"DESIRING TRUTH": FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION
IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SHORT FICTION.

by

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Desiring truth, awaiting it, laboriously distilling a few words, for ever desiring — for ever desiring ... - truth? or now, content with closeness?

Virginia Woolf, "Monday or Tuesday".
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SUMMARY

Virginia Woolf's short fiction has been accorded only slight attention by the major critics of her work. While obviously secondary to her achievement in the novels, the short pieces are significant for the extent of their experimentation in form. The publication of Monday or Tuesday in 1921 marked a major break in Woolf's work, away from conventional narrative, as, "desiring truth", she searches for a form which is true to the mind's impressions and the profusion of experience. However, the established critical attitude which views the short fiction as experimental works in which she was developing the fluid medium of associative prose for the later novels denies the extent of such formal experimentation. Woolf continually upsets the conventions of the well-made short story of the time, and in their lack of a narrative structure, these short pieces defy a distinct generic basis. This early short fiction marks a transitional stage in the development of Woolf's fiction; on the one hand, her criticism maintains a clear sense of literary genres, while on the evidence of her experimental pieces, she is making a serious attempt at exploring a form which challenges generic definition.

Woolf's use of the plot-based form in a few stories provides a yardstick against which her early experimentation can be measured. In her experimental sketches, Woolf introduces elements from other genres into the basic focus of a fictional mode. Many pieces like "Monday or Tuesday" are about writing, but explore associative prose in a form far removed from a critical essay. "The Mark on the Wall" employs association in a diary-like meditation to reveal a basic discrepancy between action and content. Sketches such as "Kew Gardens" explore
the impressionistic texture of life in the form of a prose poem. On the other hand, "An Unwritten Novel" combines a fictional mode with the concerns and tone of a critical essay. While the problematic presentation of character in "An Unwritten Novel" is generally seen as leading to Jacob's Room, this experimentation is actually extended in the later short pieces, "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass". The second of these marks the final sophistication of Woolf's formal experimentation as personality is defined by the process of visual perception. The earlier "Mrs Dalloway" stories are separate from the development of her short fiction, surrounding as they do the novel Mrs Dalloway. As the novels became more experimental so the later short fiction reverted to a traditional narrative basis.

Nevertheless, it is in the short fiction that Woolf's formal experimentation is presented most provocatively. From the early sketches to "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", the lack of a distinct generic basis is evidence of experimentation that is more far-reaching than any found in the longer fiction. The short pieces, by the extent of their formal experimentation, challenge the adequacy of such descriptions as "poetic" or "lyrical" prose, as traditionally applied to Woolf's work. It is true that in only a few pieces does she succeed in conveying the randomness of the mind's impressions in a form which is aesthetically conclusive; even here she must be "content with closeness", as she can never achieve an artistic form which accurately retains the fleeting associations of the consciousness. By contrast, the novels consistently capture the experience of the mind in an aesthetic form; they are however, more of a compromise with the traditional novel, as there is some narrative basis in the complex pattern of characters and images which finds resolution in a moment of insight. Only in her short fiction is Woolf's innovative formal experimentation seen at its fullest.
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, no material previously published or written by any other person except when duly acknowledged in the text or notes.
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NOTE ON QUOTATIONS

Throughout this thesis, the following abbreviations are used for Woolf's published diary and letters:

Diary

The Diary of Virginia Woolf.
Ed. Anne Olivier Bell.
Vol. I: 1915-1919 (1977);
Vol. II: 1920-1924 (1978);

A Writer's Diary

A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the

Letters

The Letters of Virginia Woolf.
Ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann.
Vol. I: 1888-1912 (1975);
Vol. II: 1912-1922 (1976);
Vol. III: 1923-1928 (1977);
Vol. IV: 1929-1931 (1978);
INTRODUCTION
Virginia Woolf's short fiction has received only slight attention. The major critics of her work have either ignored the short pieces or at most devoted a chapter to a consideration of their place in her development as a novelist. Often Monday or Tuesday (1921) is chosen in preference to A Haunted House and Other Short Stories (1944) because of the former's significance as a precursor to Jacob's Room, thus limiting discussion to the very early works. Several short pieces have been the subject of separate articles so allowing a more detailed exploration of the themes and form on an individual basis. However, there has been no detailed study of Woolf's short fiction as a distinct body of work.

More significantly, the short fiction has been considered only in relation to the development of the novels. The accepted attitude that the short fiction provided Woolf with the opportunity to experiment with new techniques to be used in the novels is illustrated by Blackstone's comment on Monday or Tuesday: "before embarking on a new novel she is going to experiment in the shorter form". While it is obviously true that Woolf's primary inclination was towards the novel, and that there are definite links between the thematic concerns and techniques employed in the short works and those in the later novels, the established critical attitude which views the short fiction simply as experiments for novel-writing denies its intrinsic merits. That Woolf saw the short story as distinct from the novel is evident from Leonard Woolf's Foreword to A Haunted House:

All through her life, Virginia Woolf used at intervals to write short stories. It was her custom, whenever an idea for one occurred to her, to sketch it out in a very rough form and then to put it away in a drawer. Later, if an editor asked her for a short story, and she felt in the mood to write one (which was not frequent), she would take a sketch out of her drawer and rewrite it, sometimes a great many times. Or if she felt, as she often did,

1. Hereafter referred to as A Haunted House.
while writing a novel that she required to rest her mind by working at something else for a time, she would either write a critical essay or work upon one of her sketches for short stories.3

(p.7)

While the short fiction assumed a secondary role to Woolf's work in the novel, the fact that she took care to revise such pieces, often several times, confirms that she saw short fiction not simply as experiments for novels, but as a distinct form of fictional exploration. The idea of short fiction as a "rest" from the more continuous effort of a novel is further evidence of an individual approach to the short form.

In fact the short pieces are significant for the extent of their experimentation in form.4 The publication of Monday or Tuesday in 1921 marked a major break in Woolf's work, away from the conventional narrative of The Voyage Out and Night and Day with its omniscient narrator and character development through action. "Desiring truth", Woolf searches in the short fiction for a form which is true to the mind's impressions, a form which conveys the profusion of experience within the conclusiveness of a work of art. Woolf is consciously experimenting in Monday or Tuesday, as is obvious from her diary: "they don't see that I'm after something interesting",5 and later, "Roger... thinks I'm on the track of real discoveries".6 However,

4. As Avrom Fleishman recognizes in his recent study "Forms of the Woolfian Short Story" (published, after this thesis was written, in Ralph Freedman, ed., Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp.44-70). However, Fleishman's appreciation is limited by his acceptance that Woolf's short fiction belongs in the short story tradition, and by his discussion of the short pieces merely in terms of linear or circular forms. He makes no suggestion of her innovative rejection of generic form nor of the relationship of this rejection to the aesthetic form of her short works as is basic to the present discussion.
5. Diary, II, p.106, 8 April 1921.
6. ibid., p.109, 12 April 1921.
this is not to say that these short pieces are merely experiments for novels. While developing the fluid medium of associative prose which she later used in the novels, Woolf experiments with both aesthetic and generic form in the short fiction to an extent never attempted in the longer fiction. The stories and sketches exist in a range of sophistication: some are in a fairly crude state, others have undergone more revision and are far more polished works. They vary in length from a single paragraph, to a page or two, to a longer exploration of several pages. Many are difficult to describe because of their very lack of a narrative framework, while a minority adhere to a conventional plot-based form. Nevertheless, these short works are striking for their diversity of form and their rejection of the traditional elements of fiction.

In her best pieces, Woolf continually upsets the conventions of the well-made short story of the time. While today the concept of a short story has broadened, at the time she was writing the form was more tightly controlled by conventions. A.L. Bader was only one critic who, in 1945, a year after the publication of *A Haunted House*, reiterated the central importance of plot in providing the unifying design of a short story. In the context of such critical opinion, the term "short story" is inadequate to describe the diversity of form in Woolf's short fiction. The stories of Joyce and Mansfield find their basis in character revelation through a significant incident; Woolf's short pieces, on the other hand, by their lack of narrative structure and often of character interest, defy a distinct generic basis. This was recognized by Desmond MacCarthy in his reference to *Monday or Tuesday* as "a collection of sketches, rhapsodies and meditations - there is no general name for them".

In both her diary and her critical essays, Woolf shows clarity in distinguishing literary genres. Nevertheless, such distinctions are usually made in the comparative terms of poetry, prose and drama, as evident in references to her novels as an "elegy" or "playpoem". Woolf does not provide any real definitions of generic form. In commenting on Dreiser's short fiction, she identifies "all the necessary qualities for a writer of short stories - concentration, penetration, form", but without defining these qualities. Perhaps by "form" she means aesthetic conclusiveness, an interpretation which would be appropriate to her own work. Her critical statements point to a new form in which prose is to take on some of the attributes of poetry, but in the short fiction the flow between genres is more far-reaching than simply a poetic or lyrical prose, in that new elements are introduced.

The serious formal experimentation in many of these pieces suggests that Woolf is moving away from the concept of the short story as a distinct form.

In order to evaluate Woolf's formal experimentation in her short fiction, this thesis examines all her published short works. However, the discussion does not necessarily follow chronological order. Although the conventional plot-based form dominates her later short fiction, these stories provide a significant measure for her more experimental works and are thus considered in Chapter One. This introductory evaluation serves to focus the extent of her experimentation in the form of the pieces which were included in the early collection Monday or Tuesday: "The Mark on the Wall" is discussed in Chapter Two, "Kew Gardens" and the impressionistic sketches in Chapter Three, and "An Unwritten Novel"

11. It is interesting to note that Leonard Woolf chose the title *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, whereas Virginia Woolf did not categorize in naming *Monday or Tuesday*.
in Chapter Four. These chapters illustrate Woolf's total rejection of the conventional elements of the short story in this early period of her career. "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" provide the basis for discussion in Chapters Five and Six as these later sketches extend the experimentation begun in "An Unwritten Novel" and must be considered in this context. The earlier "Mrs Dalloway" stories therefore wait until the final chapter as they are separate from the main line of development in Woolf's short fiction, exploring as they do the form developed in the novel *Mrs Dalloway*.

Thus the arrangement of the discussion develops a perspective against which Woolf's formal experimentation is evaluated. The short fiction marks a transitional stage in the development of Woolf's fictional possibilities: on the one hand, her criticism maintains a clear sense of basic literary genres, while on the evidence of her experimental pieces, she is making a serious attempt at exploring a form which challenges generic definition.
CHAPTER ONE

THE CONVENTIONAL FORM: PLOT-BASED STORIES
"I can make up situations, but I cannot make up plots", so Woolf wrote in her diary. While her comment is a true indication of where her original and creative genius lay, she does follow the conventional plot-based form of the short story in a few places. Although this form dominates Woolf's later short fiction, it is also evident in some early short stories so justifying its consideration here. More importantly, Woolf's use of the plot-based form provides a yardstick against which the degree of innovation in her more experimental short fiction can be measured. Thus an evaluation of her plot-based stories provides a suitable introduction to a discussion of her experimentation in form.

A definition of the traditional plot-based form is therefore essential. It is generally agreed that the term "plot" describes a pattern of rising action culminating in a climax and denouement. However, the true short story does not offer sufficient scope for such development of character through a sequence of actions as is found in the novel. In the modern short story as practised by Woolf's contemporaries Mansfield and Joyce, a series of events has given way to the compression of a single event: character is revealed through a significant incident which becomes the focus for a series of related actions and thoughts. Nevertheless, the basic emphasis on action to define plot and so distinguish a short story from a sketch is accepted by the major critics of the form. In an early study, Brander Matthews makes the distinction:

A sketch may be an outline of a character, or even a picture of a mood of mind, but in a short-story there must be an action.³

Ian Reid reiterates this distinction in his recent study:

1. Diary, III, p.160, 5 October 1927.
2. In fact "Lappin and Lapinova" spans both periods through its redrafting before later publication.
There is a broad initial distinction between writing about *conditions* and writing about *events*... the former... is predominantly descriptive, while the latter follows a line of action... The first of these is a sketch; the second... usually develops into a tale.4

This second definition follows our contemporary acceptance of a wide range of forms within the now broadened genre of the short story. However, when Woolf was writing, the accepted definition was more strictly limited, as illustrated by A.L. Bader's essay "The Structure of the Modern Short Story", published in 1945. In this essay Bader insisted that plot remained the definitive element of the short story. Despite a shift in emphasis away from external conflict resolved by sequential action towards the more limited internal conflict of the individual character, the modern short story retained a "narrative structure derived from plot".5 As conflict and its resolution were now internal, the plot structure was implicit but nevertheless provided the unity of design essential to the short story. Sean O'Faolain also acknowledges a shift of interest away from action itself towards a more implicit, emotional interpretation of character through a particular incident.6

Woolf's plot-based stories do not necessarily conform to this modified pattern as the conception of plot varies within the group. Nevertheless, the plot-based stories are distinct from Woolf's other short fiction in that they describe an event or sequence of events rather than a flow of impressions associated with an emotional or mental state. As a consequence, all are characterized by a traditional omniscient narrator. These stories derive from either Woolf's earliest or latest periods of writing short fiction. The early stories describe a sequence of events, and vary in structure from the simple tale of "A Society" to a more fully developed plot which rises to a climax and resolution in "Lappin and Lapinova" and "Solid Objects". On the other hand, the later stories,

6. Sean O'Faolain, *The Short Story* (Cork: Mercier, 1972), p.211. As will be seen, this form is most evident in the "Mrs Dalloway" stories but relates less to the main line of development in Woolf's short fiction.
"The Legacy" and "The Duchess and the Jeweller" are more closely associated with the form described by Bader and O'Faolain where the narrative is compressed into a single significant scene, the purpose of which is to reveal character. The exception is "The Shooting Party" which has an episodic, yet fully integrated form.

These plot-based stories are often praised by critics, especially those who are Woolf's contemporaries. However, such praise seems to be based on a preconceived notion of short story form as being determined by the conventional elements of plot and character development. If such a preconception is cast aside, these stories can be seen as inferior works which lack the impressionism, the precision of detail and most importantly, the creative originality of Woolf's more experimental short fiction.

"A Society" (1921) is a simple tale which treats the investigations of a society of women into the activities and achievements of men in a comic-satiric tone. A basic opposition between men's involvement in law, literature, art, the navy and the universities, and women's supportive role, particularly in bearing children, gives the story a feminist basis. The satiric and often burlesque treatment of the episodes of investigation reinforce this intention so that masculine behaviour is seen to be unproductive and sometimes ridiculous, while the women's basic assumptions, "that the objects of life were to produce good people and good books", and their methods of investigation are equally comic and superficial. Their findings remain inconclusive when war intervenes as the ultimate mark of masculine supremacy, but the final statement that women should believe not in men's superiority but in themselves seems naive and obvious. The story is an early forerunner of A Room of One's Own but lacks the tightness and subtlety of the later work as

7. Monday or Tuesday (Richmond: Hogarth, 1921), p.16.
its comic-satiric treatment creates a strident tone which works against any serious theme. As Guiguet notes, "The general design is uncertain, the irony often clumsy". The form too is unusual for Woolf, relying as it does on a series of satiric episodes with the narrator's first person account providing a basic unity. "A Society" is a tale in the sense of being "a fairly straightforward loose-knit account of strange happenings". Its informal style and concern with events are obvious from the opening, "This is how it all came about", which sets the tone of a tale. The story is unsatisfactory, not merely because plot remains primary, but more importantly because there is no development of character interest or any impression of lasting significance. The tale remains a comic-satiric account of events which fails to develop the unity of design inherent in the short story form. Woolf was wise in choosing not to include "A Society" in the collection which became A Haunted House.

