of viewing life represented by Mr.

Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay in the novel, the point of view presented in part 2 is predominantly "masculine," that is, more Mr. Ramsay's than Mrs. Ramsay's (Bazin 137–38). He views life from a distance (where individuals with names may appear like nameless "match-sticks") rather than from the closer perspective of the family. He perceives the sweep of time during which the individual is of little importance rather than the immediate context with all the details of a lifetime there to be remembered and loved. By conveying the cosmic vision of Mr. Ramsay, Woolf shows both his sorrow and his disengagement; he is a philosopher who is willing to face the bleak reality of a godless universe. From this stark perspective what difference would a death or a war make in the overall scheme of things? But from the perspective of loved ones, the grieving is both poignant and lasting. Woolf interjects the deaths of her mother, stepsister, and brother into the poetic prose of part 2 "Time Passes." She announces their deaths (represented by those of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew) in brackets, increasing the painfulness of these deaths by presenting them as insignificant within the larger picture. Death is unimportant only to the extent that the individual life is unimportant. Cosmic irony offers no consolation to the one who grieves.

Mr. Ramsay is a husband as well as a philosopher; he cannot maintain a detached, intellectual point of view when his wife's death leaves him feeling abandoned and lonely. Therefore, Mrs. Ramsay's death is announced in the context of his grief: "[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty]" (194). The death in childbirth of the Ramsays' married daughter, Prue, is similarly announced in brackets. Then comes the death of Andrew, their eldest son. "[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous]" (201). This dispassionate, abrupt report of Andrew's death is reminiscent of the manner in which the news of Jacob Flanders's death was relayed. The fact that Woolf based both characters—Jacob and Andrew—upon her brother Thoby points to a strong psychological connection between Woolf's personal tragedies and her sensitivity to war.

Despite some moments of unity and harmony in part 3 of *To the Lighthouse*, a sense of permanent loss remains. The threat of the void, which Mrs. Ramsay had managed to hide beneath shawls and dinner parties, can no longer be ignored. A feeling of security that could be found in the Victorian Age has been shattered by the war. The impression of permanent loss signals Woolf's awareness that a world war causes irreparable damage to the human psyche. Again in her next novel, *The Waves*, Woolf mourns irrevocable losses. The death of Percival, a representative of imperialism, symbolizes the death of unselfconscious normality and an unexamined sense of oneness.

Just as *The Waves* depicts the loss of psychological wholeness in the twentieth century, Woolf's subsequent novel, *The Years*, laments the absence of communal oneness formerly found in the family or in the nation. By the time Woolf wrote *The Years*, her focus had shifted from the individual to the group. No one character unites the novel, and her mourning here is not for a few individuals but for the whole human race. Woolf concludes that, as a species, human beings are simply inadequate. Incapable of communicating well, they are too often spiritually and morally inept.

Not surprisingly, death is a constant in this novel. Woolf includes only one instance of death in war; however, a death of some character or political figure occurs in each chapter. The novelist's preoccupation with death during the writing of *The Years* resulted, in part, from the loss in 1932 of three friends, Lytton Strachey, Dora Carrington, and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, and in 1934 of Roger Fry (Rose 216). The psychological effect of these deaths is omnipresent in this work.

In addition to death, hideous imagery permeates the novel. The pictures presented are more than depressing; they are grotesque. Colonel Pargiter's hand resembles "the claw of some aged bird" (13); Milly's fat arms remind North of "pale asparagus tapering to a point" and her "rings were sunk in her fingers, as if the flesh had grown over them" (373); a pockmarked man sucking his lips in and out exposes himself to the young Rose (29). Such loathsome images in *The Years* suggest that Woolf, keenly sensitive to the growing threat of mass violence, felt repelled by the whole human race. The character Peggy opens a book at random

and finds there an expression of what she has been thinking. "*La médiocrité de l'univers m'étonne et me révolte*" [The mediocrity of the universe astonishes and nauseates me], she read. That was it. Precisely. She read on. "*. . . la petitesse de toutes choses m'emplit de dégoût . . .*" [the sordidness of everything fills me with loathing]." Peggy continues reading, "*. . . la pauvreté des êtres humains m'anéantit*" [The banality of human beings stupefies me] (383). Woolf is disgusted not just with the fascistic Germans and Italians but with humankind.

