

## To the Readers

## Woolf and Literary Genre

Virginia Woolf's formally daring works of fiction and spirited critiques of Edwardian realism have earned her a reputation as an advocate of the modern novel. But, we suggest, Woolf was an ambivalent advocate. She was skeptical of the stasis implied by the word "novel," aware that literary form must adapt to the needs of the age, and impatient for novelists to reflect deeply on their prose medium.

Privately and publicly, Woolf often refers to herself as a "novelist" (e.g., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* [D] 3 47, "Speech to the London and National Society for Women's Service," "A Letter to a Young Poet"). And she often refers to her long works of fiction as "my novels," but only in her private writing (e.g., D3 12, D4 40, D5 79). Publicly, she hesitates to identify any of her books as a "novel" and when she does so identify, the word is buried among qualifications, as in her introduction to the Random House edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*. As this hesitancy suggests, Woolf was readier to claim for herself a profession ("novelist") than to claim for her books of fiction a genre. In the brief 1927 essay "What is a Novel?," Woolf writes of the term in question, "this repetition of a single word does considerable damage. The reader comes to think that since all these varieties of book have the same name they must have the same nature." She declares, "There is no such thing as 'a novel'," and condemns the term as a "highly potent bogey" that must be "destroyed" (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf* [E] 4 415). Like "Milton's bogey" at the end of *A Room of One's Own*, who constrains women's reading and writing of poetry, or the Angel in the House, a phantom of Victorian femininity who impedes the young Woolf's pen (E6 480-81), the term "novel" obscures individuality, in this case that of a work of art. Woolf resists not only "novel" but also other pat words for literary forms. We see this resistance in the arch subtitles of *Flush* and *Orlando* (each is "A Biography") and in Woolf's repeated description of her work as blending genres. *The Waves* is intended to be "prose yet poetry; a novel & a play" (D3 128) and a "playpoem" (D3 203); *The Years* should include "satire, comedy, poetry, narrative [ . . . and possibly] a play, letters, poems" (D4 152). Alert to the gain and risk of naming a work's genre, Woolf seeks the exact description for each of her books.

Woolf was deeply conscious of the historical interdependence and interaction of literary genres and forms. This consciousness is not evident in what is usually considered her most important essay on the novel, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs.

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**Virginia Woolf Miscellany Submissions**

Editorial note: While previously published work may be submitted for consideration, the original publication must be acknowledged at the time of submission.

**Guest Editors & CFPs**

**Issue #84—Fall 2013**  
**"Woolf and Animals"**

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**Issue #85—Spring 2014**  
**"Woolf and Materiality"**

The VWM invites discussion of how Woolf's writings explore the material world. Articles that directly address the relationship between meaning and materiality are particularly welcome, and potential topics include fresh considerations of Woolf's engagement with: the natural sciences; philosophical conceptualisations of materiality; non/human bodies and objects; fabrics and 'things'; the materiality of language and art. Send submissions of not more than 2500 words to:

Derek Ryan <D.Ryan@exeter.ac.uk>>  
by August 1, 2013

**Issue #86—Fall 2014**

**Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield**  
Articles on the topic may include Woolf's and Mansfield's writings, friendship, rivalry, shared interests; different ways they interconnect; literary experiments; modernist agendas; engagements with social, political, economic concerns; attitudes to empire, nationality, cultural belonging. We also welcome critical perspectives such as constructions of self and identity, sexuality, ecology, critical animal studies, commodity culture and the marketplace, the visual arts. Send submissions of no more than 2500 words to:

