

“Dispersed Are We”:

War in the Individual and Society in Virginia Woolf’s Novels

Thesis

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Abstract

Deze scriptie analyseert drie van Virginia Woolfs romans—*The Voyage Out* (1915), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) en *Between the Acts* (1941)—in de context van de twee wereldoorlogen. Het is een vergelijkend onderzoek dat zich richt op drie thema's. Ten eerste wordt het gedrag van de personages in de romans bestudeerd en geplaatst binnen de oppositie van het individu versus de groep of de maatschappij. Een tweede thema dat binnen deze oppositie wordt geplaatst is communicatie, hoe innerlijke monologen en dialogen zich ontwikkelen in de drie romans en wat dit zegt over het (gebrek aan) eenheidsgevoel in de groep of de gevechten die individuen moeten leveren tegen de groep en maatschappelijke conventies. Ten derde wordt oorlog als thema bestudeerd in twee van de drie romans. Het doel van het onderzoek is om te bepalen wat voor invloed de oorlogen hebben gehad op Woolfs fictie—specifieker, hoe de oorlogen haar representatie van individuen en de maatschappij hebben veranderd in de drie romans. De conclusie die wordt bereikt is dat er sprake is van een fragmentatie in communicatie en een toenemend gevoel van isolatie in de personages. De jongere generaties strijden meer en meer met de oudere generaties, en daarmee met de conventies waarbinnen ze zich gevangen voelen.

Keywords

Virginia Woolf, World War, individuals, society, behaviour, communication, fragmentation, isolation

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Introduction

Virginia Woolf's extraordinary brand of modernism could be said to be characterised by an eternal paradoxical struggle: a human being's desire to separate himself from the prison of societal expectations and rebel against convention, and a simultaneous yearning to belong to the 'tribe', the larger group, society. Stephen Fry, speaking at a BorderKitchen event in 2011, places this paradox in the context of the Roman notion of "rus et urbs", countryside and city:

All of human history is a tension between that part of us which wishes to be surrounded by others and to feel the pavement beneath our feet, and also that part of us that wishes to be in the countryside...It's my belief that most human beings are a bit of both. That is to say, most of us love the idea of belonging, of being surrounded by our own kind...but we also yearn for the idea of having a little cottage, or a little house somewhere in the fields, where there are long walks and there's the sea, and there's us and there's nature, and we can watch the seasons.

(Fry)

This thesis on three of Woolf's novels will show that these contradictory desires are present in at least one important character in each novel. The struggle for individualism whilst also desiring to belong informs many of the storylines in Woolf's work. Her novels are always deep explorations of the inner worlds of characters, but those explorations never take place in isolation. Characters are never solitary individuals who have no relationship with anyone else and do not define themselves in relation to anyone else. Their behaviour, their actions, their inner battles and their eventual choices are always the result of a combination of inner impulses—driven by their personality and their vision for what life ought to be—, and outer

influences—the people who possess a degree of authority over them and who represent the expectations of society.

This opposition of individuals versus society, as it will be labelled here, is the broad starting point for the following analyses of three of Woolf's novels: *The Voyage Out* (1915), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Between the Acts* (1941). The opposition will be separated into two more concrete research themes. Firstly, in Chapter 1, characters' behaviour will be analysed in terms of actions and the decisions they make. These actions and decisions will be shown to be responses to and motivated by social pressures. Secondly, in Chapter 2, communication between characters, as well as inner monologues, will be discussed and analysed with reference to societal changes and historical context. A third topic will be explored in Chapter 3, namely the literal and figurative manifestations of war in the novels, in order to delve more deeply in larger topics such as history, patriarchy and social paradigms.

With these three chapters, this research project attempts to answer the following question: how does Virginia Woolf's representation of the individual as opposed to the group or society change throughout three of her novels? The following secondary questions are the basis for each chapter:

Chapter 1: How does Woolf represent the characters and their behaviour in each novel, what do these representations say about the opposition of individuals versus society and how do they change throughout the novels?

Chapter 2: How do internal monologues and dialogues in the novels develop in terms of form and content and what do they say about how individuals are pitted against society?

Chapter 3: How has Woolf included the World Wars in her novels and how else is war and conflict present on a large/public and a small/private scale?

This research employs a comparative method of study of Woolf's first and last novels, and one of the novels she wrote during the 1920s. It will compare and contrast the same research themes in each of the novels in order to gain insight into the changing dynamics of society during the first four decades of the twentieth century, as perceived by Virginia Woolf. The analysis and interpretation of the opposition in the novels will therefore be based on a contextual theoretical assumption, namely that these changing dynamics are the result of the influence of the World Wars as major historical events. This assumption and the underlying theoretical framework will be explicated later on in this introduction.

The reason for this angle is in response to many other studies that have placed Woolf in a rather restrictive analytical environment. Many scholarly works have studied her life in her novels, her novels in her life and her place amongst her contemporaries, and many others have studied only her, her mental illnesses, her marriage and other relationships, her family and friends. In Woolf's case, the connection between the author and the work seems indestructible. Even though, as the following section on theoretical framework will show, every conclusion that will be reached in this thesis will not be treated as objective fact separated from the author, I find it important to exclude Woolf's biography from this research as much as I can. I am more interested in the appearance of 1910s, 1920s and 1940s British society in Woolf's novels, however inflected with all the things she was and did outside of her work. Therefore, history and biography are treated as two different things in this thesis, and while biography is important and highly interesting in Woolf's case, the following interpretations will be traced back to history rather than biography.

After elaborate and detailed preparatory research I have elected to study behaviour, communication and war within the realm of Woolf's work because these themes deepen and broaden our understanding of Woolf's work as time bound literature. Woolf's novels are always character-based rather than plot-based; what her characters feel, think and do is what

drives her novels. Behaviour and communication in particular signify *how* characters think, *why* they make certain decisions, how they treat each other and how they perceive themselves and their position within society. They are fundamental symptoms of the way social dynamics change and this research attempts to place those changes in their historical context. Aside from the themes of the first two chapters, this thesis also includes analysis of the presence of the World Wars in the novels in two ways. Firstly, literally—i.e., how characters discuss them, how they are described and treated as historical events—and secondly, figuratively—i.e., fighting and conflict between characters, the similarities between war on a minor/domestic scale and war on a major/international scale. Because of the goal of this thesis, to place Woolf's work in a historical and social context, it is important to not merely consider symptomatic themes (such as behaviour and communication) but also take a closer look at the actual presence of the wars in the novels and Woolf's representations of them. Woolf is all but silent on these topics, and therefore this research would be incomplete without them.

I chose to study these themes and topics in *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* because it is part of this thesis to track their progression in Woolf's career. One novel, as a slice of history, does not suffice to paint anywhere close to a complete picture of the period of the World Wars and all of their social consequences, because history is not a static body of facts and events. Rather, history is diffuse and it is difficult to say when a particular event or its consequences began and ended. As the subsequent chapters will show, Woolf's perception of society changed in substantial ways throughout the decades of her publishing life, and to read only one novel would be to miss out on this development in writing, perceptions and history.

Theoretical framework, definitions of terms, and methodology

The New Historicists combat empty formalism by pulling
historical considerations to the center stage of literary analysis.
— Harold Aram Veeseer's introduction to *The New Historicism*, xi

This research is grounded in various New Historicist ideas, terms and theoretical assumptions. New Historicism is a literary theory that first emerged in the 1980s. The initial focus of this school of criticism was Renaissance literature, firstly and most famously in the work of Stephen Greenblatt, but expanded into different eras and nationalities as it developed. It is a multi-faceted theory, with scholars employing it in different ways and choosing different themes on which to focus. Harold Aram Veeseer, in a very critical introduction to an anthology of New Historicist articles, writes that New Historicism responds to formalist and deconstructionist movements that advocated not venturing beyond the realm of literature. New Historicism gives scholars “new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics” and strikes down “the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affected people’s practical lives—matters best left, prevailing wisdom went, to experts” (Veeseer ix). In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams defines New Historicism as opposed to the same movements: “In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations” (182-3).

Literature is not isolated, timeless art that is “independent of the economic, social, and political conditions specific to an era” (Abrams 184). Rather than consider history as a background to a literary work, writes Abrams, New Historicists study literary works as *products* and *producers* of history, as intrinsically connected to the time, society, institutional

system and general discourse in which their creation took place. Instead of focusing endlessly on language, “allusion, symbolization, allegory, and mimesis, New Historicism seeks less limiting means to expose the manifold ways culture and society affect each other” (Veeder xii).

New Historicism holds that literary works are time bound, because their authors are and so are readers, which is why a twenty-first-century reader’s convictions and ideologies might clash with a medieval author’s work. The idea of a human nature that connects authors, characters and readers is an illusion. This leads New Historicists to adopt a particular attitude towards their research subjects. Abrams notes,

Insofar as the ideology of readers conforms to the ideology of the writers of a literary text, the readers will tend to naturalize the text—that is, interpret its culture-specific and time-bound representations as though they were the features of universal and permanent human experience. On the other hand, insofar as the readers’ ideology differs from that of the writer, they will tend to appropriate the text—that is, interpret it so as to make it conform to their own cultural prepossessions. (186)

New Historicists, who are of course readers themselves, put their own subjectivity at the forefront of their analyses. Louis Montrose, in his article “Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture”, writes about the practice of New Historicism as “a production of ideology: By this I mean not merely that it bears the traces of the professor’s values, beliefs, and experiences—his or her socially constructed subjectivity—but also that it actively instantiates those values, beliefs, and experiences” (Montrose 585). New Historicists are aware of the possible effect of their subjectivity, and try, in spite of it, to avoid

appropriation of a text by distancing the text in an attempt to see the differences between its and the critic's discourse more clearly. The main reason for this is the fact that New Historicists want to expose the forces and powers at play in a specific discourse, and in order to portray them most powerfully he needs to create contrast between his own discourse and that of the literary work, not melt them together into something traditionally labelled 'human nature'.

This theory is very suitable for this thesis on Woolf's work, for various reasons that stem both from the subject matter and my own position as a researcher. The modernists of the first half of the twentieth century are defined by their fragmented sense of story telling, their adoption of a multi-perspective narrative, caused by their belief in the inherent subjectivity of the human experience. As expressed by Tamar Katz in her article "Modernism, Subjectivity, and Narrative Form: Abstraction in *The Waves*",

Modernist experiments in narrative form often take as their goal the reshaping of narrative to a newly-envisioned subjectivity. Stream-of-consciousness, impressionism, point-of-view-narration—a range of narrative strategies offer the perceptual processes of the subject as the real story, and in doing so raise the question of just what shape subjectivity might possess. (232)

Virginia Woolf does exactly that: she gives each character in her novels their own voice and offers each of their perspectives to the reader to form a narrative, but never a complete one; there are always limits to one subject's experiences. Each character's perspective of another is also different. *The Voyage Out*'s Rachel Vinrace is perceived in five or six different ways *within the story*, but the reader knows there are several people who are absent but still have an opinion of Rachel. In other words, each character's experience of the events and of each other

adds up to a myriad of perspectives, but this does not lead to anything complete or objective—rather, the whole becomes more and more subjective, and each perspective only distorts the whole.

New Historicism, then, is a perfect mode of literary criticism to analyse novels in which subjectivity is such an important tool as well as a crucial component of the narrative. As for me as a researcher, I have always been more interested in the content of novels than in language-related analysis, which is so central to movements such as structuralism and post-structuralism. Content and context analysis often lead to more substantial conclusions that go beyond the novel and author, both of which I find impossible to perceive in isolation, without any connection to their time and history. I am fascinated by the personal and subjective nature of human experience and the crucial importance of discourse when it comes to analysing a specific point of view or giving one's opinion. Individual perspectives often do not line up because they are the result of one particular individual's upbringing, culture, country of origin, personal identity, education, political standpoint, religion, even mother tongue. I find these considerations both interesting to analyse and important to take into account, as literature and criticism seem to have become more relative compared to nineteenth-century (and earlier) notions of grand narratives and indisputable truths.

When it comes to method, there are some differences between this research and what could be called 'traditional' New Historicism—although New Historicists might object to that notion. One of the key elements of New Historicism is their simultaneous and equal reading of literary and contemporary non-literary texts, as Peter Barry writes in his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (166). Because of the focus and limited scope of this research, analysis of Woolf's novels will not be compared to contemporary non-literary texts, although it is an interesting possibility for further research. A second difference between New Historicism and this thesis is not necessarily a difference, but more of a

broadening in definition. New Historicists' analytical focus is power, the way in which it is centred or distributed and which social groups are favoured or disadvantaged. In this thesis, 'power' becomes more of a symbolic entity. Woolf's novels usually feature female main characters, and because of the time during which she wrote, these women often did not participate in the public sphere. Their narratives played out in the private sphere, in the company of their family members, friends and acquaintances. The kind of power that will come to the fore in my analysis of these novels is more the power of tradition, the power of the establishment, which influences how characters behave and perceive themselves and each other. My focus is on the individual torn between the desire to belong and the desire to rebel. Both these desires exist in relation to what is expected of them, and these social expectations are the result of established tradition, as represented by matronly characters. In short, this thesis will focus mainly on perhaps a 'female' version of power; the pressures of authoritative society that determine what individuals should and should not be.

There are also some points on which this research follows the New Historicist method and adopts its terms. Firstly, one of the key terms within New Historicism is *representations*, "verbal formations which are the 'ideological products' or 'cultural constructs' of the historical conditions specific to an era" (Abrams 183-4). This term is adopted in the research question on which this thesis is based. My research looks for Woolf's representation of the opposition of individual versus society, through the themes of behaviour, communication and war. It treats these representations in a New Historicist way, and by employing the same method: Clifford Geertz's notion of *thick descriptions*, "the close analysis, or 'reading,' of a particular social production or event so as to recover the meanings it has for the people involved in it, as well as to discover, within the cultural system, the general patterns of conventions, codes, and modes of thinking that invest the item with those meanings" (Abrams 183). In this thesis, the social events in question are the First and Second World Wars, and

they are analysed, not as themselves, but as seen through Woolf's representations of them, through her characters, what they do, how they communicate and what occupies their thoughts and catalyses their emotions. These analyses will result from a close, comparative reading of the novels, combined with a collection of relevant secondary literature that will be discussed later on in this introduction.

As mentioned earlier, one of the New Historicist's concerns is the potential appropriation by the researcher of the values and discourse that can be detected in the work they study. I recognise the importance of this but would like to add a proviso. This thesis does include some appropriation in the sense that it will occasionally connect certain developments from the times of these novels to the twenty-first century—for example the use of the term 'adolescent' in its modern sense, applied to a character in a 1915 novel. This breach of New Historicist 'ethics' is deliberate, because of the period from which the novels stem and its relevance to modern-day history. The World Wars and the period they cover—the first five decades of the twentieth century—have had a great deal of influence on today's Western and European societies. Rather than there being two separate discourses—a modern-day analysis of Elizabethan literature, for example—the temporal proximity of these events causes the discourse of Woolf's novels and my personal discourse to be more (causally) connected. This does not mean, however, that my subjectivity is eradicated or that it provides me with better insight; merely that some modern-day concepts and discourses can and will be applied to Woolf's literature.