Woolf had labeled *The Years* an "essay-novel." Furthermore, she looked upon *The Years* and her feminist antiwar essay *Three Guineas* "as one book" (*Diary* 5: 48). *The Years* conveys the mood created by the threat of fascism and war. Like the death of Mrs. Ramsay, the death of Rose (the mother in this book) marks the annihilation of the harmonizing feminine and the emergence of bad news, failures to communicate, and reprehensible human behavior. Peggy's pessimistic reverie in the final section of the novel reveals Woolf's despairing view of the world at this time. "But how can one be 'happy' . . . in a world bursting with misery? On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilisation; the end of freedom. We . . . are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed" (388). Peggy is reacting to what Woolf described in her *Diary* as the "brutality and wildness of the world" (3: 6). While Woolf was writing *The Years*, in Germany and Italy Hitler and Mussolini were mobilizing their armed forces.

In every sense, *The Years* mirrors Woolf's perception that the very continuation of civilization was now threatened (*Diary* 5: 162). This novel conveys horror, bitterness, and despair—her mood in the 1930s. This world war would not be restricted to European soil. The British were bombed, and the possibility of Nazi invasion was terrifying. By 1940 when Woolf was writing her final novel, *Between the Acts*, the Woolfs' property in London had been bombed, and she and her husband, Leonard, (Jewish and a socialist) had lethal doses of morphia ready in case the Nazis landed (Bell 2: 216). The Germans had plans to invade England and both Virginia and Leonard were on a "Gestapo arrest list" (Zwerdling 289, 351). Hence, the Woolfs' fears were justified.

Not surprisingly, Virginia Woolf's focus shifted in her later work from a concern for the survival and mental health of the individual to a concern for the survival of a culture. On the basis of her personal experiences with death, she understood the impact of war on the individual and the family. On the basis of her experience growing up in an extremely patriarchal household, she understood what she thought to be one of the primary causes of war—the excessive pampering and inflating of the male ego. Woolf concluded that the power politics she had witnessed within the home were related to male behavior in the international power struggle. The philosophy of domination threatened not only her freedom as a wife, daughter, or sister within the domestic realm but also her freedom as a human being to live and to create in society. Explicitly in *Three Guineas* and implicitly in her novels, Woolf claims that sanctioning the patriarchal behavior of males within the family permits such behavior to flourish outside the home. As Woolf states in *A Room of One's Own*, “mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge” the male ego (36). Allowing men to think they are innately superior to women gives them license to think they are innately superior to people of other races, religions, or nationalities. Such thinking leads to racism, imperialism, and war.

Having grown up in the rigid, Victorian household dominated by Leslie Stephen, Woolf witnessed the submission of her mother, her sisters, and herself to his iron rule. Also, she was sexually abused by two stepbrothers while she lived in the home of her father. She was aware, too, of the sexual molestation of her sisters, Stella and Vanessa (DeSalvo, *Impact* 2–3). Louise DeSalvo suggests that Stella may even have been raped during visits by their “mad” cousin and that she had to console her father not just emotionally but physically when her mother died (52–54, 57). Prompted by one of Virginia's breakdowns, Vanessa told the physician about their brothers' incestuous behavior (Love 200). Until then, the sisters had been afraid to speak out (DeSalvo 86, 71).

Abuses of male power, then, were secret torments to the daughters in the Stephen household. Yet Woolf recognized the

political implications of these personal experiences. Indeed, in *Three Guineas*, she observes that “fathers in public, massed together in societies, in professions” are even worse than “fathers in private” (138). Woolf personally endured the public enforcements of male privilege. She was bitter about having been denied the education afforded her brothers because patriarchal custom barred women from the universities. In *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, she lashes out at the patriarchs who have denied women access to and funding for education. In addition, she resented the fact that she was less free than her brothers to travel or choose her own social life. Thus, both private and public evidence of male privilege made Woolf keenly aware that she lived in a patriarchy.