"Solid Objects" (1920) is a more successful venture in the traditional form. Although plot-based, it is characteristic of Woolf's early short fiction in its concern with perception which is manifest in both the content and form of the story. This is evident from the opening description of a small black spot which gradually comes into focus as the story's two characters, Charles and John:

The only thing that moved upon the vast semicircle of the beach was one small black spot. As it came nearer to the ribs and spine of the stranded pilchard boat, it became apparent from a certain tenuity in its blackness that this spot possessed four legs; and moment by moment it became more unmistakable that it was composed of the persons of two young men.

(p.79)

The narrative is organized around images of perception to define John's changing perception of life. Woolf explores the mind's workings as his fascination with the piece of glass that he finds develops into an

10. Monday or Tuesday, p.13.
obsessive search for an ideal shape in pieces of broken glass and china, an aim which finally overshadows an otherwise promising political career. John's mind becomes totally occupied by shapes but unlike "Kew Gardens" - to be discussed in Chapter Three - the story does not rely on a phenomenological concern with perspective and shape for its form, instead being firmly based in a narrative development which follows a chronological pattern of events. Nevertheless, John's obsession is projected in the form of the story as his "solid objects" become the focus for actions. The deterioration of his political career is seen through their diminishing usefulness as paperweights:

their duty was more and more of an ornamental nature, since papers needing a weight to keep them down became scarcer and scarcer.

Thus the objects focus the irony of the double perspective which finally divides the two friends in a complete breakdown of understanding: while Charles dismisses them as "pretty stones" (p.85), John has developed standards of colour and shape to distinguish the objects.

Such a relationship between content and form is lacking in "A Society", but in "Solid Objects" the unity of design results in an aesthetically satisfying story. Its philosophical theme is matched by a style based on suppositions, conjectures and long thoughtful sentences. As an early story, "Solid Objects" displays similarities with the more experimental sketches of this period: there is the same exploration of associations and sense of the object as a manifestation of a hidden reality as is found in "The Mark on the Wall", while the focus on the object as an organizing centre is common to "The Mark on the Wall" and "Kew Gardens". However, "Solid Objects" is distinctive in its narrative basis. Action and theme are clearly related as the omniscient narrator simply describes a series of events which lead to a climax and resolution in the deterioration of John's career and consequent end of his friendship
with Charles. To this extent, "Solid Objects" adopts the conventional form of the short story. However, rather than a direct conflict of interests between the characters, or a more introspective conflict of emotions in John, the story is based on conflicting perceptions of reality. The basis of the plot is therefore fully integrated with both the theme of perception and the imagery through which this is expressed, resulting in a sophisticated expression of the modern form of short story.

"Lappin and Lapinova" reveals a combination of influences within Woolf's short fiction. Originally drafted in 1917 or 1918 and revised much later in 1938 before publication, the story is a product of the same sentimental tone of fantasy which shapes "A Haunted House", but sharpened by the satiric note of Woolf's later short fiction. The theme of breakdown of communication provides a means of linking the story with both early and later plot-based stories. The interest in perception is here secondary, while plot and character assume a central role in the development of the narrative. "Lappin and Lapinova" describes the disintegration of a marriage relationship through the symbol of a fantasy world of rabbits originally created by Rosalind and Ernest in the first flush of love. Rosalind increasingly identifies with this world as a means of coping with reality and marriage to a man who seems too serious for her, while Ernest shows a growing resistance to such escapism. His climactic pronouncement of Lapinova's death therefore marks not only the end of the fantasy world, but also the total disintegration of the marriage relationship.

Like "Solid Objects", the story follows the conventional form of a series of events culminating in a climax, but here the resolution is achieved by authorial comment rather than action. The concluding

11. A Writer's Diary (London: Hogarth, 1953), p.308, 22 November 1938: "have ten minutes over from rehearsing Lappin and Lapinova, a story written I think at Asheham 20 years ago or more." The story was first published in April 1939.
statement, "so that was the end of that marriage" (p.78), is unnecessarily obvious and reduces the impact of the death of Lapinova which already indicates this deterioration. Instead of relying solely on the meaning implicit in her use of symbols, as in "Solid Objects", Woolf here overstates and so draws attention to the slightness of her theme.

That these three stories derive from the same period is evident in the conception of plot as a series of actions rather than a single significant event which reveals an internal conflict of emotions. In "Solid Objects" and "Lappin and Lapinova", unity of impression is achieved through the focus of imagery. However, in the later plot-based stories there is an acceptance of the form more commonly found in the modern short story as practised by Woolf's contemporaries including Mansfield and Joyce. In "The Legacy" and "The Duchess and the Jeweller", the earlier series of events gives way to the compression of a single event. The essence of the short story's intensity and unity is here defined by the form of the plot which is based on the revelation of character at a critical moment. Narrative development is telescoped into a single scene which, in place of a denouement of action, reveals the nature of both the central character and his significant relationships. The result is a greater dramatic effect than found in any of Woolf's other short fiction, but at loss of implication and subtlety.

"The Legacy" (1941) is Woolf's most dramatic story. The action describes Gilbert's reading of his wife's diary until he finally realizes that her death was not an accident, but a voluntary act in response to her lover's suicide; this truth, confirmed by Angela's secretary, is Gilbert's legacy. The irony of the title is sustained throughout the story, allowing the reader to see past Gilbert's shortsightedness while pointing to the real basis of tension as being the

12. And as defined by O'Faolain and O'Connor.
discrepancy between reality and Gilbert's perception of their marriage. Thus the irony provides the means to reveal Gilbert's self-absorption, made evident in his every thought: his primary interest in reading the diary is to relive his triumphs and Angela's "devotion" to him, while the repeated assumptions about "Angela, with her genius for sympathy" (p.122) reveal his insensitivity to her real feelings and obtuseness about their relationship. The deterioration of the marriage finds some parallels with "Lappin and Lapinova" but here the concentration on a single episode combined with the use of irony, allows a greater degree of insight into character. However, the impact of Gilbert's sudden awakening to reality is somewhat dissipated by Woolf's again feeling the need to explain:

He had received his legacy. She had told him the truth. She had stepped off the kerb to rejoin her lover. She had stepped off the kerb to escape from him.

(p.129)

The final paragraph is an unnecessary emphasis on the story's ironic basis and explicates what is evident to the least sensitive reader. The story seems rather obvious and lacking in interest despite the irony and resultant revelation of character.

"The Duchess and the Jeweller" (1938) also adopts a conventional form, immediately evident in the opening description of Oliver's house and furnishings:

Oliver Bacon lived at the top of a house overlooking the Green Park. He had a flat: chairs jutted out at the right angles - chairs covered in hide. Sofas filled the bays of the windows - sofas covered in tapestry. The windows, the three long windows, had the proper allowance of discreet net and figured satin...

(p.93)

However reminiscent of Woolf's criticisms of Bennett, this description conveys the "rightness" of Oliver's outward life and is the first note of the social satire developed in the story. The encounter between

13. In the essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" which will be discussed in Chapter Four.
the Duchess of Lambourne and Oliver the jeweller focuses the social forces which determine Oliver's action. It is in fact a power struggle, a dramatic balance between Oliver's wealth on the one hand and the Duchess' social superiority on the other:

They were friends, yet enemies; he was master, she was mistress; each cheated the other, each needed the other, each feared the other....

(p.96)

Oliver experiences internal conflict, but despite the memory of his struggles to achieve his position of respect, he forgoes judgement and accepts her false pearls in the hope of fulfilling his love for the Duchess' daughter. In maintaining her honour, Oliver has lost his own by placing more value on a long weekend in society; his final plea to the memory of his mother defines his pathetic plight.

The story is concise and dramatic, focusing as it does on the social forces which determine Oliver's actions and finally prove too strong for him. Bestial images, though somewhat obvious, highlight the nature of the power struggle: Oliver is likened to a hog rooting for truffles, always searching for a larger one as indicative of his social aspirations, while the Duchess is seen as a peacock in her rich colours and plumes, outwardly exhibiting her social position and wealth to disguise her jaded character. The pouch containing the pearls completes the image as, like a ferret, it encapsulates the hunt for treasure in which both are involved, the Duchess for wealth, Oliver for social recognition. Again a single incident becomes representative of the forces, both internal and external, which determine character and action. The conventional form of a straightforward narrative of events seems particularly suited to the social satire through which Oliver Bacon is revealed.
"The Shooting Party" (1938) is also a social satire depicting the empty values of a fading aristocracy and belongs to the same period as "The Duchess and the Jeweller". However, the form of this story is unusual. At first reading it seems similar to the early sketch "An Unwritten Novel", sharing the basic situation of an elderly woman in a railway carriage, but this situation is not developed, instead acting as a frame for the episodic central section of the story. In place of the characterized narrator of "An Unwritten Novel" who lends unity to the various impressions and speculations about the woman opposite, the narrator here is a simple observer. The frame and central vignette are linked instead by implication as the woman in the carriage is identified by hints and references: the scar on her cheek, the initials "M.M." on her suitcase and the brace of pheasants identify her as Milly Masters, the housekeeper of the ancestral home that provides the setting for the central vignette. Amid scenes which depict the faded lives of the aristocracy, she is the only link with reality; back in the carriage, she is surrounded by mystery, cloaked by the mist and the haze of the past:

Her body had become all mist. Only her eyes gleamed, changed, lived all by themselves, it seemed; eyes without a body; eyes seeing something invisible. (p.67)

Even when the station light reveals her as an ordinary woman, she retains this sense of mystery as her final murmur, "'Chk, Chk'" (p.68) recalls the unreal atmosphere of the central scene. In fact this dreamlike sequence is revealed to be not an imaginative creation, but Milly's memory of the past: "the ghost of a family, of an age, of a civilization dancing over the grave" (p.67). Unity therefore derives from within the fictional framework, resulting in a greater integration of plot and character.

14. To be discussed in Chapter Four.
The central section has no other reference to reality. There is no narrative intrusion, but simply a series of episodes centred around the ancestral home of the Rashleighs. These scenes form a pattern of images and references through which characters and theme are developed. The repeated images of falling increase in magnitude from leaves, dying birds, rain, to trees and finally signal the destruction of the line as both Miss Rashleigh and the family shield crash to the floor. Bestial and hunting images are again employed to suggest the violent and preying nature of the characters: the dying pheasants are identified with the old women at their lonely feast and the snuffling hounds precipitate the final scene of horror. The frame contrasts in its calm and everyday situation, but an air of mystery pervades the entire narrative. Despite its episodic structure, "The Shooting Party" conforms "to the pattern of the short story" as contemporary critics recognized: a series of actions rise to a climax which finds resolution as the central vignette is revealed to be a memory of the past. However, this story displays a sophisticated manipulation of plot and character as the frame and episodic central section are gradually linked by implication and a sense of mystery. The final impression is one of a fully integrated work of art.

Although plot-based, the form of these stories varies considerably. In the early stories, "A Society" and "Lappin and Lapinova", ideas are primary as Woolf adopts the traditional structure of a series of events; only in "Solid Objects" does this form achieve unity of impression through reliance on a central image. The later stories, "The Legacy" and "The Duchess and the Jeweller", focus on a single event to reveal character at a critical moment, while "The Shooting Party" achieves a combination of these forms, relying as it does on implication to contain an episodic

narrative within the frame of a single situation. Again in "The
Searchlight", Woolf portrays a narrative of past events through a
situation in the present.

"The Searchlight" is difficult to classify. Redrafted many times
between 1929 and 1941, it marks a transition in Woolf's short fiction.
Like the earlier "Moments of Being", "The Searchlight" attempts to
capture a significant moment in prose but, while not plot-based, its
form is that of a conventional third person narrative. As in "The
Shooting Party" a frame situation in the present gives way to a narrative
of past events, but in place of the subtle linking by implication, "The
Searchlight" is narrative based. In fact the story describes the way
Mrs. Ivimey tells the story of her ancestors and so experiences a moment
of intense perception through identification with their actions. The
searchlight sweeping across the night sky defines the moment and provides
a link with the past. Mrs. Ivimey connects the light with the focus
of a telescope and so describes her great-grandfather's first sight of
his future wife. At the climax of her narrative she experiences a
complete emotional identification with the woman, her great-grandmother,
but "'The light... only falls here and there'" (p.120). This personal
apprehension of the continuity of the past in the present moment is
limited to Mrs. Ivimey's consciousness and fades as the light passes.
Thus the story remains vague and fragmentary; the narrative exists on
two levels, so distancing Mrs. Ivimey's perception. The story is based
not on the interplay of characters or any new insight into experience,
but instead on a personal experience; as this cannot be shared it
remains unpenetrated by the narrative. For Woolf the traditional
narrative form was inadequate to convey the exact nature of inner
experience.

16. See J.W. Graham, "The Drafts of Virginia Woolf's 'The Searchlight',"  
Twentieth Century Literature, 22 (Dec. 1976), 379-393.
Despite praise from the critics who evaluate Woolf's short fiction in narrowly conventional terms, the plot-based stories display a comparative lack of design. The patterning of images in "The Shooting Party" and "Solid Objects" results in a unity of impression and form, but the other stories lack subtlety and suggestion. Whereas Chekhov and Turgenev convey an emotional tone within a basically traditional description of events, Woolf's plot-based stories are more obvious in their concern to reveal character or state ideas. The precise moments of insight conveyed through a rapid fluctuation of emotions, to be seen in the "Mrs Dalloway" stories, are here replaced by a more dramatic structure in the description of events by an omniscient narrator. It is significant that most are satires, indicating that the satiric tone requires a degree of obvious statement, but Woolf often overstates the theme of a story, so reducing artistic impact.

"The Shooting Party" is the most fully integrated work from Woolf's later short fiction and attempts some breakdown of the traditional narrative structure. Nevertheless, in commenting on this story Woolf shows an awareness of the limitations of the short form:

> It came over me suddenly last night as I was reading The Shooting Party... that I saw the form of a new novel. It's to be first the statement of the theme: then the restatement: and so on: repeating the same story: singling out this and then that, until the central idea is stated.