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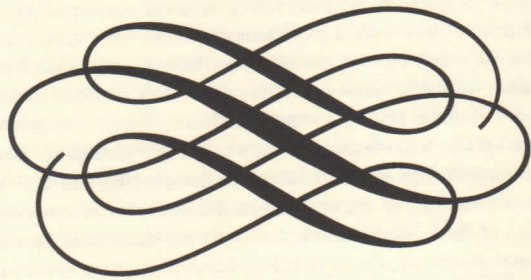
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**For information or questions about the Virginia Woolf Miscellany contact Vara Neverow**  
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Brown," which criticizes the realist novelists of the previous generation for their superficial handling of character. But this consciousness is evident elsewhere, as in the 1927 essay "Poetry, Fiction and the Future." Here, distinctions among genres are little addressed; instead Woolf emphasizes the "duties [ . . . ] discharged" (E4 434) by a given genre in a given age. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Woolf argues, lyric poetry and drama could no longer convey the complexity of modern life. She predicts, "we are going in the direction of prose" (E4 435). This forecast might reasonably be read as an effort to promote Woolf's own form. Prose was her natural medium; she attempted verse rarely and unsuccessfully, and wrote drama only to amuse friends and family. As further proof that Woolf predicts "the direction of" her own work, her diary descriptions of *The Waves* and *The Years* echo her 1927 description of the novel of the future: "It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry [ . . . ] It will be dramatic, yet not a play. It will be read, not acted" (E4 435). But the medium Woolf chose instinctively she analyzed deliberately. Her prediction is informed not only by her own project but also by wide reading in past and contemporary literature, responsiveness to the postwar mood of "doubt and conflict" (E4 430), and an understanding of language as a "tool" to be adapted for use by every generation of writers. (The word "tools" recurs throughout "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" and a version of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," as well as "Character in Fiction" [see E4 436 and 438, E3 430-32].) We might disagree with Woolf's low estimation of the poetry and drama of her time, but we cannot fail to admire her capacious reading and ambitious synthesis. Woolf's understanding of literary history finds clearest expression in her unfinished essay "Anon," which traces the development of literature from verse, the form of a preliterate, oral age, to prose, the form of a post-Gutenberg age. In this scheme, verse is created by a community while prose is created by an individual. Woolf's beloved Elizabethan theater, which blends verse and prose and includes the audience in its creation, falls in between these poles, chronologically and formally. Woolf suspected that in her time prose was displacing verse as the more flexible and appealing medium.

Woolf's defense of fiction thus entails two strategies: promoting, however uneasily, its dominant genre (the novel) and promoting its form (prose). She remarks with some discomfort in her review of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, "a wise and brilliant book about fiction [ . . . ] can be written without saying more than a sentence about the medium in which a novelist works" (E4 462). Unlike Forster, Woolf was passionate about

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### Subverting Genres and Virginia Woolf's Political Activism: *Three Guineas* as Peace Testimony

Identified as a "communist manifesto for women" by Jane Marcus (Introduction I), a "polemic" by Julia Briggs (120), and a "war pamphlet" by the author herself (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* [L] 6 159), Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) inhabits multiple genres. In collapsing the boundaries among peace pamphlet, political manifesto, letter, and essay-novel, Woolf subverts the divisions between private and public life, bringing the home and the family into the political arena and indicting the patriarchy in a war-making system. Responding to the question "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?," *Three Guineas* articulates Woolf's absolutist pacifist philosophy through a mode historically accessible and common to women: the letter. This cross between public letter and political pamphlet both models and reflects the trend of mixed-media projects that document

the genre of literature to perform the political act of peace. The collapse between the boundaries of life and art and transforming Woolf from thinker and writer to political activist. *Three Guineas* is, I argue, Virginia Woolf's peace testimony.

"Peace testimony" is a Quaker term that connects pacifist activism to spiritual worship. Caroline Emelia Stephen, the younger sister of Leslie Stephen, Woolf's father, wrote about the Society of Friends' peace testimony in her books *Light Arising: Thoughts on the Central Radiance* (1908) and *Quaker Strongholds* (1891), though she used its historical term, "testimony against war." This term, according to Pink Dandelion's *The Quakers: A Very Short Introduction* (2008), is "typically labeled the 'peace testimony' today" (14). Reading *Three Guineas* as peace testimony ties Woolf's work to the Quaker beliefs of her aunt and situates *Three Guineas* as political activism.