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf explains the interconnections between the private and the public; she claims “that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other” (142). Although she calls *Three Guineas* her “war book” (*Diary* 4: 361), her discussion focuses primarily on the tyranny women have faced in the private and public worlds. She points out that this tyranny is not substantially different from the tyranny men must now face from abroad. For centuries women have struggled against dictators—people who tell others “how they shall live; what they shall do” (53). Woolf says the nineteenth-century feminist and the twentieth-century male are “fighting the same enemy . . . for the same reasons. They [the feminists] were fighting the tyranny of the patriarchal state as you [men] are fighting the tyranny of the Fascist state” (102). For centuries women had listened to “You shall not learn; you shall not earn; you shall not own; you shall not—” (105). Women's primary goals must remain, first, better educational opportunities for women and, second, better job opportunities for women. Without these, women cannot help male pacifists “prevent war” (3). Furthermore, although women may actively help men rebel against war, they must do this as “outsiders.” Responding in *Three Guineas* to a male peace advocate who seeks her support, Woolf tells him that “the great majority of your sex are today in favour of war” (8); hence, fearing reprisals, women must work in secret. Indeed, the only women free to express their own opinions on war are those not economically dependent on men. Moreover, women should not

repeat male words and methods. Their strength as outsiders with less invested in the system lies in "finding new words" and "creating new methods" (143). British men talk about women in the same way Fascists and Nazis talk about women: The English statement "Homes are the real places of the women" may be compared with the German statement "The woman's world is her family, her husband, her children, and her home." The dictator is not just in Germany and Italy; he is "here among us." Hence, women cannot afford to fight only the enemy abroad (53).

Leonard Woolf described his wife as "the least political animal that has lived since Aristotle invented the definition" (*Downhill* 27). His statement is, of course, outrageously inaccurate. As a feminist and a pacifist, Virginia Woolf was extremely political and, indeed, quite radical. Moreover, politics permeate her art. In every one of her novels she exposes, analyzes, and subtly condemns patriarchal attitudes. She does so by using seemingly trivial but highly significant details of daily life. Through her fiction over the years, Woolf shows that inequality in the home has dire psychological and political consequences in the public sphere; in short, problems of the state are rooted in the family.

Because women had no power to create wars or fight in them, she saw the ideology of war as "masculine." In 1916, during World War I, she wondered "how this preposterous masculine fiction [the war] keeps going a day longer" (*Letters* 2: 76). She states in *Three Guineas*, "You [men] are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share" (108). Besides, she says, "To fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental" (6). Woolf values the difference that has been created and warns women against allowing their colleges to become like men's, where people are taught not "to hate force but to use it" (29). She also warns women against adopting patriarchal values as they move into the professions. Women must consciously advocate "Justice and Equality and Liberty" (102) and they must cling to what they have learned as women about poverty, chastity, derision, and freedom from unreal loyalties. Poverty means avoiding excess wealth; chastity means not allowing anyone to control your brain by buy-

ing it; derision has taught women modesty so they can consciously avoid awards and badges. Finally, women can avoid "unreal loyalties" by rejecting attitudes toward their country, school, race, sex, or religion that are overly chauvinistic and, therefore, intolerant of others (80). Indeed, having been discriminated against in Great Britain, women should be citizens of the world (109).

In Woolf's novels we follow her focus from concern for the individual victim of patriarchal attitudes and institutions to concern for the group and for civilization itself. The reasoning that underlies her argument in *Three Guineas* is that tyrants use violence or the threat of violence to control others. The threat of violence inhibits women's freedom in the home and on the street. Tyrannical rulers use war or the threat of war to control their own and other peoples. Violence enables them to impose their will. Both feminists and pacifists have to educate people to withdraw support for domineering behavior and for the use of violence as a method of control. Tyranny and wars will continue to exist only as long as they are sanctioned by the world populace. *Three Guineas* demonstrates how the struggle of women against the tyranny that limits their freedom in the home and in the workplace is an inherent part of the struggle against tyranny in national and international politics.

Woolf's feminist opposition to war, which burst forth in *Three Guineas*, had long been part of her thought. Helen Ambrose, the most articulate feminist in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, shocked her social group by saying that "it seemed to her as wrong to keep sailors as to keep a Zoo, and that as for dying on a battlefield, surely it was time we ceased to praise courage" (69). Her remark was provoked by a scene observed from the ship she was on: "the warships drew past, casting a curious effect of discipline and sadness upon the waters" (69). The words "curious" and "sadness" make clear not just Helen's but also Woolf's opposition to militarism. Still, in those early years, Woolf's primary concerns were the deadening restrictions placed upon the female by the traditional marriage. For instance, in *The Voyage Out* Clarissa is almost nauseatingly submissive to her egotistical and condescending husband, Richard, who would rather be in his grave "before a woman has the right to vote in England!" (43). Helen Ambrose

sees her husband's behavior as childish and tyrannical, but she is powerless to change it. Rachel Vinrace, the main character in the novel, actually succumbs to death rather than submit to the confines of marriage, even the comparatively enlightened one her fiancé, Terence, offers her.