Lastly, there is the term *society*. It is a broad term and can mean various different things. In this thesis, its definition will largely depend on the context in which it is used rather than any typically New Historicist definition (if there is one). This context depends on which of the three novels is being discussed at that particular point. In *The Voyage Out*, it will usually mean the expatriated group of British travellers that surround Rachel Vinrace during her

journey to South America. This group consists of family members and strangers, some of the older and some of Rachel's generation, who present her with different perspectives on life, women and what kind of woman Rachel ought to be. In *To the Lighthouse*, 'society' is also a group on vacation, although this time on British soil. Lily Briscoe is an outsider, a guest of the large Ramsay family, and the social pressures she deals with mainly flow from Mrs Ramsay, who also has clear ideas on what Lily ought to do with her life. Mr and Mrs Ramsay both represent the establishment, traditional social values, as do several minor characters. In *Between the Acts*, Giles and Isa Oliver could be said to belong to the establishment, as they are a traditional married couple, but they feel restless within those traditions. For them, 'society' is mainly their older family members, who feel completely at ease with tradition and the repetitive nature of conventional life. Giles and Isa see their own future in these people, and become more desperate to escape as the novel continues. 'Society', therefore, can be one or several people, but they are always people who, in the eyes of the conflicted characters, seem to be at ease with the conventions they adhere to, and appear to want to pressure the conflicted characters into accepting the same kind of life. That is the struggle that this thesis will be focusing on by employing this varying definition of society.

Building on this theoretical framework and these definitions, I will employ a variety of secondary literature to support and add to my close reading of the novels. Christine Froula's *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (2005) is an important source for discussions of the novels from different perspectives, and will be cited repeatedly throughout this thesis. Another source for articles on various different subjects is Sue Roe and Susan Sellers' *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2000). Janet Winston's *To the Lighthouse: A Reader's Guide* (2009) provides critique and background on several aspects of a particularly difficult novel. Then there are various texts used for more particular topics. Articles by Molly Hite, Grady Smith and André Viola will aid analysis of

behaviour in Chapter 1; work by Maria Alessandra Galbiati and Peter James Harris, Martha Nussbaum, and Julia Briggs discusses language and communication in the novels; and work by Nancy Topping Bazin and Jane Hamovit Lauter, Julia Briggs, Alex Zwerdling, and Megan Mondt discuss the presence of the wars in specific novels. This research relies on these texts and others for interpretations of particular topics in the novels, and combines them in order to arrive at more interdisciplinary analyses of the novels.

The novels

Woolf's first novel was published one year into the Great War. *The Voyage Out* (1915) portrays Rachel Vinrace's voyage of self-discovery, her struggle to find a way of being in the world despite all the hurdles her predecessors have put up for her, as Christine Froula writes in her *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity*:

Uneducated and naïve as she is, Rachel alone seeks to discover and grapple with the “laws”—natural and social—that shape the lives and destinies of men and women, and to battle against rather than propitiate civilization's many-mawed hunger for lies. (39)

Rachel travels with her father, uncle and aunt aboard the *Euphrosyne* to South America.

Rachel is a young, upper-class lady who does not know much about herself, or about anything at all. She is a typical adolescent, not committing to any kind of life but drifting. Her talents lie with music but she knows it will not become her profession—rather, she is expected to marry and lead the same kind of life as her aunt, Helen Ambrose. Without self-knowledge and knowledge of marriage, love or sex, Rachel is expected to tie herself to another human being for the rest of her life. The characters around her attempt to educate her, and it eventually

leads Rachel to follow the example of another female character in the novel and get engaged to one of the young men staying in a hotel nearby. This ‘happiness’ is short-lived: Rachel falls ill and dies shortly after.

It was a difficult novel to write for Woolf, but the book does explore and set up some of the themes Woolf would examine in more detail in her later novels, such as the rules and laws of society and their consequences, particularly for the women of the age, as well as more abstract themes such as communication and self-expression, the secrets people will keep from each other, and the relationship between the individual and the group—be it a family, a society or civilisation. Interestingly, not only is this Woolf’s first novel, it is also her only novel not set in Britain. Instead, it creates and explores a small English society abroad, and defines it using the opposition of home and away. In this thesis, *The Voyage Out*, having been written from 1907 to 1913 (Froula 345), is the novel that represents pre-war British society as well as the starting point for my analysis of the development of Woolf’s writing.

To the Lighthouse (1927) is one of Woolf’s best-known works and one of the epitomes of the modernism for which she would become famous. It describes the Ramsay family and their holiday home on the Isle of Skye, where they and selected guests vacation. Julia Briggs, in her chapter “The novels of the 1930s and the impact of history” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, describes how Woolf herself thought of the novel’s structure as an H,

“Two blocks joined by a corridor”, in which the uprights, the first and third sections, recorded a day in the lives of the family on holiday, although substantial changes took place between the two. The horizontal bar corresponds to the shorter “Time Passes” section... Ten years that include the Great War itself are thus compressed into the passage of a single night. (74)

This novel is a prime example of Woolf's deep exploration of characters' inner worlds. In terms of story, not much happens—it is merely an illustration of a contrast between two eras: the time before and the time after the war. The novel portrays the relationships between Mr and Mrs Ramsay, them and their children, and the family and the guests. It also traces the development of Lily Briscoe, who faces the same choice as Rachel Vinrace: to assert her independence or to surrender herself to the institution of marriage.

Briggs also describes how *To the Lighthouse* was an accumulation and contrast of worlds from two previous novels, *Jacob's Room* (1922), which represented “middle-class English society before the war”, and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), which portrayed it after the war (Briggs, *Companion* 72). *To the Lighthouse* portrays the contrast between these two different worlds by combining them and connecting them through the corridor of the Great War and early post-war years. For the Ramsays, the corridor was a dark one, as Mrs Ramsay and two of her children die, but the changes brought about in society and, as a result, in the individual, are far more profound. The societal ideals and standards no longer hold, and the characters' perceptions of each other have changed.

A novel with even more intricate historical dimensions and backgrounds is *Between the Acts*, Woolf's last novel, published posthumously in 1941. Like *Mrs Dalloway*, *Between the Acts* takes place in the course of a single day, but not just any day: Woolf chose a day in June 1939, mere months before the definitive outbreak of the Second World War. The members of the Oliver family host the annual village pageant and Woolf spends the whole novel describing the acts, as well as what occurs between the acts. The tableaux are merely an interruption of the conflicts the characters are having with each other, most importantly the conflict between Giles and Isa Oliver, a young married couple who do not interact with one another for the duration of the novel. Instead they struggle internally with themselves and with what the other is troubled by. The threat of the war also weighs upon various characters'

minds, and a wedge is driven between the younger and older generations as each deals differently with the prospect of war.

But unlike *To the Lighthouse*, it is not entirely clear what kind of society Woolf is portraying in her final novel. She writes during a time of war, that is certain, and from a perspective of having gone through a World War once before. But one could still think of Europe and Britain as post-war societies: the shadows of the Great War have not dispersed and there are very few people whose lives were not touched by it. It is therefore not as easy to pinpoint what kind of society the characters in the novel inhabit—which makes the novel all the more interesting.

Chapter 1 – What People Do

His eye fell upon Rachel. She was lying back rather behind the others resting on one elbow; she might have been thinking precisely the same thoughts as Hewet himself. Her eyes were fixed rather sadly but not intently upon the row of people opposite her. Hewet crawled up to her on his knees, with a piece of bread in his hand.

“What are you looking at?” he asked.

She was a little startled, but answered directly, “Human beings.”

— *The Voyage Out*, 254.

As mentioned in the introduction, this first chapter will address the following questions: how does Woolf represent the characters and their behaviour in each novel? How do these representations relate to the opposition of individuals and society, and how do they change throughout Woolf’s career? The topics of behaviour, decision-making and interactions with other people relates to this opposition because they reflect what characters do in response to the pressures, expectations, and (changing) conventions of society. The kinds of ‘behaviour’ that will be analysed in each of the novels will range from important life choices and their motivations, expressions of inner turmoil and emotional difficulties, to relationships between characters and their explanations. Each of the three novels will be discussed in three separate paragraphs, with occasional overlap between novels. In particular, there is an interesting similarity between the storyline and development of Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out* and Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*. These women face similar decisions but make different choices, and the motivations of their choices will say much about the different historical and social context in which they were written (1915 and 1927). The marriages central to *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* also present opportunities for comparison, but *Between the Acts* is above all a clean break from the writing and storylines of *The Voyage Out* and *To the*

Lighthouse. With a pageant on English history at its core, *Between the Acts* contains more direct commentary on the threat of war and topics such as social unity and the threat (or perhaps necessity) of individualisation.

Within the larger purpose of this thesis, this chapter functions as a deeper introduction to the characters and storylines of the novels and offers more general interpretations of their most important ‘markers’; central relationships, events or features (such as the pageant) that indicate each novel’s place within the progression of English society, through Woolf’s eyes and pen.

1.1: The institution of marriage

The Voyage Out (VO) is the novel with the most conventional structure out of the three chosen for this research. This is not strange; as it was Woolf’s first novel, she had a long way to go before she was able to transform her writing into the groundbreaking modernist style she displayed in *To the Lighthouse* or *The Waves*. *The Voyage Out* is not unrecognisable compared to her later works, however; it still contains many in-depth ‘Woolfian’ character and thought descriptions, and the focus is always on character development rather than ‘action’ in the sense of a series of events. The storyline is tremendously simple; it describes the journey to and holiday in South America of a group of characters essentially divided into two groups. On the one hand are Rachel Vinrace and her family, whom the reader joins aboard the *Euphrosyne* (a ship) for the journey, after which they stay in a private house; on the other are the guests of a hotel in the same town, who are mainly English and provide expatriate society for Rachel and her family.

Rachel is a young woman of twenty-four, the daughter of Willoughby Vinrace and a member of an upper-class family. Not much is expected of Rachel, except what is typically expected of a woman in her position. She has to be pretty and charming, she has to be

“prepared to entertain”, and above all, her purpose in life is to marry (*VO* 153). Examples of that kind of life are presented to her in the form of her aunt, Helen Ambrose, and Clarissa Dalloway, later the eponymous *Mrs Dalloway*, who boards the ship for a time with her husband Richard. After the *Euphrosyne* has reached its destination, Rachel comes into contact with some eligible gentlemen, such as St John Hirst, whom she despises because of his sense of self-importance, and Terence Hewet, to whom she ends up engaged.

The focus of this section is on Rachel, who is after all the main character of the novel and whose fate determines this interpretation of the novel. As has already been pointed out, Rachel is a typical adolescent, still searching for her place in life. Even though she knows that she is headed in the marital direction, she has not quite reconciled herself to that fate yet. Rachel has a passion for music and her talent for it is the characteristic by which she defines herself. This passion represents a different path in life for Rachel; as Christine Froula writes in her article “Out of the Chrysalis: Female Initiation and Female Authority in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*”,

On the one hand, Woolf’s story of the semi-autobiographical Rachel Vinrace shows how the paradigms of female initiation encourage the young woman to identify with nature rather than culture and to imagine marriage and maternity as the destiny that will fulfill her life. On the other hand, Woolf endows Rachel with a powerful desire to evade or transcend this culturally determined destiny. (63)

Rachel never comes very close to asserting her desire for independence, she never decides to take drastic measures and try to become a professional piano player; her confused rebellion takes place mainly in her mind. It expresses itself in multiple ways; for example, in her encounters with Richard Dalloway, the strait-laced politician who holds all the traditional

values that could put Rachel on the track towards becoming like Clarissa or Helen. Richard believes that women should never be allowed to enter the public sphere of politics or the realms of ‘culture’, as Froula defines it in the quote above (as opposed to nature). Women are not built for such things. Rather, women are meant to stay at home, raise their children and occupy their minds with domestic matters—that is where their virtue lies (*VO* 196-7). Richard expresses these opinions directly to Rachel, and she is irritated. She is desperate to learn what he knows, because she takes his knowledge as truth. Shortly before their conversation on the purpose of women Rachel is questioning Richard on his life and past, and she feels that she would like to say to him, “Please tell me—everything” (188).

Rachel is immediately attracted to Richard because he is an authority figure and because he radiates the kind of wisdom that might be of use to a young, uneducated girl like Rachel. If he had been unmarried, he might have been the kind of man who could offer her a guide through life. Richard knows how to live, he knows his way through social conventions Rachel has not even accepted yet. When she first sees him she notes that he is “impressive. He seemed to come from the humming oily centre of the machine where the polished rods are sliding, and the pistons thumping...” (180) Richard finds politics the most “enjoyable and enviable” profession and appreciates its usefulness in trying to resolve the messes of society (178). He turns against artists for this reason, saying that society has to accept the quirks of the artist and that, contrary to what politicians attempt to do, “artists *find* things in a mess, shrug their shoulders, turn aside to their visions...and *leave* things in a mess” (178). Rachel does not respond to this, in spite of the fact that art is what mostly drives *her*. Her appreciation of and proficiency in music define her. She probably does not realise that it places her opposite Richard, rather than closer to him.

Her ignorance of practical things and public life is what attracts him, however. Rachel fits Richard’s idea of the perfect wife when he tells her he will not allow his wife to talk politics,

or to be part of his professional life—her job is homemaking, providing an escape from reality for her husband. But Richard desires Rachel (and perhaps also Clarissa) to be two things: to be both unspoilt and worldly. He asks her to tell him about herself, all her “interests and occupations” in the midst of all the “opportunities and possibilities” of the age, to which Rachel replies, “You see, I’m a woman” to indicate that that means she does not have any strong interests (204-5). Richard then muses that she, as a young and beautiful woman, must have “the whole world at her feet... What couldn’t you do—” (205). Therefore, Richard’s expectations of women are paradoxical. He thinks they should not be a part of public life but stay at home and let their minds be guided by purer things, such as children, friends and domesticity. But at the same time, he asserts that Rachel is capable of anything, even though he and men like him have put up various roadblocks that would prevent Rachel from being anything other than a homemaker. In her article “The Public Woman and the Modernist Turn: Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* and Elizabeth Robins’s *My Little Sister*”, Molly Hite interprets Rachel’s self-deprecating response as a “demystifying remark indicating that [Richard’s] talk of possibilities applies to an audience other than his present one, although Dalloway characteristically recognizes the assertion of difference only as a provocative reminder of sexuality” (534-5).

In short, Rachel is attracted to Richard because Richard, as a successful part of society, possesses the knowledge and truth she desires, and Richard is attracted to Rachel because she is ignorant and represents the natural state of not being spoiled by society, and sees in her the potential of youth. But because Rachel desires to be enlightened, Rachel and Richard would not make a suitable couple. Rachel cannot be enlightened without losing Richard’s interest, because it is his wife’s ignorance that makes her a good wife. Much of this results from Richard’s preconceptions on women and what they should be and do, but Rachel also continuously feels the pull between individualism and belonging to a group, the pull between

adhering to social convention and choosing her own path through life. This choice also troubles Lily Briscoe, a character from *To the Lighthouse* who will be discussed in section 1.2. This mutual, though uneven attraction culminates in a kiss amidst a sea storm. Both are shocked by what they have done, and that night, monstrous men plague Rachel in her nightmares and imagination. Richard and Clarissa leave the ship the next day, excusing him and Rachel from any further interaction.

Rachel's desire for enlightenment is something of a theme throughout the novel. Particularly Helen feels it is her duty to educate Rachel, not in maths or geography, but rather how to exist in society. She asks St John Hirst, an academic and Terence Hewet's friend, for help. Hirst and Helen get on well; Hirst admires Helen greatly and Helen sees in Hirst a kind of teacher for Rachel—quite similar, in a lot of ways, to Richard Dalloway. Helen asks Hirst to help her “complete [Rachel's] education[.] She's been brought up practically in a nunnery. Her father's too absurd. I've been doing what I can—but I'm too old, and I'm a woman” (277). It frustrates Helen that Rachel “changes her view of life about every other day”. Froula writes, “To Helen, Rachel seems unformed and unformable, a watery being that culture, language, writing leave no mark upon” (“Chrysalis” 69). Helen wishes Hirst to teach Rachel not knowledge, but “the facts of life”, “what really goes on, what people feel, although they generally try to hide it[.] There's nothing to be frightened of. It's so much more beautiful than the pretences—always more interesting—always better...” (277) Helen professes herself to be more of a believer in the truth behind social conventions than in conventions themselves, but the fact that she adheres to them to the point where she defers to a *man* to teach her niece the facts of life, contradicts what she professes herself to be. After all, why would she want a man to teach Rachel the ‘facts of life’, when all Rachel needs to know is how to be a wife, and surely Helen would be more suitable to teach her than St John Hirst? It is because men

are traditionally teachers, and, according to Helen, even when it comes to learning how to fulfil her role as a woman, Rachel needs a man to show her how.