In "The Niece of a Nun," Marcus identifies how Stephen influenced the characterization of several of Woolf's female characters, such as Sally Seale in *Night and Day*, Eleanor Pargiter in *The Years*, and Lucy Swithin in *Between the Acts*, and identifies too some of the ways in which Stephen influenced Woolf's politics. Marcus reads the "intellectual chastity" necessary for inclusion in Woolf's Society of Outsiders as a source of feminine power modeled by the chastity of Woolf's aunt. Positioning Woolf and *Three Guineas* within "the female mystical/political tradition," Marcus observes that, "Like the Quaker philosophy of Caroline Stephen, *Three Guineas* attacks war, the pompous dress of men in power, the university, the established church, and the professions" (135). Marcus recuperates the female mystical tradition in Woolf's oeuvre, showing that Woolf's feminism is deeply informed by Stephen's conversion to Quakerism from the Clapham Sect of the Church of England. I will discuss, therefore, not the "rational mysticism" (a term used by Stephen and Marcus) of Quakerism, which Marcus has deftly analyzed for us, but the activist principles of the Quaker tradition, connecting Stephen's beliefs to the peace testimony of *Three Guineas*.

The Quaker concept of "testimony,"<sup>2</sup> central to the tradition of the Society of Friends, shifts religion from its purely idealistic, spiritual model and existentially situates living as a form of worship. Gathered together in a silent meeting, Friends wait in stillness to experience their "inner light," or divine inspiration. There is no single minister or priest in "unprogrammed" silent meetings—everyone engages in communion with God. If one is moved by the spirit of God, one stands and offers "free ministry," which is spontaneous and typically brief. It is not unusual to have several speakers proffer "free ministry" in one meeting, though it is also possible that no one speaks at all. Until one is "called" (i.e., moved by the spirit) to speak, one sits in silence, waiting for divine inspiration. In *Light Arising*, Stephen writes, "A Friends' meeting,

<sup>1</sup> The 2010 exhibition *The Mexican Suitcase: Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negatives by Capa, Chim, and Taro*, held at the International Center of Photography (ICP), brought to light one mixed-media approach to documenting the Spanish Civil War. The "Mexican Suitcase" is a collection of 4,500 negatives taken by Spanish Civil War photographers Robert Capa, Gerda Taro and Chim (David Seymour) that were housed in the back of a closet in Mexico for decades until they were returned in 2007 to Cornell Capa, Robert Capa's brother and the founder of the ICP. Magazine spreads during the Spanish Civil War juxtaposed Capa, Chim, and Taro's photographs with commentary to create a narrative of the conflict (see Dell). The catalog of the exhibition, edited by Cynthia Young, reproduces these spreads as well as the contact-sheet negatives of the photographs. Another example of the mixed-media projects that represent the Spanish Civil War is the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris International Exhibition, 1937, where Picasso's *Guernica* was first exhibited, hung facing murals constructed from political posters, newspaper articles, and photographs (Mendelson).

<sup>2</sup> In both *Quaker Strongholds* and *Light Arising*, Stephen explains in detail the Quaker terms and specialized language of the meeting. In *Light Arising*, especially, she focuses on the language of testimony. However, Stephen does not coin these phrases; she draws on the vocabulary that originated in the early days of Quakerism, which informs all Quaker writing and worship.

however silent, is at the very lowest a witness that worship is something other and deeper than words, and that it is to the unseen and eternal things that we desire to fit the first place in our lives" (68).

Faith, for Quakers, is not enough. Faith must be lived and followed. Silent meeting is Quakerism's primary testimony to the "inner light" that guides Quaker faith; the other testimonies, including peace, are a witness to living in the light. According to Stephen in *Quaker Strongholds*, "testimony" consists of "practices conscientiously adopted, inculcated, and watched over [ . . . ] with a jealous care which [ . . . ] has nevertheless moulded the very inmost springs of action" (120). She continues, "the essence of Quaker 'testimony' is witness bearing—a lifting up in practice of the highest possible standard of uncompromising obedience to the teaching of Jesus Christ, both as recorded in the Gospels, and as inwardly experienced as light" (120). In essence, a "testimony" is an action that testifies to the conscience of an individual, a conscience informed by the divine spirit. Peace testimony, or "testimony against war," is a collection of actions—most Quakers would argue a lifestyle—that manifests pacifist beliefs.