Woolf recognizes that short fiction does not allow the complex development of character, thought and imagery which she required to state her vision in the novels. Certainly at this later stage in her career

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18. The later stories share the social satire, bestial imagery and concern with the deterioration of relationships explored in *Between The Acts* (1941), but lack the tight poetic form of the longer work.
the short fiction assumed secondary importance. In fact the early
collection *Monday or Tuesday* marks the true place of short fiction in
Woolf's work by its provocative presentation of formal experimentation.
In contrast to the conventional plot formula, these pieces define form
by their tentative explorations of reality and consciousness.
CHAPTER TWO

THE MEDITATIVE MODE: "THE MARK ON THE WALL"
"The Mark on the Wall" (1917), Woolf's earliest experiment in short fiction, is not so much a story as a diary-like meditation. Turning from the traditional elements of character and plot, she explores the life of the mind. The narrator, sitting in her room, has noticed a mark on the wall above the mantelpiece. In a way which for Woolf is characteristically feminine, her mind refuses to stay with the external fact of the mark and muses on its origins, so occasioning an entire stream of associations related to these speculations. While the mark is both the stimulus and centre of her reverie, the narrator is concerned less to ascertain what the mark is than to describe the mental play it initiates. Woolf is interested not in the solidity but in the flux of life; in response to externals she, like Sterne, renders the flow of inner impressions rather than a factual definition.

On the surface, the sketch appears formless. Completely submerged in the narrator's consciousness, the reader is swept along in a steady flow of impressions and associations which escape definition. The mark is the first organizing principle of the sketch, providing an identifiable point from which to order the various impressions, so imposing artistic form on the otherwise unlimited fluidity of the reverie. The images are diffuse, reflecting the apparently incongruous associations of memory and the normal recurrence of images in the mind's reverie, but the tight pattern is that of the artist. Critics have usually interpreted the sketch as a stream of free association, often tracing (or even paraphrasing) the train of impressions which are generally seen as based on word and image association, the mark being seen as an almost incidental stimulus. While the lack of a narrative basis in the sketch makes it necessary to trace the stream of thoughts

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1. In fact the narrator is not distinct from Woolf herself.
and impressions, the critics generally fail to realize the deeper unity and significance of the ideas which lie beneath the impressionistic surface. Despite the seeming randomness of her associations, the impressions are in fact carefully organized around a basic tension between the surface world of fact and the deeper world of imagination. Seen in this light, the mark becomes the centre for an integrated and meaningful series of associations.

The narrator opens by describing the circumstances of her first seeing the mark. As she was gazing into the fire late on a winter afternoon, her musing was dispelled as her eye focused on the mark. Thus the basic movement of the sketch is established, as the mind’s imaginative wanderings give way to a factual perception which in turn initiates further imaginative speculations. It is a movement in and out of consciousness, conveyed in the sense of up and down within the physical space of the mind. Time is uncertain; the narrator’s first apprehension of the mark is recorded as in the past, but her focusing on the mark provokes a new stream of associations in the indeterminate "present", presumably on a similar occasion after tea. The reverie in fact occurs in the "pure" time of consciousness which allows impressions to merge in an inner unity and so escape sequential definition as in the conventional story. The mark itself provides the main point of definition in the reverie, as both focus and stimulus for the mind’s wanderings.

Having grasped the physical fact of the mark, the narrator’s mind moves on:

2. Herbert Marder, *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968) provides the fullest interpretation of the significance of the sketch (despite a lengthier discussion by Dalbaere-Garant). While his analysis explores the basic tension and resolution of the reverie, he does not extend his discussion to the problematic form of the sketch.
How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, then leave it... If that mark was made by a nail...

(p.40)

Her definition of the mind's workings applies equally to the movement of the sketch; a swarm of impressions only develops so far before it is abruptly halted to allow a new stream of association to come to life. So, her speculations immediately move off to the former residents of the house and the inconclusiveness of their acquaintance. Life too is uncertain, likened to a series of incomplete images "as one rushes past in the train" (p.41); how can she ascertain what the mark is when solid objects are transient and offer no lasting hold on life? She recalls her lost possessions which are now only images of a random, disorganized world. Even civilization has no control over life,

Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; the inaccuracy of thought! ... -what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization...

(p.41)

Life is seen as an endless flux, a chaos of objects and impressions which refuses order or control precisely because it is experienced through the individual mind, whose action is not bound by external control but expresses "the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard" (p.41). She turns to a consideration of the afterlife. Here, below the surface of life and hence freed from the inconclusiveness of external facts, a more subjective experience is possible. This world is one of pure visual sensation, lacking the distinct outline of the external world and seen rather as a pattern in terms of space and colour:

There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct colour - dim pinks and blues - which will, as time goes on, become more definite...

(p.42)
This is an image of the subjective nature of perception, as the pure data of sensation is gradually organized into a recognizable image. The narrator is fascinated by this imaginative world, but it is still too indefinite and subjective in comparison with the mark, to which she returns. The mark takes on some of the associations of her vision; no longer seen as a nail-hole, it is now supposed "a small rose leaf, left over from the summer" (p.42); which has survived because she has not dusted adequately.

A tree tapping against the window pane diverts the narrator's attention from the mark, so allowing her to return to her reverie,

I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciously ... to slip easily from one thing to another ... I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts.

(p.42)

She is drawn towards the expansive realm of the mind, but is constantly brought back to the external facts of the mark and the tree tapping against the window. Caught in a conflict between the inner unity of experience in the mind and the fragmentation of the world of facts, she thinks of Shakespeare as a means of reconciling these opposite ways of experiencing reality. Like the narrator, he is seen sitting in an armchair, looking into the fire, when "a shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high Heaven down through his mind" (p.42).

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf refers to Shakespeare's mind as "naturally creative, incandescent ... as the type of the androgynous", allowing him to express himself completely; it is natural for her to turn to him now in an attempt to combine the analytical with the intuitive mode of experience. However, her image of Shakespeare is external and static, so consequently lacks the depth of penetration necessary to resolve the basic tension, and is dismissed as "historical fiction".

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Instead the narrator must achieve reconciliation through her own insight.

This causes her to consider her own self-image and how fragile it is. She makes a significant distinction \(^4\) between two views of personality which reflect the two-fold nature of reality: the inner view, the self-image as seen in a looking-glass includes the depths of personal reflection in contrast to the outer reality of a person as seen by others,

Supposing the looking-glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people - what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! A world not to be lived in.

(p.43)

A loss of the richer, imaginative aspect of personality leaves her with only the barren world of facts; there must be depth behind the outer "shell" to provide a balanced insight into personality as she considers is the novelist's task, developing her reference to fiction in relation to Shakespeare:

... the novelists in future will realize the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted ...

(p.43)

Novelists must take account of both levels of reality, paying less attention to external description so as to explore the inner depths of personality: a plea Woolf repeats throughout her writing, notably in "Modern Fiction", "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "An Unwritten Novel". As with the image of Shakespeare, the narrator is here musing rather than creating so lacks the subjective penetration to provide insight, and dismisses her reflection as surface "generalizations".

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4. This distinction is particularly significant in relation to the later stories, "An Unwritten Novel", "Moments of Being" and especially "The Lady in the Looking-Glass".
Simple word association leads her from "generalizations" to the outer world of rules and authority, suggesting the masculine realm of "leading articles, cabinet ministers" (p.44). The solid Victorian world of her childhood was one in which "reality" consisted of such fixed conventions and rules, but is now crumbling:

What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which established Whitaker's Table of Precedency ...

(p.44)

Thus the masculine principle is firmly identified with the outer world of fact and the tension underlying the sketch becomes explicit. The masculine view represents an attempt to limit and order the manifestations of life, so contrasting with the intuitive and all-embracing feminine mode which the narrator is seeking to achieve by her sinking into herself. The masculine hold on life has lessened since the war, allowing her a tentative possibility of freedom from the fixed way of seeing life, but the mention of freedom causes her to pause and return to the mark.

It now seems a small mound on the wall. Her musing continues in an easy stream as she associates the mound with the barrows on the South Downs, whether they are tombs or camps (both recalling the war), so leading to the masculine figure of the antiquary who must investigate the exact nature of the barrows. Recalling the man who thought that "art should have ideas behind it" (p.41), the antiquary too needs facts to justify the question of the barrows, and is self-satisfied in his findings; both men are unable to express their ideas, as life interrupts, leaving their philosophy unexpressed - the arrowhead becomes a mere relic of the past without the antiquary's findings to give it significance beyond its objective existence. The masculine order is again seen as
having only a tentative hold on the fleeting impressions of experience. In the unrevised edition of "The Mark on the Wall"⁵ this link between the two figures is more developed. Both are made comic, as they are men whose ideas cannot be taken seriously. The man who thinks that art should convey a message "drew posters for an oatmeal company"⁶ - the juxtaposition making him slightly ridiculous. When the antiquary comes to believe in the camp theory and "casts all his arrowheads in one scale"⁷ a comic refinement of putting "all his eggs in one basket", he limits his findings to one viewpoint rather than presenting a balanced argument; for Woolf, such one-sidedness denies the imaginative all-embracing side of experience.

The housekeeper who appears only in a brief general reference in the later text, is more fully developed in the first edition and is like these masculine figures. Thinking that she is not "a very vigilant housekeeper",⁸ the narrator is confronted with the image of "a woman with the profile of a policeman", who threatens her reverie by her fastidious attention to dust and marks. Under her influence, the narrator feels compelled to identify the mark, as the housekeeper would have her terminate the imaginative activity around the mark by limiting it to its factual existence, as happens at the end of the sketch. Like the man who thinks that art should convey ideas,

she has about her the pathos of all people who wish to compromise... what I really resent is that she resents me.⁹

The housekeeper talks of art, has her paintings on her walls, yet resents the purely imaginative activity of the narrator; to protect

⁵. The sketch was originally published in Two Stories by Leonard and Virginia Woolf (Richmond: Hogarth, 1917), then issued separately in 1919. It was revised before inclusion in Monday or Tuesday in 1921.
⁷. ibid., p.7.
⁸. ibid., p.3, and A Haunted House, p.42.
⁹. ibid., p.4.
her reverie, the narrator must rid herself of the woman's image, so she concentrates on the tree tapping on the pane. Thus the tree which interrupts her reverie in the final version acts as a means of escape from unpleasant images in the first. While the comic aspects of these figures is in keeping with the playful tone of "The Mark on the Wall", the revisions to the sketch are more consistent with the tone of a reverie as thoughts are gradually organized into a basic tension between fact and imagination rather than the earlier more explicit treatment.

Tracing the antiquary's death and the inconclusiveness of his findings naturally leads the narrator to muse again on the uncertainty of life. She lists the various relics held by a museum, including the arrowhead, but apart from their objective existence they have no significance as "nothing is proved, nothing is known" (p.45). When perception itself is subjective, reality is necessarily experienced by the individual as undefined and transient. Returning to the mark to illustrate her point, she asks:

And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really - what shall we say?... what should I gain? - Knowledge? Matter for further speculation? I can think sitting still as well as standing up. And what is knowledge?

(p.46)

The mark is not important in itself, but rather as a stimulus to the narrator's thought processes; it is the subjective experience of the mark which is significant, as her way of seeing the object is an indication of her own personality. She continually rejects the factual in favour of the subjective perception. Thus she discounts the masculine realm of knowledge as based on superstition, and turns to respect for the mind and the inner experience of life; this emphasis allows a smooth transition into a feminine world of subjectivity.
Throughout the sketch, the narrator has constantly been attempting to sink into herself and into the spacious world of the mind, and this is finally achieved. She imagines a totally subjective world of pure visual sensation, lacking the definition of masculine order:

... one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea-eggs.... How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters, with their sudden gleams of light, and their reflections...

(p.46)

This feminine world recalls and develops the image of the afterlife; again there is a sense of tranquillity and wholeness while the white sea-eggs suggest rebirth. Time seems suspended as we are totally immersed in the subjective fluidity of the mind's impressions, while the indefinite patterning of light and shadow suggests the process of perception as the sediments settle in the waters of the mind. In fact the narrator has reached the base of her stream of consciousness, so naturally uses a fluid analogy for her own creative process. However, like the image of the afterlife, this world is a subjective retreat which takes no account of external reality, so the narrator is again pulled back by the thought of Whitaker. It seems that the masculine realm must dominate, and she feels compelled to ascertain what the mark is.

The narrator has previously not been interested in identifying the mark, though it assumes a central role in the development of the reverie; she now feels that she must do so to ascertain external reality. It immediately becomes obvious that it is not the masculine domination which compels her, nor an unconscious fear of losing her own

10. Except in the housekeeper section, omitted from the revised version.
identity in the flux of the subjective world, but rather the action of nature, directing the narrator's thoughts to "think of the mark on the wall" (p.47) to avoid a "collision with reality" (p.46). Even as she achieves a subjective feminine mode, the narrator is aware that the external world does exist - the conflict between the two is basic to her reverie. However, guided by nature, she begins to realize the reconciliatory power of the mark. It has never interrupted her reverie; instead her thoughts have willingly drifted back to it as to a centre, and here she finally realizes that the mark is able to resolve the opposite forces of imagination and fact as

There's no harm in putting a stop to one's disagreeable thoughts by looking at a mark on the wall.

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality... Here is something definite, something real.

(p.47)

Once the narrator has fixed her eyes on the mark, it becomes a point of definition in the otherwise formless subjectivity of her feminine mode and allows her to achieve wholeness and balance in her reverie. The mark immediately steadies her thoughts: Whitaker's order is reduced from dominance to a shade, and she is saved from losing her own identity in the total subjectivity of the feminine world. Where the image of Shakespeare lacked the necessary penetration, the mark provides a means to transcend the conflict and achieve a balance between fact and vision. This is possible because it combines both worlds in itself; it is a fact on the wall, and an imaginative stimulus to the narrator's reverie; the two modes are seen as necessarily interrelated for any order and meaning in life. Associated flower-dust images which recur throughout the reverie are another expression of this interrelatedness; while dust is associated with the losses of the

outer life and the transience of civilization, it is necessary to the
organic growth of the flower. So the organic life of the mind is
dependent on the outer life for the primary data of perception, while
awareness of an existence other than its own is necessary to provide
balance and identity against the fluid experience of the mind.

Fixing her eyes on the mark also begins a new train of associations
in the narrator's mind, as at the start when it dispelled her childhood
fancy to begin the present reverie. Again simple word association
leads her from "plank" to "wood" and hence "tree"; she starts with an
object and speculates on its origin as she has with the mark. However,
whereas the previous streams of thought have swung between objective and
subjective extremes, here the reconciling power of the mark is evident
as the two approaches are integrated. Many images reminiscent of the
subjective feminine world in its silence and stillness are here employed
in a description of the external world rather than the mind's impressions.

It is constantly emphasized that this is a pleasant stream of thoughts
as "wood is a pleasant thing to think about" (p.47); it not only acts
like the mark to stop the disagreeable thoughts of the masculine realm,
but also with each repetition of "I like to think" (p.47) the narrator
is gradually penetrating from external description to the inner lived
being of the tree:

I like to think of the tree itself: first the close dry
sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm;
then the slow, delicious ooze of sap.