As a shortcut to both receiving and completing this education at the same time, Rachel could just get married, which is what she and Terence Hewet, Hirst's friend, decide to do. The English tourists go on an expedition into the jungle, and when the others are resting by a river, Rachel and Hewet are "left standing by themselves without occupation. Terence saw that the time had come as it was fated to come" and they decide to walk into the jungle by themselves (369). The scene where they get engaged is a very strange one, as Froula also notes, because the engagements happens "without ever uttering the words" ("Chrysalis" 79):

"You like being with me?" Terence asked.

"Yes, with you," she replied.

He was silent for a moment. Silence seemed to have fallen upon the world.

"That is what I have felt ever since I knew you," he replied. "We are happy together." ...

"Very happy," she answered. ...

"We love each other," Terence said.

"We love each other," she repeated.

The silence was then broken by their voices which joined in tones of strange unfamiliar sound which formed no words. Faster and faster they walked; simultaneously they stopped, clasped each other in their arms, then releasing themselves, dropped to the earth. ...

"We love each other," Terence repeated, searching into her face...By degrees she drew close to him, and rested against him. In this position they sat for some time.

She said, "Terence," once; he answered, "Rachel." (*VO* 371)

The engagement between Hewet and Rachel is not entirely unexpected, because the novel has been building towards it. But this is the first instance of several where Rachel says something she later contradicts. Hewet never directly asks her to marry him in this scene, leading to the conclusion that the decision—perhaps even the interpretation of this conversation as an engagement scene—comes more from Hewet’s side than it does from Rachel’s. Rachel only ever repeats what he says and is not offered a concrete decision. A few pages after this exchange, Hewet asks Rachel whether she loves him, and “she murmured inarticulately, ending, ‘And you?’” (378) She goes on to say, “Am I in love—is this being in love—are we to marry each other?” (379) Uncertainty again maims what convention dictates should have been a perfect moment of happiness and clarity. Rachel does go on to try and convince herself and Hewet of being in love with him, but it is only ever contradicted by other statements and emotions. Perhaps understandably, after making such a life-altering decision, Rachel and Hewet emotionally switch between complete happiness and fearful uncertainty, but Rachel’s assertion in the next chapter that she never fell in love with Hewet proves the theory that she agreed to marry him because she believes that is what she is expected to do and because as a young woman, she cannot deny she feels flattered and enjoys the romance of it. But she is just as uneducated as she was at the start of the novel and she still wonders, “What are the things people do feel?” (*VO* 393)

They remain engaged, however; Hewet does not break it off because he really is in love with Rachel, and Rachel stays because to her it is the proper thing to do—it is what is expected of her. For this reason, her engagement gives her peace of mind she has never known before. She feels independent within the impending confines of matrimony, because it excuses her from finding an identity of her own, outside the conventional institution of marriage. She may not love Hewet, but maybe she does, she is not sure. How is Rachel, at her age and with her life experience, supposed to know what love is and supposed to distinguish

one feeling from another? It is the institution of marriage, the thought that she will be cared for and safe for the rest of her life, that gives Rachel her feeling of independence and calm. She is on her way to fulfilling her destiny as a woman, and never even had to learn all the things she thought she might have to know before becoming more like Helen or Clarissa Dalloway. Her engagement solidifies her future, even if her personality has not solidified yet.

The novel ends with Rachel's illness and swift death, bringing her engagement to Hewet to an end. Although her death seems perfectly natural, and, as Froula writes in "Chrysalis", a result of something she picked up while in the jungle, it could be interpreted as a highly symbolic death as well. In her book *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, Froula writes that a character in Woolf's next novel, *Night and Day*, says "that marriage entails the sacrifice of a woman's desire and will", but Rachel is the complete opposite: "She does not go like a lamb to the slaughter, but...takes up arms against the system and dies a soldier's death in the 'cause' of seeing women, men, and marriage new" (57). This interpretation seems correct in most respects, but, to go one step further, Rachel's very action of accepting Hewet seals her fate, because she does it without having a reason to do it. She does not love Hewet, but accepts him because she feels obligated to—it is society's growing influence that motivates her, and her death is a symbolic punishment for giving up her self to a man. She takes up arms in the sense that she does not flatter Hewet's ego when she tells him she never fell in love with him. Her uncertainty, her searching and questioning nature are symptoms of her adolescence, but society and the time in which she lives determine that women do not get to search for and question where they truly belong. Their path is already set out for them. This 'rule' takes hold of Rachel and leads her to accept Hewet, but her punishment for not choosing herself is death. Froula, in "Chrysalis", interprets Rachel's death in two ways, one of which is more related to Woolf's writing process, and will therefore be omitted from the argument in this section. She writes that "Rachel's death represents...the power of female

initiation structures to overwhelm female desire when it ventures to imagine a different future” (63). The different future Rachel imagines is her music—the only thing she is sure about in the entire novel is her love and talent for music.

Rachel struggles for most of the novel to assert the search for her own identity as the determining factor in her life. But she dies for two reasons: firstly, she is punished because she has accepted Hewet, and is prepared to be part of the conventionality of marriage and society rather than remain an individual. Secondly, she is punished because she does not accept her marital faith without a fight—she does not entirely surrender her individuality, and even though she does feel independent within her engagement, she is no closer to knowing her true feelings than she was at the start of the novel. Molly Hite writes that Rachel’s death also “raises the disturbing question of whether there is any role or adult position in life that Rachel could occupy within the social world without sacrificing her own identity and aesthetic capacities”—an interesting question that will be answered in the section 1.2, where *To the Lighthouse*’s Lily Briscoe faces the same dilemma but chooses a different path (542).

1.2: The road not taken

In *To the Lighthouse* (*TL*), Lily Briscoe occupies the same position as Rachel Vinrace. The reader learns most about her in the first part of the novel, entitled “The Window”. Lily is a painter in her early thirties, and she is unmarried. She is one of the guests of the Ramsay family on the Isle of Skye, and she spends her time painting and reflecting on the family life of the Ramsays. Mr Ramsay is the patriarch on the island; he is a surly, moody philosopher who tends to terrorise his children, spoil their fun and claim his wife’s attention and sympathies. He has a habit of randomly reciting lines of poetry that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Mrs Ramsay, the matriarch, is very similar to Helen Ambrose in *The Voyage Out*. She is very charismatic, particularly for her children and for Lily, because she is

a married woman who has settled very successfully in her roles as wife and mother. She is a mediator between her husband and her children. The best example of this is at the very start of the novel, when James Ramsay, one of their children, has expressed his desire to go to the lighthouse (hence the title); his mother tries to be optimistic and hopes that the weather will be fine enough for them to go to the lighthouse, whereas his father—the eternal realist—keeps saying the weather will not be good. Mrs Ramsay is there to keep the children’s world—which she believes should always be exempt from realism—intact, to protect it from the so un-childlike Mr Ramsay, who prefers his children to know the truth. In her *Woolf’s To the Lighthouse: A Reader’s Guide*, Janet Winston writes that Mr Ramsay is devoted “to pursuing the unadorned truth at any cost”, whereas Mrs Ramsay “elevates the importance of people’s feelings over other considerations. Her interactions are guided by a fine-tuned sense of individual human needs as well as the understanding that multiple truths coexist and communal harmony requires self-sacrifice” (47). Mrs Ramsay wants to allow her children to do what they please, to let them explore their natural impulses and talents. Mr Ramsay’s relentless reason as well as his sense of self-importance make him very unapproachable for his children, and not a natural father or husband.

Lily’s storyline in the novel is two-fold: firstly, she is working on a painting and trying to complete it, which takes her the entirety of the novel and, in terms of actual time span, more than ten years. Secondly, Mrs Ramsay wishes Lily to marry William Bankes, an old family friend of theirs and also among the guests. Lily is aware of Mrs Ramsay’s vision for her life, which is why marriage and a family life like the Ramsays’ are on Lily’s mind as well while she works on her painting. Lily is fascinated by Mrs Ramsay as an individual and as a matriarch, even though she is critical of her marriage. Lily feels that Mrs Ramsay humours her husband too much and does not like that she allows him to be such an overbearing shadow over her and her children’s lives. But she bears an interesting and perhaps paradoxical

affection for her, because Mrs Ramsay is also the epitome of homely motherhood, a kind of glowing example for any young, unmarried woman as well as something for unmarried men to aspire to attain. William Bankes is enraptured at the sight of Mrs Ramsay reading a story to James. Lily sees why and feels a part of the harmony of it; she “felt intense gratitude” for it, “for nothing so solaced her, eased her of the perplexity of life, and miraculously raised its burdens, as this sublime power, this heavenly gift, and one would no more disturb it...than break up the shaft of sunlight lying level across the floor” (35).

Lily’s affection for Mrs Ramsay is paradoxical. She adores her in a way that could be both familial and romantic. It is familial in the sense that, as André Viola notes in his article “Fluidity versus Muscularity: Lily’s Dilemma in Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*”, “Lily does function as an adopted, but marginalized, daughter” (271). She feels the same kind of reverence for Mrs Ramsay as James, for example. But, as will be shown in Chapter 2 in the context of communication, Lily also wishes to be at one with Mrs Ramsay, almost in a romantic way, stemming from a deep-rooted desire to be understood and to express what she truly feels. This is the pull of society that is represented by Mrs Ramsay, the safe harbour that Rachel Vinrace also enters once she agrees to marry Terence Hewet. Quite naturally, Lily is attracted by the kind of safety William Bankes would provide, both financially and socially. She would no longer be alone; she would belong to a family just like the Ramsays belong to each other. Grady Smith, in his article “Virginia Woolf: The Narrow Bridge of Art”, writes about completeness, a sense of ‘we’ that is the result of engagement or marriage. An example of this, writes Smith, is Mrs Ramsay inferring Minta Doyle and Paul Rayley’s engagement from Paul’s use of ‘we’. The same completeness can be found in Mr and Mrs Ramsay’s marriage; it informs Mrs Ramsay’s desire to see Lily married, and it is also why Lily is tempted by the thought of marriage.

But Lily is also critical of Mrs Ramsay, and Mrs Ramsay's wish for her to marry counteracts Lily's own hopes and wishes for her future. Mrs Ramsay tries to set Lily's and Minta and Paul's marriages up because she has the rather traditional view that women are not women until they are wives and mothers, being convinced that "an unmarried woman... has missed the best of life" (*TL* 36). From a daughterly perspective, Lily's love for Mrs Ramsay might be able to persuade her to adhere to Mrs Ramsay's wishes—i.e., marry William Bankes. But from the perspective of a stubborn artist, an individual who "liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for [marriage]", Lily cannot give up her own idea of happiness in exchange for the approval of Mrs Ramsay or a place within society (*TL* 36). Smith writes,

The tension in Lily between wanting completeness and being repulsed by the idea of marriage and husband... causes Lily a great deal of pain... On the one hand she longs for the completeness in Mrs. Ramsay through some kind of union... while on the other hand she views marriage as a 'dilution' and 'degradation'. (41)

So instead, Lily turns to her painting to fill the void she cannot bring herself to fill by marrying. However, she is far from confident in her own capabilities as a painter. Her emotional state continuously moves between courage and insecurity, overwhelmed with a feeling of "her own inadequacy, her insignificance" one minute, and "'in love with this all,' waving her hand at the hedge, at the house, at the children" the next (*TL* 14). Janet Winston writes, "[Lily] is filled with self-doubt throughout the story until the novel's last line" (54). Woolf herself writes in the novel that Lily is always "struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see,' and so to clasp some

miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her” (14).

In spite of this perpetual self-doubt, Lily is remarkably courageous when it comes to definitively rejecting the institution of marriage at the end of the first part. She suddenly replaces marriage with art during the dinner party at the end of “The Window”. This moment is particularly interesting considering the fact that this part of the novel is set before the First World War—a time when it was much harder for women to choose not to marry. The Great War was, if anything, a turning point for social and cultural values (as will be discussed in Chapter 3), and Lily’s choice is so impressive because she makes it before this crucial period. It is possible that this is the result of Woolf writing about pre-war English society from a post-war perspective, but it might also be meant to portray Lily as a strong female character, who, because she “renounces marriage...has the freedom to develop her own talents rather than, as is the case for Mrs Ramsay, those of a husband and children” (Winston 51). In a lot of ways, Lily’s storyline forms ‘the road not taken’ for Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*. Both Lily and Rachel are artists, and although there is nearly ten years between them in terms of age, both face essentially the same societal pressures: to marry or to remain individuals. As became clear, Rachel gives in to the pressure but is punished for it, as well as for her incomplete commitment to her impending marriage. Lily finds strength in her insecurity; as she moves between confidence and despair, forces such as Charles Tansley—who haunts her with the words “women can’t paint, women can’t write”—have less and less impact on her (*TL* 35). Even though the completeness of marriage tempts her, it is not enough, and she resolutely reminds herself that “she need not marry, thank heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree [in her painting] rather more to the middle” (74). Here, Lily replaces marriage very clearly with her work, her

painting, and that is exactly what she has done when she returns to the island after the war, in the third part of the novel entitled “The Lighthouse”.

Lily is in a way victorious in “The Lighthouse”; she is happy, in spite of never marrying, whereas Minta and Paul, who did buckle under the pressure of social convention, are not happy. Prue, one of the Ramsay children, also marries in “Time Passes” (the second part of the novel, representing the years between the two visits to the Isle of Skye, among which the years of the war) but dies in childbirth. Viola writes that she “dies from too complete an obedience to her mother’s wishes”, an interpretation that completely corresponds with what has emerged about Lily’s dilemma. Lily has not done what Mrs Ramsay wanted of her and she triumphs, whereas the Rayleys and Prue suffer from their adherence to Mrs Ramsay’s wishes. Lily and William Bankes are still good friends, but Lily feels like she “escaped by the skin of her teeth” (TL 131). In the end, Lily remains an individual and her achievement at the very end, when she has had her vision and completes her painting, is the climax of the novel. It is her personal victory over Mrs Ramsay (or society’s pressure on single women) and over her own self-doubt: Lily’s ultimate decision to stick to her personal capabilities rather than make herself dependent on another human being.

Lily’s storyline in *To the Lighthouse* is not the only one, and the next chapter will focus more on Mr and Mrs Ramsay as a married couple, but Lily’s storyline says much about the difference between pre-war and post-war society, and the courage it took for a woman like Lily to choose her own path.

1.3: The present. Ourselves.

Between the Acts (BTA) begins by introducing the members of the upper-class family Oliver living in Pointz Hall, while they are preparing for the pageant that will take place in the grounds of the house. Bartholomew Oliver and his sister Mrs Swithin are representative of the

older, conservative generation, the people who say things like “By Jupiter” and have the same conversations year after year (*BTA* 316). At the same time, Isa and Giles Oliver—Giles being Bartholomew’s son and Isa his wife—represent the younger generation, who find it difficult to tolerate their senior relatives and their pointless nonsense. Both Isa and Giles feel isolated and trapped in their social roles, possibly because they know that they will have taken Bartholomew and Mrs Swithin’s place in a few decades, and will be just as obsolete and mundane.