Therefore, when I maintain that *Three Guineas* is Woolf's peace testimony, I am arguing that *Three Guineas* is a form of action. Reading *Three Guineas* as peace testimony positions the text within the peace activist movements of the Spanish Civil War and of the impending world war. This reading also recognizes Woolf as a voice of dissent in an intellectual environment that was moving away from pacifist beliefs in response to the violence against civilians committed during the conflict in Spain. The Spanish Civil War erupted on 18 July 1936, forcing to a crisis the tension that Europe had felt among Fascism, socialism, Communism, democracy, and capitalism. It also made the impending world war obvious to anyone with political acumen. As 1936 progressed into 1937, the English intellectual left, many of whom had been pacifists in the First World War, increasingly supported the war in Spain against General Francisco Franco.<sup>3</sup> In the advent of an increased usage of the military technique "total war" (in which civilians become military targets), pacifists faced certain ethical and philosophical questions. They asked themselves, can we legitimately wage war under the sign of peace? And how do we stop the innocent slaughter of civilians in cases of genocide or total war?<sup>4</sup> The fight in Spain, with the international involvement of Russia (on the side of the Republic) and Germany and Italy (on the side of the Francoist fascists), struck most politically invested artists as a fight of good against evil. Though some pacifist organizations, like the Quakers, continued their peace testimony and provided relief work throughout the Spanish conflict,<sup>5</sup> the threat of an even more technologically advanced and bloody world war made it difficult for many individuals, including the poet Julian Bell, Woolf's nephew, to sustain a pacifist philosophy.

In writing *Three Guineas*, Woolf maintains her peace testimony in spite of a cultural climate moving towards war. She addresses at once large-

<sup>3</sup> As the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War* (1937) makes clear, most of the intellectual left supported the Spanish Republic, sometimes sacrificing their pacifist beliefs for their fight against Fascism. For example, Rosamond Lehmann states: "Up till now a pacifist in the fullest sense, I have come to feel that non-resistance can be—in this case, is—a negative, a sterile, even a destructive thing" (21). This pamphlet records the short responses of 148 authors to the questions: "Are you for, or against, the legal Government and the People of the Republican Spain?" and "Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism?" (2). Out of the 148, only sixteen remained neutral and five supported Franco's rebellion.

<sup>4</sup> For more on ethics, total war, and *Three Guineas*, see Berman.

<sup>5</sup> Mendlesohn highlights the importance of "the Testimony of Social Justice in the working out of the Quaker Peace Witness in the middle years of the twentieth century" (180). Since a peace testimony is defined as a series of actions testifying to an inner belief, it must be manifested or enacted in some way. Mendlesohn points out that one of the ways in which some Quakers enacted their testimony was to

scale mobilization and, more personally, her nephew.<sup>6</sup> Bell's increasingly ambivalent position towards pacifism is summed up in a sentence from his introduction to the anthology *We Did Not Fight* (1935): "I believe the war-resistance movements of my generation will in the end succeed in putting down war—by force if necessary" (xix). Anticipating his involvement in the Spanish Civil War, this statement clearly indicates that Bell believes in war as a viable method of establishing peace. It is also representative of the shift away from his Quaker schooling and the values of Bloomsbury conscientious objectors. Wanting badly to volunteer with the International Brigades, Bell was talked out of enlistment as a conciliation to his pacifist mother; instead, he volunteered as an ambulance driver with the noncombatant organization Spanish Medical Aid (Stansky and Abrahams 263-64). On 18 July 1937, he was killed by a bomb (Stansky and Abrahams 278). After Julian's tragic death, when Woolf was writing *Three Guineas* with all-consuming intensity to escape feeling the full effect of his absence, she wrote to Vanessa Bell, her sister and Julian's mother, "I'm completely stuck on my war pamphlet[.] [ . . . ] I'm always wanting to argue it with Julian—in fact I wrote it as an argument with him. Somehow he stirred me up to argue" (L6 159). On the day *Three Guineas* was published, Woolf wrote in her diary, "I was always thinking of Julian when I wrote" (*The Diaries of Virginia Woolf* [D] 5 148). These statements suggest that Julian Bell is one of those not-so-invisible presences who haunt *Three Guineas*, as Emily Sharpe has recently argued. Notably, the genre blending of *Three Guineas* is a technique that Bell himself used in 1936 and 1937 to write three "open letters": "On Roger Fry: A Letter," "The Proletariat and Poetry: An Open Letter to C. Day Lewis," and "War and Peace: Letter to E. M. Forster." The last essay makes the statement to which Woolf's letter implicitly responds—"I, and many more men of military age, have ceased to be pacifists" (336)—and expounds on Bell's idea that some evils are worse than war—namely, Fascism. Soon after Bell wrote this open letter, he put his position into action by going to Spain. Woolf, however, contends throughout her peace pamphlet that any capitalist, militarized state will always lead to Fascism and that those ostensibly fighting Fascism will inevitably become much like their enemy. *Three Guineas*, therefore, is a peace pamphlet that says everything to Bell that Woolf never got to say. In this way, it could also be considered a text of mourning.