Woolf's second novel, *Night and Day*, is another indictment of the patriarchal marriage. Just as Rachel Vinrace wanted the freedom to pursue her interest in music, the protagonist in *Night and Day*, Katharine Hilbery, wanted to pursue her interest in "mathematics and the science of astronomy" (242). Katharine did not want to marry at all, but she was not free to remain independent. She chose Ralph Denham over William Rodney because Denham offered her a marital relationship that would allow her some freedom for her own pursuits. Thus in these two earliest novels, Woolf was already launching an attack on the patriarchal system, beginning with the family, where the tyrannical rule of most men flourished unopposed.

Woolf even attacks the patriarchal attitudes of the male victims of wars. For example, although she movingly depicts the grief of Jacob's mother, she also notes Jacob's misogynist outlook. During a service in King's College chapel, he equates the presence of dogs with that of women: "a dog destroys the service completely. So do these women—though separately devout, distinguished, and vouched for by the theology, mathematics, Latin, and Greek of their husbands. Heaven knows why it is. For one thing, thought Jacob, they're as ugly as sin" (33). A believer in the patriarchy and its patriotism, Jacob later went off to war quite naïvely, as his friend Bonamy suggests by his thoughts after Jacob's death. "'He left everything just as it was,' Bonamy marvelled. 'Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn about for anyone to read. What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?'" he mused, standing in the middle of Jacob's room" (176).

Woolf's other war victim, Septimus Smith, also went off to war quite willingly. Indeed, he "was one of the first to volunteer" and he had his own strange reasons for going to war. "He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square." In the war, as custom dictates, Septimus had "devel-

oped manliness" (130). Ironically, however, he had simultaneously discovered homosexual inclinations (130) that in turn played havoc with his "manly" conscience and thereby contributed to his madness (98–106). As was true of Jacob, Septimus in many ways was a victim of the patriarchal ideology he supported.

Like Rachel Vinrace (who died rather than marry) and Katharine Hilbery (who married despite a desire to remain single), Clarissa Dalloway had to make sacrifices in order to adapt to the demands of the patriarchy. To resist the restrictions of the traditional marriage, Clarissa had to give up her passion for Peter Walsh. "If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!" (70). Unfortunately, Peter was too jealous, possessive, and insecure. To protect the "privacy of her soul," she had chosen Richard Dalloway and slept in a narrow bed in the attic. Like Septimus, she needed her spouse's support to survive, but she and Richard were friends, not lovers. Like Septimus, she also had to deny her homosexual inclinations. Carefully protective of her own freedom, she understood too why Septimus chose to kill himself rather than turn himself over to doctors who had continually refused to listen to him. They had repeatedly imposed their will upon him. The patriarchy exacts a heavy price from both men and women.

Like Jacob and Septimus, Mr. Ramsay displays the attitudes and behavior of the patriarchal male. As the most autobiographical of Woolf's novels, *To the Lighthouse* demonstrates more clearly than any of the others the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle nature of the patriarchal behavior that Woolf experienced in her own home. Her condemnation of what she witnessed is tempered by her love for the patriarch, her father. It is tempered, too, by her recognition of Mrs. Ramsay's (or her mother's) complicity. Mr. Ramsay is free to be childish and demanding and tyrannical only to the extent that Mrs. Ramsay tolerates that kind of behavior. But a patriarchal society makes rebellion difficult for the individual female by institutionalizing the economic dependence of the female on the male and sanctioning only the dominant-male / submissive-female mode of behavior.

Lily Briscoe demonstrates how to rebel: she refuses to get married. Traditionally, the only way for a female to resist male

dominance successfully has been to reject marriage. The rebellious female has paid a high price; either she has had to live without an intimate heterosexual relationship or she has had to relate to someone as passionless as Mr. Dalloway who would leave her alone. The female protagonists in *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse* all struggle to solve the problem of how to relate to a man without becoming a submissive, self-sacrificing wife and mother.