(p.47)

It is a phenomenological exploration into the essence of the tree;
while showing tremendous sympathy with the non-human world, the
description is balanced: she is exploring not her experience but that
of something outside herself, and she is careful to maintain a balance
between the inner subjectivity of the tree and the external perspective
of its life cycle within the wider cycle of the seasons. Consequently
the image gains a depth and wholeness. That the tree lives on as
timber "lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes"
(p.48) suggests that the cycle of the reverie is almost complete, as the
image eases the narrator back into the real situation at the beginning of
her reverie.

At this point the reverie is interrupted by someone talking to the
narrator, preventing her from investigating the tree's thoughts. She
is at first puzzled by the loss of her thread and the general upheaval
of impressions, but the interruption gradually registers on her mind.
As her thoughts are drawn back to the surface world of external reality,
she is left with the fragments of her vision. The organizing power of
the mark was imaginative and is lost with this externalization. The
narrator is brought firmly back into the outer world by this intruder.
He is obviously a masculine figure as he wants facts and action as
represented in a newspaper, and calls the war by name (which she has
largely avoided). With his factual approach, he finally identifies the
mark as a snail.

In her final comment, the narrator is not resentful; she shows no
sense of either loss or curiosity satisfied, but accepts the fact of
the snail. The significance of her reverie is not negated by the
factual naming of the mark, as its value as imaginative activity remains.
The mark is central to the reverie; it directs the development of the
tension between the two opposed views of reality and provides a means
to resolve that tension. However, while the fact of the snail is
unimportant in terms of the development of the reverie, it is revealed
as a fitting symbol: the snail combines a hard shell of outer form
with a fluid organic centre and so is analogous to the reverie where

12. As both Marder and Dalbaéro-Garant recognize.
the fixed world of fact finally encloses the free world of consciousness. Thus the power of the mark to resolve the basic masculine factual/feminine subjective tension is extended in the image of the snail. In this way, "The Mark on the Wall" gives a significant early indication of Woolf's later concern in *A Room of One's Own* with the concept of an androgynous mind which unites the masculine and feminine aspects of thought in a "natural fusion".13 This idea is obviously implicit in her thinking of Shakespeare, but it is only through the mark that she can steady and so remove herself from the conflict.

Thus a careful reading of "The Mark on the Wall" shows it to develop beyond a simple transcription of the mind's musing on a mark and its origins, to a sketch of much wider implications. It is a complete work of art, integrated and unified by the formal device of the mark which acts as stimulus, focus and resolution of the basic tension between the masculine and feminine ways of perceiving reality. An anchor against formlessness, the mark gives shape to the reverie by finally bringing it back into the external sphere of time and space. Unlike the flower-bed which provides the central point of view in "Kew Gardens", the mark is more subtly integrated with the mental flow it occasions. A close reading cannot do justice to either the range or the playful linking of images within the reverie, but far from being a "dreamy reverie",14 "The Mark on the Wall" is an exploration of consciousness which preserves the elusiveness of the mind's impressions within the tight structure of art. Like Woolf's later novels, it is aesthetically conclusive while suggesting the randomness of the mind's impressions.

"The Mark on the Wall" represents perhaps Woolf's earliest serious experimentation with narrative form, and is definitely her first experimental attempt with short fiction. First published in 1917, it was

written before she had read either Dorothy Richardson or James Joyce (as Leonard Woolf notes in his autobiography 15), and so provides a significant indication of the extent of her own innovations in both subject matter and form. In fact it is difficult to decide which genre if any is adequate to describe the form of "The Mark on the Wall" when the sketch so obviously challenges a sense of definite form. The degree of Woolf's experimentation is appreciated only with the recognition that at the time she wrote "The Mark on the Wall", the term "short story" applied to a tight formula of character revelation through plot and action. This is exemplified by "Lappin and Lapinova" which was first drafted at this time. In contrast, "The Mark on the Wall" shows a total disregard for such traditional elements of fiction. The only story development is limited to the narrator's wondering what the mark is and it's being revealed as a snail. This is a totally inadequate summation of the sketch, taking no account of most of the content of the mind's associations, and reducing the sketch to an illustration of the elusiveness of external reality. When the identification of the mark is ultimately not important, this cannot be a valid interpretation.

Holtby 16 refers to "The Mark on the Wall" as an "essay" in that it is composed of "fully formed thoughts" so that "each idea leads naturally to the other". It is true that ideas are carefully developed within the sketch around the basic tension between two different ways of knowing reality, but this is cast within the fictional framework of the narrator's meditation on the mark. To some extent, the sketch is implicitly an essay on the problems of a writer 17 and specifically on how she is to convey experience without an excess of facts; however, this aspect is

17. As are several of the short sketches including "An Unwritten Novel", the impressionistic sketches and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass".
never openly stated. It is not a modern essay, as Hafley points out that "we now conceive of the essay merely as a form for the objective communication of verifiable truths".\(^{18}\) As "The Mark on the Wall" illustrates, Woolf is not concerned with, and cannot conceive of absolute truths; her narrator (Woolf herself) instead moves between manifest fiction and an essay mode. In this way, the sketch is closer to the nineteenth century essay as practised by Lamb, Hunt and Pater, a form which was often whimsical or reflective, but not often factual. In this sense, "The Mark on the Wall" could be seen as a "personal essay".

The most adequate term to describe "The Mark on the Wall" is simply a "reverie", in that the primary unity of the sketch derives from the narrator's consciousness. There is a distinctive narrative voice, not found in Woolf's novels and therefore removing it slightly from the realm of fiction (especially when the narrator is readily identified with Woolf), but whose musing provides the basic material for an integrated and unified work of art. Clive Bell described "The Mark on the Wall" as "the equivalent of a reverie - a work of art",\(^{19}\) recognizing that, despite its suitability in this case, the term "reverie" is not applicable as a literary genre. The same problem arises if the sketch is described as a diary-like meditation; again the description is adequate to suggest that the narrator is meditative rather than omniscient or objective, and that the subject matter is the mind's soliloquy in solitude, an ordered expression of the mind's impressions yet preserving the sense of flow as new associations come into being. However, a diary entry also lacks the necessary connotations of a literary work of art. In fact there seems no generic term which would adequately describe "The Mark on the Wall". The term "sketch" has been used loosely in this discussion partly because it is indefinite in its associations, but it


does have the disadvantage of suggesting a painter's sketch, an unfinished draft version of a work, not applicable to "The Mark on the Wall" which is totally integrated and complete. The very difficulty of assigning an adequate generic term to define "The Mark on the Wall" is in fact the best illustration of how radically innovative were Woolf's experiments in the form of her short fiction.
CHAPTER THREE

IMPRESSIONISM IN PROSE: "KEW GARDENS"

AND THE EARLY SKETCHES
Much of Woolf's earliest experimentation in short fiction belongs to a mode perhaps best described as an impressionistic sketch. This literary form is analogous to the Impressionist movement in painting in its emphasis on pure sensation, relying on the random associations of the mind rather than logical progression. Freeing herself from the conventional short story structure determined by plot and character development, Woolf sought to capture the fleeting impressions of the mind at the moment at which sensations are transformed into feelings. As she suggested in "Modern Fiction", she sought to trace the "atoms as they fall" and to endow the life of the mind with the permanence of art. As in "The Mark on the Wall" the emphasis is less on the object perceived than the effect it produces on the senses for, as she later wrote, "the 'book itself' is not the form which you see, but the emotion which you feel". Such a concept of fiction as an emotional experience and of the life of the mind as its proper concern demanded a new subjective form, first seen in "The Mark on the Wall" and extended in the impressionistic sketches.

These are impressionistic sketches in the painter's sense of providing a basic outline or impression through the juxtaposition of images and phrases; in place of the finer distinctions of character found in the conventional short story up to this time, these short pieces attempt simply to evoke a mood, while maintaining a sense of the incompleteness and tentativeness of half-formed thoughts. This is what makes the impressionistic sketches distinctive: for while all Woolf's fiction relies to some extent on impressionistic description, these sketches do not attempt to go beyond this to a fuller development

2. "Modern Fiction" (first published as "Modern Novels" in 1919), Collected Essays, II, p.106.
of character or action, and some do not even establish a developing
line of thought: the evocation of mood and translation of impressions,
though often indefinite, is the primary concern.

Thus the impressionistic sketches present Woolf's experimentation
provocatively, in the extent to which they push aside the conventional
elements of the short story. This is further evident in the fact that
they make up so large a part of her first collection of short fiction.
Of the eight pieces in *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), five could be considered
impressionistic sketches. The significance of such experimentation has
long been recognized. Holtby pointed out in 1932 that in *Monday or
Tuesday*,

... Mrs. Woolf was experimenting, stretching her prose to
the fullest limits of intelligibility, and sometimes beyond, seeing how far it was possible to discard description,
discard narrative, discard the linkages which bind ideas
together, seeing how far it was possible to write her prose
from within, like poetry, giving it a life of its own.4

It remains to question whether Woolf intended such experimentation as
a means to develop a new technique for writing novels, as Holtby suggests,
or whether it was carried out for its own sake, as experimentation in a
new form of short fiction. While *Monday or Tuesday* puts the theory of
"Modern Fiction" into practice, in Woolf's turning to the life of the
mind in place of an exploration of character relationships, perhaps
equally importantly the collection demonstrates the suggestion made in
"Modern Fiction" that the modern short story was "vague and inconclusive"5
and perhaps not a short story at all. Certainly, for Woolf, it was no
longer possible to categorize the short story as a distinctive form.
Pippett echoes these feelings when, in referring to "Kew Gardens" as a
"sketch", she adds that "if it is a story it is quite a new kind of
story", and such critical qualification is still necessary today. The

interpretation and appreciation of the early sketches.
1953), p.103.
recent publication of *Books and Portraits* is a notable example of the need for greater critical clarity in relation to the exact genre of Woolf's short fiction. Lyon includes "In the Orchard" and "A Woman's College from Outside" under the category of "Literary Essays", which she defines as those pieces of prose which deal "with literary matters or with writers". However, these two works are more properly considered as short fiction in that they share not only the fictional mode, but also the techniques and concerns of the other impressionistic sketches. Consequently both have been included in the present discussion.

Although the impressionistic sketches vary greatly in the extent of both experimentation and sophistication, there are consistent themes and techniques which make it possible to consider these sketches as a group. All rely on an impersonal narrative voice, often little more than a filter, to convey impressions. Perhaps the lack of a traditional omniscient narrator, more than the evasion of other conventional elements of a short story, results in the fact that some of these sketches are obscure. Such obscurity is less a mark of complexity in this case, than of Woolf's failure to communicate her intention. However, in a new form which is centred in impressions and sensations which are necessarily chaotic and fragmentary, occasional obscurity is to be expected. Not all the sketches succeed either intellectually or aesthetically, but even the most obscure are interesting examples of Woolf's innovations in the form of her short fiction.

"Monday or Tuesday" (1921) is a direct translation of mental life, and shows the mind both forming pictures in the process of perception and also registering the external impressions received in the course of a single day. From the languid frame image of a heron sweeping across sky, the perspective moves down to earth as a mind searches for truth.

8. Woolf herself referred to "In the Orchard" as "a story", *Letters*, II, p.549.
amid the intrusive impressions of everyday life. When evening falls these divergent impressions give way to quiet reflection, but the desire for truth remains unfulfilled as the heron's flight across the night sky closes the sketch. In "Monday or Tuesday" Woolf puts the theory of "Modern Fiction" into practice; the sketch is a fictional embodiment of the often-quoted passage on "life":

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there...

To trace "the life of Monday or Tuesday", Woolf eliminates external facts and the conventional elements of fiction, to rely on suggestion and a unity derived from the basic continuity and flow of life in all its "myriad impressions". In place of a rational process of development, she relies on the reader's ability to interpret her meaning intuitively through the random impressions of the mind: a mixture of external impressions, conversation and reflection. Consequently the sketch is difficult; while it communicates a sense of the profusion of experience in a single day, not all the images are clearly related.

"Monday or Tuesday" is abundantly suggestive, but also puzzling and obscure. The very fluidity of the prose presents problems, as paragraphs begin with indefinite participial constructions which leave their pronouns uncertain: who is desiring truth? what is flaunted? The desire for truth is constant yet seems unrelated to the flow of darting impressions, except to be thwarted by such divergence. Holtby sees the sketch as portraying the workings of two forces,

...while the visual imagination forms pictures, the will is at work, desiring ... truth, the means to capture truth...

Holtby accepts truth as an absolute value rather than a specific desire in relation to the external impressions registered in the sketch. Extending her interpretation, "truth" becomes a vast universal question which Woolf desires but cannot achieve, so being "content with closeness" (p.13), with questions of personal relevance or simply her own inner contentment. Such a movement of thought from the universal to the personal is matched by the narrowing perspective of the sketch from the sky to the day's activity and finally the confinement of a cosy room. However, if "truth" remains thus undefined (as does "closeness") with no clear relation to the flow of impressions, the sketch seems fragmentary, lacking the significant meaning implied by its being the title piece of Woolf's first collection of short fiction. 11

Critics have long accepted that "Monday or Tuesday" puts the theory of "Modern Fiction" into practice, but without the recognition that the sketch is not only a translation of the mind's impressions, but is actually a statement about writing. The truth Woolf seeks is directly related to the form of the sketch, as she is actively exploring a form which is true to the fragmentary impressions that are the individual's experience of life:

Desiring truth, awaiting it, laboriously distilling a few words, for ever desiring - (a cry starts to the left, another to the right. Wheels strike divergently. Omnibuses conglomerate in conflict) - for ever desiring - (the clock asseverates with twelve distinct strokes that it is midday; light sheds gold scale; children swarm) - for ever desiring truth.

(p.12)

Woolf is searching for a form which is faithful to the experience of life in the mind, "distilling a few words" as she attempts to verbalize the mind's impressions through sensual images of sight and sound. The search for truth, for a form true to the profusion of experience, is continually broken by the divergent impressions of external life, but

11. Although this was the title of the book before the story was written (Letters, II, p.445), its significance is unchanged.
it is these very impressions which she is attempting to capture as they impinge on her consciousness. The indefinite quality of the paragraphs which can seem so puzzling, is in fact an exploration of the writer's mind as she experiments with a form to convey truthfully the individual's inner experience of life. As the mind receives fragmentary impressions, so the form must be correspondingly indefinite and diffuse.