From another vantage point, one could see Woolf's peace pamphlet as part of a larger trend within pacifist circles, a movement that tended toward "positive peace," i.e., a pacifism that "argued that the peace movement must be constructive, not simply reactive, promoting social, political and cultural reform to eradicate the causes of war" (Brockington 2). Similar to the Quaker idea of "testimony," "positive peace" must be manifested in *doing* something to create a world without war. Within the early-twentieth-century pacifist community, producing pamphlets and writing against war was actually seen as one of the most important contributions to peace politics and political activity. In fact, the kind of work that *Three Guineas* does is precisely the kind of work Vanessa Bell, and indeed the entire Bloomsbury community, wanted Julian Bell to undertake. Instead of fighting in Spain, they argued to Bell, there was a more important fight against Fascism at home, to be pursued by, in Vanessa Bell's words, "thinking, writing, speaking, planning" (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 239). This is the fight in which Woolf is engaged by writing *Three Guineas*, clear from the May 1938 musing in her diary,

<sup>6</sup> See Woolf's diary entry on 15 April 1937, where she records a dinner party that Bell attended: "Julian, KM [i.e. Kingsley Martin], Stephen [Spender]—all calling each other by Xtian names. What is our duty? What is the responsible man like KM to do? Cant be a pacifist; the irresponsible can" (D5 79). Woolf makes it apparent that this conversation affected the writing of *Three Guineas* when she states: "I sat there splitting off my own position from theirs, testing what they said, convincing myself of my own integrity & justice [ . . . ] Julian [o]bstinately set on going to Spain—wont argue; tight; hard fisted [ . . . ] we discussed hand

The multimedia form and generic blending of *Three Guineas* allows the text to perform this “positive peace.” The book includes extensive footnotes that rely on women’s biographies, newspaper articles, propaganda pamphlets, and, as the author notes, “manifestoes and questionnaires” (203). Five photographs of powerful British men interrupt the text, as if to expose the source of war.<sup>7</sup> Informed by the Spanish Civil War pamphlets that use literary imagery in order to make a political case,<sup>8</sup> and by the Spanish Civil War journalism that breaks the mold of the objective, non-partisan recorder, *Three Guineas* is a Spanish Civil War text, participating in the generic blending that the war inspired.

Woolf’s allusive and epistolary form facilitates a breakage of boundaries that is both essential to and constitutive of her politics. *Three Guineas* models its feminism by citing reading material to which women who did not go to university might have had access, sources as diverse as Sophocles’s *Antigone* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Further, these letters invite Woolf’s readers to join in a conversation. As Gina Potts puts it, “Woolf espouses [ . . . ] a form of collective—undivided, or co-operative—thinking: thinking as ‘we’” (46). As Marcus points out, *Three Guineas* is a difficult text because the position of the reader is never stable (Introduction *xlvi*), thus forcing the reader to inhabit multiple points of view. Sometimes the reader is aligned with the writer; at other times the reader is aligned with any of the various recipients and addressees. This unstable subjective/objective positioning renders the readerly stance fluid. The reader is therefore able to suspend the “I” for the collective thinking of “We”—the same cognitive orientation necessary for a functioning Outsiders’ Society, the hypothetical society Woolf founds for the prevention of war (first mentioned on 126), composed of the daughters of educated men.