Like Lily Briscoe, Virginia Stephen did not want to become another Mrs. Ramsay—or another Julia Jackson Stephen, her mother and the model for Mrs. Ramsay. Mr. Ramsay was content to let Mrs. Ramsay perform her duties as a wife or mother, but he was restless and jealous if she picked up a book. Although he was a scholar, he did not want his wife to use her mind. “And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not booklearned at all. He wondered if she understood what she was reading. Probably not, he thought” (182). Conscious of her husband’s silent but relentless demand for her attention, Mrs. Ramsay soon put down the book. Similarly, when Mr. Ramsay came near Lily Briscoe, she found she could not concentrate on her painting. He was not as outspoken as the “odious” young scholar, Charles Tansley, who affirmed repeatedly, “Women can’t paint, women can’t write.” Yet Mr. Ramsay effectively suppressed any ambition Mrs. Ramsay had to set up a clean dairy on their island. By laughing with his children at Mrs. Ramsay’s passionate concern, he effectively silenced her and undermined her energy and motivation. While expecting her upon demand to nourish his energy by reflecting him at twice his actual size, he refused to reciprocate. In the following passage, Woolf conveys brilliantly how patriarchal attitudes are detrimental to a woman’s potential and her well-being:

It was much rather a question (she was thoroughly roused, Lily could see, and talked very emphatically) of real butter and clean milk. Speaking with warmth and eloquence, she described the iniquity of the English dairy system, and in what state milk was delivered at the door, and was about to prove her charges, for she had gone into the matter, when all

round the table, beginning with Andrew in the middle, like a fire leaping from tuft to tuft of furze, her children laughed; her husband laughed; she was laughed at, fire-encircled, and forced to veil her crest, dismount her batteries. (155–56).

To shore up his own ego, Mr. Ramsay required that Mrs. Ramsay give *him* her undivided support and admiration. Lily Briscoe observes, “He is petty, selfish, vain, egotistical; he is spoilt; he is a tyrant; he wears Mrs. Ramsay to death” (40).

What success Mr. Ramsay has as a philosopher he achieves only with Mrs. Ramsay’s readily offered reassurance during those moments when he fears failure. He comes up to her, demanding her full attention: “the arid scimitar of the male . . . smote mercilessly, again and again” (59). The mock-heroic language Woolf applies to him—that of the leader and the hero—clarifies that he is not unlike Hitler and Mussolini who rely, as Woolf points out in *A Room of One’s Own*, upon the praise and admiration of women to puff them up (36). Ironically, it is usually insecurity in the male that makes him self-centered and boastful—saying I, I, I.

Spoiled, overpraised, educated in the philosophy of dominance, and treated as kings in their homes, the males with overblown egos may go forth into the world, causing trouble.

True, they had money and power, but only at the cost of harbouring in their breasts an eagle, a vulture, for ever tearing the liver out and plucking at the lungs—the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives them to desire other people’s fields and goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas; to offer up their own lives and their children’s lives. Walk through the Admiralty Arch . . . or any other avenue given up to trophies and cannon, and reflect upon the kind of glory celebrated there. (*Room* 38–39)

The arrogant and selfish male, a product of patriarchal attitudes in homes and universities, too often adopts the militaristic attitude that can lead to fascism.

In *The Waves*, Woolf subtly links the patriarchal ideal, as embodied by Percival, with imperialism. Percival is the ideal athlete and soldier. He goes to India to uphold the British Empire.

The virility used to justify dominance over women in the home is used by the imperialist to justify the dominance over darker-skinned peoples who, like women, are "innately inferior."

In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues that the tyrannies of the patriarchal family become the tyrannies of the fascist state (142). In *The Years*, Abel Pargiter is the paternal despot. Woolf clearly implies that "the will to dominate is the same in a Victorian father as in a Hitler and that the battles against the patriarchal state and against fascism are closely allied" (Rose 218). Just as the so-called inferiority (physical, mental, and emotional) of the female was used to justify the authoritarian behavior of husbands and fathers, the "inferiority" of Jewish people was used to sanction Hitler's efforts to exterminate them. Hitler and his soldiers used anti-Semitism as an excuse for setting aside civilized behavior. In *The Years* and *Three Guineas* Woolf clearly advocates rebelling against the patriarchal ideology, for it encourages authoritarianism and, in turn, violence—the ultimate way to try to impose one's will on another person or nation.