Her mind freed from the stream of everyday impressions, the evening allows reflection by the fire, and Woolf's thoughts again return to the question of truth and its embodiment in fiction. Her book fallen, she retreats to her inner thoughts as "from ivory depths words rising shed their blackness, blossom and penetrate" (p.12): in her quiet reflection, words are freed from their external form and sink into the mind where they gain meaning. However, instead of her capturing this inner truth in her fictional form, Woolf's mind creates visual images from the fire's sparks, as it did with the clouds at the beginning of the sketch. She still ponders the question of truth: "truth? or now, content with closeness?" (p.13). Throughout the day's activity she has sought the means to capture the mind's experience in prose, but she now realizes that she must be "content with closeness", with being as close in form as possible; she cannot translate mental life except in visual terms. Both words and visual images are the product of perception rather than the pure sense data received by the mind, but this is as close as she can come to translating the inner experience into the medium of prose. She must rely on suggestion rather than direct translation of mental activity. The sketch is therefore not only an impressionistic rendering of the mind's activity, but at the same time

12. Joan Bennett in her review of *A Haunted House* (New Statesman and Nation, 26 Feb., 1944, p.144), recognizes that "the truth Virginia Woolf wove her words and her patterns to capture was the truth of human experience", yet does not interpret "Monday or Tuesday" as a direct expression of this aim.
an implicit statement of Woolf's search for a form which was true to such inner experience.

If "Monday or Tuesday" is seen in this light as a series of notes on the problem of writing as well as an attempt to find a solution in the exploration of a new form, it seems an obvious choice for the title of Woolf's first collection. Holtby suggests that it was chosen "because it is the high water mark of experiment". While it is true that "Monday or Tuesday" is the most experimental of the early works (excluding "Blue and Green" which is too slight to be aesthetically satisfying), the subject matter being the question of writing seems a much more substantial reason for its being so chosen. In fact "Monday or Tuesday" expresses what Woolf is attempting to do in the collection: to find a form which reflects the experience of life more accurately than found in the traditional short story.

However, "Monday or Tuesday" is not totally successful as an expression of Woolf's aim, in the sense that the impressionistic technique has long obscured the recognition that the sketch is about the act of writing prose. Nonetheless, it is concise but richly suggestive and communicates the mental life of a day, capturing the evanescent quality of fleeting impressions impinging on the consciousness from all angles; for most readers this unity of impression is sufficient. The heron's flight provides a satisfying perspective and frame for the sketch, conveying a sense of space and freedom while marking the passing of a day, indifferent to the writer's search for truth. At the same time, the sketch does lack the integration of a later and longer work such as Mrs Dalloway where all impressions are related to a central unifying consciousness. As already implied, "Monday or Tuesday" is central to Woolf's short fiction as it expresses the very problem of creating a form adequate to reflect the

14. On a lesser scale, the heron serves the same function as Big Ben in Mrs Dalloway to provide both an indication of time and a formal structure for the fluid prose.
experience of the mind through an innovative exploration of the short story form. However, she does not here manage to both capture the essential quality of impressionistic experience and contain this in an aesthetically satisfying form to the extent that she did in the later novels. With a few exceptions, this is characteristic of all Woolf's short fiction: she must be "content with closeness".

In comparison with "Monday or Tuesday", "Blue and Green" (1921) is slight, but does mark the extreme of Woolf's impressionism. In this brief prose poem of two separate but linked paragraphs, her method is a simple association of mental images organized around the basic focus of green day and blue night. "Green", the first piece, is a series of short images connected by their associations of greenness. As a crystal light reflects the green outside, she thinks of feathers and palm leaves, but as the eye moves to the green light reflected on the marble mantelpiece, so the mind imagines pools, firstly a mirage in the desert, then the greener English pool with reeds and frog. Evening shadows immerse the green in an ocean of blue as the light reflects the night sky. This definite identification of green with day, blue with night is the only link between the paragraphs. In contrast to the changing images of "Green", "Blue" develops a single image. The night sky is portrayed as a sea monster, his hide black with blue streaks, relieved by a spray of watery stars. The metaphor is completed as the blue reflects on the beach, but the closing image of a cathedral with its blue vapour of incense likened to madonnas' veils seems separate and disjointed.

Apart from the final image, "Blue" carries a suggestion of the unity of darkness which contrasts sharply with the movement of light and consequent fragmentation of darting impressions in "Green". Using poetic techniques, Woolf makes the rhythm of the prose capture this
effect of night and day. In "Green" the phrases and images are short and connected with dashes or semi-colons to suggest the rapid flow of associations in daylight. "Blue" consists of longer sentences where interrelated phrases are joined by commas to develop a description of the sea-monster; these fully-formed images both echo the mind's slower perception at night when the senses are dulled and convey the feeling of peace free from the external situation of daily life. The sketch is slight in content; it simply conveys a mood through the impressionistic linking of images: the effect is charming but lacks meaning. In form, "Blue and Green" is closer to a prose poem than a short story. As a brief exercise in a new technique, Woolf did not wish to reprint it so it was not included in A Haunted House, but is discussed here as an indication of the extent of her early experiments.

Two other sketches are closely associated with "Monday or Tuesday": "A String Quartet" (1921) by its impressionistic rendering of the experience of a concert, and "In the Orchard" (1923) by its exploration of perspective and space. Like "Monday or Tuesday", "A String Quartet" presents a juxtaposition of external impressions and inner thoughts, but here the rendering is more definite as all are clearly related to the frame image of a concert. Consequently, the sketch is easier to interpret. From the immediacy of the opening phrases, the reader is placed at the centre of Woolf's consciousness and the flow of impressions falls clearly into different levels of experience, from the fragmentation of external impressions to an inner unity found through the harmony of the Mozart quartet. The immediate impressions of arriving at the concert, the people, snippets of conversation, a chance meeting are caught as the random manifestations of society which flicker through the consciousness: "the mind's shot through with such little arrows" (p.27). Woolf suggests that such surface details only mask a deeper search to capture "a buried
memory" (p.28), an indefinite desire perhaps to be fulfilled by the music. This movement inward is again apparent as a description of the musicians' preparation gives way to rich impressionism as the imagination translates the music into visual images.

Such images suggest the different levels of feeling which encompass a personal response to the quartet. The rapid flow of the opening is caught in images of water: fountains, river eddies, fish splashing and the rush of water over pebbles are translated into emotions and desires as all the senses are immersed in this feeling of ecstasy: "I want to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink thin, sharp wine. Or an indecent story..." (p.29). She plunges back into the music, becoming completely involved as her first joyfulness becomes mixed with sorrow and love as she imagines a melancholy river, a boat sinking and peace under a shower of rose petals. Punctuated by the external impressions of the audience and conversation, the flow of harmony now conjures up an image of lovers, a romantic exchange which is resolved in the unity of the final movement. With this crescendo, all the former images are dissolved into a vision of a white city on the evening sky, some indefinite but awesome goal which remains obscure. The mood is broken, she is impelled to leave but cannot comment except for a bare "good night": "the tongue is but a clapper" (p.30), words being inadequate to convey the power of the music. Nevertheless, Woolf has successfully conveyed the experience of the concert without narrative direction. Against the fragmentation of the external circumstances, the flow of developed images create their own unity of impression. "A String Quartet" is a richly suggestive representation of the mind's response to external stimuli.

"In the Orchard", on the other hand, is simply an experiment in technique. The sketch explores space and perspective in three parallel
but separate movements, linked by a time-scale and frame which centres in Miranda's actions. Each movement begins with a description of Miranda dozing in the orchard and ends with her jumping up to exclaim "Oh, I shall be late for tea!"\(^{15}\) From this basic framework, the movements describe the situation from differing perspectives. The first section is an objective presentation of the activity around the sleeping Miranda with emphasis on space and sound. Beginning with a description of Miranda asleep beneath the apple tree, her book fallen and the breeze blowing her dress, the perspective gradually moves upward, each level above Miranda being matched by sounds which carry outwards beyond the orchard. The sound of children, Old Parsley, an organ, church bells, the squeak of a wind vane and finally the drone of the wind itself, all are part of this movement upwards and outwards. The focus plummets to Miranda again, allowing the second movement to begin. This section is centred in Miranda's consciousness as she repeats a phrase from her fallen book. Again the movement is upward as she imagines herself rising to a high cliff with gulls flying above her. The external images and sounds are mirrored through her own feelings in a dreamlike flow, patterned and moving like the wind but centred in her sensations. The change of wind again breaks her dream to introduce the third section.

In contrast to the former upward movements, this section is firmly tied to Miranda's immediate surroundings in the orchard and is concerned to describe the external situation, the minute movements of trees, leaves, boughs and birds within the confined space of the orchard walls. The elaborate patterning and lack of openness and space balances the earlier movements; after the sense of freedom and the panoramic view of life suggested in Miranda's semi-conscious state, life is not tied down to a limited physical space. "In the Orchard" presents a structured patterning

\(^{15}\) *The Criterion*, 1, No. 3 (1923), 244, 245.
of images to suggest a sense of space, motion and perspective like that of the heron in "Monday or Tuesday", but fails to convey a distinct mood or impression. Woolf later wrote that she did not like "In the Orchard" and her opinion seems justified as the sketch lacks vision and does not rise above an exercise in technique. However, this very experimentation places "In the Orchard" definitely within the scope of Woolf's short fiction, and it should be considered as such rather than as a literary essay.

Compared with these slight sketches, "A Haunted House" (1921) is a perfectly realized poem in prose. It unites sense and sound in a flow of images carefully modulated with the cadence of verse. On a first reading, the pace and easy flow of impressions yields an effect of pure sound, the evocation of a dreamlike mood which clouds the meaning. However, while "A Haunted House" like the other impressionistic sketches has no narrative framework, there is an implicit story behind the narrator's quest for spiritual communion with the ghosts of her house, and this quest, like the desire for truth in "Monday or Tuesday", is specific and integral to the design of the sketch. However, in this case the narrator is not easily identified as Woolf and rather than a merely passive filter for impressions, she is an active participant in the ghosts' search to regain their former "treasure". While the opening seems tentative and lightly handled through changing pronouns and the indefinite nature of the ghosts' quest, it is soon apparent that one of the present occupants of the house is sensitive to a presence and puts down her book in search of enlightenment.

Throughout the sketch, the narrator's quest for illumination is seen in terms of an image of light, usually behind glass. During the day all

16. Letters, III, p. 49.
the senses are at work, obscuring her vision with reflection and sound, so her desire is unfulfilled: "My hands were empty" (p.9). As night falls, the light image becomes more specific,

So fine, so rare, coolly sunk beneath the surface the beam I sought always burnt behind the glass. Death was the glass; death was between us...

(p.10)

Death is the barrier separating both the ghostly couple from their former joy together, and the narrator from the communication she seeks. This spiritual knowledge is kept safe by the house, its "pulse" constantly adding to the pace of the quest and providing an indication of progress in the narrator's search. In the stillness of the house at night "the ghostly couple seek their joy" (p.10), reliving their past experience in the house, experiences which are shared by the present occupants. Against the hush of night and the liquid movement of sleep (emphasized by the repetition of adverbs ending in "-ly"), the conscious processes and senses of waking life are suspended, giving way to intuition. As the ghosts find the sleeping occupants, they regain their own joy and love; this is intuited by the narrator who wakes with new spiritual enlightenment: "Oh, is this your buried treasure? The light in the heart" (p.11). This is perhaps Woolf's first expression of a "moment of being": the emotional experience of sudden insight or illumination which seems to unite past and present within a moment of particular significance. The spirit of love and joy in the life of the senses is preserved in the house which shares in the communion between the dead and living: "'Safe, safe, safe', the heart of the house beats proudly" (p.10).

The effect is pure poetry, a stream of impressions and images which gradually reveal an implicit meaning. Woolf relies on the poetic technique of cadence to produce the ethereal quality of ghostly
movement, but all the senses are involved through assonance and the careful handling of such perfect onomatopoeias as "the wood pigeon drew its bubble of sound" (p.9) or "the hum of the threshing machine" (p.9). The image of light is central to the quest but lends its own beauty to the prose, wavering and illuminating its focus on different images and sensations, before the final resolution in a moment of communication. While the sketch could be seen as sentimental, its exquisite treatment of the theme provides a balance and depth to the dramatic element of the quest. Woolf was to return to the idea of a house preserving the spirit of former occupants in the lyrical "Time Passes" section of To the Lighthouse, and "A Haunted House" seems a worthy forerunner in its evocation of experience recaptured through the spirit of place.

"A Woman's College from Outside" is difficult to place within Woolf's short fiction. First published in a college journal\(^{18}\) in 1926, and since reprinted under the category of a literary essay, it belongs properly with the impressionistic sketches. It shares much with "A Haunted House" in its dreamlike mood, the use of light and a final waking image, but the motif is less definite and the sketch remains somewhat obscure. It portrays a slightly feminist intent through the exploration of Angela's inner hopes but is far more subtle than "A Society". The description and thoughts presented in "A Woman's College from Outside" are more fully formed than in many other impressionistic sketches, but there is the same sense of tentativeness, emphasized by the impersonal narrative "one". In this sketch Woolf again explores the liberating effect of night, where, freed from the external occupations of the day, Angela's inner thoughts and hopes are allowed to surface in quiet contemplation. Night is associated with an almost

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18.\_Atalanta's\_ Garland, Edinburgh University Women's Union.
visionary spiritual unity, captured through the image of the moonlight's white vapour which envelops all the college occupants in a sleepy haze and frees them from the fragmentation of daily rules and timetables to explore their secret emotions. This distinction between the outer fact and the inner vision is captured in Angela's reflection; as a "lily floating flawless on Time's pool", her inner hopes and wonder at her new opportunities are timeless, but she realizes that "even the lily no longer floats flawless upon the pool, but has a name on a card like another". It is through the necessary external order of her life at college and the fact of study that such new experience is open to her.

While aware of the external facts of her life, Angela is free at night to explore her deepest feelings. In spite of the companionship of other women and the desire for sleep, she is caught by an inner restlessness. She is drawn into the haze of white vapour, liberated from her immediate surroundings as such impressions are translated into her own sensations. Her communion with another woman stimulates a restless excitement, an intimation of the new life now open to women:

the incredible stooping of the miraculous tree with the golden fruit at its summit - hadn't it dropped into her arms?... after the dark churning of myriad ages here was light at the end of the tunnel.

These images suggest Angela's personal realization of such tremendous opportunities and its attendant wonder; however, her response is not an unequivocal acceptance of her new role. She cannot sleep, and the light image gains added significance with the dawn. While dawn signals the end of the free spirit of night in the return to outer rules and order, it is more importantly an image of "this new world, this world at the end of the tunnel" which represents a new life for women; Angela's reaction is "a desire to see it or forestall it".

20. ibid, p.6.
21. ibid, p.8.
22. ibid, p.9.
23. ibid, p.9.
The final waking image of her exclamation reinforces this ambivalence. Angela is both embracing and drawing back from the opportunities and responsibilities which confront her. Her questing spirit, unlike that of the narrator in "A Haunted House", is less defined and more uncertain about her discovery, though there is the same sense of spiritual awakening. Significantly, in place of a developed feminist theme, the sketch seeks only to convey the mixture of excitement and fulfilment in Angela's mood; it is this evocation of mood through a flow of sensations in place of narrative development which identifies "A Woman's College from Outside" as being in the form of an impressionistic sketch.

