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The American University in Cairo (AUC)

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Fragments of a Writer's Mind:
Virginia Woolf in Her Own Words**

A thesis submitted to

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by

Baheya Zeitoun

Under the supervision of

Prof. Ferial J. Ghazoul

April 2023

Dedication

I dedicate this master's degree to my mother, my primary source of support and reassurance throughout this process, and my backbone in life.

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to everyone that has provided me with support over the course of this experience.

I would like to give special thanks to Dr. Ferial Ghazoul for her continued guidance, expertise, and input during the thesis process and throughout my master's degree.

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I would like to give warm thanks to my family and friends for their comforting and uplifting presence, as well as their unwavering belief in me.

Finally, I am thankful for the moral support and encouragement my fellow graduate colleagues provided, and the sense of community that developed over this journey.

Abstract

This thesis provides a thematic reading of select autobiographical and theoretical works by Virginia Woolf. It utilizes Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of the rhizome as a methodological framework. The rhizome does not have a hierarchical structure but is rather interconnected. In the same way, the chapters interweave the multi-disciplinary theoretical approaches to connect the disparate factions of the modernist writer's mind and life.

The early twentieth century saw the rise of post-suffrage writers with narratives that diverged from male-centric values. Woolf is one of the writers who makes a clear distinction between male and female values by championing women's experiences and struggles. She argues for female economic independence, through education and employment opportunities. In addition, she emphasizes the importance of female intellectual production to bridge the gap between men's and women's voices in history.

The theme of mental health is discussed by analyzing Woolf's fiction and non-fiction writings on the topic. Given her struggles with manic depressive disorder, known contemporarily as bipolar disorder (BD), she also serves as a case study for the condition and how it is linked to creativity. By following her writing style and feminist views on her society, light is shed on mental health struggles in the early twentieth century and compared to contemporary theories.

As Woolf lived through a tumultuous period of British history, she witnessed the rise of the emotionally expressive modernist movement and became one of its most prominent literary figures. The movement utilized a literary device known as stream-of-consciousness writing; an approach to consciousness proposed by American psychologist William James. Thus, psychology and mental health were vital to her use of language and central to her written works, which provided insight into her psyche.

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Introduction

Writing about the Self

“And how can one explain what one is? One can but be it. Thus, forced always to look back or sidelong at his own past the critic sees something” – Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill*

Autobiography is a literary genre that has been debated by critics over the decades. In its essence, it is a work where the writer writes about himself/herself. It has been categorized as a separate literary genre since the “late eighteenth century” and has spurred many controversies “about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction” (Anderson 1). In *Writing Life: Early Twentieth-Century Autobiographies of the Artist-Hero*, Mhairi Pooler proposes the notion of a fictional persona, where the author is distinguished from the narrator, explaining how the “enunciated persona,” or the protagonist of the autobiography, “is created in conjunction with the reader” (178). In this case, there are three separate entities infused into one. This is especially true in creative autobiographies, where “art reveals the artist,” and one cannot always be separated from the other (177). Thus, the authors of such works can maintain a degree of anonymity, while simultaneously giving the reader a glimpse into their lives.

Autobiographies have also been written in many different forms, “narrative, poem, and play,” which is important to note when trying to define the genre (Elnaggar 169). As one moves away from the factual personal history or the linear first-person narrative, the autobiography expands our understanding of what it means to write about one’s own life. From letters to confessions to poems to fantastical myths to experimental narratives and essays, writers have utilized every form of writing to express their life journeys and the lessons they learned through them.

Adeline Virginia Stephen was born on 25th January 1882 to Leslie and Julia Stephen. She had what would be described as a traumatizing childhood, which would continue to haunt her until the end of her life in 1941. Like her father, who founded the *Dictionary of National Biography* from 1882 – 1891, Woolf carried on the “the Stephen family tradition of biographical writing” and was influenced by her Bloomsbury friends (Humm 75). Furthermore, according to Daniel Albright, her diaries are considered “masterworks of modern letters” (1). Thus, they are excellent illustrations of the style of that era. Moreover, she follows in the footsteps of female autobiographers. The female autobiography provides an intimate portrait of women’s inner lives and thought processes. In *When Memory Speaks*, Jill Ker Conway argues that it also serves as “a mirror of culture,” one that has assumed women as inferior and “shaped modern women’s inner consciousness through the internalized male gaze surveying the female as sex object” (4). With this notion in mind, I chose several of Woolf’s autobiographical writings as primary texts.

From her literary canon, I have chosen *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). The novel is set in the interwar period and unfolds over the course of a single day. It follows a middle-aged Clarissa Dalloway as she prepares for a party and Septimus Warren Smith as he struggles with shellshock and his own mortality. According to Hermione Lee it “was the ideal novel through which to fictionalize the life of Virginia Woolf, because it is itself so much about life-writing” (*Virginia Woolf’s Nose* 42). In addition, the novel offers a glimpse at the demise of its author, as its suicidal character imagines an escape from his life which mirrors Woolf’s own death. The suicide letter she leaves her husband in 1941 will also provide final insight into this tragic decision.

Three of Woolf’s essays were utilized as examples of how her theoretical contributions were uniquely personal to her experiences. First, “On Being Ill” (1926) discusses the topic of

illness in literature and how the well-being of the body is not given the same importance in literature as the affairs of the mind. The essay aims to link mental and physical health, bridging the literary and linguistic gap between them. Second, *A Room of One's Own* (1928) is based on two lectures about women and literature delivered at Newnham College and Girton College, women's constituent colleges at the University of Cambridge. With a focus on intellectual production, it takes the author across the university campus and through volumes of books to find the place of women in the literary arts. Third, *Three Guineas* (1938), is a long-form essay expanding on the points discussed in *A Room of One's Own* with an economic emphasis at its helm. Broken down into three central points: the education of women, their employment, and their ability to protect culture.

Finally, her most personal texts allow the reader access to the writer's emotional mind, namely, *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings of Virginia Woolf* (1976), made up of several short autobiographical texts, including her memoir -- "A Sketch of the Past." The memoir was written four months before her death, amid the Second World War, and serves as a reflection on her childhood at an unsteady time in her adulthood. *Moments of Being* touches upon Woolf's feminist ideology, her mental state, as well as a culmination of her stylistic journey as a writer. *A Writer's Diary* (1953), a series of diary entries compiled and edited by her husband, Leonard Woolf, will be used as a supplementary text in every chapter to provide insight into the writer's emotions or context to the texts.

Methodology

"Rhizomes do not propagate by way of clearly delineated hierarchies but by underground stems in which any part may send additional shoots upward, downward, or laterally. There is no hierarchy. There are no clear lines of descent. A rhizome has no beginning or end. It is always in the middle."

– Brent Adkins on Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*

From Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, the opening plateau, "The Rhizome", will act as a methodological framework. As stated in the quotation above, rhizomes have no hierarchy, grow in every direction, and are always in a middle state. Likewise, the chapters are meant to have multiple links to one another to produce an image of a writer's mind and thinking process. The thesis is divided into an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The chapters follow the writer's ideology and then delve deeper into her trauma-induced illness in childhood to the progression of her writing style. The primary texts and theoretical frameworks will vary based on the discussed theme. Nevertheless, even though, each chapter will have a primary focus, it will also incorporate elements of the other two chapters. For example, the first chapter will primarily discuss feminist thought, but it will inevitably touch upon mental health and writing style, which will be explored at greater lengths in chapters two and three respectively. Using an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, which utilizes the social sciences, natural sciences, and humanities, I will follow a rhizomatic structure in a chronology of experience awareness. To elaborate, the texts within each chapter are organized based on when Woolf became aware of a certain theme rather than when the text was written.

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter argues that "women writers responded to the war, [First World War], by turning within, yet they renounced the demands of the individual narrative self" (240). As a response to the violent male ego, early twentieth-century female writers wrote "anti-male" narratives (242). Furthermore, according to Ewa Ziarek in *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*, Woolf contrasted femininity to genius and believed that such juxtaposition provided "the embodiment of artistic freedom" (91). By claiming that femininity is the "antithesis of genius," Woolf is making a clear distinction between masculine

and feminine values. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler asks “how is [a woman’s] identity shaped, and is it a political shaping that takes the very morphology and boundary of the sexed body as the ground, surface or site of cultural inscription?” (129). To answer this question, I will explore the link between the female body and a woman’s identity in the primary texts.

While Woolf’s fictional narratives will not be discussed in this chapter, her feminist ideology will be explored through her essay *A Room of One’s Own*. At the core of her ideology is the belief that if women have enough money to support themselves and their own rooms as well as “the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what [they] think. . . then the opportunity will come” (112). It is also important to note that Woolf is not looking to provide her female listeners/readers with concrete advice, but rather have them learn to think for themselves (Saloman 77). This logic still rings true almost a century after the publication of the essay. Furthermore, according to Hermione Lee’s biography of Woolf “her political position, her intellectual resistance to tyranny and conventionality, derived from a great extent to her experiences as a woman patient” (*Virginia Woolf* 179).

The first chapter will explore the origins of Woolf’s feminist ideology through Showalter’s theory on female writers in the post-Great War era, as well as the economic circumstances of women and Britain at the time. It will also include Judith Butler’s notions on the subjugation of the body and subverting gender roles, especially regarding Woolf’s experiences with sexual assault.

The theme of mental health will be discussed by analyzing fictional and non-fictional texts. Virginia Woolf’s struggles with manic depressive disorder, known contemporarily as bipolar disorder (BD), are reflected in her writings across all genres. As she writes in her diary in 1926: “mind a blank. Slept in my chair. Thursday. No pleasure in life whatsoever; but felt

perhaps more attuned to existence. Character and idiosyncrasy as Virginia Woolf completely sunk out” (94). The entry is written after a mental breakdown and provides a glimpse into the inner psyche of Woolf the person, not the writer.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault studies the polar processes between the melancholic and the manic mind. The extreme juxtaposition between the two mental states of the manic depressive reflects their creative as well as their destructive nature. Virginia Woolf, the creative writer who ends her own life, is an excellent embodiment of that duality. In the second chapter, I will apply Michel Foucault’s notions of mania and melancholia to Virginia Woolf’s writing on her distressing experiences. Furthermore, the chapter will use the author as a case study to attempt to answer some of the questions linking BD to creativity by following her style and her feminist views.