Virginia Woolf had witnessed the despotic behavior of her father toward her half-sister Laura. Laura was a disobedient child. Her emotionally-disturbed behavior is not surprising because, after her mother's death, she was neglected by her grief-stricken, self-pitying father and left in the care of a German nursemaid. When Leslie Stephen remarried two years later, family life resumed. However, Laura could not adjust to this new household (DeSalvo, *Impact* 28–29, 32). For her disobedience and bizarre behavior she was eventually banished to another area of the house, cut off from the family, and then placed at age twenty-one in an insane asylum (DeSalvo 36, 24–25). In Victorian England such threats of harsh punishment were used by male heads of household to control members of their families. Aware of this from her own experience, Woolf is pointing out that the Nazis were not strange beasts but rather men like those found in one's own home. Circumstances in Germany and Italy had simply unleashed behavior that was indeed "mad," but not unlike behavior that could as easily have erupted in Great Britain. How Leonard Woolf, her own husband, had treated the Ceylonese over whom he had had jurisdiction makes her assertion believable (Trombley 268). Furthermore, from Cey-

lon, Leonard had written to Lytton Strachey that Arab workers "will do anything if you hit them hard enough with a walking stick, an occupation in which I have been engaged for the most part of the last 3 days and nights." He explained that he did this to them because they treated him as an equal (*Growing* 91, 94–95). Virginia may or may not have perceived the extent of her own husband's potential for brutality. However, she definitely knew that a brutal nature was often held in check by a façade of gentility. To the outsider like Virginia whose group (female) was not in power, the capacity for violence seemed to lie in those males who had the power to use it.

Like Woolf's other novels, her last book, *Between the Acts*, reveals her acute sensitivity to the rapid escalation of violence as World War II began. Violence breeds more violence and makes the possibility of rational thought and civilized behavior increasingly remote. In *Between the Acts*, however, Woolf focuses on the threat war poses to civilization and, in particular, to art. Art is what captures the essence of the individual, the culture, or both, and giving it form renders it "eternal." Through writing books that would be preserved in libraries or creating art objects that would be placed in museums, the artist, too, gains a kind of immortality. In her essay "A Letter to a Young Poet," Woolf writes, "I do not believe in poets dying; Keats, Shelley, Byron are alive here in this room in you and you and you" (*Collected Essays* 2: 190). However, war threatens to destroy not only the "immortality" of the art object and of the artist but also the very civilization to which they contribute.

The form or pattern is what makes a work of art partake of the eternal, for the shape of the work represents the essence or permanent reality beneath the flux of life. In "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf discusses her philosophy. "Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself" (*Moments of Being* 72). From Woolf's perspective, there is no

God or heaven above. There is only the "thing itself," which may be preserved and made permanent through art.

Much of Woolf's writing reiterates her faith in art and in the artist's pursuit of a vision. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel lost herself in her music; in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily sought to capture her vision in her painting; in *The Waves*, Bernard struggled to find the right phrases and the right story that would place his perceptions into a coherent whole; and in *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe briefly creates unity with her pageant. The prevalence of art as subject matter in Woolf's work makes clear her belief in its value.

The artist's talent can capture the oneness beneath the multiplicity of life. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily translates a mother and child into color and shape—the essence. In *The Waves*, Bernard seeks to impose order on a chaos of impressions. Miss La Trobe even detects the unity residing in the "orts and fragments" of modern life.

Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. (*Between the Acts* 189)

Through Miss La Trobe's pursuit of her aesthetic vision, there is hope for order and harmony. If the artist ceases to work, the essence of pattern, the order and harmony, will not be intuited and preserved. Woolf's horror of war stemmed in part from the fact that it both destroyed art and distracted the artist from his or her work.

Woolf's diaries and letters persistently stress the stifling effects war had on her creativity.