According to Potts, “In *Three Guineas*, a model for collective thought is found in the Outsiders’ Society” (50). Potts explains:

by having no hierarchy of officers, for example, the society works on the basis of having no divisions, and thus no power struggles between members. Of course, there are difficulties that would arise for a society that held no meetings or conferences, or had no money, and, Woolf’s description of the Outsiders’ Society, therefore, seems an exaggeration. How would politically-active groups, like the WCG [i.e., Women’s Co-operative Guild], work for practical solutions to social and political inequalities without meeting or having funding for their work? (51)

What is the answer to Potts’s question? The model, I think, lies in the Society of Friends. Marcus, in “The Niece of the Nun,” observes, “the Outsiders’ Society could be the Society of Friends” (135). For details on how the Outsiders’ Society’s meetings might work, let us look to Woolf’s aunt. When Friends make decisions concerning governance (of themselves, of the meeting, or of “any question of special interest” [Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds* 8]), they hold meetings with a specialized intention, such as a Meeting for Sufferings or a Meeting for Business. These meetings, Stephen tells us in *Quaker Strongholds*, require consensus for any decision to be made, as “no question is ever put to the vote” (9). Governance occurs under “what may be called a practical unanimity” (9). In refusing hierarchy, granting each member an equal and necessary voice, and insisting on consensus of an issue before the

<sup>7</sup> The list of illustrations, after the cover page, reads as: “A General (25) / Heralds (29) / A University Procession (32) / A Judge (75) / An Archbishop (144).” The fact that Woolf does not name the individuals indicates to me that they are intended to transcend their specificity and represent men of their position and class. For identification of the photographs, see Staveley.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly striking is Woolf’s use of Louis Delaprée’s war pamphlet/journalistic account of the Spanish Civil War, titled “The Martyrdom of Madrid.” This pamphlet, quoted at length in footnote 15 of part III of *Three Guineas* (210), demonstrates the breakdown of journalistic convention during the Spanish Civil War.

Outsiders’ Society also shares the aims of the Quaker community, which tries to create the world it imagines by living the testimonies of “integrity, peace, simplicity, community, and equality” (*Historical Dictionary* 340).

*Three Guineas* mirrors closely not only the Quaker testimony of peace but also the testimony of simplicity. This testimony appears in *Three Guineas* as a rejection of ceremonial dress. Disparaging the pompous display of military and academic uniform, which stratifies individuals into spheres of power, Woolf requires simplicity of dress of would-be members of the Society of Outsiders. Wearing plain clothing as a political statement against inequality is a part of the Quaker testimony of simplicity—hence the outfits of Quaker grey that are often associated with the Society. In *Light Arising*, Stephen connects the testimony of simplicity to the testimony against war, seeing greed and finery as a source of conflict: “This method of witnessing by personal plainness and simplicity against the source of wars has, moreover, the advantage of being open to all, at once and continually” (107).

When imagining a new society, Woolf, either deliberately or unconsciously, moves towards her Quaker roots. Writing is Woolf’s form of civic action, her testimony of peace. Inspired by her aunt’s beliefs and in rebuttal to her nephew’s volunteer work in Spain, Woolf composes a text that breaks the boundaries between letter and peace pamphlet, between literature and political manifesto. In doing so, she breaks down the boundaries between the I and You, thinking a world in which the ethical orientation is We, witnessing the possibility of peace. In the call-to-action that is *Three Guineas*, we find Virginia Woolf’s peace testimony.

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### Mapping the Search for Consolation in *Mrs. Dalloway*

Snatches of English poetry fill *Mrs. Dalloway*, as well as its precursor, the short story "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street." But where another author might employ poetic allusion to tie modern-day London to the past, Virginia Woolf uses bits of Shelley and Shakespeare to distinguish her character's lament from the modes of mourning available to poets of earlier eras. The elegy, Woolf suggests, demands a different approach in the twentieth century, as secularism swells and the Great War leaves its mark on the living as well as on the dead.