In the meantime, Miss La Trobe, the anxious writer and director of the pageant, is preparing the music and the actors. In the village (which, although unnamed, is presumably very English), Miss La Trobe is a bit of an outsider: “With that name she wasn’t presumably pure English” (*BTA* 333). The villagers speculate that she might be from the Channel Islands, or from Russia. She usually behaves in a way that makes people think she “wasn’t altogether a lady”, as she swears a lot and has received the nickname ‘Bossy’ (333). At the root of her behaviour is ambition, and a sense of having something to prove.

The pageant she has written consists of several scenes depicting different periods in English history. It begins with a prologue in which the personification of England introduces the pageant, followed by scenes typical of certain kinds of historical plays or periods. The patriotism of the pageant seems undeniable. Miss La Trobe has included scenes of the Elizabethan and Victorian ages, leaving out large chunks of time in between. But, writes Julia Briggs in “The novels of the 1930s”, the superficial patriotism of the pageant is undermined by the parodies that the tableaux actually are. She compares Woolf’s pageant to other pageants in the works of Woolf’s contemporaries, and writes that “the pageant at Pointz Hall provides the opportunity to create a potted history of the English language written in a series of parodies...The pageant reduces English history to a sequence of familiar, and therefore essentially comic, plots” (85). The audience does not always notice this—particularly the

older characters tend to recognise only the celebrations of Englishness through the stereotypical, the familiar and the conventional.

The audience only realises that this pageant is not all it seems when the final act begins. The audience reads in their programmes,

The present time. Ourselves...But what could she know about ourselves? The Elizabethans, yes; the Victorians, perhaps; but ourselves sitting here on a June day in 1939—it was ridiculous. ‘Myself’—it was impossible. Other people, perhaps...But she won’t get me—no, not me. The audience fidgeted. (390)

The audience expects some kind of big, patriotic finale with “a Grand Ensemble. Army; Navy; Union Jack” (390) to wrap up an otherwise seemingly patriotic pageant, but instead, the actors come on stage “holding what? Tin cans? Bedroom candlesticks? Old jars? My dear, that’s the cheval glass from the Rectory! And the mirror—that I lent her. My mother’s. Cracked. What’s the notion? Anything that’s bright enough to reflect, presumably, ourselves?” (392) Eventually they all stand still, holding their reflecting objects and mirrors, “and the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still. The hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves” (393). The audience members are most indignant as they are forced to look at themselves, and most of them cannot even manage it: “All shifted, preened, minced; hands were raised, legs shifted...All evaded or shaded themselves—save Mrs Manresa...” (393)

The pageant then ends with a final monologue from the gramophone that has supplied the play with musical accompaniment. The gramophone confronts the members of the audience with their own fallibility and tells them not to hide from themselves or take anything at face value. It asks them how it is possible that “the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall,

civilisation” should be built by flawed “orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves” (394). The Reverend Streatfield, who delivers a final speech and gives his own interpretation of the play, calls for unification in spite of fallibility, because “we act different parts; but are the same” (396). Shortly after, the audience is given its desired (but entirely accidental) display of patriotism when “twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead. *That was the music*” (397). Before the audience disperses for the last time, they produce a spontaneous rendition of “God Save the King”, and as they leave, the audience members talk to each other about the pageant, its meaning, the war and anything else they can think of, and Pointz Hall and its inhabitants are left deserted.

In between the acts of the pageant, some of the characters are analysed more closely, and their struggles become apparent. Isa is torn between the life she has and the life she feels attracted to, which takes the form of a neighbour with whom she is infatuated. She cites poetry to herself in an effort to resolve her internal conflict, and carries her emotions inside of her, knowing she cannot share them and feeling increasingly more isolated, also from her children. At the start of the novel, when Isa is in her bedroom and she spots her children and their nannies walking across the lawn to the house:

She tapped on the window... They were too far off to hear. The drone of the trees was in their ears; the chirp of birds; other incidents of garden life, inaudible, invisible to her in the bedroom, absorbed them. Isolated on a green island, hedged about with snowdrops, laid with a counterpane of puckered silk, the innocent island floated under her window. (312)

The fact that Isa is fighting with her husband and is not speaking to him only aggravates these feelings. Giles has his own emotional difficulties to deal with; out of all the characters in the

novel, he is most affected by the war and the effects it is already having on the people on the continent. Giles is irrationally angry and irritated several times throughout the novel, and he expresses his emotions more actively and openly than, for example, Isa. He is a stockbroker who arrives at Pointz Hall from London for the pageant, and the moment he arrives home he is already “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?” (328)

Giles despises the conventions that inform so much of what his older relatives do and unfortunately also determine much of what he has done in his life. He feels powerless and he thinks of himself as a coward (353). Neither he nor his older relatives are in any position to do anything about the situation in Europe, and so they fill their time watching ridiculous pageants and drinking tea: “This afternoon he wasn’t Giles Oliver come to see the villagers act their annual pageant; manacled to a rock he was, and forced passively to behold indescribable horror” (334). His irritation and powerlessness culminate in an act of violence during the interval after the Elizabethan scene. He leaves the grounds where the pageant is being held and walks to the barn, where he encounters a snake choking on a toad:

The snake was unable to swallow, the toad was unable to die. A spasm made the ribs contract; blood oozed. It was birth the wrong way round—a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. The mass crushed and slithered. The white canvas on his tennis shoes was bloodstained and sticky. But it was action. Action relieved him. (353)

Particularly the first sentence of this quotation is reminiscent of the Second World War, only impending in the novel but already a reality by the time Woolf wrote it. Nazi Germany and

the rest of the Axis Powers tried to swallow the rest of the West, but the Allies resisted too hard to be able to die. Giles's act of stomping both the snake and the toad to death could have several meanings. On the surface, it is merely a release for Giles's building frustration with his situation in life and his anger at his own cowardice. When interpreted as analogous to the Second World War, however, there are two possible interpretations. One is that Giles fears (or hopes) that both sides, the Axis and the Allies, will battle themselves to complete destruction without gaining anything. Secondly, it could also represent the small extent to which Giles will be able to take part in the war: a symbolic action performed out of helplessness and frustration. His involvement in the war could be limited to this one action of cruelty or mercy.

Isa and Giles's strained marriage and their individual senses of isolation inform Julia Briggs's interpretation of the novel as a whole. The title, *Between the Acts*, denotes what takes place in between the acts of Miss La Trobe's pageant, but, as the ending of the novel describes, it also denotes what takes place in between the acts of Giles and Isa's marriage. According to Briggs, "the play that has remained suspended, unperformed all the way through the book, the story of the quarrel of Giles and Isa, is about to begin" (87). Night is falling when "the curtain rose. They spoke" (*BTA* 409). Just here, at the beginning of another play, the novel ends. The interval is over and the play of Isa and Giles's marriage, the play of life continues; "the plots of love and war come together, since it is the primitive and uncomprehended impulses of love and hate within the individual that nurture the seeds of war" (Briggs, *Companion* 87-88). One page before the end, Isa acknowledges the same thing, that she hates and loves Giles: "love and hate—how they tore her asunder!" (*BTA* 408) Their marital fights are a micro version of war. C. Basham, writing about the theme of disintegration in *Between the Acts*, adds to this a third interpretation of the title, namely "that longer interval between the first and second European wars" which is just coming to an end in the novel (106).

However, Giles and Isa's marriage also brings to mind Mr and Mrs Ramsay's marriage, and especially Mrs Ramsay's thoughts on marriage. In *To the Lighthouse*, Lily is challenged to make a choice between her individualism and the demands and rewards of belonging to society. Lily chooses herself and her work. But through their marriage and through the way that their fight is represented as a play of life rather than just a private, singular or domestic affair, Isa and Giles very clearly belong to society. They have already been married for some time and have children, and even though they have individual emotions and preoccupations, their life together is not unlike the marriages of many others in England, and elsewhere. Perhaps this is why Woolf did not name the village where the novel is set. As will become clear in Chapter 3, *Between the Acts* presents several ideas on the cyclical nature of history, how it repeats itself and how Giles and Isa are a part of the perpetual machine of society, where they are simply one of the many couples that enable the human race to move forward.

Overall, what keeps coming back in the various characters and storylines of the novel is the themes of unity, dispersal, fragmentation and disintegration. The pageant seems to serve as a unifying force, as Marilyn Zorn notes: "For it is not until recognition occurs that communal feeling may spring into being" (117). However, the final scene serves to undermine this and emphasise dispersal, individuality. The audience literally become "scraps and fragments" rather than one people, united by a shared English history, which leads to the notion that the present, with its impending war, is just as fragmented and shared culture or history will only ever be a farce. It will not be enough to unify them and it will not be enough to withstand the violence of war.

Giles and Isa are a fragmented couple throughout the novel. They are two individuals whose marriage does not hold them together. Contrary to Mr and Mrs Ramsay, Giles and Isa are usually referred to by their first names, rather than Mr and Mrs Oliver. Their private struggles have nothing in common and it is only at the end of the novel when an ensuing fight

could lead to an “embrace” from which “another life might be born” (409). “But first they must fight”, first a war must be fought if any hope for peace and renewed unity can exist (409).

In short, the themes of love and hate, war and peace, and unification and dispersal take on fairly concrete, behavioural forms in *Between the Acts* and can be found on macro and micro levels. It seems that the English, as a unified people, are being dispersed by a foreign force (Miss La Trobe and the impending war) and must make a choice to stick together, despite their individual fallibility, or let the doom of war tear them apart. Isa and Giles face the same choice, as well as their individual struggles with social conventions and their own fallibility.

1.4: Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the behaviour and motives of the characters in *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*. In *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse*, two female characters deal with the same dilemma, and they both choose different paths leading to different outcomes. The choice they face between joining society through marriage and remaining individuals is essentially a choice between traditionalism and modernity, dependence and freedom, comfort and war. Characters like Lily, who chose to work rather than marry, must have had a hard time convincing others that they were still worth something. Even though Rachel says that her marriage to Hewet “will be a fight” (*VO* 380), Lily would forever face the public’s perception of her as a spinster—in fact, Grady Smith still refers to her as a spinster in his 1993 article (39). In other words, these first two novels say much about social rules and conventions, and how difficult it was for women to break these rules. Rachel almost breaks them but is punished because she is too young to assert her own independence; Lily breaks them but only after struggling with societal expectations. Lily will also probably be punished for it for the rest of her life, but her

individualism is intact, and she succeeds and triumphs both in how she shapes her life and in having her vision and finishing her painting.

Between the Acts is also a story of marriage, but mostly a story of war on a small scale and the *threat* of war on a larger scale. The themes of unity and dispersal are reflected in Giles and Isa's marriage, which is defined by interrupted conflict, and in the audience of the pageant. The audience is both brought together and dispersed by the pageant, through the typically English tableaux and Miss La Trobe's final scene. The whole of the novel plays with the opposition of individuals versus society, but says more about the notion of individuals *existing within* society rather than choosing one side over the other, as Lily and Rachel do in the other two novels. Giles and Isa are a solid part of society, as an upper-class married couple with children, but they both struggle with feelings of isolation (as will become clearer in Chapter 2), and suffer from the gap between the generations (as will become clearer in Chapter 3). *Between the Acts*, therefore, as Woolf's most mature novel, provides the reader with insight into what happens to people who have given society everything it expected, and find that it does not reward them as much as they might have thought it would.

Chapter 2 – What People Say

‘I want to write a novel about Silence,’ he said;
the things people don’t say. But the difficulty is immense.’

- *The Voyage Out*, 324.

The previous chapter explored the key decisions, relationships and events in the novels, with the purpose of finding parallels and differences in behaviour as influenced by temporally determined social values and conventions. This chapter, structured in the same way as Chapter 1, delves more deeply into the psychological struggles of the characters as represented by modes of communication. Communication is discussed on two levels here: on a thematic and on a technical or formal level. Roughly, there are two ways in which language and communication are a theme in the novels. Firstly, there is the silence that results from social pressures, how several characters find it difficult to accept the inherent dishonesty of society. Secondly, all three novels include the problem of knowing other people, even *understanding* exactly what other people mean, with language and communication being the obstacles. On a technical or formal level, this chapter also discusses Woolf’s use of internal monologue and dialogue, the changing form of the dialogues in her novels, and characters’ use of poetry to express emotions. What this chapter will show is that, although Woolf’s obsessions about communication seem to remain constant—with all three novels containing more or less the same themes—the forms of the kinds of communication she uses change, as do the ways in which characters do or do not learn to deal with the problems that result from language and communicating with other people.

Compared to the first chapter, this chapter is a level deeper and requires more abstract analysis. Language and communication are what define a society’s mechanisms and dynamics. To what extent people seem to be able to understand each other, whether they can

or cannot express what they feel, is an indicator of the pressures that are put upon them by society. This, in turn, will say much about the changing relationship between society and individuals, and, most importantly, between individuals themselves, as this chapter will argue that *Between the Acts*, as Woolf's Second World War novel, features more fragmented communication and isolated characters than before.

2.1: The pressure of social conventions

Rachel's development throughout *The Voyage Out* is defined by her frustration at social conventions, in particular the fact that "nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked of a feeling they felt" (171). She even accuses the people around her of telling lies, both to themselves and to her. A concrete example of this is shortly after the *Euphrosyne* has departed and Mrs Chailey, a servant of the Vinraces, complains to Rachel about their living situation on the ship. Mrs Chailey's cabin and her bed linen will not do, and something must be done—"Lies! Lies! Lies!" cries Rachel in response, "What's the use of telling me lies?" (165)

Rachel's anger "that a woman of fifty should behave like a child and come cringing to a girl because she wanted to sit where she had not leave to sit" is an example of her frustration with the social conventions even the servants are bound by (165). She has known the charade of the upper class all her life and has been brought up to preserve it, but people from the lower classes seem as incapable of escaping it as she, making her feel trapped and surrounded by liars. Mrs Chailey aims to get what she wants by less-than-subtle hinting, and seems to put much stock in things Rachel finds unimportant. Mrs Chailey assumes the behaviour of a loyal servant, but at the same time she insults her employers by accusing them of treating her unfairly ("you couldn't ask a living creature to sit where I sit!") and resents their decision to take to the seas, because "it was not home" (165).

There is also an interesting opposition to be found in the characters of Rachel and Mrs Chailey. Rachel describes Mrs Chailey as a broad and thick woman, even “rocklike” (164). Several pages earlier, Helen observes her niece and thinks,

Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes...Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than normally incompetent for her years...Yes! how clear it was that she would be vacillating, emotional, and when you said something to her it would make no more lasting impression than the stroke of a stick upon water. There was nothing to take hold of in girls—nothing hard, permanent, satisfactory. (158)

This fluidity of mind and spirit is Rachel’s defining characteristic and informs much of her behaviour and many of her emotions—for example, her uncertainty about her engagement to Hewet and her sudden conviction that in spite of accepting him, she does not love him. Rachel is, partly because of her youth, contradictory and far from steadfast in her opinions. This is one of the reasons why she is drawn to Richard Dalloway, as described in the previous chapter. The short, intense relationship between them is motivated on Rachel’s part by her desire for knowledge, tangible evidence of how the world works in the form of a man who encourages her to “conceive the world as a whole”, who believes that there is “no more exalted aim—to be the citizen of the Empire” (196). He is part of the machine Rachel feels excluded from, but there is an inherent difference in perception that separates Rachel from people like Richard—possibly forever. As emerged in the previous chapter, Richard and Rachel form an opposition of politics versus art, reason versus emotion and society versus the individual. In their first conversation, Richard talks about his work and about public life, the

difference between the domestic life of his wife and his own in the outer world. Rachel, in turn, describes an imaginary widow in the suburbs of Leeds who forms a stark contrast with the machine life of Richard and his work in London. The biggest difference between Richard and the widow is not their lives, but their minds; Rachel accuses Richard of wasting his affections, his “higher capabilities”, as Richard puts it himself (196). Because the widow does not have to keep the societal machine pumping, she is at liberty to explore her emotions and the capacities of the human mind. But Richard disagrees; his practical attitude leads to a discrepancy in communication between him and Rachel: “The attempt at communication had been a failure. ‘We don’t seem to understand each other,’ she said” (197).