The final chapter will analyze her artistic style as well as contextualize her writing. The late nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century saw the rise of modernism, an artistic/literary movement that rejected the traditional forms of the past and opted for an aesthetic that is more emotionally expressive. One of its most common literary devices was stream-of-consciousness writing. The notion was proposed by William James who believed that “the consciousness of the Self involves a stream of thought” (82). This description of human consciousness stands at the root of modernist writing.

Moreover, Ben Yagoda, in *The Sound on the Page*, argues that “a female writing style would tend to stress emotional and personal connections” (76). While this claim is too general and can border on stereotypical, it provides insight into the significance of female autobiographical writing and how it is linked to the female psyche. This is relevant in the case of Virginia Woolf in particular, because as her biographer, Hermione Lee, describes “her [mental]

illness has become her language” (*Virginia Woolf* 172). Thus, the analysis in this thesis will also touch upon her state of mind and the source of her ideology, as they are central to her reflections, observations, descriptions, and use of language.

A product of her time, Woolf’s struggles led to her ultimate suicide; however, her autobiographical works provided insight into her psyche. In the following chapters, I will attempt to delve into the mind of Virginia Woolf to dissect her feminist ideology, mental state, and writing process using an interwoven multi-disciplinary structure mirroring the interconnected non-hierarchal rhizome.

Chapter 1

Sociological and Economic Sides of Feminist Ideology

Virginia Woolf's feminist ideology can be traced back to her childhood. Long before the young Woolf (née Stephen) had any awareness of feminism, she understood that men and women were treated differently based on her family's dynamic. Furthermore, her experience as a female patient exposed her to the injustices which befell mental patients and helped develop "her political position [and] her intellectual resistance to tyranny and conventionality" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 179). So even though, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that "literature is an assemblage," which does not and has never had anything to do with ideology (4), Woolf's literature and writing, in general, opposes this notion. Her writing was considered an "antithesis of genius," and thus embodied her celebration of femininity and her artistic freedom (Ziarek 91). Nevertheless, the female aesthetic, which was meant as a tool for survival, a means to transcend the anger and darkness within, only buried the darkness deeper as women were helpless to confront and fight the forces that caused them (Showalter, *Their Own* 262). The battle between a woman's place in the home and her place in the workforce created an imbalance of power between the genders and kept women at the mercy of their male counterparts, be they, spouses, or other family members. And the nervous disorders suffered by women "expressed the insoluble conflict between their desires to act as individuals and the internalized obligations to submit to the needs of the family and to conform to the model of self-sacrificing 'womanly' behavior" (Showalter, *Malady* 144).

The history of feminism is intrinsically linked to the history of capitalism, which, itself, stems from the patriarchal values of feudalism. According to feminist economists, the relationship between women and production can be visualized in a U-shaped curve; "status is high in agricultural societies when women work in production (left side of the U), then status

falls as industrial capitalism emerges in the society and women are excluded from production (low center of the U), and, with time, status rises again as capitalism draws women into the productive labor force (right side of the U)” (Peterson and Lewis 275). Nevertheless, as industrial capitalism grew in the early twentieth century, so did the tertiary sector (service sector) of the economy.

The growth in government and corporate employment opportunities contributed to the growth of the middle classes and increased the demand for women in the workforce (Peterson and Lewis 278). This shift in demand had a profound effect on women’s mental health. Many believe that the decline in female hysteria and mental breakdowns results from women being given meaningful work and having to face real crises (Showalter, *Malady* 195). However, even though the economic history of Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries stipulated a need for female employment and there was evidence supporting its benefit to female mental health, the liberation offered by salaried work was hindered by the social hierarchy which excluded women from high-skilled jobs.

In *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, John Maynard Keynes argued that a major fault of the economic society of his time is linked to a failure to provide full employment (372). Writing during the Great Depression, Keynes suggests that if institutions contribute funds to the economy and income is redistributed in a way to “raise the propensity to consume may prove positively favorable to the growth of capital” (373). Keynes is also critical of warfare as it strains the market and adds pressure on the population (381). And while Woolf, his fellow Bloomsbury member, agrees with his promotion of modernist consumption and the fiscal irresponsibility of warfare, she does not support the “entrenched ideas about sexual difference” in his text (Gualtieri 189). For while the argument for full employment is compelling,

it does not address income inequality between the genders. Her essay *Three Guineas* was published two years after Keynes's magnum opus and acts as a response to his views.

As Ewa Ziarek describes in *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*, femininity was meant to represent the antithesis of genius, because genius was classified as the work of men. Woolf's work with its emphasis on long thought sequences and a celebration of women's everyday life stood in direct opposition to the glorified aggression of war. Having suffered aggression at the hands of men in childhood and their inhumanity in adulthood, Woolf's belief in feminine values as well as those of the Bloomsbury Group became central to her ideology and her writing. This chapter will discuss Woolf's political ideology as a feminist writer by touching upon her childhood experiences, as well as her artistic and economic views. The chapter will utilize her autobiographical text *Moments of Being*, and two of her theoretical texts: *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

Moments of Being

In the collection of autobiographical writings, *Moments of Being*, Woolf discusses the economic realities central to gendered power dynamics within her society. Upon the suggestion of her sister, Vanessa, she wrote "A Sketch of the Past," where she describes them both as "tomboys," who pursued masculine hobbies and would be ashamed to look at themselves in a mirror because it would have been "against [their] tomboy code" (*Moments* 68). The tomboy persona can be construed as a front or a survival mechanism--a means of not appearing weak and vulnerable. As she explains later, the two sisters formed a "very close conspiracy" or a "private nucleus" in the world of men (Woolf, *Moments* 123). This world of men is that of her household and the Victorian high society to which she belonged. Thus, they aimed to protect themselves from said

world by adopting more masculine demeanors or at least appearing to do so. Yet these efforts were futile in the face of their reality.

In the memoir, Woolf says of her half-brother George Duckworth: “he was thirty-six when I was twenty. He had a thousand a year and I had fifty” (131). She emphasizes two key differences between her and her brother: age and wealth. The two represent a difference in their power dynamic. She continues: “but besides feeling his age and his power, I felt too another feeling which I later called the outsider’s feeling. When exposed to George’s scowling, I felt as a tramp or a gypsy must feel who stands at the flap of a tent and sees the circus going on inside” (*Moments* 132). The word ‘scowling’ gives animalistic imagery, like that described in the mirror dream (after recounting an incident of molestation by Gerald Duckworth, Woolf recalls a dream in which she is looking at herself in a mirror when the horrible face of an animal appears behind her). The face serves as a mental image of the bestiality of her abuser in her mind, and her memory of inescapable childhood despair (DeSalvo 105–06). Her view of men as animalistic, barbarous, and sources of fear reinforces the need for a tomboy/masculine protective persona.

Furthermore, the early incidences of feeling like an outsider continue with her for the remainder of her life and could have contributed to the decline in her mental health as well as her belief in the feminist ideology. The ‘circus’ refers to a party, and she continues describing George’s approach to parties: “we were not merely enjoying ourselves. We were made to feel that every party was an examination, a test: a matter of the greatest importance; it led to success; it led to failure” (Woolf, *Moments* 134–35). Thus, she and her sister lived under constant scrutiny and fear of failing the societal test of womanhood.

This scene emphasizes two feminist principles which will later be featured in her essay. The first is the relationship between money and power. The second is the perceived decorative

nature of women in English high society at the time. Woolf describes herself as a “tramp,” alluding to a feeling of homelessness within her own home, and a “gypsy,” a probable comparison to the race’s performative occupations. Thus, she views these societal parties as spectacles, much like a circus, where she is to perform a specific role under the watchful eye of the ringmaster, George.

In “22 Hyde Park Gate,” Woolf provides another glimpse into the dynamic between herself and her brother George Duckworth; she writes: “the room was dark. The house silent. Then, creaking stealthily, the door opened; treading gingerly, someone entered. ‘Who?’ I cried. ‘Don’t be frightened,’ George whispered. ‘Don’t turn on the light, oh beloved. Beloved -’ and he flung himself on my bed and took me in his arms” (*Moments* 155). The term “beloved” stands out the most in this scene. It is a term of endearment, which makes the scene more disturbing and reminds the reader of an incident between Virginia and Gerald Duckworth, who touched her inappropriately when she was six years old (*Moments* 69). While less descriptive than the incident with Gerald, this scene provides further proof of the unsafe environment within the Stephen/Duckworth household.

In *Gender Troubles*, Judith Butler asserts that “cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body understood as a medium indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed” (130). Thus, the patriarchal values which dominated Woolf’s childhood home were repeatedly inscribed on her body, and a layer of autonomy falls off her flesh creating a new blank page for a new inscription. The source of these values within the household, however, was Leslie Stephen. Woolf describes her father as “godlike, yet childlike,” and understood that his rage was a product of male privilege (DeSalvo 125). Furthermore, in his memoirs, Leslie Stephen admitted that he never

fathered the Duckworth brothers (children of his wife from a previous marriage), who took their anger and frustration out on their favored younger sisters; therefore, “they were victims who victimized in reprehensible ways” (DeSalvo 113-14). Thus, the sequence of abuse that led to both Woolf’s mental health struggles and her feminist beliefs can be traced back to her father’s neglect.

The cultural values of the time allowed for her father’s rage to be accepted as the norm. And without proper guidance, the Duckworth brothers were given ample opportunities to act on their resentment in a brutal manner. Using endearing language such as “beloved,” an abuser tries to soften his actions, if only to himself; thereby, creating a vicious mental cycle where the victim associates endearing words with abusive acts. At the core of this misalignment are fear on the part of the victim, a need for control, and revenge on the part of the abuser. Between the façade of the social spectacle and the reality of domestic violence, the Stephen sisters were trapped in a system from which there was no way out. Furthermore, as Woolf pointed out, at the time her annual income was only £50.