"Kew Gardens" (1919) is the earliest of the impressionistic sketches yet marks the fullest expression of the form. From the opening description of the flower-bed, the delicate play of light and colour determines the leisurely movement of the lyrical prose. Woolf's eye catches now the stem of a flower, now the tip of a petal, now the colours reflected from a rain-drop: all are captured with minute precision to convey the vivid and intense beauty of the garden. Such flickering images of pure colour and shape create the sense of an impressionist painting in words. Visual perceptions are interspersed with patterns of thought as passers-by come into the range of the flower-bed; in this way the impressionistic texture of life is organized into meaningful moments of insight.

The formal unity of the sketch derives from the central image of the flower-bed. The focus shifts upward from the bed as the reflection of light and colour is "flashed into the air above" (p.32) to be perceived by the passers-by; thus visual impressions are united with mental reflections in a complete image of life in Kew Gardens. Woolf maintains a delicate balance between external reality and inner feelings through
the image of the snail, to which she returns from time to time. In contrast to the aimless wanderings of the men and women, the snail has "a definite goal" (p. 34) and with tremendous sympathy, Woolf penetrates his movements as he endeavours to move from one stalk to another. With minute perception, she defines the snail's progress and so establishes a framework of external time to unify the momentary perceptions of the passers-by. Unlike the snail, the people are not bound by chronological time as past memories and present reflections mingle in the "pure" time of the consciousness; thus they are able to attain "moments of being", manifestations of heightened reality in a seemingly timeless moment in the consciousness. As each moment is complete, the focus shifts back to the flower-bed so that unity is achieved while allowing a series of meaningful moments.

Such inner experiences are impossible to communicate and words are seen as merely the outer manifestation of internal feelings. Images of words falling suggest both their dissociation from the emotional experience and their unity with the lazy atmosphere of the garden:

"words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them..." (p. 37)

Jackson sees this inability to communicate as a pessimistic expression of the isolation of the individual, but the moment is an experience of great emotional value which Woolf celebrates in prose bursting with life and colour. Precise images suggest the acute awareness of reality experienced in such moments. The inner experience is completed by an

24. Thus James Hafley interprets "Kew Gardens" as a Bergsonian expression of life, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as a Novelist (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), pp. 42-43. However, the sketch was intended to convey atmosphere rather than a philosophical perspective, Letters, II, p. 257: "... its a case of atmosphere".

outward movement of the consciousness to embrace the life of the gardens.

The people are increasingly identified with the flowers and insects; the young couple are described in terms of natural images, as being

in that season which precedes the prime of youth, the season before the smooth pink folds of the flower have burst their gummy case, when the wings of the butterfly, though fully grown, are motionless in the sun.

(p. 37)

Lost in a dream world, they have difficulty accepting external reality except as a pattern of shapes and colours. Finally all the passers-by lose their identity and dissolve into the leisurely atmosphere of the garden:

Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green-blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere.

(p. 38)

Images become translucent as all melts into the heavy atmosphere of a summer afternoon. The senses are dulled yet there is total harmony as natural and human forms coalesce in a wavering pattern of shape, colour and sound. The outside world intrudes at the end of the sketch only to seal the unity of life in all its manifestations in Kew Gardens.

Thus "Kew Gardens" achieves complete unity of impression while conveying a sense of the abundance of life in the garden. The careful patterning of time and space determines the form of the sketch; the flower-bed establishes perspective and a unifying point of view for the multitude of impressions, while the snail's progress develops a unity of time. More importantly, such patterning allows the interplay of consciousness in multiple moments of being. The prose conveys the heightened awareness of reality in such moments through a vivid sense of colour and mood. "Kew Gardens" retains the impressionistic texture of life in the highly-wrought form of a prose poem and is Woolf's most accomplished expression of the sketch.
Together with "The Mark on the Wall", the impressionistic sketches represent a complete break in the history of the short story. With the abandonment of external facts, action and character development, Woolf's subject becomes the delicate shifts of emotion in the consciousness. This new content demands a form which relies on the suggestion of sensations and impressions rather than a rational process of development. The repeated image of a fallen book in "Monday or Tuesday", "In the Orchard", "A Haunted House" and "A Woman's College from Outside" signals this shift of emphasis as the intellectual pursuit is forsaken for the mind's impressions and associations. The prose is suggestive rather than descriptive, and relies on the reader's ability to interpret meaning from a flow of images and impressions in the mind. The lack of a distinct narrative voice in the impressionistic sketches is also innovative: for Woolf, the narrator's role was to question and suggest rather than direct the reader's appreciation.

The sketches are successful to the extent to which they abandon the conventional elements of the short story form, in that they define a new concept of short fiction. The question of aesthetic satisfaction is less certain. In these early works, Woolf was making her first attempts to find a form which was aesthetically conclusive yet retained the openness of life, an attempt which she later referred to as "the old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind yet be exact".26 The impressionistic sketches do convey "the flight of the mind" precisely, yet often fail to contain such openness within an ordered form. Woolf's repeated use of a frame to link outer space with the inner space of the mind succeeds in "Monday or Tuesday" and "Kew Gardens"; the experimentation with perspective and the repetition of motif and image marks a similar attempt to control the necessarily random associations of the mind within

a controlling image. However, such attention to technique may result in a loss of unifying vision, the particular fault of "In the Orchard". Woolf aimed "to carry the virtues of the sketch - its random reaches, its happy finds - into the finished work", but the difficulty of conveying such openness in a complete, ordered form is evident in many of these sketches, and such balance is only fully achieved in "Kew Gardens, "Monday or Tuesday" and perhaps in "A Haunted House" through its implicit quest. Several of the stories are marred by slight obscurity, others lack vision and remain a simple translation of the mind without the necessary quality of insight or emotional tone to provide meaning.

Nevertheless, the impressionistic sketches are significant in Woolf's development. Considering that they make up so large a part of Monday or Tuesday, her first collection of short fiction, they are surprising in their lack of conventions. The sketches are highly experimental, to an extent which was not attempted in her later novels. The novel form demands the development of character and theme, thus limiting the pure play of consciousness which is explored for its own sake in the sketches. Obviously it was in these early pieces that Woolf discovered the techniques of lyrical prose, the tracing the consciousness rather than outer action which she was to use in the novels, but such pure impressionism was possible only in the short form of a sketch, or as an interlude to a novel, such as the "Time Passes" section of To the Lighthouse. While the novels depend on similarly fluid prose and the exploration of consciousness, the longer form does not allow the light touch of a simple evocation of mood through shifting impressions and emotions captured here. On the other hand, the impressionistic sketches never attempt a more complex development than the suggestion of

27. ibid., p.331, 31 March 1940.
a moment of insight or the emotional response to an experience. "Kew Gardens" is Woolf's most perfect expression of impressionism in prose, and although she made several more less successful attempts - discussed earlier in this chapter - she had after "Kew Gardens" perhaps realized the limitations of the form and moved into new areas of experimentation. While *Monday or Tuesday* shows her still exploring this form, a new interest in character combined with this impressionistic approach had begun in "An Unwritten Novel".
CHAPTER FOUR

"AN UNWRITTEN NOVEL": FICTIONAL CRITICISM
As its title suggests, "An Unwritten Novel" (1920) is an unusual kind of story which combines short fiction with the mode of a critical essay. While sharing the same interest in the processes of perception as seen in "The Mark of the Wall" and "Kew Gardens", the interest here is specifically that of the novelist as she attempts to create a personality for the woman sitting opposite her in a railway carriage. From the fact of the woman's presence, she creates a fictional life which is finally undercut when the woman leaves the train; she is not the lonely spinster the narrator has imagined her, but a middle-aged woman happy to be met by her son. The narrator's problem is one both of perceiving what the woman is like and of creating a life for her from the bare details of appearance and chance gestures. Throughout the sketch, we are constantly made aware of the active creative faculty of the novelist, selecting and combining details to build up this sketch of "An Unwritten Novel". It is this very awareness which allows Woolf to introduce serious critical contentions into the basic form of a short story. "An Unwritten Novel" is one sketch which can be broadly described in narrative terms, but the story is created only to be rejected. The plot-based story was an inadequate pattern to contain Woolf's vision of life, and in its rejection of the conventional form this story is less an experimental sketch for a novel than a significant critical statement of a novelist's problems.¹

From the opening of the sketch, the narrator is constantly concerned with "life" as both an external image, the description of life in a newspaper, and the inner experience of life as seen in people's eyes. The woman's miserable expression seems to denote her sorrow and the narrator is ambivalent towards this individual knowledge, using the Times

¹. Blackstone, Virginia Woolf, p.51 comments that "this rejection of a conventional, carefully worked-out plot is in the nature of a manifesto", but sees the sketch as experimenting in techniques for the later novels.
as protection from communication. However, just as the anonymous narrative voice, "one", is soon discarded for the more personal "I" or "me", so this general image of life, the description of human actions in the Times, is narrowed to fix on the woman and her personal experience of life. The narrator is forced to look directly at "life" when the woman gazes into her eyes, penetrating her reflections with her own searching look. This intense communion with the woman is completed when the narrator too experiences her nervous twitch as she rubs a spot on the window pane. Thus, in the opening paragraphs a character has imposed itself on the narrator who, being specifically a novelist, immediately begins to create a personality from the apparent details of the woman's life. This in turn allows a subjective and indirect discussion of the problems of writing.

Such concerns as the creation of character and the multi-faceted significance of "life" formed the central issues of Woolf's debate with Arnold Bennett. "An Unwritten Novel" is clearly a critical parody of Bennett as it picks up the very contentions and terms of reference which had already been expressed in "Modern Fiction", first published as "Modern Novels" in 1919, and burlesques Bennett's style and even some of the details of his The Old Wives' Tale. Woolf rebuked Bennett for his attention to external details rather than the inner life of the character, and the narrator of "An Unwritten Novel" moves between these different methods of characterization, allowing a full range of fictional possibilities as the burlesque tone enables humorous treatment to co-exist with serious critical contentions. The narrator occupies a shifting position somewhere between Bennett and Woolf; Minnie Marsh is largely created by the traditional method of character development as used by Bennett, so providing a basis for implicit criticism and
burlesque, while at the same time there are hints, not fully developed, of Woolf's vision of inner experience.

From the moment when the woman penetrates her gaze, the narrator feels drawn towards her, searching for an explanation of the woman's miserable look. No longer convinced that "life" is to blame, she looks for a personal reason for the twitch; thus her identification with the woman is deepened. The narrator feels compelled to rub at a spot on the window pane, allowing the woman to communicate her twitch:

Something impelled me to take my glove and rub my window. There, too, was a little speck on the glass. For all my rubbing it remained. And then the spasm went through me ... she had communicated, shared her secret, passed her poison; she would speak no more. (p.16)

After this intense emotional communication, conversation with the woman ceases, leaving the narrator free to interpret her inner character so any further remarks are taken into her imaginative flow. From the bare facts of the woman's appearance, fragments of her conversation, her miserable look and melancholy communication, the narrator fills in the details of her life. The woman's reference to "holidays" and "brothers in Eastbourne" provide the basic circumstances for Minnie's annual visit to her brother and sister-in-law; the bitter tone with which she said "My sister-in-law" (p.15) leads to the creation of Hilda, while the humility and loneliness imposed on Minnie brings forth her repentance for a past crime as she looks out of the bedroom window. The method of characterization is typical of Bennett: Minnie is developed through the details of her external behaviour, the miserable look and nervous twitch; of her motivation and actions, her crime for which the twitch is punishment; and of her external relationships, with Hilda, her family and later Moggridge.
We are constantly made aware that the narrator is selecting details to build up Minnie's life. She expands on the remark about sisters-in-law to create Hilda:

Hilda's the sister-in-law. Hilda? Hilda? Hilda Marsh - Hilda the blooming, the full bosomed, the matronly. (p.16)

Given a basic fact, the narrator's imaginative flow provides the details. So, looking at the woman opposite, she fills in her thoughts; having decided that Minnie is praying to God, she must find a reason for her penitent twitch:

Is that why she prays? What she rubs on the window is the stain of sin. Oh, she committed some crime!

I have my choice of crimes... (p.18)

Throughout the sketch the narrator is seen consciously selecting and arranging details, as the novelist creating an "unwritten novel". This expression of a novelist at work lays the basis for criticism of Bennett's method, which is obvious at this stage. While employing the traditional means of characterization, the narrator deliberately avoids detailed descriptions which are external to the central character's experience:

But this we'll skip: ornaments, curtains... skip, oh, but wait! Halfway through luncheon one of those shivers...

"Why should she twitch?" Skip, skip... (p.17)

The details she skips would be enumerated by Bennett, as would the crime; the narrator on the other hand, while she does call for authenticity by referring to the woman opposite who seems to agree with her assumptions, is less interested in the details of the crime than its effect on Minnie's spiritual and emotional life:

Ah, but the detail matters nothing! It's what she carries with her; the spot, the crime, the thing to expiate, always there between her shoulders...

Whether you did, or what you did, I don't mind; it's not the thing I want. (pp.18-19)
The crime is a burlesque not of Freud, as several critics have suggested, but of Bennett. Minnie's crime is that she lingered in a draper's shop, reaching home too late, to find her baby brother scalded to death. This is an almost exact parallel to Sophia's behaviour in *The Old Wives' Tale*; Sophia, attracted by Gerald Scales, a commercial traveller, lingers in her parents' draper's shop and rushes upstairs too late to save her invalid father who has died of asphyxia. She too is penitent, finding comfort in religion until Scales rescues her in a romantic elopement. More importantly, Sophia develops a nervous twitch after a minor paralysis later in her life; the link between the twitch and a past crime is Woolf's, but the basic details are to be found in Bennett. The repeated references to draper's goods, and the later creation of Moggridge, the commercial traveller who deals in buttons, further support the fact that "An Unwritten Novel" is a direct parody of Bennett. 4

Stephen Fox 5 sees Minnie's crime and guilt as a figment of the narrator's mind, so characterizing the narrator. However, seen in its true context, Minnie's crime provides the focus for a critical issue; in concentrating not on the details of the crime, but on its inner effect on Minnie's personality, the narrator is stating Woolf's

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3. Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale* (London: Dent, 1966), p.80: She took to religion, and her conscientious Christian virtues, practised with stern inclemency, were the canker of the family.

4. Hilda's looking out of her bedroom window across the roofs of Eastbourne (p.18) perhaps bear some relation to Bennett's *Hilda Lessways*, to which Woolf refers in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown".

own method of character creation, while implicitly criticizing Bennett's. This criticism is reinforced by the burlesque in the specific details which are sketched and the conscious avoidance of most details made obvious by "skip, skip".