Richard angers Rachel by excluding her definitively from the machine. He tells her that women do not have any sense for politics, essentially banishing her, like the widow, to the suburbs of Leeds. As a result Rachel feels great “irritation, and a thrusting desire to be understood” (197). She tries again to communicate with Richard, but she fails, and “there was a pause, which did not come on Rachel’s side from any lack of things to say; as usual she could not say them, and was further confused by the fact that the time for talking probably ran short” (197).

Rachel represents the fluidity of adolescence, but there are also multiple examples, beyond Richard Dalloway, of the rigidity and steadfastness of adulthood and marriage, perhaps most clearly in the form of Ridley and Helen Ambrose. There is a sense of comfort in married life, reflected by the mode of communication between a husband and a wife:

When two people have been married for years they seem to become unconscious of each other’s bodily presence so that they move as if alone, speak aloud things which they do not expect to be answered, and in general seem to experience all the comfort of solitude without its loneliness. The joint lives of Ridley and Helen

had arrived at this stage of community, and it was often necessary for one or the other to recall with an effort whether a thing had been said or only thought, shared or dreamt in private. (303)

Ridley is a scholar and can be temperamental and behave childishly, in some ways like Mr Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. But Helen does not humour her husband like Mrs Ramsay does. She is not afraid of criticising him, telling him, for example, that he is the vainest man she knows (223), in spite of the fact that their marriage is based on traditional gender roles and Ridley holds traditional opinions on women. Helen and Ridley have found a way of existing comfortably in their marriage and for Rachel they are one of the examples of successfully following social convention.

In their article “Reality and language in *The Voyage Out*, by Virginia Woolf”, Maria Alessandra Galbiati and Peter James Harris write about the types of narration and communication in *The Voyage Out*. They contend that in this first of Woolf’s novels, Woolf does not attempt much innovation in terms of narration and utilises a mostly omniscient narrator, able to inform the reader of the thoughts and feelings of many of the characters. But there is an interaction between the narrator and each character’s voice, and so “the novel operates on two planes or levels of expressions” (68). These two planes are firstly “explicit/direct”; the dialogues as well as the actions of the characters, i.e. the characters’ expressions in the outer world, and secondly “implicit/indirect”; “the thoughts, reflections and feelings of the characters, expressed through indirect speech and summary” (69). Throughout the novel, some of the characters’ attempts at expressing themselves directly are frustrated by the pressure of social convention as well as natural emotions, such as fear, insecurity, ignorance and immaturity. When this happens, characters retreat into indirect speech or internal monologue, and these instances are often where “Woolf is clearly seeking a means of

adequately expressing not only what is said but also what is hidden beneath the surface of the utterance... According to [Patricia Laurence], Woolf confronts the narrativity of silence and the cultural constraints of her time” (69). Silence, or frustrated, bumbling speech are the result of social pressures as well as the inadequacies and limitations of language. A character like Rachel is pitted against characters like Helen, Richard, Hewet and Hirst; Rachel suffers the most from the difficulties of navigating the ‘sayable’ and the ‘unsayable’, whereas the others—usually the (educated) men—know exactly what they can and cannot say. This is why Rachel’s silences often say as much as what she does say, for example during the strange engagement scene, when she only ever repeats what Hewet says (who, surely, knows what is allowed in such situations, whereas she does not) and the couple remain mute on the point of the actual proposal.

There is also the added advantage of gender. In this novel, communication is often determined by patriarchal constraints: the women are usually listening to the men. The men are allowed to express their annoyances. They can take pride in their achievements, most notably when St John Hirst introduces himself by saying, “I’m a very distinguished young man”, to which Hewet replies, “One of the three, or is it five, most distinguished men in England”, and Hirst says, “Quite correct” (261-262). And thirdly, they can express their opinions of other people quite freely. Ridley talks about Rachel, right in front of her, saying, “Ah! she’s not like her mother” (154), and Hirst doubts the intellectual capacities of women in general and Rachel in particular, again right in front of her (269-270).

This does not mean that the women never speak their minds, but when they do, it is usually to their confidants—their husbands or relatives (Helen criticising Ridley, Clarissa Dalloway criticising Richard). The only one who breaks this female, social rule of keeping peace amongst disgruntled, vain men who are not afraid of saying what they feel, is Rachel, for example when she tells Hewet quite bluntly that she does not love him. Rachel is “slow to

accept the fact that only a very few things can be said even by people who know each other well" (*VO* 262) and is incapable of restraining her emotions after Hirst insults her intelligence by presuming it absent. She expresses her annoyance to Hewet but does not say these things to Hirst's face, which she finds frustrating: "Why is it...that I can laugh at Mr Hirst to you, but not to his face?" (317) The laws of society are taking hold over Rachel as she grows from adolescence into adulthood, making it only possible for her to say a limited amount of what she feels to someone close to her (Hewet).

The pairing of Hewet and Rachel is interesting when it comes to communication. As Hewet says in this chapter's epigraph, he is a novelist who is trying to write about "the things people don't say" (324). Rachel, however, finds music a more complete form of communication than literature: "...music goes straight for things. It says all there is to say at once. With writing it seems to me there's so much...scratching on the matchbox" (317) Suzanne Raitt, in her article on Virginia Woolf's early novels in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, writes:

Music allows Rachel to confront and articulate the world without mediation; it allows her to craft and to perform her own voice...She is freed both from her own personality and history...and from the personalities and wishes of others. Through music she can perform, rather than express, her self. In clinging on to music, she defends her own solitude and autonomy. (35)

Music is also her escape when she feels excluded from the adult world, but the adults around her only want to turn her away from it. Clarissa declares it "too emotional" (181) and Rachel's father would prefer to see "a little less of *that*" in his daughter (214). Raitt writes,

“Helen Ambrose, Terence Hewet and her father, all seek to turn her towards books” (35).¹

Rachel is therefore forced to abandon what she perceives as the perfect language and find a way of existing in a society that relies on words and the general silence of women. Raitt also notes that Hewet and Rachel must learn to deal with these inadequacies of language within their relationship. An intimate relationship such as a marriage requires a new mode of communication that is new for both, but “for Rachel...there is the added difficulty of sex...Rachel must struggle to speak for herself when others endlessly seek to educate and speak for her” (Raitt 31).

Rachel’s instinct as an adolescent is to turn against social formalities and the intrinsic dishonesty that comes with being part of society. But as the novel progresses, these forces as representatives of society take hold over Rachel’s individuality, and her choice to marry Hewet appears to be a final deathblow to her adolescence. But Rachel and Hewet’s different modes of communication still do not align, because Rachel will not give up her music (the only thing she knows she is good at) and Hewet does not understand it. Raitt discusses a scene where Rachel refuses to answer Hewet when he asks her about something he has written and “simply continues to play. She is irritated by Terence’s constant interruptions, and he, for his part, dislikes it when she plays difficult music, like Beethoven, rather than ‘nice, simple tunes’” (35). In other words, Rachel does not seem to be willing to let go of her individuality within her impending marriage. Christine Froula, in a chapter on *The Voyage Out* in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, interprets this in the context of Rachel’s exclamation that her and Hewet’s marriage “will be a fight” (VO 380).

In *The Voyage Out*, all these different influences cause Rachel to struggle. Her lack of education, her gender, her adolescence leading to a perpetual feeling of being misunderstood, everything that is expected of her within society and her preference for music all cause

¹ Hirst also belongs in this list.

friction with the people around her. Her role as a woman, a role that mostly requires her to be silent, does not (yet) tally with her convictions and what she expects of life. She does not understand the mechanics of society yet and feels a desperate urge to be included in a life generally meant for men. She is meant to understand without being told, and this causes her battles with the people around her, and, in turn, with society.

2.2: To know one another

One of the most defining characteristics of *To the Lighthouse* is its heavy reliance on inner monologue and description. As Martha Nussbaum notes in her article “The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*”, the “ratio of internal action to external communication” is very much askew (734). Even actual conversations between characters are summarised in indirect or even free indirect speech, blurring the lines between different kinds of communication. When Mrs Ramsay and Charles Tansley walk to town, for example, they spot a bill announcing the imminent arrival of a circus:

“Let’s go,” he said, repeating her words, clicking them out, however with a self-consciousness that made her wince. “Let us go to the Circus.” No. He could not say it right. He could not feel it right. But why not? she wondered. What was wrong with him then? She liked him warmly, at the moment. Had he not been taken, she asked, to circuses when they were children? Never, he answered, as if she asked the very thing he wanted to reply to...they were walking on and Mrs Ramsay did not quite catch the meaning, only the words, here and there...dissertation...fellowship...readership...lectureship. (*TL* 9)

These kinds of passages are more of a norm than an exception in *To the Lighthouse*. In one flowing, seamless paragraph, Woolf uses both indirect and free indirect speech as well as inner monologues, reflecting the characters 'secret'—or at least unsaid—emotions and responses to the behaviour or spoken words of others. A valid question to ask is why Woolf uses these techniques, and how they function within the story. The theme of the 'unspeakable', as Julia Briggs calls it in her article "The Conversation Behind the Conversation: Speaking the Unspeakable in Virginia Woolf", is omnipresent in Woolf's novels. Societal oppression leading to silence is what killed Rachel Vinrace, and this kind of silence is much more overtly present in *To the Lighthouse*. This theme is possibly mostly the result of the culture and time Woolf was living in; Briggs notes that "there is also the quite different but equally significant anteriority of social or cultural context which exerts its own pressure on what and how a writer writes" (6). In other words, 'silence' or 'the unspeakable' is both a theme in Woolf's writing and a problem she was struggling with as a writer. Even though Woolf is, especially nowadays, considered a modern woman because of her way of life and her ideologies, she was still a product of the Victorian Age. The prudishness that defined this cultural period was difficult for Woolf to shrug off, and it did not only prevent people from discussing issues of a sexual nature, but also many personal opinions and emotions. Woolf's goal, according to Briggs, was to give voice to the intimate interiors of her characters, "but other forms of the unsaid or the unspeakable, words and thoughts that cannot be spoken in polite society, also exert their pressure on what does get said" (7). Nussbaum agrees with this when she writes that "these characters almost always resist being known, speak and act in ways that actively impede the encroaching movements of an alien understanding. Social form is one prominent reason for this resistance" (737). Another reason is shame, which is also motivated by fear of the judgement society might pass.

Nussbaum also writes about the question of why the characters in *To the Lighthouse* lack the ability to truly know each other, as they are on the inside. One of the inescapable reasons why it is impossible to truly know another person is the “imperfect instrument of understanding”: language (734). Whereas emotions are perfect when they are felt, the method of expressing them is inadequate, as well as “inflected with the peculiarities of each person’s history and character and taste” (735). It is the language of daily communication in particular that is inadequate for expressing personal thoughts and opinions, and because this is the norm and each person has his own ‘interpretation’, so to speak, both of events and of the meaning of words, “we find ourselves using the same words in different ways, to mean very different things” (735).

This does not mean that none of these characters know each other, although the definition of ‘knowing’ differs for every pair of characters. Nussbaum specifically analyses Mr and Mrs Ramsay, two characters who do seem to know each other intimately, despite the barriers of language and society. How have they attained such knowledge? Nussbaum writes,

We might say, they know one another as we know them—by reading. Having lived together for a long time, they have gathered a lot of information about patterns of speech, action, reaction... They spend a good part of their solitude thinking about each other, piecing together what they perceive and think, learning to read not just statements, but also gestures, facial expressions, silences. (745)

But, as became apparent in the first chapter of this thesis, this does not mean that there is no conflict between Mr and Mrs Ramsay. Mr Ramsay is a moody individual, and he displays a habit of quoting lines of poetry. He speaks or cries out lines like, “Stormed at with shot and shell” (12), “Someone had blundered” (14, 18, 22, 24) and “Best and brightest, come away!”

(51), and he is not the only one. The first two lines, “Stormed at with shot and shell” and “Someone had blundered” come from the poem “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854) by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “a poem memorialising a fatal advance in the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War, and hence ironically symbolising military and masculine bungling,” writes Nicola Bradbury in her introduction (*TL* 156).²

“Someone had blundered” is repeated several times, but not always in direct speech. The first occurrence is in chapter four, when Lily Briscoe and William Bankes are talking as she paints. Mr Ramsay “bore down on them” and the line is recited in the style of free indirect speech, without quotation marks, but because Mr Ramsay is “shouting, gesticulating”, it is clearly him who spoke the line (13). The second occurrence is in direct speech, said to Lily and William, a little later on in the same chapter. The third occurrence is at the beginning of chapter six, when focalisation moves to Mrs Ramsay, who has been keeping an eye on her husband:

But what had happened?

Someone had blundered.

Starting from her musing she gave meaning to words which she had held meaningless in her mind for a long stretch of time. “Someone had blundered”—
Fixing her short-sighted eyes upon her husband, who was now bearing down upon her, she gazed steadily until his closeness revealed to her...that something had happened, someone had blundered. But she could not for the life of her think what. (22)

² See appendix 1 for the full poem.

In this quote, it is difficult to uncover whether these lines of poetry are actually spoken, and if so, who speaks. The fact that Mrs Ramsay is thinking indicates that she is quoting her husband (or Tennyson) in her mind, rather than actually speaking the lines, even though the second time the line is quoted it includes quotation marks.

In chapter six, Mr Ramsay also paraphrases several other lines from the poem in one continuous flurry of mental activity:

He shivered; he quivered. All his vanity, all his satisfaction in his own splendour, riding fell as a thunderbolt, fierce as a hawk at the head of his men *through the valley of death*, had been *shattered*, destroyed. *Stormed at by shot and shell, boldly we rode and well, flashed through the valley of death, volleyed and thundered*—straight into Lily Briscoe and William Bankes. He quivered; he shivered. (22, italics mine)

The italics indicate the lines and words taken directly or paraphrased from “The Charge of the Light Brigade”. This conveys Mr Ramsay’s mental state as being agitated, thunderous—confirmed by Mrs Ramsay, who realises “from the familiar signs...that he was outraged and anguished” (23). This is repeated further down the page, when Mr and Mrs Ramsay are again disagreeing about the possibility of a trip to the lighthouse and Mrs Ramsay asks her husband why he is so certain that they will not be able to go. Mr Ramsay gets very angry by “the extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women’s minds...He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered and shivered” only for his wife to tell lies to his children and give them false hope (23).

“Best and brightest, come away!”, which comes from the poem “To Jane: the Invitation” by Percy Bysshe Shelley, is used only once later on in chapter twelve, when Mr and Mrs

Ramsay are walking and talking. Mrs Ramsay thinks about her husband's habit, that "sometimes it was awkward—Best and brightest, come away!—poor Miss Giddings, when he shouted that at her, almost jumped out of her skin" (51). This gives the impression that Mr Ramsay recited this particular line in the past, when Miss Giddings (who is not on the island) was nearby. This line from Shelley is the first that has a positive connotation, indicating a happier state of mind in Mr Ramsay. A second example is the poem he begins to recite during the final part of the dinner party, which is the poem "A Garden Song" by Charles Elton.³ Mrs Ramsay later mutters some of the lines from the second stanza to herself. The poem is full of references to nature and has a kind of melancholy to it, but overall it is happier, cheerier than "The Charge of the Light Brigade", and represents the other side of Mr Ramsay's moods.