A Room of One’s Own

A Room of One’s Own was published a year after British women achieved full suffrage and focused on psychological and material autonomy, especially of the female artist (Black 180). The essay is a combination of two lectures delivered at Newnham College and Girton College, women’s constituent colleges at the University of Cambridge, and takes the author across the university campus and through volumes of books to find the place of women in the literary arts. The central ethos of the book can be found in the statement: “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved” (6). This takes a conceptual

approach to women's contribution to intellectual production and its link to financial stability, two notions which are expanded upon in her 1938 essay *Three Guineas*.

With eight children and two adults, who required servants to maintain their household, the combined Stephen-Duckworth family struggled financially on an average annual salary of £500; a fact which was reflected in their daughters' education, as they could not afford a governess and had to be taught by their mother, Julia (Gualtieri 183). Thus, Woolf understood first-hand how much education and by extension, the production of intellectual or artistic works was contingent on income. While she herself inherited a capital of £2,500 from her aunt, which had grown to "£9,300 and yielded an income of around £400 a year" by the time of her marriage, she understood her position of privilege and expressed it in *A Room of One's Own* (Gualtieri 184).

In the essay, Woolf explains a hurdle she faces when trying to conduct her research, she writes: "ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction. That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library" (*Room* 9-10). These gatekeeping practices restricted women's access to information, and thus hindered their education and affected the breadth of their knowledge. If women are denied access to the very institutions that carry the volumes of human knowledge, how can they contribute to intellectual production? The answer is: they cannot. As the early twentieth century was obsessed with genius, it greatly influenced Woolf's arguments that genius needs to be nurtured, not neglected, to grow and flourish (Marcus 44).

Themes of neglect and nurture, poverty and prosperity, and intellect and ignorance are repeated in Woolf's work. In *Room*, the reader walks beside Woolf as she conducts her research

and posits questions along the way. Among these, she asks the following: “why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?” (27). The question of prosperity and poverty is linked both in terms of material and intellect. As men are given more access to education, information, social debate, and political authority they have the highest influence on art and culture. The central question of the essay asks listeners/readers to consider the other side of the historical narrative, the side that was not given a chance to have a voice or taught the language to do so; issues that are still relevant in the twenty-first century.

Woolf uses Napoleon and Mussolini as examples of tyrannical men who insisted “emphatically” that women are inferior to men, and argues that for centuries women have served as “looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size, [but] if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished” (*Room* 37). Woolf’s criticism of the inflated male ego can stem from both her father’s character, as well as the turmoil of living through the First World War and the repercussions that ensued. She understood that her father’s rage and lack of emotional control “were the product of male privilege,” notions that were perpetuated and supported by her mother (DeSalvo 125). By using political figures, whose actions are cemented in history and thereby known by her audience and the general public, she further emphasizes her position against the masculine ego. And thus, implies that the behavior which was accepted and condoned on a familial level is later glorified at the global level until its repercussions are too severe to ignore; i.e. until egotistical behavior threatens the lives of nations and their people.

The most famous thought experiment in *A Room of One’s Own* is that of Shakespeare’s fictional but equally gifted and adventurous sister, Judith. In this experiment, Woolf imagines

this young Renaissance-era woman trying to teach herself to read between household chores. She ran away to the theater to avoid an arranged marriage and beating from her father. But was laughed out of the theater, and eventually impregnated by an actor-manager who took pity on her, then “killed herself one winter’s night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle” (50). The tragic story illustrates the possible fate of talented women of that era, and thus the reason why their voices are missing from the bookshelves. It is a “shattering reminder of the monstrous destruction of the possibility of female art by gender, colonial, and class exploitation. By contrast, Shakespeare is evoked as a figure of unsurpassed originality and ‘incandescent mind’” (Ziarek 90). Nevertheless, it is interesting to point out that the theme of suicide once again echoes in Woolf’s work. It is clear from her writing and her real-life experiences, as she had multiple suicide attempts before she succeeded in taking her own life, that Woolf believes that death is the only escape for the artist entrapped in a confining woman’s role. While that mindset may have seemed logical to her intellectual mind, it carries an air of despair. For she did not conclude the thought experiment with the murder of Judith Shakespeare at the hands of an intolerant group in a regressive society or her escape to another land where she might find a better life for herself and her unborn child, but rather that death was the only option for a woman in her position. And while she uses the tragic fate of this character to illustrate the absence of early female writers from the library shelves, it also sends the morose message to her audience that there could have been no other alternative. In the concluding passage of *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf advises women:

For my belief is that if we live another century or so—I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals—and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we

have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves . . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. (112)

The passage urges women to embrace freedom and think of themselves as a collective entity, who look at human beings not only in relation to each other but to society and the world at large. She argues that women's "practice of freedom in political, economic, and intellectual life are the precondition of a revolutionary literary act" (Ziarek 88). It is a revolutionary act that will not only avenge the silenced women of past eras but provide future generations with the courage to speak their minds and tell their sides of the story of humanity.

Three Guineas

Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* is structured as a response to an educated gentleman asking for her advice to prevent the war efforts. Each guinea represents a point in her argument: first, the education of women, second, their employment, and third, helping them protect cultural and intellectual liberty. The essay expands on the points delivered in *A Room of One's Own*, as well as emphasizes in figures the costliness of the upcoming war. According to the text, the British government was "spending £300,000,000 annually upon arms" (Woolf, *Three Guineas* 161). Nevertheless, the essay is not a critique of the war as much as it is a treatise on the advancement of women. But unlike her predecessors, she rejects the idea of "progressive feminism" and rather shifts the focus to "the cultural transmission of gender as a process of negotiation and critical resistance" (Cameron 171).

That being the case, the relationship between the title of the essay and its contents is paradoxical. To understand the paradox, one must look at the history behind the word ‘guinea’ itself. The coin itself is linked to British imperialism and the elite classes which benefit from it, including the ancestors of the Stephen family. In 1661, gold coins were made for trading between the Company of Royal Adventurers of England and the Guinea Coast of West Africa; they were made from Guinea gold and eventually called a guinea (Black 176). Thus, the history of the currency is linked to enslavement and exploitation rather than enlightenment and progress. Nevertheless, in the essay, Woolf repurposes the currency to help lift the status of women, who had no role to play in imperialist politics but were affected by its patriarchal values and the inter-European wars to which they led.

The first guinea argues for the education of women. Woolf uses a technique that she had successfully utilized in *A Room of One’s Own*, where she creates fictional characters to argue theoretical or ideological points. In this case, it is a woman named Mary Kingsley who speaks on behalf of herself and other daughters of educated men when she says: “I don’t know if I ever revealed to you the fact that being allowed to learn German was all the paid-for education I ever had. Two thousand pounds was spent on my brother’s, I still hope not in vain.” (Woolf, *Three Guineas* 4). Thus, she starts by indicating that parents do not invest as much in the education of girls as they do for boys. However, these girls grow up to become mothers, who are sometimes expected to cater to the education of their own daughters, as was the case with Woolf’s mother, Julia Stephen.

She explains that the benefits of formal education for men as expanding beyond academics. She writes, addressing men: “games educated your body; friends taught you more than books or games. Talk with them broadened your outlook and enriched your mind. In the

holidays you traveled; acquired a taste for art; a knowledge of foreign politics” (Woolf, *Three Guineas* 6-7). Thus, the argument is that men are given a holistic education in the way the world operates because they are expected to enact change as they rise to positions of leadership. This is a significant point of difference between Woolf and her male contemporaries in her Bloomsbury circle--most notably between herself and Keynes, the renowned economist who was educated at Eton and King’s College, “an education whose patriarchal ‘infection’ Woolf felt had left unmistakable traces in his thinking” (Gualtieri 190). She, however, learned economics from the working-class women of the Cooperative Guild (a faction of the women’s movement representing the interests of working-class women), who taught her “the importance of pounds, shillings, and pence in shaping women’s lives” (Gualtieri 190). Thus, her response to the technical text written by Keynes for his fellow economists is one that is meant to have a more practical down-to-earth approach, yet ironically titled after the gentlemanly currency, guinea, rather than the more common, pound.

The second guinea calls for the empowerment of women through professional labor, to prevent warfare.

And it is at once obvious, if what we have said about influence is true, that we must turn to the professions, because if we could persuade those who can earn their livings, and thus actually hold in their hands this new weapon, our only weapon, the weapon of independent opinion based upon independent income, to use that weapon against war, we should do more to help you than by appealing to those who must teach the young to earn their livings; or by lingering, however long, round the forbidden places and

sacred gates of the universities where they are thus taught. (Woolf, *Three Guineas* 146)

To analyze this passage, one must first notice that it is written in a single sentence--one flowing thought delivered without stops, hesitations, or literary tactics. Her language is also direct and emphasizes a specific word: "weapon." The use of war rhetoric has a dual role. First, it highlights her capability as a woman to use such rhetoric, meaning it is a measure of her own intellect. Second, as a reminder that weapons are meant for defense, and questioning the values behind war is the best form of defense, that is prevention. Her argument is thus, that if women are given the chance to enter the workforce and voice their opinions on public matters from within, they could serve as better advisors than if they remained on the fringes of society.

Woolf continues by stating that the government spends £42,000 on the employment of women. The figure is repeated several times before she asks the question: "How much peace will £42,000 a year buy at the present moment when we are spending £300,000,000 annually upon arms?" (*Three Guineas* 161). The impact of Keynesian economics can be seen in this question, as he too believed that warfare strains the market and is thus unproductive in a capitalist consumer model. However, she strays away from Keynes by questioning the values which drive such wasteful spending. While both Keynes and Woolf present convincing arguments, the threat of fascism was imminent in Europe during the 1930s -- an ideology contingent on military strength.