To discover the inner effects of Minnie's crime, the narrator's mind builds on the image of her praying. The actual spot and twitch become outward signs of her retribution, her inner humiliation and guilt. However, just as the narrator is carried away by this inner vision of her character, objective reality intrudes with the woman's saying that "Eggs are cheaper" (p.20). This commonplace remark is tied to the everyday world, so divorcing the woman in the carriage from the created vision of Minnie Marsh. The narrator here shows Woolf's awareness of the central problem of writing: how is she to construct a creative vision of a character while retaining some relationship to the external world of fact? The novelist's problem is brought to a focus as the narrator questions her reading of character:

Have I read you right? But the human face - the human face at the top of the fullest sheet of print holds more, withholds more. Now, eyes open, she looks out; and in the human eye - how do you define it? - there's a break - a division - so that when you've grasped the stem the butterfly's off...

(p.20)

The problem is one of perception, as emphasized by the repeated image of eyes. The narrator wants to capture the woman's inner spirit; it is glimpsed through her eyes, but like a butterfly poised above a flower, moves off when almost caught. The difficulty is that of knowing another person when full reliance must be placed on perception of external characteristics, as such impressions are constantly changing. The narrator can see the woman's outer self, and so interpret these impressions to build up a total character, but the inner thoughts and feelings are unverifiable to anyone but the woman. It is not possible to read her
personality fully in her face, as even her eyes reflect externals. Each person therefore experiences an inner freedom in contrast to the outer self which is caught in other people's perception of the person: "the eyes of others our prisons; their thoughts our cages" (p.20).  

The woman's eggshell provides a neat summation of the whole problem of character creation. Referred to as a "hollow shell" (p.21), the egg is a metaphor for Minnie Marsh; the narrator has captured only the external shell of her character, and even this is a fragmented and transitory perception:

... little angular fragments of eggshell - fragments of a map - a puzzle, I wish I could piece them together! If you would only sit still. She's moved her knees - the map's in bits again.

(p.21)

Minnie too is a "puzzle", as the narrator cannot piece together these external impressions to create her full personality. However, instead of despair, the narrator expresses exuberance by the ridiculous fun image of boulders which the eggshell occasions. She is asserting the novelist's right to use facts as a stimulus to the imagination; in the last page, she has expressed a whole range of fictional possibilities, from the problems of writing to the humorous, ridiculous possibilities of image association, and thereby has reinforced her critical position as a novelist. Woolf's awareness of the problem of capturing the inner spirit of a character is expressed through the complex images of the cyc and the eggshell, but these hints of Woolf's own method are not fully integrated with the characterization of Minnie. Instead, the narrator plunges into the traditional Bennett-like method of character development. While this lack of integration maintains the critical aspect of "An Unwritten Novel", as different methods of character development are explored for their own sake rather than to provide a complete vision of Minnie, it does leave the sketch fragmented.

6. This image echoes "The Mark on the wall":

As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. (p.43)
Again adopting the conventions of writing, the narrator continues the burlesque of Bennett with the introduction of James Moggridge. Despite her conscious selection of details, she recognizes that a novelist's creation is bound by its truthfulness to "life", so she must dismiss her desire for rhododendrons, and similarly Moggridge's wife:

She's of the unborn children of the mind, illicit, none the less loved, like my rhododendrons. How many die in every novel that's written - the best, the dearest, while Moggridge lives. It's life's fault.

(p.22)

Such a dismissal expresses the essential tension between Woolf and Bennett: for Bennett, "life" or reality" tied the novel down to the need for authenticity, whereas Woolf seems to escape such a reliance on everyday details. The creation of Moggridge marks a compromise: the narrator accepts that "life" can impose a commercial traveller, so conceding to Bennett's commercial spirit, but treats him with such playfulness that he cannot be regarded seriously as a character. She has hidden him "behind the ferns" (p.21), but even as he emerges, only the barest details are sketched. Again there is an attempt to "skip" external facts, such as the detailed description of Moggridge's buttons. The tone is comic, the criticism implicit; such attention to details is totally inadequate to explore character: "this is primitive, and, whatever it may do the reader, don't take me in" (p.22).

Once again, the narrator turns from a possible problem in her writing to affirm her own exuberance in the very act of creation. She cannot escape including Moggridge, but can refuse to be limited by this necessity:

There must be Moggridge-life's fault. Life imposes her laws; life blocks the way; life's behind the fern; life's the tyrant; oh, but not the bully!

(p.22)

7. Here the narrator can be definitely identified as Woolf.
So "life" becomes her ally, providing the opportunity for fun. When she expresses a desire to "penetrate... the person, the soul, of Moggridge the man" (p.23), the aim is not serious, it is instead carried to the comic extreme of an inner physical description of Moggridge, as "from above meat falls in brown cubes and beer gushes to be churned to blood again" (p.23). Surely this is the stomach rather than the soul! The narrator's position inside Moggridge does allow a fresh view of the imagined scene through his eyes, but the whole episode is too comic to yield a new perspective on Minnie. It seems fitting that Moggridge should leave the sketch with no real penetration of his character; he is engrossed in the time-bound outer world and is seemingly hollow inside, like his boxes. Rather than another character whose relationship with Minnie illuminates her own personality, Moggridge is ultimately a comic figure whose significance lies in the burlesque of Bennett.

Before returning to Minnie, the narrator must pause to collect her thoughts, which have been disturbed by the imposition of Moggridge. Picking up an earlier image which refers to the "sediment" at the depths of the eyes (p.15), her mind is seen as a pool in which the "mud" and "swirl" caused by the intrusion of external details gradually settles:

...by degrees the atoms reassemble, the deposit sifts itself, and again through the eyes one sees clear and still.

(p.24)

The metaphor expresses the organizing function of the mind as it sifts the extraneous impressions to allow a new concentration on Minnie, in harmony with the visual perception given through the eyes. This description of consciousness is very like Woolf's statement of the novelist's task in "Modern Fiction":
The mind receives a myriad impressions ... From all
sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms;
and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of
Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from old... Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this
varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit... with as
little mixture of the alien and the external as possible?8

When seen in relation to this passage, the metaphor of perception gains
in significance. Not only in the terms used, but in the call to concen-
trate on the inner character rather than rely on external details is
"An Unwritten Novel" reminiscent of the critical essay. Here, however,
the treatment is subjective.

Moggridge represents the traditional means of characterization, and
as the narrator rids her mind of him to concentrate on Minnie, she is
figuratively moving towards a different means of characterization which
relies less on external details than the inner vision of a person. The
metaphor of the mind describes the state of limbo between these two modes.
Significantly, as her perception clears, Moggridge is "gone for ever"
(p.24), dead to her imagination. The narrator is dismissing Bennett
to follow Woolf's method of character creation; external references
immediately become irrelevant to the novelist's vision of her character.

Such references to reality change within the sketch. At first
the narrator makes constant reference to the woman opposite, her look,
gestures and conversation. This call for authenticity is obvious
when the woman seems to agree with the narrator's interpretation of her
crime (p.19). However, after the basic delineation of Minnie, she is
less willing to interrupt her creative process to accept such references.
The objective fact of the progress of the rail journey hardly arrests
her imaginative flow:

Here's Minnie eating her egg at the moment opposite and
at t'other end of the line - are we past Lewes? - there
must be Jimmy...

(p.22)

She is unwilling to acknowledge the woman opposite, wanting instead to concentrate on the created character. Three times, twice marked by the same square brackets, she refuses to refer to, or at least to accept any reference to the external person:

[Minne you must promise not to twitch till I've got this straight.] James Moggridge...

(p.22)

[Yes Minnie I know you've twitched, but one moment - James Moggridge.]

(p.23)

A similar reluctance to accept the woman against the imagined Minnie is seen at the end of the sketch. There is a gradual shift in emphasis from a need for authenticity to the validity of the narrator's imaginative creation in itself. This affirmation of the creative process is developed where the distinction between external fact and imagination is unclear, as a fact is taken into the imaginative flow and made valid within this context. So the woman's remark about the cheapness of eggs which had broken the narrator's reverie, is verified as Minnie's: "... who was saying that eggs were cheaper? You or I? Oh, it was you who said it on the way home, you remember" (p.21). However, this integration of the remark is not fully developed, resulting instead in a comic image. Again after the dismissal of Moggridge, the narrator refers a remark to the woman opposite; here, however, the verification comes not from the woman, as she is ultimately not taken into account, but rather is given validity in the imagined context:

Well, Minnie - "I can face it no longer". If she said that - (Let me look at her. She is brushing the eggshell into deep declivities). She said it certainly, leaning against the wall of the bedroom...

(p.24)

The novelist's urge to create, to use a fact as stimulus to the imagination is here affirmed, as some validity is conferred upon her creation by its very nature as the product of her imaginative process; as such, this anticipates the ending of the sketch. More importantly, the
process allows a penetration of the inner character, as external details are cast aside and validity derives solely from the novelist's vision.

This concentration in the inner spirit of Minnie is made immediately apparent with the image of her soul. Minnie's "I can bear it no longer" is not an external remark, but the voice of her spirit: "when the self speaks to the self" (p.24) it is the soul speaking, free of external relations and so revealing the inner reality of the character. This is the deepest level of the self and in contrast to the penetration of Moggridge, the narrator here attempts a serious vision of Minnie's soul. Her true feelings and despair driven inward by her disappointed life, Minnie finds some consolation in material comforts, but while such external details help cover the emptiness of her life, the narrator sees past to a clear vision of her inner feelings and despair.

Picked up from the woman's rubbing the spot on the window pane, the image of her glove allows a more Woolfian interpretation of character. The glove is a symbol of Minnie's disappointed life, the worn thumb of her guilt and humiliation, and her darning becomes an attempt to "close the breach" (p.25), to cover the guilt which has limited her spiritual development. Having mended the glove, Minnie is able to confront her potential self in the looking-glass and has the courage to face Hilda. Like the earlier egg image, the glove functions as a symbol which represents the essence of character without superficial details, but ultimately facts intrude and the vision is lost.

At the same moment as the narrator is certain about Minnie, convinced that "I've read you right - I'm with you now" (p.25), reality interrupts. Just as life imposed Moggridge, so it imposes the progress of the rail journey, and Minnie is destroyed as the woman

9. Perhaps these details are also part of the burlesque of Bennett, as Sophia's old dog, Possette, is one of her great comforts.

10. Hilda had interrupted the narrator's thoughts on p.20, so foreshadowing on the fictional level, the final return to reality.
alights to be met by her son. At first the narrator holds to the imaginary situation, rebuking Minnie for her behaviour, but acceptance of the outer reality brings a tremendous sense of loss. This marks an artistic crisis for the novelist who has failed to capture the inner reality of the moment. The narrator is overwhelmed: she has lost Minnie, Moggridge, even her own identity is in question, and "Life's bare as a bone" (p.26).

Here the critical aspect of "An Unwritten Novel" is evident; if it were purely fiction, the novelist would be justified in using a fact as stimulus to a symbolic vision in no way responsible to the fact which occasioned it. The novelist's vision is self-justifying as discussed above. However, in "An Unwritten Novel", commonplace reality destroys the narrator's vision, as the created Minnie is referred to the actual woman in the carriage: the emphasis is less on the narrator's interpretation of Minnie than the actual processes of perception and character creation, both critical concerns. This is clear as the sketch ends: even in the context of the forced rejection of Minnie's life, the narrator affirms the very process which created her. Reality caused her loss of vision, but provides the stimulus to new imaginative activity. She immerses herself in the abundant impressions of "life" and her mind is again active: "Oh, how it whirls and surges - floats me afresh!" (p.26).  

David Daiches rightly sees the ironic conclusion to "An Unwritten Novel" as pointing to the dangers of a novelist seeing character through her own sensibility,  but this reading should be extended. Woolf is aware of the problem: in fact she is pointing to the unverifiable nature of character and the inadequacy of an omniscient narrator. How is the narrator to know another person without relying on external details to develop her own interpretation? In the process of rendering her vision, she inevitably

11. Again referring to the image of the mind as a pool.
characterizes herself in the way her creative imagination asserts itself beyond such details.

At the end of the sketch the woman's gestures and conversation are seen in a different light, that of excitement or expectation rather than misery. Thus Fox decides that "the narrator has an implicit belief in the hidden despair of people"13 which leads her to project her own sadness onto Minnie; the facts of Minnie's life are proven false, while the narrator is created without such facts through an implicit characterization in the details she chooses for Minnie.

This interpretation not only denies the comic tone of the sketch, but more importantly takes no account of the implicit criticism of Bennett. The true reason for the narrator's readiness to see Minnie's twitch as hiding a past crime lies, surely, in the burlesque of The Old Wives' Tale; similarly Moggridge offers no illumination of Minnie's character, but exists as a burlesque specifically of Scales, and more generally of Bennett's commercial spirit. That the facts of Minnie's life are proven false is ultimately unimportant. The nature of the mark in "The Mark on the Wall" is not significant, the true value being the process of association which it occasions in the mind. So in "An Unwritten Novel" Minnie's significance lies not in the truthfulness of her personality, but in the way the narrator-novelist presents her. It is not the narrator who is characterized, but rather the process of character creation; as this method of characterization implicitly refers to Bennett, the sketch must be placed within the context of a critical essay as well as that of short fiction.

The significance of "An Unwritten Novel" in relation to Woolf's critical debate with Bennett is not sufficiently recognized. In fact the sketch represents a fictional manifestation of the same impulse which

produced "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", the central essay of the debate. Woolf had already outlined her contentions in "Modern Fiction" (1919) against the Edwardian "materialists" who were "concerned not with the spirit but with the body", and called for a new form of novel to capture the essence of life as she saw it. These issues, which were to emerge again in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", give an earlier basis for the concerns expressed in "An Unwritten Novel", written in the interim period (1919-1920). In both structure and ideas "An Unwritten Novel" parallels "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"; several critics have made limited reference to this similarity, but none has given sufficient recognition to the perhaps integral part played by the sketch in the final shaping of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown". To do so, it is necessary to realize that two versions of the critical essay were published, and to see "An Unwritten Novel" in relation to this revision.

"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" was originally published in The Nation and The Athenæum in December 1923. Woolf rewrote the essay to be delivered as a lecture at Girton College, later published as "Character in Fiction" in The Criterion in July 1924; this second version was subsequently reprinted under the original title as the first pamphlet in the Hogarth Essays series. The two versions vary considerably, though both are to some extent an answer to Bennett's criticism of the younger novelists in his article "Is the Novel Decaying?" Here he established character as the basic issue of the critical debate with his statement that "The foundation of good fiction is character-creating and nothing else". More importantly from Woolf's point of view, he criticized Jacob's Room, so provoking her to write "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown".

This first version of the essay is a direct answer to Bennett, as she admits in the diary:

People, like Arnold Bennett, say I can't create, or didn't in J's R, characters that survive. My answer is - but I leave that to the Nation: it's only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now.\textsuperscript{17}

So in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Woolf first agrees with Bennett on the importance of character in fiction, then sets out to show that the Victorian and Edwardian modes of character are no longer adequate, the whole concept of character having changed after Dostoevsky as writers began to explore the inner being in place of external relationships. It is not until the second page of the two-page article that she states the whole problem of character-creating and the consequent need for a new form, while Mrs. Brown makes only a fleeting entrance in the last two paragraphs, and then almost as an afterthought to illustrate the point about a change in character:

For what, after all, is character - the way that Mrs. Brown, for instance, reacts to her surroundings - when we cease to believe what we are told about her, and begin to search out her real meaning for ourselves? In the first place, her features crumble; the house in which she has lived so long (and a very substantial house it was) topples to the ground. She becomes a will-o'-the-wisp, a dancing light...\textsuperscript{18}

From this illustrative figure with no real identity, Mrs. Brown assumes a central role in the second version of the essay, which is a far more polished and concrete discussion of the problems of creating character.