I should, if it weren't for the war—glide my way up & up in to that exciting layer so rarely lived in: where my mind works so quick it seems asleep. (*Diary* 5: 214)

Its difficult, I find, to write. No audience. No private stimulus, only this outer roar. (*Letters* 6: 479)

It seems entirely meaningless—a perfunctory slaughter, like taking a jar in one hand, a hammer in the other. Why must this be smashed? Nobody knows. This feeling is different from any before. And all the blood has been let out of common life. . . . Of course all creative power is cut off. (*Diary* 5: 235)

During the pageant in *Between the Acts*, planes were flying overhead cutting "words in half," symbolizing the way that war destroys creativity and prevents its audience from responding.

In an essay entitled "The Artist and Politics," Woolf articulates some of the ways in which war and authoritarian regimes threaten the freedom and well-being of the artist.

it is clear that the artist is affected as powerfully as other citizens when society is in chaos, although the disturbance affects him in different ways. His studio now is far from being a cloistered spot where he can contemplate his model or his apple in peace. It is besieged by voices, all disturbing. . . . First there is the voice which cries: "I cannot protect you; I cannot pay you. I am so tortured and distracted that I can no longer enjoy your works of art." Then there is the voice which asks for help. "Come down from your ivory tower, leave your studio," it cries, "and use your gifts as doctor, as teacher, not as artist." Again there is the voice which warns the artist that unless he can show good cause why art benefits the state he will be made to help it actively—by making aeroplanes, by firing guns. And finally there is the voice which many artists in other countries have already heard and had to obey—the voice which proclaims that the artist is the servant of the politician. "You shall only practise your art," it says, "at our bidding. Paint us pictures,

carve us statues that glorify our gospels. Celebrate fascism; celebrate communism. Preach what we bid you preach. On no other terms shall you exist." (*Collected Essays* 2: 232)

The threat at this point in history was not only the war but also the possibility that the Nazis might win. In 1940, novelist E. M. Forster, a friend of Woolf's, wrote in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, "If the Nazis won, culture would be destroyed in England and the Empire" (43). Without freedom and civilized behavior, there would be a return to the barbaric and violent, untempered by ethics or love.

The extent to which the onset of World War II disturbed Virginia Woolf as an artist is evident throughout her final novel, *Between the Acts*. As Woolf stated in her *Diary, Between the Acts* represents "the present state of my mind" (5: 135). Two of the main characters, Isa and Giles, seem irritable, uneasy, and frustrated. Giles is clearly upset about the war. "And he came into the dining-room looking like a cricketer, in flannels, wearing a blue coat with brass buttons; though he was enraged. Had he not read, in the morning paper, in the train, that sixteen men had been shot, others prisoned, just over there, across the gulf, in the flat land which divided them from the continent?" (46) Worried about the war, he finds the small talk of his luncheon guests intolerable.

Giles nicked his chair into position with a jerk. Thus only could he show his irritation, his rage with old fogies who sat and looked at views over coffee and cream when the whole of Europe—over there—was bristling like. . . . He had no command of metaphor. Only the ineffective word "hedgehog" illustrated his vision of Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens and blast the Folly. (53)

His anger and frustration stem from his powerlessness to prevent the violence that is about to happen; "manacled to a rock he was, and forced passively to behold indescribable horror" (60). Relief finally comes but in an act of grotesque violence. He comes upon a snake in the grass, choked with a toad in its mouth. The snake can neither swallow nor eject the toad. "It was birth the wrong way

round—a monstrous inversion" (99). Giles solves the dilemma by violence—to which humans resort when they are impatient or assume there are no other alternatives. Violence is often the "easy" solution. Giles raises his foot and stamps on the snake and toad. "The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him" (99). Giles is not only relieved but fortified by his act of power. Of course, nothing is really resolved because both parties in the struggle are dead. The snake is not fed and the toad is not free.

The violence of the war is also conveyed in this novel through the image of rape. In wartime, the rapist may be the warrior. Giles's wife, Isa, is mesmerized by an account she reads in the *Times*. "And they dragged her up to the barrack room where she was thrown upon a bed. Then one of the troopers removed part of her clothing, and she screamed and hit him about the face" (20). The rapist, like the warrior, uses violence to impose his will upon another. In *Between the Acts*, the rape motif is present also in references to Swinburne's "Itylus"; in the Philomela myth, because the father has raped his wife's sister, the wife gets revenge by killing her son Itylus and feeding him to the father. This motif of the destruction of the son is reinforced by a reference to Matthew Arnold's poem "Sohrab and Rustum." The pain and guilt of the father in these stories is reflected in the most patriarchal male character in *Between the Acts*, Giles's father, Bart Oliver. Bart is troubled by his son's unhappiness, the primary cause of which is the war.