As she walks through London in "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street," Clarissa Dalloway thinks of these lines from Shelley's "Adonais":

From the contagion of the world's slow stain  
He is secure, and now can never mourn  
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain . . .

(Shelley 40.356-58, qtd. in part in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*[SF] 154)

These lines enable Clarissa to mourn not only her "dear Jack Stewart" (SF 154) but also those who, like her, live to face their regrets and limitations as they age. These traditional elegiac themes give way to

continues her walk to the refrain of "And now can never mourn, can never mourn" (155). One can "never mourn" again because the traditional modes of mourning are disintegrating.

Clarissa's thoughts outline a rift in the elegiac tradition, from when "It used [ . . . ] to be so simple," to now, when, she thinks, "simply one doesn't believe [ . . . ] any more in God" (158). The burgeoning secularism of the twentieth century presents a problem for the modern elegist: poets less confidently conclude their mourning song by finding consolation in thoughts of life beyond death. Peter Sacks and Jahan Ramazani have sketched the arc of elegiac poetry from its origins in Greece through its modern English incarnations. Both critics set up their discussion along Freudian lines: Sacks sees traditional elegies as having a strong consolatory component, facilitating a kind of productive mourning that enables the mourner to work through grief and then move on (4). Ramazani conceives of modern elegists as pursuing instead a *resistance* to consolation that looks a lot like Freud's definition of melancholia in "Mourning and Melancholia" (xi).<sup>1</sup> But this psychoanalytic distinction obscures another major difference between the poets of old and the modern elegists: whereas the former generally ended their elegies by offering up the dead to God or gods for immortality, the latter are far less certain that there is some means of offering the dead immortality other than through their own poetry.

Woolf compels her readers to witness the unraveling of poetic tradition that accompanies a loss of belief, an unraveling that appears to cost modern poetry its consolatory power. Clarissa observes: "For all the great things one must go to the past [ . . . ] the moderns had never written anything one wanted to read about death" (SF 155). Through Clarissa's dismay, Woolf registers a failure on the part of modern poetry to address the needs of mourners who seek consolation and find only cynicism from poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. In her essay "On Not Knowing Greek," which was published in *The Common Reader* the same year *Mrs. Dalloway* appeared in print, Woolf echoes Clarissa's dissatisfaction with the elegiac poetry of her contemporaries in the face of "the vast catastrophe of the European war": "The only poets who spoke to the purpose spoke in the sidelong, satiric manner of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. It was not possible for them to be direct without being clumsy; or to speak simply of emotion without being sentimental" (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf*[E] 4 48). Although Clarissa is by no means a stand-in for Woolf, the clear correspondence between the fiction and the essay suggests that more than a little of Woolf's own frustration with contemporary elegy finds an outlet in Clarissa's musings.

Woolf's 1925 query, "I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new — by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" has generated a stream of scholarship on her novels' elegiac tone (*The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*[D] 3 34). *To the Lighthouse* has long been the locus of discussions of Woolfian elegy,<sup>2</sup> but *Jacob's Room*, *The Waves*, and *Mrs. Dalloway* have more recently received their share of attention.<sup>3</sup> Although Christine Froula has argued for a reading of

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, a variety of opinions as to the form and function of elegy over the course of literary history. See "Elegy" in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* for further references, particularly as regards the history of the elegy and its origins in classical Greek literature. Since the publication of *The English Elegy* in 1985, however, Peter Sacks has been the most widely cited expert on elegy in the English tradition, and his psychoanalytic reading has been extremely influential. Ramazani's continuation of the study of English elegy where Sacks left off has brought more attention to the melancholic, rather than the mourning, side of the equation, but it has not fundamentally altered the terms of the discussion about mourning, melancholia, and elegy.

<sup>2</sup> See Greenwald, Knox-Shaw, and Stevenson and Goldman. Woolf's suggestion of the term "elegy" in her diary came just as she was finishing *To the Lighthouse*. The novel also serves as a natural point of entry for discussions of elegy and Woolf because of its references to Woolf's deceased parents and childhood holidays at St. Ives.