In the third guinea, women are asked to "protect culture and intellectual liberty," which society will need again in times of peace, but Woolf responds, "let us consider how we can help you to prevent war by protecting culture and intellectual liberty, since you assure us that there is a connection between those rather abstract words and these very positive photographs — the

photographs of dead bodies and ruined houses” (Woolf, *Three Guineas* 309-10). Once again, she emphasizes the importance of preventing the war this time through protecting culture.

Throughout the text the noble cause of war prevention is repeated; however, the purpose behind the upcoming war (WWII) is never addressed. While the First World War was an imperial war, the Second World War can be seen as a war of retribution. Even though Woolf critiques the masculine traits associated with warfare, she does not discuss the economic, political, and psychological realities which lead to a fascist regime in Germany. When it lost World War I, Germany was required to pay reparations, lost territories, and was forced to shrink its army in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles. It then suffered severely during the Great Depression. After rebuilding the army and the economy, the new regime wanted to restore national pride and showcase military dominance.

Woolf makes a valid case when she describes women as “members not of the intelligentsia but of the ignorantsia” (*Three Guineas* 316). Her argument is not that women are not intelligent, but rather that they are not given sufficient opportunities or are actively excluded from the production of culture. She uses George Elliott and George Sand as examples of women who wrote under male pseudonyms to get published (*Three Guineas* 324). She continues: “thus, since we have very little power over those who earn their livings by reading and writing, we must go to them humbly without bribes or penalties. We must go to them cap in hand, like beggars, and ask them of their goodness to spare time to listen to our request that they shall practice the profession of reading and writing in the interests of culture and intellectual liberty” (*Three Guineas* 324). The sincerity of her reasoning hints at the irony of the situation from two angles: one, women are asked to protect intellectual liberty while being repeatedly denied that

liberty. And two, she is a woman who has unique access to cultural production. Hogarth Press, after all, was established in the Woolfs' house in Richmond.

In February 1939, after completing *Three Guineas*, Woolf shows the text to her husband for feedback. He approves of the analysis. However, her own take on it is more interesting; she writes: "I think it may have more practical value. But I'm much more indifferent, that's true: feel it a good piece of donkeywork, and don't think it affects me either way as the novels do" (*Diary* 278). The remark frames her character in a negative light. Her indifference to issues, such as education and employment that seriously affect the women she is advocating for can be construed as callous arrogance. On the other hand, it may be her way of honestly expressing her preference for literary writing.

In *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, Naomi Black voices criticisms of Woolf's text by stating that "the interwar period's seemingly inexorable descent into catastrophe shadows the analysis that informs *Three Guineas* but persistent hope for a better postwar future nevertheless inspires the recommendations that so many take for impracticable" (179). By comparing Woolf's recommendations to the views of her critics, one can conclude that her arguments would be practical in times of peace when it is necessary to question and change social conventions; however, impractical when a society's survival is under threat and resources need to be reallocated. Nevertheless, Woolf's advocacy for women's education, employment, and for their voices to be heard and become part of the literary canon is central to her continued influence.

Finally, "Virginia Woolf's is a feminism that stands up to the test of time," is an accurate assessment by Naomi Black (174). Rooted in a tumultuous childhood, Woolf's feminism treads the line between realistic and idealistic. Her candid description of her home life reveals the hypocrisy embedded in her social environment, as well as the complexity of generational neglect

and the power dynamics which later lead to abuse or even violence, not only on the personal level but on the societal and international levels as well. At the heart of power imbalances are dominance and economic circumstances, which influence access to education, social values, and political decisions. And gender is central to her argument, as men are given more opportunities to have such an influence.

The relationship between education, access to knowledge, employment, money, and women's cultural influence are central to the theses of *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. In *Room*, she focuses on the untold stories of women missing from shelves of the Cambridge library and emphasizes that women need their own money and a place where they can write in order to produce literary works. In *Three Guineas*, she relates the role of women's education, their employment, and their ability to protect intellectual liberty in the prevention of war.

Woolf presents systemic and social realities that hinder women's advancement and obstruct their abilities to enact change within their society, some of which are true to this day. Nevertheless, her insistence on gendering certain values can make her outcomes seem limited, idealistic, or detached from reality. To elaborate, framing warfare and aggression as masculine values negate the fact that women can be aggressive or that there are examples of female warriors and politicians in history. Furthermore, while her critique of government spending, work opportunities, and fair wages for women is founded, the timing of the essay coincides with the brink of war, when funneling funds toward domestic growth and social reform will not deter a looming military threat. Ultimately, her feminist views presented a foundational stone for future women and added an important voice to their history.

Chapter 2 An Exploration of Mental Health

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari explain that “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (9). Thus, the rhizome can be used to describe the behavior of neural networks in the brain. The term “neuroplasticity” refers to the changes at the structural, biochemical, and pharmacological levels, as well as alterations in connectivity and the generation of new neurons (Oliveira 1). These explanations clarify the connection between the mind’s anatomical behavior and the rhizome’s philosophical concept, and how it can be used to reflect the mental disturbances that can occur within the mind.

According to Michel Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization*, the melancholic mind can be seen as stagnant, fixated on a single topic, and driven by sadness and fear, while the manic is chaotic and driven by fury (125). Using the method mentioned above, these extreme mental states can be explained from within. While Foucault gives a description of how mania and depression are seen through the eyes of the outside world, internally the image is different. If the neural pathways are drawn into a rhizomatic map, it would better visualize these two extreme thought patterns. A depressive mind would be expressed with longer pathways connecting points, slowing down the thinking process and forcing it to appear stagnant or fixed. A mind “entirely occupied by reflection” (125). In a contradictory state, is the manic mind. Occupying a more rapid state, the connections in the manic mind would follow multiple shorter pathways. In other words, the mind is “occupied by a flux of impetuous thoughts . . . [as] mania deforms all concepts and ideas” (125).

This brief neurological and conceptual illustration of two extreme human thought processes introduces the reader to the illness which plagued Virginia Woolf and colored her writings. Woolf's biographer, Hermione Lee, opens the chapter titled "Madness" with the following paragraph:

Virginia Woolf was a sane woman with an illness. She was often a patient, but she was not a victim. She was not weak, or hysterical, or self-deluding, or guilty or oppressed. On the contrary, she was a person of exceptional courage, intelligence, and stoicism, who made the best use she could, and came to the deepest understanding possible to her, of her own condition. She endured, periodically, great agony of mind and severe physical pain, with remarkably little self-pity. Her illness is attributable to genetic, environmental, and biological factors. It was periodic and recurrent. (*Virginia Woolf* 171)

The medical term associated with this illness in the 1900s was "cyclical manic depression," (Appignanesi 237). Contemporary clinicians refer to the condition as bipolar disorder (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 172). Breaking down the nomenclature also provides a simple understanding of the condition itself. Bipolar means existing in two poles or on opposite ends, while disorder is synonymous with chaos. Thus, it can be described as a mind moving across two extreme poles, or moods, which would lead to chaotic or unpredictable behavior.

According to Hermione Lee's biography, Leonard Woolf closely monitored his wife's illness and related it to her "creative genius," work ethic, and stress (176). Her symptoms; however, told a different story. She would talk incessantly for two or three days without paying

attention to the people around her or those speaking to her to the point of incoherence and would feel guilty about her condition; therefore, her husband tended to her illness by remaining alert to arising symptoms and took the necessary steps to ensure her comfort (Appignanesi 238). These accounts indicate that there was more to her condition than creative genius. Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf, herself, seemed to share this belief, as she had little time for psychiatrists and believed that there were better uses for her unconscious processes (Appignanesi 241). As a prolific writer, known for her long internal monologues, she would have had to embody her characters to better represent them on the page. Whether this process aggravated her condition or acted as an outlet is unknown. And even though creativity is considered central to the identity of individuals with bipolar disorder, and despite the evidence of a link, there are many unanswered questions (Johnson et al., *Creativity & BD* 33). The reason is that initial evidence of the link has been limited to biographical accounts of eminent creatives, case studies, and small sample studies of creative individuals from writers and poets to musicians, to artists with some suggesting that the link might be a result of disposition to psychosis (Miller et al. 129).

Over the decades, one explanation for the relationship between creativity and bipolar disorder is “unusually high levels of divergent thinking . . . defined as the ability to generate a broad range of responses to a given stimulus” (Johnson et al., *Understanding Creativity* 316). While divergent thinking can describe the process of generating free-flowing ideas, or the creative process, it does not explain the single-focused slow reflective state of depression. Reports from some creative individuals indicate that the creative state resembles a period of restless mania, nevertheless, these ideas are refined during periods of melancholia and the alteration between the two enhances creativity; however, it is important to question “whether this

labile relationship between mood and creativity is dependent on one's current position in that space" (Glicksohn and Boikova 66).

Even though the alternation between two extreme moods may enhance creativity depending on the person's head-space, it would be callous to overlook the reality to which it might lead. While Virginia Woolf was a talented writer with great insight into the human condition, she suffered for years from a disorder that caused her to end her life. This chapter will, thus, explore mental illness by sampling a snapshot of her fictional and non-fictional writings.

On Being Ill

In January 1926, Woolf published an essay titled "On Being Ill." After experiencing a nervous breakdown and remaining bedbound for several months the previous year, she decided to write an essay on illness itself and how it ought to be a serious subject in literature. She describes the breakdown as follows: "thought of my own power of writing with veneration, as of something incredible, belonging to someone else; never again to be enjoyed by me . . . Character and idiosyncrasy of Virginia Woolf completely sunk out. Humble and modest" (Woolf, *Diary* 94). Her words imply that she feels internally hollowed out by her breakdown. While an observer may be confused, concerned, or judgmental, the afflicted feel that they are losing their grip on reality or losing themselves.