Overall, the habit of quoting poetry originates from Mr Ramsay. Because he is such an analytical, highly rational intellectual, reciting poetry is his only way of expressing his emotions. He quotes lines about destruction and death when he is anguished or angry, and lines about nature and harmony when he is content. Mr Ramsay's inability to express his own emotions except through his behaviour or the lines of poetry he recites makes him a difficult man to live with and, for a lot of people, a difficult man to understand. But his wife is the only one who has made the lifelong effort to do so, and as a result, she enables him to live his life as a member of the patriarchy. Reminiscent of *The Voyage Out*, Woolf writes of "the subjection of all wives...to their husband's labours" (*TL* 8). Mrs Ramsay plays her part as her husband's wife, but at the same time tries to protect her children from his moods and caprices. The reason why she does this is two-fold: she understands her husband and sympathises with his difficult nature, but also, society has determined that that is the kind of wife she has to be. In order to anticipate his moods or what he is going to say, she 'reads' him, as Nussbaum

³ See appendix 2 for a history and two full versions of the poem.

writes. She pieces together his current state of mind with the help of his movements, how he behaves towards people around him, how he speaks and what he says.

As for Lily Briscoe, she is a different creature altogether. Lily is unmarried, and therefore not bound by the same rules. She does not have to humour anyone; her goal in the novel is to complete her picture, and because she is only a guest and has no profound connection to anyone in the novel, the only rules she is bound by are the most general rules of polite society. Her emotional responses, however, reflect a deep-rooted wish to express what she truly feels, and she is also the character that wonders most about the difficulties of communicating truthfully, thinking “it was impossible. One could not say what one meant” (14).

Lily is drawn to Mrs Ramsay and wishes to know her, possibly as intimately as Mr Ramsay does:

[Lily] imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of [Mrs Ramsay] were stood...tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything...What art was there...by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored?...Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought...How then, she had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were? (37)

Lily represents the problems of communication very literally here, but also the dire wish to communicate, to know someone else. However, this desire for openness happens entirely in

secret. Lily, sitting with her arms around Mrs Ramsay's knees, smiles "to think that Mrs Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure" (*TL* 37), but at the same time, "she dreams of removing from Mrs Ramsay all possibility of concealment" (Nussbaum 742). Lily wants to remain hidden, but she desires for complete openness on Mrs Ramsay's part—all without telling her.

In the final part of the novel, when Mrs Ramsay is gone, Lily is less obsessed with these issues and more with trying to reclaim the past. She fantasises about Mrs Ramsay being there, what she would say and do. She even fantasises about Minta and Paul's marriage, appearing "to her in a series of scenes", and "this making up scenes about them, is what we call 'knowing' people, 'thinking' of them, 'being fond' of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same" (129). Lily's perception of human relationships and communication has changed, possibly because she has realised the impossibility of knowing other people. In any case, the past has become distant to her; irretrievable except through memory and imagination, and the memory of Mrs Ramsay gives Lily as strong an emotional reaction as sitting at her feet did.

In short, communication is a more overt theme in *To the Lighthouse* than in *The Voyage Out*, but in both novels communication and silence determine much about the fates of the characters. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's death is caused by her choice to get married and simultaneously her refusal to keep silent, whereas Lily does not marry and grows to understand the impossibility of honesty in society. She does not keep quiet but saves her honesty for her art, thereby preserving her individuality.

2.3: Dispersed are we

Between the Acts has two themes in common with *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse*: the problem of knowing other people and the silence that results from societal pressures. Giles

and Isa Oliver, the married couple in *Between the Acts* who are having a fight and do not communicate, perhaps best represent silence due to social oppression in this novel. The entire novel is set in between different acts of their fight and their fight is interrupted by society, a social situation where the rules dictate that they should act like a happy couple. But they know each other in the same way that Mr and Mrs Ramsay know each other: through gestures and looks, through behaviour. Julia Briggs writes about this marital communication in the context of William Dodge's homosexuality, which "gave Giles another peg on which to hang his rage" (BTA 334). He does not express his anger, but Isa notices it nevertheless. Briggs writes, "like many married couples, they are intensely engaged in a ceaseless, if hostile, dialogue which operates at some deeper level. The passage as a whole...makes a continuous and highly suggestive play with hand movements and gestures" ("Unspeakable" 10).

The problem of knowing other people is present as well, both literally and more abstractly, for example in the pageant itself. The pageant contains scenes depicting different periods in English history, from the Elizabethan to the Victorian era, ending with a scene depicting the present. The historical scenes are all perfectly understandable to the audience, whereas the scene portraying the present confuses and even upsets the members of the audience. It emulates real life: the past seems more within reach, within the realm of understanding than the present because we perceive it in context and are able to understand the stereotypes and clichés it produces. The present, however, is still undetermined, unknowable, because we do not know where it will lead and what the consequences of our actions will be. The past is also a general, faceless concept, about which only facts matter, the facts as they happened and as they have been written down in history books. The present is the individuals that are alive in it, and so our conception of the present depends on our particular circumstances, the life and the people we know. But it is impossible to truly know other people, let alone ourselves, as Woolf has tried to show, which is why the members of

the audience feel uncomfortable with the scene depicting the present and try to get away from their own reflections.

What separates this novel from *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse* is the omnipresent themes that section 1.3 focused on: unity, dispersal and fragmentation. These notions can also be found on multiple levels of the novel's language and modes of communication. The actual word 'disperse', in all its forms, also appears regularly. It is first churned out repeatedly by the gramophone, indicating an interval after the first act of the pageant. The audience disperses, and some of them leave thinking about the phrase. Isa mutters it to herself, and Dodge wonders, "Shall I...go or stay? Slip out some other way? Or follow, follow, follow the dispersing company?" (352) Eventually, the music "petered out on the last word *we*" (353). The pageant music includes the same words—"dispersed are we"—several times when an act ends, and at the end of the pageant, the gramophone continues to remind them: "*Dispersed are we; who have come together. But, the gramophone asserted, let us retain whatever made that harmony...Dispersed are we, the gramophone triumphed, yet lamented, Dispersed are we...*" (399).

Fragmentation can also be found in the characters. C. Basham, in an excerpt from an article on *Between the Acts*, writes that "not only are the audience dispersed: the main characters too are separated to an unusual degree" (107). Isa and Giles as a couple feel separated from each other, and Isa feels alienated from her children. These spiritual and mental separations are, according to Basham, also represented in the way Woolf portrays their inner worlds. Her focus is often on their inner struggles, but "in this novel more than any of the others there is a feeling of loneliness and isolation as the characters meditate, as though a barrier is placed between them and others" (Basham 107). This is also expressed in the language they use. For example early on in the novel, when Isa appears to be reciting some poetry, and she eventually mutters twice, "There to lose what binds us here" (313). One

sentence later, she even calls herself “abortive”, never choosing or having what satisfies her or what she truly wants. Isa is one of the characters that feel cut off from other people and long for some kind of natural unity or harmony. After Giles becomes angry at William Dodge’s homosexuality she wonders, “Why judge each other? Do we know each other? Not here, not now. But somewhere, this cloud, this crust, this doubt, this dust—She waited for a rhyme, it failed her; but somewhere surely one sun would shine and all, without a doubt, would be clear” (335). Isa’s isolation is often expressed through her recitation of poetry, for example when she hums, “Fly then, follow...Fly, away. I grieving stay. Alone I linger” (360). For her, as for Mr Ramsay, poetry and rhymes are a way to express her emotions.

Throughout the novel, the audience of the pageant is continuously coming together and dispersing as the acts of the pageant begin and end. The gramophone keeps track of these acts and is able to bring the audience together when the time has come for the pageant to continue, releasing them once it is over: “Tick, tick, tick, the machine continued. Time was passing. The audience was wandering, dispersing. Only the tick, tick of the gramophone held them together” (379). It seems that the gramophone, or the pageant, is what holds the audience together, unifying the individuals under the banner of English history, and therefore, the English nation. The familiar scenes form a stark contrast with the impending war, a war during which every nation involved would be forced to reconsider what it stood for, and where every individual might not retain faith in history, which so often reinforces a country’s identity.

Then there is the way characters actually communicate with each other, which is very distinctly different from the other two novels. Almas Khan has written an article in which she enforces the theory that there is a close relationship between the language of *Between the Acts* and war. She particularly notes a fragmentary kind of communication between characters as a result of an inherent uncertainty about what to expect of the near future and what to take as

truth. “Sight proves unreliable”, and so “characters seek truth from more veracious sources within and outside of the text” (111). The audience’s criticism of the final scene of the pageant results from their doubts “regarding the possibility of representing contemporaneity” (110). This is supported by examples of dialogue that show a searching kind of communication with short sentences—very different from *To the Lighthouse*, where Woolf wrote those long sentences in long paragraphs containing different kinds of speech and internal monologue. A good example is just before the second act begins and members of the audience are talking. Miss La Trobe is standing behind a tree as “scraps and fragments” reached her:

That’s one good the war brought us—longer days... Where did we leave off? D’you remember? The Elizabethans... Perhaps she’ll reach the present, if she skips... D’you think people change? Their clothes, of course... But I meant ourselves... Clearing out a cupboard, I found my father’s old top hat... But ourselves—do we change? (*BTA* 364)

Khan quotes the next paragraph of conversation, where people are talking about the war, how they do not trust politicians and discuss what they have read in the papers. She summarises these communications as follows: “[C]haracters often only tentatively convey their opinions or what others have told them, instead seeking evidentiary support from tangible publications” (111). This hesitation is reflected in the way Woolf reports their speech, and, writes Khan, it is symptomatic of the inadequacy of language catching up with society. The problem of inadequacy already appeared in *The Voyage Out* and in *To the Lighthouse*, but it had not yet infected dialogue—only internal monologue, only the minds of characters would become crippled with the inability to express what they felt. In this novel, uncertainty

prevents characters from uttering complete sentences and silence takes the place of language when even an attempt at communication fails.

The audience's commentary during the pageant is often cut short, either because the novel changes perspective or because the characters do not finish their sentences. "The novel frequently omits words," writes Khan, "or emphasizes their deficiency through characters' inability to articulate certain phrases or make themselves heard" (112). The most literal expression of this problem is when Mrs Swithin says, "We haven't the words—we haven't the words...Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that's all" (332). The same sentiment is applicable to Isa up in her bedroom several pages earlier, when she thinks about the sudden romantic feelings she harbours for a gentleman farmer who lives in the neighbourhood: "Inner love was in the eyes; outer love on the dressing-table" (312). The inner love is her romantic love for the farmer, a secret, intangible and uncertain, as well as inexpressible; the outer love is the love "for her husband, the stockbroker—'The father of my children'", a love that is a reality in the form of a marriage, solidified by her life with him, her children and the objects on the dressing table (312).

The fragmented language of *Between the Acts* has a lot to do with how Woolf perceived society at the time of the Second World War. The uncertainty of Woolf's characters and their disconnectedness are symptoms of uncertainty on a greater scale. Those of Woolf's generation, who had lived through the First World War and were now confronted with a second, major war, had to deal with a kind of fear that was different from the fear of those for whom it was entirely new. Woolf knew what to fear and what to expect, leading to an *a posteriori* apprehensive inward turn and social isolation. But the war has also become a topic of discussion in *Between the Acts*. In *To the Lighthouse*, as Julia Briggs notes, "it was above all the First World War that came to stand for the unspeakable, the unspoken" ("Unspeakable" 9). The war is not discussed except for a short description of the Ramsays'

son Andrew's death, and the destruction of the war is metaphorically represented by the corrosion of the Ramsays' abandoned holiday home. In *Between the Acts*, although it happens in uncertain whispers, characters do discuss the war, its politics and its sacrifices. History and the war in *Between the Acts* will be the main topic of discussion in Chapter 3.

2.4: Conclusion

Although these three novels are very different from each other, they do contain similar themes, similar personal struggles. Most fundamentally, there is the problem of the inadequacy of language, how it can never fully encapsulate what someone means to say or what he feels. This troubles Rachel Vinrace in *The Voyage Out*, and she is torn between the demands of society and the perfect means of communication represented by music. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mr Ramsay tries to resolve this issue by using the words of others—poetry. In *Between the Acts*, linguistic inadequacy coupled with uncertainty causes fragmentary communication in Isa Oliver in particular, but is noticeable in the audience members as well. The difficulties of expression within a linguistic environment also cause other problems, most importantly the problem of knowing other people. This theme is most conspicuous in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, because in *The Voyage Out* it is mostly self-knowledge that Rachel struggles with and which causes her doubts and difficulties. In the other two novels, characters such as Lily Briscoe, Isa Oliver and several members of the pageant audience think and talk about the impossibility of knowing each other and themselves.

In short, themes such as self-expression, self-knowledge, knowing other people and the very reach and capacities of language itself all play an important part in these novels. They are issues each individual is dealing with as a result of being part of a society that demands communication. Society causes the need for a common language, but, as Martha Nussbaum writes, “we find ourselves using the same words in different ways, to mean very different

things". Therefore, there is an eternal separation between each pair of individuals, as well as an eternal separation between each individual and society. As the war approaches, uncertainty about the future and a growing lack of faith in traditions causes fragmentary communication and openness about these societal problems. War needs people to band together, but how can they do that when they cannot even say what they think or truly know the people around them?

Chapter 3 – When People Fight

...we perish, each alone...

— *To the Lighthouse*, 126.

The themes of the previous two chapters were chosen because they were symptomatic of the influence of greater events, and this final chapter has these greater events, the two World Wars, as its focus. It will touch on these symptomatic themes, communication and behaviour, to put them in a broader context and come to conclusions about war as a theme as well as a catalyst for change in Woolf's novels. Rather than discussing the three novels in chronological order, the analytical emphasis will lie on *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* as more consciously containing references to and representations of the wars. As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter will discuss literal and figurative representations of war; the presence of the actual World Wars in the novels, and conflict between characters, war on a domestic level.

But first, a word or two about *The Voyage Out*. Researching the presence and representation of the wars in these three novels for this chapter has resulted in rather slim pickings for *The Voyage Out*, compared to the other two. This is not wholly unexpected; whereas—as this chapter shall explore—*To the Lighthouse* portrays pre-war society from a post-war perspective, this first novel serves primarily as a portrayal of pre-war society from a pre-war perspective. As such, *The Voyage Out* does not contain any references to the First World War, and Woolf had no way of knowing how much it would influence every layer and aspect of British society, as she did when she wrote *To the Lighthouse*. Although there are several themes and fixations in this novel that keep coming back in Woolf's later works (such as her emphasis on female characters and their struggles, the difficulties of expressing one's

deepest emotions as a result of societal pressures), its topics were mostly determined by the events of Woolf's young life, her literary influences and experiences—all shaping Rachel Vinrace. The war cannot be said to have entered into it, nor can the *coming* of the war, since the novel takes place far away from Britain and its plot focuses on the struggles of a girl growing into womanhood.

Why, then, include *The Voyage Out* in a thesis on the influence of war on Woolf's fiction? Most importantly, *because* this novel was written before any World War had happened; it depicts the pre-war functions and structures of society and the individual as they were at the time. It also represents a starting point for Woolf's development as an author, the tracing of which is also a purpose in this thesis. These two characteristics make this novel indispensable, but also more suitable for thematic analysis in the previous chapters, where these societal aspects were studied, than in this chapter.

3.1: Contrast

As has already been noted, *To the Lighthouse*, in Woolf's own interpretation, is structured like an H, “‘Two blocks joined by a corridor’...The horizontal bar corresponds to the shorter ‘Time Passes’ section” (Briggs, *Companion* 74). The first block, “The Window”, depicts pre-war society, and the second, post-war society. The corridor, “Time Passes”, represents the war in the form of the empty, abandoned Ramsay family home. Nancy Topping Bazin and Jane Hamovit Lauter write in their text “Virginia Woolf's Keen Sensitivity to War: Its Roots and Its Impacts on Her Novels” that “the primary image in part 2 is that of a childhood summer home, unused for ten years, being destroyed by time and nature. As [Makiko] 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’” (20). The corridor of “Time Passes” then leads to post-war society in “The Lighthouse”, which is very different from “The Window”, according to

Bazin and Lauter, because “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” (20).