The war is disturbing to another main character—Miss La Trobe. Miss La Trobe is an artist struggling to achieve her vision despite the war. Her medium is a village pageant which sweeps us through the history of English culture. Her pageant takes place in the uncontrollable setting of the outdoors and her players are untalented amateurs. Her audience is fidgety. Miss La Trobe is in a high state of anguish because of her fear of failure. "If only she'd a back-cloth to hang between the trees—to shut out cows, swallows, present time! But she had nothing. She had forbidden music. Grating her fingers in the bark, she damned the audience. Panic seized her. Blood seemed to pour from her shoes. This is death, death, death, she noted in the margin of her mind; when

illusion fails. Unable to lift her hand, she stood facing the audience" (180). The possibility of failure is not just because of the unprofessional circumstances of the production, the lack of sophistication in the audience, and the usual difficulties of creating what she had envisioned but also because of distraction created by the war. War inhibits the creative spirit; it creates an undercurrent of uneasiness.

Woolf suggests the way consciousness of the war weaves in and out of one's thoughts; it is a constant source of stress. Snippets of conversation in *Between the Acts* show how the war remains a preoccupation despite other activities.

"No, I don't go by politicians. I've a friend who's been to Russia. He says . . . And my daughter, just back from Rome, she says the common people, in the cafés, hate Dictators. . . . Well, different people say different things. . . ." (121)

"And what's the channel, come to think of it, if they mean to invade us? The aeroplanes, I didn't like to say it, made one think. . . ." (199)

"And what about the Jews? The refugees . . . the Jews. . . . People like ourselves, beginning life again. (121)

The villagers never engage in a lengthy or serious discussion about the war. Their conversations quickly drift into other topics. Their reluctance to talk in depth about the war reflects Woolf's own experience. Like the villagers, she found the war too painful to discuss: "Nobody in their senses can believe in it. Yet nobody must tell the truth. So one forgets. Meanwhile the aeroplanes are on the prowl, crossing the downs. Every preparation is made. Sirens will hoot in a particular way when there's the first hint of a raid. L. & I no longer talk about it. Much better to play bowls & pick dahlias" (*Diary* 5: 167).

War threatens civilization. Without civilization, there is no order, only chaos. In the middle section of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf uses the way nature takes over in the absence of civilized life to illustrate the threat World War I posed to the social order. "Nothing now withstood them; nothing said no to them. Let the wind blow; let the poppy seed itself and the carnation mate with

the cabbage. Let the swallow build in the drawing-room, and the thistle thrust aside the tiles, and the butterfly sun itself on the faded chintz of the arm-chairs. Let the broken glass and the china lie out on the lawn and be tangled over with grass and wild berries" (208). Without civilization, nature reestablishes its power, destroying all vestiges of human-imposed order. A site may revert to its original state. Similarly, without civilization, human beings regress to the ways of their earliest ancestors. In *Between the Acts*, elderly Lucy Swithin introduces the theme of the prehistoric as she ponders what life was like in primeval England. The frankly erotic character, Mrs. Manresa, introduces the simplicity of instinctual sexual drive uncomplicated by ethics, culture, or commitment. The primeval and the sexual are joined in the final scenes between the protagonists, Isa and Giles Oliver.

Isa and Giles are feeling distant from one another and, although married, each has spent the day desiring someone else. They come together at the close of the novel but only on a primitive level. All pretensions of a civilized, loving relationship have been abandoned. "Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night" (219). This scene suggests a terrifying reversal—a return to violence and passion on a primitive level. The one hope is that new life will emerge from the darkness. The final passage clearly situates Woolf's protagonists in prehistoric time, with no civilization, no art, only an instinct to survive. "Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks" (219). This final scene verifies Woolf's vision of the likely death of civilized life—of a return to cave dwelling where nothing but survival matters. It is a dystopian vision of the future of humanity—a future in which art and personal relationships have been destroyed by war and the brutal laws of nature preside.