Quentin Bell, Woolf's nephew, and biographer, describes trying to understand her psyche as "guesswork of the hazardous kind" (109). He ascertains that by looking from the outside one can go no deeper than an outline. He compares her moods to the curves of a graph "unusually abrupt and the impression unusually deep and lasting; so that the despair of 1926 was vividly recalled in 1927" (111). The description visualizes the condition to an outside observer. If one uses the graph analogy to track the timeline of her breakdown, alongside Bell and Woolf's

accounts, their frequency becomes more apparent. She is derailed from her work between late September and early December 1925, according to a gap in her diaries. In *Virginia Woolf: Becoming a Writer*, Katherine Dalsimer affirms this notion by attributing the gap in documentation to acute illness and highlighting that the documented incidents are not written in the present tense, as indicated in the passage above (184).

In the essay's opening paragraph, Woolf emphasizes how common illness is and how "tremendous" of a "spiritual change" it brings with it, referring to a decline in mood as "wastes and deserts of the soul" ("Being Ill" 317). While she focuses on bodily illnesses, it is implied that her psychological ailments are at the forefront of her mind. This description of illness connecting the body to the soul aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's observation of roots in nature indicating that they are "lateral and circular systems of ramifications" not dichotomous (5). Deleuze, Guattari, and Woolf emphasize that nature precedes thought. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the two French theorists refer to this process as a "lag" (5). While Woolf criticizes literature for its concern with the mind and dismissal of the body as nothing more than "a sheet of plain glass" ("Being Ill" 317). Thus, her central argument is to eliminate the separation between the body and the mind, as the state of one is directly related to the other.

Woolf writes, "we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters" (321). The language used indicates that everyday existence for her was akin to a war. She continues the analogy as follows: "they march to battle. We float with the sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able (321). She emphasizes that the nameless, faceless "they" in her society can march forward through life, while the ill and the ailing are carried by the currents on which they float. The imagery indicates helplessness, but also points to a degree of freedom, if not physical then mental. But the phrase

“helter-skelter,” gives the reader a sense of the haphazardness which occurs during a psychotic episode.

Woolf’s mastery of descriptive language can be seen as a response to what she refers to as “the poverty of language” when trying to describe pain and illness (“Being Ill” 318). She argues that writers are too focused on the noble civilizing pursuits of the mind, that they neglect the “great wars” the body wages alone enslaving the mind along with it; being it fever or melancholia (“Being Ill” 318). Thus, her illness becomes more than a therapeutic endeavor but rather part of her ideology. It is through her illness that she attempts to revolutionize the use of language in literature. Because, when ill an adult can “recapture a young child’s experience of language” with more vivid and sensory words and no cautious respectability (Dalsimer 176).

A Sketch of the Past

“A Sketch of the Past” started as a relief from writing Roger Fry’s biography and was completed almost four months before Woolf’s death. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari claim that a book remains the image of the world, even if it has become chaotic; because the mystification of the book is that it is “more total for being fragmented” (6). Woolf’s fragmented childhood memories and the feelings she attaches to them, which she found difficult to describe, are collected and explored in this memoir. By delving into her recollection of childhood grievances, it becomes clearer why she chose to end her life. In her final letter to her husband, Leonard, she writes “I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can’t go through another of those terrible times. And I shan’t recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can’t concentrate. So, I am doing what seems the best thing to do. You have given me the greatest possible happiness” (Woolf, *Letters VI* 481). The opening lines of the letter express conviction both of her condition and of her inability to live with it any longer. Hearing voices and the feeling of going

mad can refer to persistent flashbacks or panic attacks. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel Van der Kolk explains that trauma is stored as “flashbacks that contain fragments of the experience, isolated images, sounds and body sensations that initially have no context other than fear and panic” (161). When the sensations are overpowering, a person may feel that they have lost control over their emotions or their minds, i.e., they feel that they are “going mad.”

In the memoir, she recounts the roots of her despair and depression which stem from her early grievances, particularly her relationships with men and proximity to death. She describes an incident where she was fighting with her older brother Thoby Stephen and explains how she tried to defend herself but felt there was no need to hurt another person and instead stood there and let him beat her: “I remember the feeling. It was a feeling of hopeless sadness. It was as if I had become aware of something terrible; and of my own powerlessness. I slunk off alone, feeling horribly depressed” (*Moments* 71). The internalized sense of helplessness brought about by fear from abuse and trauma became an integral part of Woolf’s personality. In this scene where she had the chance to fight back, even though she would have been overpowered, but chose not to, she illustrates the paralysis of despair.

Woolf was also notably traumatized by sexual assault. Her earliest experience with assault happened at age six at the hands of her older stepbrother Gerald Duckworth, “I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped it would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts . . . But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it – what is the word for so dumb mixed feelings?” (*Moments* 69). The description of the event is vivid and encompasses her confusion, her vulnerability, and her shame.

Furthermore, she reflects on her detachment from the incident by citing her belief that Virginia Stephen “was born thousands of years ago, and had from the first encounter instincts already acquired by thousands of ancestresses in the past” (*Moments* 69). The detachment serves as a coping mechanism. If her soul is thousands of years old and was embodied by thousands of women over the centuries, then her body is not that of a child but rather of a grown woman. The analogy indicates an understanding that sexual activity was meant for non-incestuous adult relations. Nevertheless, these early sexual experiences were carried into adulthood (Appignanesi 240).

On the day of her mother’s death, she writes: “George took us down to say goodbye. My father staggered from the bedroom as we came. I stretched my arms to stop him, but he brushed past me, crying out something I could not catch; distraught. And George led me to kiss my mother, who had just died” (*Moments* 91). Until her forties, Woolf was obsessed with her mother, the obsession stopped after writing *To the Lighthouse*. She was at peace. The act of writing became more of a necessity than anything else (Woolf, *Moments* 73). The act of writing gave her agency over her life that she had not had in the past. By penning a fictionalized version of her family and exploring her past in a memoir she gained control over her memories and her mind. Thus, she was exploring the possibility that her depression, despair, and suicide attempts were not hereditary, but rather a reaction to her life experiences (DeSalvo 100).

When discussing Woolf’s history with madness, it is pertinent to mention Sigmund Freud. Her assessment of the Austrian father of psychoanalysis is as follows: “Dr. Freud gave me a narcissus” (qtd. in Appignanesi 241). This harsh character assessment is on par with her general dislike of doctors but also points to a difference in ideology. Freud’s ideology can be linked to his training as a neurologist, with an understanding of brain development, and a

naturalist, who was influenced by Darwinian theories. According to Freud “the deepest root of the sexual repression that advances along with civilization is the organic defense of the new form of life achieved with man’s erect gait against his earlier animal existence” (qtd. in Ellmann 67). Thus, Freud links sexual repression to civilization and human development; implying that the childhood stage mirrors the animalistic stage of development, where desires have not yet been civilized. Having read Freud, Woolf disagrees with his conclusion that incest acts as wish fulfillment and attributed her depression and madness to childhood abuse (DeSalvo 127).

According to a 2022 report in the European Neuropsychopharmacology journal, women with bipolar disorder who reported severe levels of childhood maltreatment present “with structural alterations in the hippocampus [responsible for learning and memory] . . .which relates to mood severity” (Colic et al. 43). Therefore, Woolf’s beliefs about the source of her own condition were accurate. Nevertheless, Freud’s opinions remained with her and “eroded her sense of self” (DeSalvo 128). As she grappled with her sanity in the face of the opinions of experts such as Freud, she lived in doubt about whether she was a sane woman, who was abused, or it was simply her nature. Ultimately, she succumbed to despair, believing she was mad and that her madness would return.

Mrs. Dalloway

The field of psychoanalysis was on the rise during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the time, trauma from war was seen as a form of neurosis. French psychologist, Pierre Janet, associated dissociation as a symptom of overwhelming stress and believed that “memories can be stored on various levels – as narratives, sensory perceptions, visual images such as nightmares and hallucinations, and visceral sensations such as anxiety reactions and psychosomatic symptoms” (Boehnlein and Hinton 160) his notions are still prevalent in contemporary trauma theories.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf's semi-autobiographical novel, Septimus Warren Smith is a World War I veteran who suffers from shell shock. The condition has a wide range of symptoms including "slow reaction times, mental dullness, confusion, headache and fatigue with prolonged mental effort, amnesia, hyperacusis, startle, and terrifying dreams," which can be attributed to a mixture of conditions from PTSD to anxiety to a "physiological response to prolonged fear" to concussion (Boehnlein and Hinton 161). Furthermore, from a neurobiological perspective, a disruption of the healthy emotional function/structure created by a network between the pre-frontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala "to mediate fear learning and memory processes" has been linked to PTSD (Harnett et. al 8). Thus, traumatic experiences not only affect the psyche but also the brain structure.

When a car backfires at the start of the novel, Septimus Smith freezes "as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 12). His introduction sets him up in opposition to the poised sheltered Clarissa Dalloway. Unlike the title character, he has seen the horrors of the world in which they live and is thus affected by its reality. Woolf frequently mediates time and space to linger on a character's internal consciousness (Pawlowski xv).

In 1924, when penning *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf described the similarity of her own thought process, she wrote: "but how entirely I live in my imagination; how completely depend upon spurts of thought, coming as I walk, as I sit; things churning up in my mind and so making a perpetual pageant, which is to be my happiness. This brew can't sort with nondescript people" (Woolf, *Diary* 66). She explains that her life unfolds entirely within the boundaries of her own mind and is thus contingent on excessive cognitive effort during these "spurts of thought." As explored above, these short bouts of mental rapidity are associated with her manic stage; a period

when she can produce. Therefore, while she describes a character frozen in horror, her own mind is in motion.

As shell shock was a catchall term for mental illness, there was a degree of stigma around the condition or the symptoms associated with it. When Lucrezia Warren Smith takes her husband on a walk in Regent's Park, it is in accordance with the instructions of Dr. Holmes, who believes that Septimus is just "a little out of sorts" and should take an interest in the outside world instead of focusing on himself (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 16). The term "out of sorts" comes across as intentionally dismissive of grief and war trauma in favor of a quick practical solution; it also paints the doctor as ignorant or arrogant as he is unwilling to learn more about his patient's condition.