Although much can be and has been said about “Time Passes”, it will not be analysed in too much detail here. The focus will be on the differences between “The Window” and “The Lighthouse”. Mary Lou Emery writes in her article “‘Robbed of Meaning’: The Work at the Center of *To the Lighthouse*” that “Time Passes” makes a break with the continuous portrayal of domestic life and thereby “broadens its scope beyond the house and domestic values. The much larger scale of time and events in Part Two enables the passage from pre-war sensibilities to those of the modern post-war period” (220). The presence of this contrast makes the novel quite unique in Woolf’s oeuvre. With the use of secondary literature, the differences between the moods in “The Window” on the one hand and “The Lighthouse” on the other will be analysed here.

Both Bazin and Lauter and Megan Mondí’s article “‘You Find Us Much Changed’: The Great War in *To the Lighthouse*” note that although the novel is definitely (among other things) about the war, Woolf’s focus is always on the psychological rather than the sociological, political or historical (Bazin and Lauter 20; Mondí 13). Bazin and Lauter’s particular focus is on the presence of the patriarchy in “The Window”, especially in the form of Mr Ramsay. Mr Ramsay is the dominant male in this part of the novel; his moods determine the moods of the rest of the family, and although his wife assumes the traditional role of hostess and decides all matters domestic, the guests are there by the grace of Mr Ramsay. Should he choose to send them away, should he choose to forbid his children to do something, they have no choice but to obey. “Mr Ramsay’s success in life depends upon feeling superior to women and heroic in protecting them,” write Bazin and Lauter (19). His recitation of Tennyson (see Chapter 2, “What People Say”) “reveals the link in his mind

between the role of the husband-hero and that of the soldier-hero” and between “the patriarchal husband” and “the male defender of the patriarchal nation” (Bazin and Lauter 19). Mrs Ramsay, as has already been concluded earlier on in this thesis, humours him, allows him to go on a rampage through the house and the garden, even if she and her children might resent him for it. She is the mediator between her husband and her children, not living for much else except for the role Victorian tradition has bestowed upon her. Her death, as Bazin and Lauter write, is not only her physical death but also the symbolic death of Victorian values amongst the carnage of the Great War.

Three deaths occur in “Time Passes”: Prue’s, Andrew’s and Mrs Ramsay’s. These deaths are announced rather laconically, “in brackets, increasing the painfulness of these deaths by presenting them as insignificant within the large picture [of the war]” (21). Andrew Ramsay’s death as a soldier at the front is essentially an actualisation of the heroism Mr Ramsay believes in, as well as a representation of the uselessness of war. It is also the only truly overt reference to the First World War. According to Alex Zwerdling in “*Between the Acts* and the Coming of War”, the fact that Andrew’s death is announced in brackets is a sign of Woolf’s “reluctance to let [the war] dominate the novel” (221). Prue dies in childbirth, possibly the most female of all deaths, probably because throughout the novel she is portrayed as the womanliest of the Ramsay children, ready for adult life. It is mentioned several times that Prue is beautiful, she is called “Prue the Fair” by William Bankes (*TL* 16), and when she gets married in “Time Passes”, it is mentioned how beautiful she looked. Mrs Ramsay’s death is not described in much detail, except that it was quick. This could be because it is more than a physical death; it is also the death of everything Mrs Ramsay represents, and everything that “The Lighthouse” lacks: “Despite some moments of unity and harmony in part 3... 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” (Bazin and Lauter 22).

Lily Briscoe feels this emptiness the strongest, particularly in the absence of Mrs Ramsay. Mrs Ramsay was a mother figure to her, an example of harmonious family life. Lily does have a desire for the kind of life and family Mrs Ramsay had, but her independent nature trumps that desire and leads her to put her painting first. After the war, however, she cannot resist nostalgia, longing for what is no longer there and cannot be reclaimed, but feeling its presence stronger than ever. Nostalgia is also present in “The Window”, but then it is Mrs Ramsay who looks at her children, wistfully thinking, “They were happier now than they would ever be again” (*TL* 43).

Lily is troubled by the same kind of inability to speak her mind in “The Lighthouse” that troubled her in “The Window”. As she stands painting, Lily looks at Mr Carmichael, who sits nearby, and wishes she could say everything she wanted,

About life, about death, about Mrs Ramsay—no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low...For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (She was looking at the drawing-room steps; they looked extraordinarily empty.) (*TL* 133)

Lily feels that she is drifting and she is desperately searching for the meaning that life has lost since the war, the certainty, the traditionalism, knowing what to expect. “What does it mean? How do you explain it all?” Lily wonders (133). Mrs Ramsay represented Victorian traditionalism and the assurances that enabled social frivolities, but now that she is gone, so is that idea of life, the structures, meanings and definitions.

Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? ... Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?—startling, unexpected, unknown? For one moment she felt that if they both got up, here, now on the lawn, and demanded an explanation, why was it so short, why was it so inexplicable, said it with violence...then, beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape; if they shouted loud enough Mrs Ramsay would return. “Mrs Ramsay!” she said aloud, “Mrs Ramsay!” The tears ran down her face. (134)

This mood is a direct result of a war that rearranged everyone’s priorities and removed the need for societal frivolities—Megan Mondie writes that it “shows a collapsing of the old order” (17). Women like Mrs Ramsay represented the balance that must be kept within society, to preserve the peace amongst battling men. But Lily does not fill the void Mrs Ramsay has left behind; she does not play the role Mrs Ramsay used to. Before Mr Ramsay, Cam and James leave for the lighthouse in the third part of the novel, Mr Ramsay is rambling around the garden again, as he used to, desperately in need for someone to feel sorry for him. Because Mrs Ramsay is not there, he turns to Lily, but Lily does not want to indulge him: “she pretended to drink out of her empty coffee cup so as to escape him—to escape his demand on her, to put aside a moment longer that imperious need. And he shook his head at her, and strode on (‘Alone’ she heard him say, ‘Perished’ she heard him say)” (110). Mr Ramsay, more than Lily and his children, is still stuck in the past and finds it difficult to move on, which is also why he is determined to finally get James to the lighthouse. He looks to Lily to allow him to be the dominant male, and she sees right through him and his perception of her as a woman:

Instantly, with the force of some primeval gust (for really he could not restrain himself any longer), there issued from him such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something—all except myself, thought Lily, girding at herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid presumably... All Lily wished was that this enormous flood of grief, this insatiable hunger for sympathy, this demand that she should surrender herself up to him entirely... should leave her. (113-114)

Another symptom of re-arranged priorities is that some of the characters are finally getting in “The Lighthouse” what they wanted in “The Window”. James’s wish of going to the lighthouse is finally fulfilled, although he is a little reluctant because he has changed as much as any child would between the ages of six and sixteen, and Lily finishes her painting. She is only able to finish her painting because, as Emery writes, “she escapes the narrative requirements of marriage or death” (222). The two married women of the novel, Mrs Ramsay and Prue, who marries in “Time Passes”, both die. The cause of these deaths is not the war, but the changes that take place in society. During and after the war, the roles of women changed and more ‘rebels’ like Lily chose to remain independent rather than marry. Bazin and Lauter state that the only way for women to escape patriarchal dominance was to remain unmarried (29-30). This struggle to maintain individualism is a theme in several of Woolf’s novels, including *The Voyage Out* and *To the Lighthouse*, as explored in Chapter 2, “What People Say”.

It is important to remember that Woolf wrote *To the Lighthouse* after the war, and that the first part of the novel, which contains a portrayal of pre-war British society, was written from a post-war perspective. Although the argument could be made that this gave Woolf a better view of the changes that had happened over the course of four years, it did cause some

anachronisms, as Mondt points out, for example in terms of language (14-15). Woolf uses words like ‘allies’ and ‘holocaust’, the latter in the context of Mrs Ramsay waiting for Paul and Minta and two of her children to return: “she thinks for a moment that they could have drowned. She consoles herself by thinking ironically that ‘holocaust on such a scale was not probable’. Readers of Woolf’s novel would know all too well that mass tragic death is possible” (Mondt 14).

But these anachronisms were also necessary; Woolf wanted to write about the war, and in particular her perception of the war. As an upper middle class woman, Woolf could not have written about the front—she could only have written about the changes she saw in the world that surrounded her. As a result, the main differences between pre-war and post-war society in *To the Lighthouse* are changing priorities and shifting gender roles, as well as a move from traditional values to a new social paradigm—of which no one is entirely certain yet. The younger characters have changed the most; Lily, Cam and James have been influenced by the war in how they perceive the world, the past and each other. Mr Ramsay, older and more Victorian than Lily and his children, has remained stuck in the past and the loss of Mrs Ramsay has meant the loss of sympathy. Although Lily and his children can see what he wants and what he feels, they are no longer prepared to merely accept his moods and obey his tyranny—they no longer have to.

3.2: An outline of history

The treatment of war in *Between the Acts* is very different from *To the Lighthouse*. As Alex Zwerdling points out, “In none of her other novels is Virginia Woolf as conscious of and responsive to contemporary events as in *Between the Acts*” (Zwerdling 220). Woolf wrote abundantly on the causes and consequences of war and on the Second World War in particular, both in non-fiction pieces and in her diaries, but her novels were a world of their

own. Zwerdling introduces the thought-provoking idea that, although Woolf held deep convictions about civilisation, politics, peace and war (as Christine Froula also points out in the first chapter of her book *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde*, “Civilization and ‘my civilisation’”), she had very little interest in the socio-political circumstances of the time she lived in, especially when it came to subjects for literature. “Historical events were contingent, accidental,” writes Zwerdling, “Woolf wanted to write about the universal and inevitable in human life” (221). Whilst living in a period of great political and historical mayhem, Woolf was pursuing timelessness in her novels. The one novel where she could be said to have failed in that respect is *Between the Acts*, which is “obviously and deliberately timebound” (Zwerdling 221).

History itself figures in the novel, through Mrs Swithin’s reading of *Outline of History*, as well as the pageant that represents English history in a series of tableaux. Miss La Trobe has a definite purpose in mind with her pageant; she presents her audience with seemingly traditional and respectable tableaux, but, as already described in Chapter 1, these scenes are essentially parodies. The pageant ends with the scene that depicts the present and confronts the audience with themselves, making them finally understand that the pageant is not just for entertainment but is meant to force them to think about their own time in the context of the rest of English history.

The pageant, Zwerdling argues, is a form of cultural continuity, because it uses English literature (timeless classics, presumably) and also casts the same people to play different parts in the various historical periods (229). The people that populate the village in the novel are essentially the same ones that lived two hundred years ago, as the characters bear the names of their ancestors and take their history as their own. Mrs Swithin, for example, says that she does not believe there really were Victorians, “Only you and me and William dressed differently” (388). Therefore, history repeats itself, most directly and most frighteningly in the

form of a *Second* World War. The cultural continuity that the pageant represents is also parodied and pointed out by Giles to be completely unproductive and useless:

...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. He, too, loved the view. (*BTA* 331)

Bolney Minster and Hogben’s Folly are landmarks the characters are able to see from where they are. They are tradition, they are always there and they never change. Giles could be so agitated because he wishes for these places to be destroyed, so long as something new could be done with them. “That’s what makes a view so sad,” remarks Mrs Swithin, a few sentences before the above quotation, “It’ll be there...when we’re not” (331). Giles wishes to *see* the view change for once, rather than spend his lifetime looking at the same view his ancestors used to see.

Giles cannot stand the English stiff upper lip and the “Keep Calm and Carry On” approach, because it makes him feel powerless. Karen Schneider writes in her article “Of Two Minds: Woolf, the War and *Between the Acts*” that “Giles’ private violence and his alienation from Isa stem not only from his emotional response to the impending war, but also from his resentment of the tradition that has trapped him in meaningless ungratifying work and that has enslaved him to the ‘ghost of convention’” (102-3). Schneider notes that several others of the younger generation feel the same kind of entrapment within social convention and traditionalism; Isa, for example, who wonders at the end of the novel, “Surely it was time

someone invented a new plot” (408). Change has to come, as Mrs Lynn Jones thinks earlier on in the novel, “unless things were perfect; in which case she supposed they resisted Time” (388). But considering both *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, it seems that change can only come with the cataclysm of a major war. Only war seems to allow people to break free from the past in terms of the values that ruled over them. The First World War allowed them to renounce Victorianism; perhaps the Second World War will allow people like Giles and Isa to live a new kind of life, to see things in a new light and to make a clean break from conventionality and traditionalism.

Literal and figurative fighting frames *Between the Acts* on multiple levels. The title, as has already been explained, refers to the acts of the pageant and the acts of Giles and Isa’s fight, but, as Zwerdling contends, it also refers to the period between the two world wars. The novel is therefore shaped by interrupted fighting, war suspended by failing attempts at civilisation—both on a macro and a micro level. Characters like Giles, Isa and Miss La Trobe are internally conflicted about various different things but are forced to act civilised in the company of other (usually older) people. Giles in particular is a very angry man, exemplified in the scene described in Chapter 1, when he stamps a snake and a toad to death as a release for his anger caused by impotence and cowardice. It is interesting, however, to point out that, although war constitutes a large part of English history, it is not featured in the pageant. Colonel Mayhew remarks just before the start of the third act, “Why leave out the British Army? What’s history without the army, eh?” (*BTA* 380) His wife repeats this near the end of the novel when she says, “Also, why leave out the army, as my husband was saying, if it’s history?” (399) This implies that these characters equate history with war; with war being the source of history or at least the way history is made.

The opposing themes of unity and dispersal have already been discussed in this thesis, but it is important to return to these themes in this chapter and place them within a broader

context, with the help of Zwerdling's article. Fragmentation has turned out to be a recurring state in both *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*. In both novels, characters feel cut off from others by their inability to express their emotions, because the truth is often not socially acceptable or respectable. In *To the Lighthouse*, the contrast between pre-war and post-war society becomes a contrast between social certainty and a search for lost meaning. The Victorian rules have been abandoned; the First World War has ended that way of life and has created room for a certain measure of liberty. Which sounds terrific, but the problem Lily Briscoe struggles with is the fact that no one will now tell her what to do; she does not have a husband and she has lost Mrs Ramsay, who represented the ultimate societal authority ("Do this, [Mrs Ramsay] said, and one did it" (*TL* 131)). Lily had to find the strength to assert herself, to stand up to Mrs Ramsay. She has done exactly that at the end of "The Window" and now, in "The Lighthouse", Mrs Ramsay is gone and Lily has made her own life choices. She has to learn to deal with the consequences, leading to a brief episode of despair at the loss of a golden past where everything was clear and structure was in place. She has now ended up in a drifting society that is searching for meaning amongst the wreckage of a trench war that took the lives of the young men who were supposed to shape and move the world in their adulthood.

The unity that existed before the war was not perfect, but it held everything in place. The war tore it apart and gave a degree of freedom, for example when it came to the roles of women, but did not put anything else back, no mandate, no authority. It is fragmentation of the highest order, a dispersal of people and purposes on which they were supposed to build a new civilisation. In *Between the Acts*, fragmentary communication has already been noted and discussed, as has Miss La Trobe's assertion in the pageant that during the interbellum, the people of England (and, presumably, elsewhere in Europe) have not managed to put

themselves back together, that they are still “orts, scraps and fragments” who cannot possibly be supposed to be able to build a new civilisation (*BTA* 394).