Septimus is also infantilized and feminized by the medical community because he had no masculine tool to cope with his sorrow (Pawlowski xii). A notion that feeds into the damaging stereotype of machoism or stoicism as the only appropriate framework for masculine behavior. And that is a result of the community not only being influenced by scientific facts but also the sociocultural and political environment of the era, thus a man's breakdown needed to fit these parameters for him to be deemed "honorably wounded" (Boehnlein and Hinton 160, 161).

Lucrezia's internal monologue is also telling of this conundrum, for she does not believe the doctor's opinion that there is nothing wrong with her husband: "And it is cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself [says Lucrezia] but Septimus had fought; he was brave, he was not Septimus now" (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 17). The juxtaposition between the cowardness of suicide and the bravery of going to war indicated in the monologue highlights the sociocultural prejudice directed against men's grieving. This prejudice also dismisses the reality that military training and bravery on the battlefield stand in stark contrast to normal civilian life. Thus, a war veteran who

was trained to live in an alert state under the threat of fear and loss will struggle to quickly readjust his mindset and rewire his thought patterns.

Woolf presents the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith through an internal and external lens, “I leaned over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* 52). In this passage, Smith narrates his own suicide to himself, framing it as a form of salvation from his waking life, and foreshadowing the events of his actual suicide. It also points to Woolf’s own desire to rest under the water, which she accomplished by placing a large rock in her coat pocket and walking into the River Ouse (DeSalvo 133). Smith, however, ends his life by throwing himself from a window onto rusty spikes underneath. When Mrs. Dalloway overhears the incident at her party, she believes that death was an attempt to communicate extreme loneliness and despair and therefore there was a warmth in death’s embrace (134). Woolf frames death as a welcomed escape from despair and insanity. As a result, Septimus Smith served as a portrait of the experience of madness from its “harrowing terror, loneliness, paranoia, grandiosity, hallucinations, and ultimately suicide” (Dalsimer 180). He was also a shadow of the author herself looming over the story and its characters.

In conclusion, Virginia Woolf suffered from manic-depressive/bipolar disorder, a mood disorder where the person struggles with severe mood swings ranging from periods of mania and periods of depression. The illness “can profoundly modify cognition, personality, judgment, sleep patterns, and metabolism (the chemical changes supplying energy to all body cells)” (Caramagno 33). It has been linked to creative minds; however, there is not sufficient data to prove that it causes or is caused by creativity. Due to the extreme nature of the mood swings, it may lead to suicide as was the case at hand.

Woolf traces her feelings of depression and despair to her early childhood experiences of abuse and grief. The lack of agency and inability to escape her circumstances left her feeling helpless and hopeless. Furthermore, the abuse and the perpetual fear she endured affected her psyche. Woolf herself attributes her madness to these childhood traumas. To regain her agency and make sense of her past, she engaged in writing. Thus, writing had a therapeutic purpose in her life. Tragically, her belief in her own madness was stronger.

Nevertheless, Woolf believed that illness is an important topic to be discussed in literature. She argues that writers are too concerned with the workings of the mind that they treat the body as no more than a vessel when, the two are inseparable. Her own health timeline is indicative of the correlation between physical/mental health and productivity. Woolf also criticizes the inadequacy of language in describing illness.

The character, Septimus Warren Smith, serves as a stand-in for Woolf herself and her mental health troubles in the novel. Through this character, she offers a critique of the medical community of her time and how they treat patients struggling with mental health conditions. Woolf also foreshadows her own death through the character's internal monologue and his ultimate demise; indicating, her deep-seated belief that the only escape from the sufferings of the mind is death. By following the various threads discussed in this chapter, the rhizomatic structure becomes more apparent: Woolf's creativity is linked to periods of mania and rapid mental activity, her depression is a result of childhood abuse and trauma, she utilizes her language to describe her mental and physical illness, and her fiction provides insight into how the shortcomings of a society can lead to the end of a life.

Chapter 3

Stream of Consciousness and Modernism

In *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, Noam Chomsky argues that “the faculty of language enters crucially into every aspect of human life, thought, and interaction. It is largely responsible for the fact that alone in the biological world, humans have a history, cultural evolution and diversity of any complexity and richness, even biological success in the technical sense that their numbers are huge” (3). Chomsky applauds language’s role in the preservation of human history, as well as the survival and prosperity of the species. Essentially, he is affirming that without oral histories and written texts passed from one generation to the next civilizations would not have developed.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (5). Thus, they are expanding the role of writing from informative to analytical and creative. They further expand on this notion with the following explanation: “a method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence” (8).

Considering Chomsky, Deleuze, and Guattari’s views on language and writing one can infer that the role of the writer is to record, analyze, create, inform, entertain, engage, and influence. Thus, a writer needs to be a thinker with the capacity to connect dispersed concepts and ideas in a way that would appeal to his/her audience, as well as a technical wordsmith with the ability to utilize a malleable tool such as language to express these ideas. As a result, writers’ work is contingent on developing or employing a particular style of writing, across one or several genres.

Woolf was a prominent modernist writer, who adopted the style and influences of the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century artistic/literary movement. During that time period, writers “turned sharply inward” and shifted their focus from the exterior world to the individual character’s “mind or soul” (Mahaffey 36). When describing the movement, Woolf claims that “in or about December 1910, human character changed” (qtd. in Hoffman et al. 20). This quote explains why she adopted the modernist writing style. As the human condition changes according to a change in circumstances, so too must the way it is expressed. The modernists, therefore, rejected the traditional styles of the past and opted for an aesthetic that is more emotionally expressive. And as a result, they were committed to dealing with the “un-patterned, undisciplined and unclear” chaos of the conscious mind (Humphrey 85). Thus, the stream-of-consciousness style was born.

The phrase was coined by American philosopher/psychologist William James, who used it to explain the process of thought, and the constantly changing state of consciousness (21). By comparing conscious thought to a stream, he emphasizes the flow of the thinking process within the human mind. Much like an unrestricted stream of water, thoughts within the mind move freely unbound by convention or propriety. To bring forth this natural cognitive method, writers liberate themselves from rigid structure and allow their readers to see inside a character’s mind. In *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, James argues that each mind keeps its thoughts to itself and there is “no thought even comes into direct sight of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own” (20). However, he did not anticipate that modernist authors would translate this technique into a written form, thereby making the impossible possible.

According to James “consciousness is always interested more in one part of its object than in another, and welcomes and rejects, or chooses, all the while it thinks” (37). If this

decision-making or choosing process is applied to Woolf's writing, it can explain the variety of writing genres that her works occupy. As she switches between fiction, theory, biographical and autobiographical writing, the reader is introduced to the varying sides of her consciousness as well as the range of her talent, all while maintaining a consistent style. Furthermore, "war inspired horror in Virginia Woolf" (Bazin and Lauter 14). Therefore, it had a profound effect on her consciousness and by extension her manner of writing. This chapter will explore how Woolf used this style in two autobiographical works of different writing forms.

In the ideological personal essay, *A Room of One's Own*, adapted from two university lectures delivered to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtaa Literary Club at Girton, women's colleges at the University of Cambridge, Woolf explains her research and analytical thought processes when she inserts herself into the text. However, she regularly shifts the focus back to her central topic, using thought experiments, historical examples, and imaginative scenarios to prove her points. The sparse presence of the author and the academic nature of the text reflects the intellect of its intended audience and the versatility of this technique.

Woolf also writes her memoir "A Sketch of the Past" using her signature style; however, this text is neither lyrical nor academic, but rather a more refined version of her personal diary. In the memoir, Woolf pieces together events from her childhood, upon the suggestion of her sister, Vanessa, and explores them from the point of view of a quinquagenarian, while living through the Second World War; the events of which are discussed in her diary.

A Room of One's Own: A Theoretical Collective Biography

Hermione Lee suggests that Woolf's "*A Room of One's Own* could be read as her own disguised economic autobiography," because it was written at a time when her income and her "earning power" was increasing (*Virginia Woolf* 548). The reason behind this assessment can be found in

the central message of the essay: for women to have influence in society they need to have their own income or wealth, as well as the time and space to do so. In a sense, the lectures cement her influence among the British intelligentsia and are a guide for young women to follow in her footsteps.

The essay's roots can be found in her personal childhood history from the father's financial troubles to "the daughters' exclusion from school and university" (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 548). It is evident from her approach to the topic of women and fiction that she felt there was something missing. On the page, she expresses that women's voices are what is missing from the shelves of the library and their experiences from history. On a personal level, the missing piece of her history is access to formal education and the opportunities it provides. Thus, the experience highlights her imposter syndrome and insecurity about her position, Woolf writes that she is "bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders . . . [and to call her] Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please – it is not a matter of any importance" (*Room* 6–7). This implies that she is unremarkable and indistinguishable from any other woman, and possibly unworthy of presenting on such a topic. By then she was a woman in her forties with an established literary career.

On 28th Nov. 1928, a month after the lecture, Woolf writes in her diary: "Father's birthday. He would have been 96 . . . I used to think of him and mother daily, but writing the *Lighthouse* laid them in my mind. . . He comes back to me as a contemporary. I must read him someday. I wonder if I can feel again, I hear his voice, I know this by heart" (135). There are two contradictory accounts in this entry: she laid the memory of her parents to rest and she continues to hear her father's voice. The latter appears to be more plausible, as the dominance of her father's words and actions continues to echo throughout her work.

In “Virginia Woolf as Autobiographer,” Danial Albright criticizes the author for continuing the centuries-long tradition of female anonymity through a process of “self-suppression and impersonality” thereby detaching her own life from her written works (17). This criticism strips her work of its nuances and paints Woolf as a writer devoid of subjectivity and originality. When looking closer at *Room*, one can ascertain that the work is infused with unique life experiences. However, as the text progresses, Woolf, the protagonist, is lost in the background, while her observations stand in the forefront. As Judith Butler notes,

for feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women. This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women’s lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all. (1)

Therefore, in response to Albright, the personal detachment from a theoretical autobiographical text was necessary for her ideas to prevail. As Butler points out, the development of feminist theory and feminist rhetoric was a response to cultural misrepresentation or lack of representation of the female population. Woolf’s text utilizes autobiographical elements to support her theoretical argument rather than showcase her life experiences.