The orts, scraps and fragments, Zwerdling writes, are explicated by the final act of the pageant. Miss La Trobe turns the focus on the audience by having her cast members carrying reflective objects and mirrors and standing in front of the audience, becoming a wall of mirrors in which the spectators see themselves. But the wall of mirrors is utterly fragmented and “the little mirrors players focus on the audience are unable to hold more than one person at a time” and often not even that (234): “And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still” (*BTA* 393). Zwerdling writes that “it is inevitable” that this final act “should stress the utter fragmentation of life in the modern period, in which the medieval sense of a human community has finally been shattered... This vision of contemporary life as essentially discontinuous... connects with and illuminates the situation of the present-day characters in the novel... each trapped in the prison of self, rarely if ever able to feel a sense of vital connection to another human being” (234).

3.3: Conclusion

At this stage in history, although Victorian rules of society had already been abandoned in “The Lighthouse”, the characters in *Between the Acts* are still trapped within what they perceive as an old, obsolete society. They feel isolated from each other, feel unable to do and say what they truly feel. But it seems that the only way to solve this, is through a massive cultural and societal shock, such as a World War. The war in *To the Lighthouse* was the catalyst of change, for women like Lily Briscoe and children like Cam and James Ramsay. Another catalyst of change awaits the characters in *Between the Acts*, a rebirth, represented by Lucy Swithin picking up her *Outline of History* again at the end of the novel and starting to read about the very beginning of England, and of time, the prehistoric world. After she has

gone to bed and night has fallen, Giles and Isa come together privately for the first time in the novel:

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 fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night... 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. Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (409)

What Giles and Isa are about to do is essentially war on a domestic level; they will fight and fragment, be torn apart, and then they will come together again and continue to live in a new way. Their fight will take place in the darkness of prehistoric England, where nothing has been said yet, no wars have been fought yet and England does not even have a culture yet, post-Victorian or otherwise. From their fight new life might be born, as a new society might be created after a war has been fought. In other words, the curtain rises for the Second World War; the curtain rises for a war between Giles and Isa. Both will break with the past and lead to something new though not necessarily better, for another war might arise. The cycle, however, will continue and history will repeat itself, only dressed differently and bearing different names. The frustrations of the younger generations will lead to new social paradigms with new cultural values, communication will change as the senses of unity and dispersal wax and wane. The authors, painters and musicians that attempt to have their visions will provide cultural continuity. Darkness will reclaim the land and the world will be reborn, with new life, old history and a different time.

Conclusion

I can only note that the past is beautiful because one never realises an emotion at the time.

It expands later, & thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past.

— Virginia's diary, 18 March 1925, qtd. in *Virginia Woolf* by Hermione Lee, page 20.

The purpose of this thesis, in general terms, has been to trace the influence of war on Virginia Woolf's fiction. More specifically, the opposition of the individual versus society has been studied in terms of behaviour and communication as a result or symptom of war. Three of Woolf's novels, *The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts*, have been subjected to analysis and have provided an overview of the progression of these themes and characteristics in the products of Woolf's literary career.

The Voyage Out is an interesting novel that already contains many of the subjects that preoccupied Woolf for most of her life. Rachel Vinrace grows into adulthood throughout the novel and faces the ultimate dilemma for a woman of her age and time: to assert her own individuality and will or to subject herself to a man through marriage. As became apparent in Chapter 1, pre-war British society comes to the fore in the form of the pressures put on Rachel. The people around her—Helen and Ridley Ambrose, St John Hirst, Rachel's father—feel the need to educate her, to make her into a woman, to have her take her place in society, thereby fulfilling what they see as a woman's role in life. To be a wife and mother is her purpose. But, interpreting Woolf from a modern perspective and therefore labelling her character with a fairly modern term, Rachel is an adolescent. She is not a woman and she is not a child, and she has not yet discovered what she does want to be. But society makes the decision for her and steers her in a clear, though wrong, direction—wrong because it kills her. The expectations of society are for Rachel to give up her individuality and become like Helen, and so she decides to accept Terence Hewet as a husband, in spite of the fact that she does not

love him. She is too young to really know what she wants and is portrayed throughout the novel as having a ‘weak’ personality: she has no strong interests, not many strong, defining characteristics—the only thing she cares about is her music, and, had she lived a century later, she would have become a musician before ever considering marriage. But because she is so young, such a typical adolescent, she is easily persuaded by the forces around her to follow them in their conventions and marry. Her punishment follows swiftly and decisively; her engagement is ended abruptly by her own death, and although it seems to have very little impact on any of the other characters—they barely knew her, as she barely knew herself—it almost sets a precedent for Woolf’s later novels.

For the same dilemma returns almost literally in *To the Lighthouse*, although it must be pointed out that this 1927 novel has virtually nothing else in common with Woolf’s first. Lily Briscoe, although older than Rachel by about ten years during the first part of the novel, faces the same choice, between individuality and freedom, and subjugation and conventionality. Lily asserts her independence very strongly several pages before the end of “The Window”, realising that her work is what will save her from “that degradation” (marriage), because “she would move the tree rather more to the middle” in her painting (*TL* 74). When she decides not to marry, that ‘void’ is filled by her occupation, being a painter.

What makes the outcomes of these novels for these very similar characters different has several causes. Both Rachel and Lily are artists and young women living in the early twentieth century, before the Great War happened. They are both facing the same forces of society attempting to influence their individualities. Rachel is not able to withstand its influence, excepting her last attempt at exercising her independent mind when she tells Hewet, “No, I never fell in love with you”, whereas Lily is (390). This is partly because at Lily’s age, around 34 during “The Window”, she knows her own mind much better than Rachel and is more capable of asserting her independence, but also because Woolf was

writing nearly a decade after the end of the First World War. Her perspective on the pre-war society in which she had become an adult had inevitably changed, and this gave Lily Briscoe the strength to choose work rather than marriage.

If this seems like a trivial change in plot, it is more than that; it is a sign of the major changes brought about by the First World War. This war ended the Victorian Age once and for all and massively diminished the strength of its values. Society had not stopped exerting pressure on the individual, but its rules were no longer law. What haunts Lily after the war is not the consequences of her choices but the unattainable perfection of the past. The image of Mrs Ramsay, who enthralled Lily, is an ideal one because Mrs Ramsay died, embalming her and preserving her image in the perfect, longing nostalgia of those who knew her. It is unclear whether Mrs Ramsay died before Prue and Andrew, but it is probable that the characters in “The Lighthouse” long to be (with) Mrs Ramsay because she does not have to learn how to live with the consequences of the war. If she did have to suffer the loss of two of her children, she did not have to suffer it for long, whereas the characters in “The Lighthouse” still have to deal with their own fallibility, their memories of life before the war and the events that occurred between that day on the Isle of Skye and this. Mrs Ramsay will live forever in their memory, which cannot be touched by the desolation of war. In some ways, Mrs Ramsay’s death is the symbolic death of Victorian traditionalism, on which people looked back with the same kind of nostalgia. Lily’s rejection of marriage might be anachronistic, but it is also a declaration of modernity, and therefore a very clear break with the past.

Communication follows a different trajectory. Although the individual is liberated by the Great War, becoming free to rebel against the expectations of society, communication (in Woolf’s novels, at least) fragments more and more. *The Voyage Out* employs a fairly conventional novelistic form in terms of dialogue and internal monologue. Conversations between characters are complete, with full sentences, and the ratio between dialogue and

internal monologue is even and balanced. In *To the Lighthouse*, this ratio shifts to favour internal monologue in long paragraphs, and Woolf also employs (free) indirect speech to report spoken words. In *Between the Acts*, short sentences define the novel's style, uttered by people who are not sure of what to think and what to know. What the novels have in common in terms of communication is the inferiority of language when it comes to expressing oneself, saying what one means, as well as the unsuitability of language when it comes to knowing other people fully. This development is easily linked to growing individualism within society: if society fragments into different individuals, a collective language, defined by collective values and a collective culture (previously Victorianism), could also fragment into different individual languages. This makes people feel all the more separated from each other because they are unable to say what they mean and, as a result, only ever misunderstand each other.

In all three novels, there is conflict between people of the old and people of the young generation. Younger people in Woolf's novels always find themselves outnumbered and outgunned in terms of authority. The opinions that surround and shape Rachel in *The Voyage Out* are those of her older relatives, and although there are some characters of her age, she does what the older characters tell her to and follows their example. Mr and Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, particularly in the third part, shape the world the other characters exist in, and they perceive the world through the presence or absence of Mr and Mrs Ramsay, their behaviour and the image they project. In *Between the Acts*, Giles is greatly frustrated with the older people that surround him, that set the standard and represent the values he must adhere to, the authority he must obey. Giles, Isa and William Dodge, who represent the younger generation, let their lives be determined by the traditions of the older generation; their longing to speak the truth of what they feel is stronger in this novel than in the previous two, but is frustrated once again by the presence of the past. The Victorian shadow still holds sway, as many of the characters were alive before the First World War and knew the world before

everything changed. The older generation was unable to change with it, but the younger generation is desperate to escape. War represents overt conflict, laying one's cards on the table and declaring one's sympathies and antipathies—in short, openness; contrary to the characters in *Between the Acts* and the other two novels, who are continuously forced to keep their anger, their unhappiness, their love and their hatred hidden away. The characters in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* have experienced the international 'publication' of the internal battles and wars that they have always fought. As time moves on, the characters in *Between the Acts* feel the rumblings of the coming war as another impending paradigm shift. Society will change again, and this time, perhaps, it will change for the better. Civilisation will be rebuilt on the remnants of the old, new life will be born, and with it perhaps a chance for honesty. The dispersal of the interbellum might lead to a new unity in wartime, with new collective values and a new collective language.

That is not to say that this leads to the conclusion that Woolf applauded the new World War, nor that she actually thought it would bring the world anything other than carnage. As is well known, she and her husband despised and greatly feared the war; they were both on a Nazi black list and had agreed to commit suicide should the Nazis invade Britain (Lee 730). But *Between the Acts* presents a view of history as cyclical; it would always repeat itself, as it had done all these centuries. As someone who had already lived through a World War, Woolf knew this very well. The novel asserts the idea that everything the First World War brought—freedom, yes, for women and for men, and the partial abandonment of Victorian values and rules, but also the impotence of language, the impossibility of honesty and truthful communication, the retreat into the individual mind—might also come after the Second World War, but in a different way. Like a kind of deluge, the war would sweep everything away and Britain would be allowed to break with the past once again.

Looking back and looking ahead

This research has employed several New Historicist ideas, terms and methodologies as a theoretical frame and a variety of secondary literature as support for and additions to my interpretations of the novels. Some of the articles and books used were published in the 1970s and 1980s, but the great majority were published from the 1990s onwards. These texts were used either because they discussed a very specific topic, such as the language of a particular novel, or because they discussed a fairly broad topic, such as Woolf's earlier or later fiction. This research has relied, for the most part, on literary analysis from a new perspective—namely comparative study with a focus on societal changes caused by war—based partly on the findings of previous texts. What has been found lacking in these texts is mainly this mode of comparative study, which has led to some very interesting conclusions about Woolf's perception of society as well as war. Some of these texts also lacked a depth of analysis to which Woolf's novels, more than many others, are so ideally suited, or drifted off into biographical interpretation. But they were included for the valuable insights their authors came to, and a combination of this previous research and the interpretations that resulted from my perspective on the novels has led to an interdisciplinary and multi-faceted overview of these novels' place within history.

This was exactly the purpose of this thesis, and is also the reason why New Historicism has proven to be such a suitable frame and theoretical foundation. This school of criticism pulls Woolf's dense novels from the limiting realm of linguistic analysis and places them in the spotlight of contemporary history. This research has solidified my view that literature is not to be perceived as an isolated affair, and that an interdisciplinary kind of analysis has given Woolf's work a richness, a depth and a versatility that it would not have had, were I to have focused solely on her life in her work, for example. In spite of New Historicism initially being applied to Elizabethan literature, this research has proved that it is very suitable for

modernist literature as well, and possibly for even younger literature. The notion of the grand narrative has not returned to modern literature, and neither has the notion of objective historiography. New Historicism is a fascinating mode of criticism with a great amount of potential, shifting attention from the novel and the author to an entire world that lies behind.

This thesis has focused very deeply on a handful of topics that are very fundamental in each of Woolf's novels, and has therefore perhaps provided a pattern of analysis that could be followed for the novels that were not discussed. What seems most interesting in terms of further research is a complete overview of Woolf's literary career in the light of how war changed British society, because what has been included in this thesis is only a small part of Woolf's complete body of work. It could also be interesting to compare the worldview set forth in her novels to what Woolf wrote in for example *Three Guineas*, her non-fiction work on how to prevent war, as it became apparent from a comparison of her perception of war in *Between the Acts* and her diary that her fiction and non-fiction did not always align. And, as mentioned in the introduction, New Historicist criticism could further be implemented by investigating what kinds of non-literary texts could be read alongside Woolf's novels. Research in the vein of what has been attempted in this thesis can shed a broader light on Woolf's fiction, as this thesis has tried to connect various threads in her fiction that researchers generally analyse in isolation, such as feminism, communication, social paradigms and the course of history.

Appendix 1 – “The Charge of the Light Brigade” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

1.
 Half a league, half a league,
 Half a league onward,
 All in the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.
 “Forward, the Light Brigade!
 “Charge for the guns!” he said:
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

2.
 “Forward, the Light Brigade!”
 Was there a man dismay’d?
 Not tho’ the soldier knew
 Some one had blunder’d:
 Their’s not to make reply,
 Their’s not to reason why,
 Their’s but to do and die,
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

3.
 Cannon to right of them,
 Cannon to left of them,
 Cannon in front of them
 Volley’d and thunder’d;
 Storm’d at with shot and shell,
 Boldly they rode and well,
 Into the jaws of Death,
 Into the mouth of Hell
 Rode the six hundred.

4.
 Flash’d all their sabres bare,
 Flash’d as they turn’d in air,
 Sabring the gunners there,
 Charging an army, while
 All the world wonder’d:
 Plunged in the battery-smoke
 Right thro’ the line they broke;
 Cossack and Russian
 Reel’d from the sabre-stroke
 Shatter’d and sunder’d.
 Then they rode back, but not
 Not the six hundred.

5.
 Cannon to right of them,
 Cannon to left of them,
 Cannon behind them
 Volley’d and thunder’d;
 Storm’d at with shot and shell,
 While horse and hero fell,
 They that had fought so well
 Came thro’ the jaws of Death
 Back from the mouth of Hell,
 All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

6.
 When can their glory fade?
 O the wild charge they made!
 All the world wonder’d.
 Honour the charge they made!
 Honour the Light Brigade,
 Noble six hundred!

Published Sackville-West version (1945)

Come out and climb the garden path
 Luriana, Lurilee.
 The China rose is all abloom
 And buzzing with the yellow bee.
 We'll swing you from the cedar bough,
 Luriana, Lurilee.

I wonder if it seems to you,
 Luriana, Lurilee,
 That all the lives we ever lived
 And all the lives to be,
 Are full of trees and changing leaves,
 Luriana, Lurilee.

How long it seems since you and I,
 Luriana, Lurilee,
 Roamed in the forest where our kind
 Had just begun to be,
 And laughed and chattered in the flowers,
 Luriana, Lurilee.

How long since you and I went out,
 Luriana, Lurilee,
 To see the kings go riding by
 Over lawn and daisy lea,
 With their palm leaves and cedar sheaves,
 Luriana, Lurilee.

Swing, swing, swing on a bough,
 Luriana, Lurilee,
 Till you sleep in a humble heap
 Or under a gloomy churchyard tree,
 And then fly back to swing on a bough,
 Luriana, Lurilee.

CHARLES ELTON [1839-1900]

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