After returning from her lectures, Woolf acknowledges a deep urgency to write a history about Newnham or the women’s movement “in the same vein,” as well as touching upon what one reviewer of *To the Lighthouse* referred to as a crisis in her style, which has become “so fluent and fluid that it runs through the mind like water” (*Diary* 134). Thus, it indicates the stylistic and ideological shift from which the full essay of *A Room of One’s Own* was written.

During her visit to the college campus, she attempts to access a famous library to conduct research for her lecture but is denied admittance because she is a woman without a Fellow as a chaperon or “a letter of introduction” (Woolf, *Room* 9). This event happens early in the book and is crucial to her central thesis on women and literature. How can a woman write literature, if she is denied access to books? Woolf responds to this insult by internally commenting “that a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library” (Woolf, *Room* 10). Such witty or sarcastic remarks are prevalent throughout the texts as a response to the events of the day or the material she is reading. And in this way, Woolf highlights seemingly trivial issues and provides them with “inexpressible significance” (Humphrey 102).

On her way back to her inn, the protagonist ponders the events of the day. During this scene, Woolf delves deep into her thought process as she unpacks and analyzes the day that had elapsed, “I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out, and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and, thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer” (Woolf, *Room* 25-26). Woolf uses semi-colons to give the reader a chance to pause without halting the character’s train of thought, thereby indicating that the thoughts are quickly articulated in a continuous flowing stream, one after another. It is also important to highlight the phrase “mind of a writer,” as it emphasizes why this method is appropriate for this context. A writer’s mind, especially one as proficient as Woolf’s, would be defined by speed and a stringing of thoughts to reach a conclusive tapestry.

Thus far, the stream-of-consciousness technique has been discussed as a response to or a reflection of events and circumstances. However, Woolf also uses it to indicate the intrusion of

thoughts in one's daily life. In chapter two of *A Room of One's Own*, there is a scene where she is surprised to find more money in her purse than she had initially anticipated. It is evident from her reaction that there may have been a time when she was not accustomed to having a steady income. She explains that her change in circumstance is a result of the death of her aunt in Bombay: "I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year forever," says Woolf (*Room* 39). This scene affirms Lee's description of the text as an "economic autobiography" (*Virginia Woolf* 548). Furthermore, while it still takes place within the character's mind it could be read as speech. Woolf directs the story of her inheritance to her audience, detailing her situation before and after she was gifted the money. The clarity of the text reflects the directness of the author's own voice and the acquired worldliness of her character. For she is aware that her opportunities are limited and that such an inheritance was necessary if she wished to live comfortably and harness her craft.

By merging her external experience with her inner "mental impressions," Woolf can portray a complete picture of reality (Chaudhary 314). This introspective technique, which is at the core of the stream-of-consciousness style, is ideal for autobiographical writing, as it provides the reader with insight that could have been lost had the author focused solely on external events.

In *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Genre*, Scott Russel Sanders wrote a chapter titled "The Singular First Person," describing the essayist's nature. He explains that novelists and playwrights hide behind their characters' voices, manipulating them like puppet masters, while scholars and journalists hide behind quoted sources; however, "the essayist has nowhere to hide" (31). The author of a personal essay, therefore, must depend on his/her ideas to carry them through the text. With no fictional personas and no expert opinions to pin their voices to, essayists need to navigate the labyrinth of their own thoughts and extract meaning from their

acquired knowledge. Therefore, Sanders describes the essay as “the closest thing we have, on paper, to a record of the individual mind at work and at play. It is an amateur’s raid in a world of specialists” (32). The term “amateur” in this context, however, undermines the value of the essay as a literary form and the writers who produce it. Edward Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* releases the term from its derogatory connotation by attaching it to the intellectual thinker, describing him/her “as exile and marginal, as amateur, as the author of a language that tries to speak the truth to power” (xvi). Essentially, he is implying that the intellectual must be an amateur if they are to present an alternative to the established professional mainstream perspective.

If the essay is a “record” of the inner workings of the writer’s mind, and as described in *Room*, that writer has refined and polished the quality of their thoughts through extensive research, then neither they nor their work should be dismissed or derided. Instead, essays should be given due recognition for combining the personal with the scholarly. Since the essay “must be driven by deep concerns” (Sanders 34), and its writers need to dive deep into their minds to procure views worthy of the form, it cannot be dismissed as inferior to the more celebrated forms mentioned above. Based on this analysis, an essay is the most appropriate autobiographical form for a text that favors the author’s ideas over their life journey.

With a structure that relies on logic and analysis rather than description and plot, the essay allows the writer’s ideas to flow seamlessly across the text until they reach their desired conclusion. While a narrative can jump through time and space, end on a cliffhanger, or allow the reader to interpret their own ending, an essay does not allow for the same liberty. Thereby, the author’s train of thought needs to come to a coherent conclusion, no matter how long. In *A Room of One’s Own*, “Woolf assumes the pose of the familiar essayist, adopting all the freedoms

that come with this identity. In the process, she raises fundamental questions about the nature of essayist fiction and the paradoxical means by which the essay can provide access to a reality that is otherwise unavailable” (Saloman 76).

The essay starts by clearly stating her central thesis: women and fiction, and pondering what it might mean. She poses a series of questions regarding the meaning behind such a title; it is a technique she utilizes often throughout the text to try and determine how she should approach the topic and conclude the essay. But she says, “I should never be able to come to a conclusion” (*Room 5*). While this might imply a defeatist attitude; in reality, she is trying to stress the magnitude of the topic. As a woman who writes fiction, she is an authority on the topic; however, she doubts her own capabilities or at least appears to do so in order to captivate her audience.

She proceeds to describe her approach to the topic by walking the reader through her research process. “I pondered until all such frivolous thoughts were ended by an avalanche of books sliding down onto the desk in front of me... [And this research lead to] my simple and single question—Why are some women poor?” explains Woolf (*Room 29-30*). In such moments, Woolf veers away from the content to insert herself into the text. Knowing that her essay should focus on her interpretation of the research and her own views on women and fiction, she allows herself such short intrusions of narrative for humanistic appeal.

Her question “why are some women poor,” is a question of intellectual, rather than economic, poverty. Even though she questions both over the course of her research, she is more concerned with the premise of intellectual poverty. The most significant thought experiment she uses to try and explain this phenomenon is that of Shakespeare’s sister. Woolf urges the reader to imagine a scenario where Shakespeare had an equally talented sister, who wished to produce

poetry and plays in the sixteenth century. Such a sister would have found it impossible to pursue her talent and turn it into a profitable occupation because her fate was already sealed. She was to be a wife and mother or endure a dire fate. She would have “gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at,” explains Woolf (*Room* 51). The experiment fits prominently with her thesis as it uses the story of a pseudo-historical figure to explain why women had less to contribute to literature.

After the questioning, analysis, and fictional scenarios, Woolf can leave her audience with a suggestive conclusion. “My own suggestion, is a little fantastic, I admit; I prefer, therefore, to put it in the form of fiction,” says Woolf (*Room* 111). Thus, to answer the question of female poverty in literature, she recommends that women add to the literary canon and literary scholarship by finding a way to write. When considering that that conclusion was the real purpose behind the essay, this choice of form makes sense. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* can be read as a collective biography of women in literature told through one writer’s journey through history.

Woolf provides two note-worthy comments on her experience at Cambridge in her diary. First, her impression of the young women as “starved but valiant” and “intelligent, eager, poor; and destined to become schoolmistresses in shoals” (*Room* 131-32). One can conclude that she both admires and pities these women. She believes that these hopeful and eager minds will have their dreams crushed by the weight of reality and the limited opportunities it offers women. Second, she reflects on the world and her place within it by saying “I fancy sometimes the world changes. I think I see reason spreading. But I should have liked a closer and thicker knowledge of life. I should have liked to deal with real things sometimes. I get a sense of tingling and vitality from an evening’s talk like that; one’s angularities and obscurities are smoothed and lit”

(Woolf, *Diary* 132). The comment is an amalgamation of optimism and despair. The spread of reason gives her hope that the world is heading in a better direction; however, she feels bad about her own circumstances or rather her own past. The irony is that despite her tumultuous early years, she achieved a level of success that surpassed the expectations for a woman of her generation or future generations. Nevertheless, the scars of her past and the mental illness they caused continued to plague her, distort her view of herself, and erode her confidence.

A Memoir and a Diary at a Time of War

Woolf had her only conversation with a dying Sigmund Freud in January 1939. They discussed Hitler and he linked her reaction to the political figure, namely, “shame, fear, helplessness, rage, a horror of passive acquiescence,” to the emotions she used to experience towards her father; she applied this account to “A Sketch of the Past” (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 713). Thus, the psychoanalyst played an instrumental role in how she reflected on her past and how she approached the daunting reality ahead. By suggesting an emotional link between the two men, Freud embedded an added layer of fear in her psyche. As a result, he may have triggered a relationship between the trauma of the past and the potential horrors of the future. April 1939, the month she starts her memoir, Woolf writes in her diary “the severance that war seems to bring: everything becomes meaningless: can’t plan: then there comes the community feeling: all England thinking the same thing – this horror of war – at the same moment” (302). The communal feeling of horror is juxtaposed with the perceived meaninglessness of life, creating a unique emotional complex.

Between 1940 and 1941, Germany started a bombing campaign against the United Kingdom known as the Blitz, a truncated version of the word Blitzkrieg or “lightning war” in German. On October 17th 1940 Woolf writes in her diary “Tavistock Square [where the Woolfs

had a house] is no more” (342). Hermione Lee assesses Woolf’s relationship to the English capital as follows: “Her feeling for London was romantic and heroic: it was her “only patriotism.” All her sense of English identity, of opposition to the enemy, her respect and sympathy of ordinary citizens, and her feeling of being part of a community, cohered around the city” (*Virginia Woolf* 732). If one considers Woolf’s words alongside Lee’s assessment, a layer of tragedy is added to the tone of the memoir. Furthermore, she and her husband (a Jewish socialist) had readied “lethal doses of morphia” in case the Germans landed, as they were both on a “Gestapo arrest list” (Bazin and Lauter 23).

While writing the memoir, Woolf’s mind was that of a woman whose reality was crumbling before her eyes. Advised by the authority on psychoanalysis to consider the similarities between the tyranny of her father and that of a fascist dictator elevated her anxiety. Losing her home, and her sense of national belonging and community was a prelude to preparing for her potential demise. All these circumstances combined can explain the prevalence of morbid themes within the memoir, as well as why she ended her life four months after starting it.

In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf discusses her first experience with death. She writes, “George took us down to say goodbye. My father staggered from the bedroom as we came. I stretched my arms to stop him, but he brushed past me, crying out something I could not catch; distraught. And George led me to kiss my mother, who had just died” (*Moments* 91). The scene lacks descriptive language or in-depth emotional exploration. It states the facts of the incident as remembered with as much precision as possible. “The tragedy of her [mother’s] death was not that it made one now and then and very intensely unhappy. It was that it made her unreal, and us solemn and self-conscious,” writes Woolf (*Moments* 95). The gap left behind by her mother’s loss feels surreal, leaving her and her sister self-conscious.

When exploring the description of Julia Stephen's death and her daughter's reaction to it through Chomsky's *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, Woolf's writing is cast in a new perspective. Chomsky believes that "language is the result of the interplay of two factors: the initial state and the course of experience. We can think of the initial state as a 'language acquisition device' that takes experience as 'input' and gives the language as an 'output' – an 'output' that is internally represented in the mind/brain" (4). The experience of losing her mother and watching her father in distress would have been input as out-of-context and thus shocking. In her writing, the shorter sentences reflect her childhood self in a state of shock and confusion. As time passes, the tragedy takes on a new light: surreality. As the mind is unable to comprehend the experience of loss, the language flounders to fully describe it and the behavior of the two sisters reflects it. Writing about the experience forty-four years later, Woolf transports the reader into her teenage mind.

Nevertheless, she is forced to break to cater to her mental health on 19th July 1939, fearing that "these breaks" would hinder her ability to complete her memoir (Woolf, *Moments* 98). As the voice of Virginia Woolf superimposes the voice of Virginia Stephen, the writer loses her omniscient status and actively inserts herself in the text. Her stream-of-consciousness is no longer merely a style of writing, but a mode of characterization in her personal narrative. It is an informative device that allows the reader to pause and look beyond the abstract symbols on the page to the woman behind the pen.

In *When Memory Speaks*, Jill Ker Conway explains that women's memoirs, which vary in their transitions and narrative styles, constitute a fight against cultural taboos which defined them as voyeurs rather than participants in the events of their own lives (88). Woolf expresses this struggle early in her memoir: "here I come to one of the memoir writer's difficulties – one of

the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happen. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being” (*Moments* 65). Bessel Van der Kolk argues that talking about painful events does not necessarily establish a sense of community, and as a result, trauma victims edit their narratives into a palatable form that would less likely “provoke rejection” (291). Thus, as she reflects on her early years in such a tumultuous period, it had to serve as a time capsule not only of her own experiences but also of an era in history. This shift of focus from mental health and survival of the individual to that of a culture can be seen in her later work, as she draws from her personal experiences with death to illustrate “the impact of war on the individual and the family” (Bazin and Lauter 24).

The experience of Virginia and Vanessa Stephen within their household mirrors that of British people during the war; Woolf writes: “it thus came about that Nessa and I formed together a very close conspiracy. In that world of many men, coming and going, we formed our private nucleus” (*Moments* 123) -- people living in private nuclei, banding together in their homes or their basements, afraid to look up. Using the Freudian theories disseminated in her circle, she presents “a relentlessly determinist diagnosis of civilization and the individual” (Lee, *Virginia Woolf* 712). Following a psychoanalytical framework, Woolf dissected her childhood and presented a memoir that reflected the realities of Victorian society and the anxieties of early-twentieth-century Britain. The memoir can be read as a critique and a final therapeutic attempt on the part of its author.

Lastly, William James describes consciousness as a constantly changing stream of ever-flowing thoughts. It is a notion expressed in the interiority of the modernist writing style, where ideas carry the reader from one thought to another with ease. However, upon analyzing Virginia Woolf’s influences and contextualizing her work, the emotions behind her words become clearer,

and the perspective on her style shifts from a flowing stream to a constricting whirlpool that eventually drowned its author. As she circles back to her childhood in every text, whether theoretical, autobiographical, or fictional she restricts her thoughts within a rigid framework into which she filters all external influences.

A Room of One's Own was written in the interwar period, a time of peace when intellectuals had the luxury to theorize and discuss social and artistic issues. Yet at the height of her accomplishments, Woolf was still plagued by self-doubt; she was unable to separate herself from the image of her youth or silence her father's voice. In contrast, her memoir and the diary excerpts discussed were written during the Second World War, a period of national fear and personal anguish. Influenced by Freud's theories on childhood trauma and civilization, along with his assessment of her anxieties, she had no mental refuge from her past as it unfolded once more in her present. Being caged in this traumatic state, and falling regularly into despair, had an immeasurable effect on her worldview. While it provided her with a unique insight into the human psyche, particularly the female mind, it was not enough to alter the outcome of her life.

Conclusion

A plethora of work was written about Virginia Woolf. Her multitudinous topics of interest offer scholars a variety of lenses through which to analyze her writing. The beginning of Hermione Lee's biography on Woolf highlights the different starting points biographers have chosen to write about the life of the prolific author. Thus, each writer chooses to read Woolf through a particular theoretical lens. "Virginia Woolf was an autobiographer who never published an autobiography," writes Lee (*Virginia Woolf* 4); yet, her life story is scattered throughout her body of work.

I chose to start with her diary; the most unfiltered of her writings allowed personal insight into herself. It served as a companion text throughout the research, acting as the voice of Virginia alongside the words of Virginia Woolf. Connecting disparate fragments of her autobiographical writing into a rhizomatic biography, beyond the limitations of chronology, provided an overarching view of her life and her demise. The thematic structure introduces a different method to the study of autobiographies, which allowed for the utilization of theories from multiple disciplines. The interdisciplinary approach expands the versatility of the genre, as autobiographies cover a wide array of writing forms. This is evident in Woolf's work, as her varying writing identities enabled her to adapt her modernist style in accordance with her topic and shape the autobiographical genre to fit her needs. Woolf, the feminist theorist, the fiction author, and the modernist writer were all products of her Victorian upbringing and the experiences which shaped her young impressionable mind -- a mind that suffered from personal trauma in childhood and political turmoil in adulthood.

In *The Flight of the Mind: Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness*, Thomas Caramagno states that the “issue of how identity is tied to mood and perception was especially crucial for a woman who struggled to throw off Victorian dogma that limited who and what a woman could be. It was a challenging task” (38). As she lived through the hypocrisy of Victorian society, Woolf realized that the behaviors of men within such a society mirrored their atrocities in the national and international arena. Her gendered view of human emotions created a dichotomy between men and women, placing men as aggressors and women as victims; however, she highlights the systemic discrepancies which hinder women’s economic advancement and restricts their intellectual influence.

In such a system, women have fewer educational opportunities, which limited their earning potential and kept them dependent on men. While Woolf was a woman of means, she explains that her wealth was inherited and thus provided her with the freedom to pursue an intellectual and literary career, an uncommon occurrence for a woman of her era. Nevertheless, her lack of formal education was a source of shame and insecurity throughout her life.

Woolf’s manic-depressive diagnosis, resulting from abuse in her childhood, also contributed to her feelings of shame and multiple suicide attempts. As discussed in Chapter 2, bipolar disorder affects the structure of the brain, thereby affecting the flow of information between neurons, and by extension mood and behavior. The disorder changes the structure of the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for learning and memory, and relates to the severity of mood swings. The years of abuse cemented Woolf’s image of herself and became the lens through which she experienced reality. Basel Van der Kolk explains how “the memory of trauma acts like a foreign body. . . [and] it is the body’s response to the foreign object that

becomes the problem more than the object itself' (294–95). As a result, the mind continues to fight against trauma whenever triggered as a way of defending itself against a perceived attack.

Bipolar disorder has been associated with the creative process; a contemporary rationalization points to the relationship between the disorder and high levels of divergent thinking or creative thinking, which can mirror the manic state. The theorization does not explain the melancholic state and does not stray far from the early twentieth-century understanding of mental illness. As Woolf proved in her autobiographical writings, mental health patients were often derided by the doctors who were meant to treat them. While among creative/intellectual circles, mental illness was seen as an eccentric anomaly used to inspire works of art and literature.

By analyzing the recurrent themes within Woolf's work, it becomes evident that while her writing follows the flowing stream-of-consciousness modernist style, her thought process does not. Woolf's thoughts and ideas circle back to her childhood trauma regardless of her central topic. Thus, restricting her mind to a spiraling vortex. Her writing served as a therapeutic technique and a window into the reality of her mood disorder from an autobiographical perspective, reflecting on her personal history to analyze her present circumstances. But she became consumed by the inability to endure another manic-depressive episode, the fear of losing her husband, the looming threat of getting arrested during the war, and an ever-present terror of dominant men stemming from her past. Thus, as the political and societal circumstances in which she lived further exacerbated her anxieties and locked her in a state of extreme fear, Woolf felt that her only escape was to revert to the suicidal solution she had attempted in her youth.

The socio-economic context, by itself, does not explain Virginia Woolf creatively; neither do neurological forays into her symptoms elucidate her stylistics, once and for all. But

when her fragmented, intersecting, and overlapping autobiographical texts are linked together in a rhizomatic fashion, it provides an entry into Virginia Woolf's own story. As she sprinkles her life across her fiction, essays, letters, lectures, memoirs, and any other form of written self-expression she used, she writes a disjointed autobiography uniquely mirroring her personality and the inner workings of her mind.

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