In this second version Woolf again agrees with Bennett about the central importance of character, and her opening assertion that a novelist writes as the result of a character imposing itself on him leads naturally into an account of her own experience. She describes her encounter with "Mrs. Brown" as a concrete example of character imposing itself. The whole situation is very close to that of "An Unwritten

\textsuperscript{17} Diary, II, p.248, 19 June 1923.
\textsuperscript{18} "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," The Nation and the Athenaeum, 1 Dec. 1923, p.343.
Novel" in both the details and the development of the episode. The setting is a railway carriage, where a woman is left alone with the narrator-novelist, here Woolf. Mrs. Brown is physically very similar to Minnie Marsh, being elderly, clean but threadbare and "suffering intensely";¹⁹ like the narrator of "An Unwritten Novel", Woolf is compelled to explore her character:

The impression she made was overwhelming... Myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas crowd into one's head on such occasions; one sees the person, one sees Mrs. Brown, in the centre of all sorts of different scenes.²⁰

The imagined scenes are different to Minnie's, but the process of creation is the same, as the novelist selects details to interpret her character. Mrs. Brown is humiliated, not by her sister-in-law, but by "Mr. Smith", the man with whom she was travelling, and like Minnie she makes her "heroic decision", her defiance of his superiority. The episode is brief and much less developed than the encounter with Minnie, but the effect of the woman opposite on the novelist is the same:

Here is a character imposing itself upon another person. Here is Mrs. Brown making someone begin almost automatically to write a novel about her.²¹

Minnie also made the narrator begin to sketch "an unwritten novel", the only difference being that Woolf here makes an explicit statement of the influence of the character.

Having established her basic situation, Woolf points to the subjectivity of a novelist's interpretation of character and reality, allowing that Mrs. Brown would be portrayed differently by different novelists: Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells. Dismissing Galsworthy and Wells as social reformers who see Mrs. Brown only as a victim of the social system, not as a character in herself, she is free to examine Bennett's method in a more concrete way than in her earlier essay. Significantly, she

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²⁰. ibid., pp.323-324.
²¹. ibid., p.324.
parallels the implicit criticism of his attention to details found in "An Unwritten Novel". In her own interpretation of Mrs. Brown, Woolf is not so concerned with details, and echoes her approach to Minnie:

... but details could wait. The important thing was to realize her character, to steep oneself in her atmosphere.22

The very details she notes as Bennett's are significant in relation to the earlier sketch. He observes that Mrs. Brown "had mended both gloves - indeed the thumb of the left-hand glove had been replaced", but in spite of such meticulous attention to detail, Bennett is no closer to Mrs. Brown. In "An Unwritten Novel" the narrator observes Minnie also mending her glove, but the interpretation is Woolfian, as the glove becomes symbolic of Minnie's inner spirit and her urge to escape the humiliation imposed on her. The detail of the glove is the same, the consequent insight into character poles apart.

Woolf leaves Bennett's interpretation of Mrs. Brown to illustrate her point from his novel, Hilda Lessways. Her analysis is unfair, misquoting and omitting lines to emphasize Bennett's reliance on material details in place of insight into character. However, the basic point that Bennett creates Hilda's house and leaves the reader to guess her character, if not fair in context, is significant. The encounter with Mrs. Brown, as with Minnie Marsh, takes place in a railway carriage, with equal critical importance in both cases: Mrs. Brown's house crumbled in the first version of the essay to show the destruction of the solid social basis of the Victorian and Edwardian novel; in the second version, in line with a changing view of character, this solid fabric gives way to more limited and chance impressions of character, such as are glimpsed in a transient journey. The railway carriage is a direct counter to Bennett's novels; in The Old Wives' Tale and Hilda

22. ibid., p.324. This compares closely with "An Unwritten Novel", p.19 quoted above.
23. ibid., p.328.
Lessways we are made very conscious of houses as physical and commercial surroundings to character. That the narrator sees Minnie or Mrs. Brown in a railway carriage emphasizes a different relationship between the character and society: she is no longer clearly defined by external details, and any insight into her inner nature must be interpreted from the few available impressions of her thoughts and emotions. The implicit criticism of "An Unwritten Novel" is again made explicit in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown".

This second version of the essay is a more polished and integrated work, relying on the central situation of the railway carriage to present Woolf's argument. The ill-temper of the first version is gone, but Woolf answers Bennett's criticism that she "can't create characters" by creating Mrs. Brown as she had Minnie. Admittedly Mrs. Brown is basically created through a few external details, a method not clearly different from Bennett's own. The significant difference is that Woolf is aware of this inadequacy, in fact she is expressing her critical concern precisely by showing the deficiency of such a method of character creation:

The incident has made a great impression on me. But how was I to transmit it to you? All I could do was to report as accurately as I could what was said, to describe in detail what was worn, to say despairingly, that all sorts of scenes rushed into my mind, to proceed to tumble them out pell-mell, and to describe this vivid, this overmastering impression by likening it to a draught or a smell of burning... I let Mrs. Brown slip through my fingers. I have told you nothing whatever about her.24

The method described here is that used in "An Unwritten Novel", but the sketch goes further. At the end of the essay Woolf calls for a new interpretation of character in fiction, one which comes closer to the experience of life by translating the disorder of emotions and thoughts in the mind into literature. "An Unwritten Novel" hinted at this method

24. ibid., pp.331-332.
in the narrator's reverie and Minnie's feelings as she darned her glove, but no corresponding translation of the mind is given in the essay. "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" is primarily concerned with the inadequacy of the traditional means of characterization, while "An Unwritten Novel", being cast in a fictional mode, shows the narrator actually shifting from one method to another, trying new ways to convey her character. Nevertheless, both pieces show the same interest in the problems of character creation and use the same situation to illustrate these problems. Significantly, both end with an affirmation of life: Mrs. Brown is "the spirit we live by, life itself", and the novelist is inevitably drawn towards life in an attempt to convey this spirit in fiction, even after her failure with Minnie.

A close reading of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" thus brings an appreciation of the extent to which it follows "An Unwritten Novel"; the earlier sketch must be considered as a definite influence on the revision of the essay. Guiguet notes that:

In fact, Minnie Marsh in "An Unwritten Novel" is elder sister to Mrs. Brown, and Virginia Woolf undoubtedly bore in mind the sketch - written in 1919-1920, when elaborating the typical figure on whom she based her theory. However, Guiguet's statement needs to be extended. He makes no mention here that two separate versions of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" were published. As the second version uses the basic situation and details of "An Unwritten Novel" and is developed within the same structure, it seems reasonable to conclude that Woolf rethought her earlier argument after returning to the sketch, and so produced the more detailed second version. This lends further validity, other than internal evidence, to the interpretation of "An Unwritten Novel" as a burlesque of Bennett. As the sketch was specifically concerned with Bennett's method of characterization, it was natural to look back to it when writing a critical essay on the same subject.

25. ibid., p.336.
"An Unwritten Novel" is thus placed securely within a critical context, as a product of the same impulse which produced "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown": the sketch is an exploration of the problems of character creation, rather than a developing pattern of actions. Woolf in "An Unwritten Novel" breaks down the distinction between fact and fiction, incorporating the attributes of a critical work within the basic mode of short fiction, just as she later incorporates a fictional episode in the critical essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown". She is experimenting in form, introducing new elements into her short fiction to extend the traditional boundaries of the short story.

The novel, The Pargiters (1931-1933) marks a much later, less successful attempt by Woolf to combine fact and fiction. The "Novel-Essay" represented a new experiment in form, a novel of fact rather than a novel of vision. Like "An Unwritten Novel", The Pargiters is concerned with writing and the process by which a novelist translates life into fiction. Written from a feminist perspective, it examines the profession of a woman writer; each chapter of fiction is followed by an "interchapter", an analysis of how the novelist translates facts into a creative vision, so demonstrating how she is specifically limited by being a woman. Thus the reader is made aware of the real situation behind the fictional presentation through such analysis and interpretation. Partly as a result of its feminist intention, The Pargiters showed a complete evolution in form. Based on an essay delivered to the National Society for Women's Service in January 1931, it was originally conceived of as an essay form; by July 1932, Woolf refers to "a promising novel",27 and the "Essay" on the title-page was changed to "Novel-Essay" by October. However, what had begun so hopefully ended in despair; the "Novel-Essay" was abandoned in February 1933 for a conventional novel form. The chapters were recast and the interchapters dropped, to become

the 1881 section of The Years, the novel often considered as a failure of Woolf's poetic vision. The truth of fact and the truth of fiction had refused to merge, for as Woolf stated in "The New Biography" (1927), "though both truths are genuine, they are antagonistic; let them meet and they destroy each other". Despite this earlier distinction between fact and vision, Woolf still attempted to merge the two in The Pargiters, thus suggesting that her critical certitude was not necessarily observed in her fictional work which instead attempts to break down the distinction between different genres.

In his Introduction, Mitchell Leaska emphasizes the significance of The Pargiters:

The "Novel-Essay" would have been for Virginia Woolf a new and profoundly challenging experiment in form, calling into action both the creative and the analytical faculties almost simultaneously.29 "An Unwritten Novel" represents a similar attempt on a far lesser scale, relying as it does on the exercise of both the creative and analytical faculties. However, the sketch is more successful in merging the two types of truth. In The Pargiters the two functions are largely separate as reinforced by the structure of a chapter of fiction followed by an interchapter. We are less aware of the novelist actually creating her characters than of her analysing their actions and her own choice of details to relate both to a wider social context outside the novel. That the narrator is specifically a novelist is common to both pieces, but in "An Unwritten Novel" this allows an integration of critical and creative functions within the larger context of a novelist's problems in writing. We are conscious of the narrator throughout, both creating and analysing different methods of character creation as part of the same process; the criticism of Bennett is implicit in her own choice of details and consequent insight into character.

"An Unwritten Novel" shows that Woolf was prepared to push convention aside to introduce new elements into the short story form. Rather than a story based on character development, the sketch explores the basic difficulty of knowing another person, and consequently the problem of perception. These concerns were not accommodated by the traditional form of the short story, so Woolf devised a new form. Within the basic focus a fictional mode, "An Unwritten Novel" takes on a critical dimension; this is evident both in the basic situation of a novelist creating Minnie Marsh, which allows an awareness of the problems of writing, and in the obvious parallels to Woolf's critical essays. "Modern Fiction" is echoed in the critical contentions and images of perception, while "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" can be seen as a more explicit statement of the concerns and situation of "An Unwritten Novel".

The sketch shows a potentially radical awareness of the inadequacy of the traditional novelist's attitude, but no positive alternative is given. There are hints of a more Woolfian interpretation of character through symbol and consciousness, but these are not fully integrated before the vision is finally broken and authenticity wins. "An Unwritten Novel" lacks the intense moment of perception found in "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass". Instead it remains essayistic, providing the basic awareness of the problems of character and perception which were to be developed in these more sophisticated later stories. Nevertheless, the sketch is innovative to the extent that it rejects an omniscient narrator and the traditional elements of plot and character development, and instead embraces a variety of genres within the basic mode of short fiction.
CHAPTER FIVE

CAPTURING THE MOMENT: "MOMENTS OF BEING"
"Moments of Being" (1928), like "An Unwritten Novel", follows a consciousness attempting to define another person. However, in place of a writer-narrator, Woolf here centres her exploration in the consciousness of her character, Fanny Wilmot, as she experiences some insight into her music teacher, Julia Craye. "Moments of Being" at first seems to follow a conventional short story form. The situation it describes is more dramatic than usual for Woolf as it is apparently based on a tension between the two characters. As Miss Craye completes her performance of a Bach fugue, Fanny's corsage falls, and Julia's remark that "Slater's pins have no points..." (p.101), the subtitle and original title of the story, provides the stimulus for Fanny to reconstruct Miss Craye's life. While she searches for her pin on the floor, Fanny assimilates a number of impressions into a seemingly complete image of her teacher. However, it is soon obvious that Woolf is describing not Julia's past life, but Fanny's imaginative creation of it, so that the tension exists, not between the two characters, but rather between Julia Craye the person and Fanny's image of her; this tension is resolved in a "moment of being". Like "An Unwritten Novel" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", this sketch describes a consciousness defining another character, but here the characterization of the observer by her thoughts and impressions is more important that the character these impressions describe, or the actual process of perception.

Julia's sympathetic remark shocks Fanny. She is "transfixed" (p.101) by the incongruity of such a knowledge of the everyday reality of pins against her image of Miss Craye, and the fugue she has just performed. She questions the idea of Miss Craye's actually going to buy pins, so that the phrase "Slater's pins have no points" becomes the theme of Fanny's own reverie, and the organizing principle of the story. The form of

1. The flower is described as a rose on page 101, then a carnation on pages 103, 107. This inconsistency appears to have escaped notice in both publications of the sketch.
the story carries on from where the fugue finished; the external remark is taken into Fanny's consciousness, organizing and developing her scattered impressions into an image of Miss Craye which only finds resolution with reality in a communication of feeling between the two characters at the final restatement of the theme. The seeming incongruity of the remark becomes a revelation of reality in this moment of being.

It is Fanny's consciousness which defines Julia. In the few moments before she finds her pin, Fanny creates an image of Miss Craye which is based on a variety of impressions: remembered remarks and gestures, Miss Kingston's observations of Julia, and Fanny's own suppositions. She sees Miss Craye as being separated from life by a "pane of glass" (p.102). Julia seems "cased" (p.101) like her brother's archaeological treasures, existing in "the cool glassy world of Bach fugues" (p.101) which embodies a permanence not found in everyday reality. For Fanny, Julia cannot participate in the present moment but instead relies on the permanent values of past beauty to define her life.

Fanny's mind works in images, unable to keep to the facts of Miss Craye's life which she has learnt from Miss Kingston's character sketch: namely that the Crayes lived in a world of ancient treasures, none of them married, and Julia "was left badly off... at her brother's death" (p.101). Remembering these details, Fanny's mind moves further into its own reverie, which picks up Julia's remark and attempts to justify it as perhaps said "at a venture" (p.102) without due thought, said less as a true expression of Miss Craye's knowledge of Slater's pins than as an attempt to break her isolation behind the pane of glass. Miss Kingston's account of her stay with the Crayes is expanded by Fanny into a tableau contrasting the little girl's liveliness with Julius's, and similarly Julia's separateness, as defined by their look which seems to say,
"Stars, sun, moon, ... the daisy in the grass, fires, frost on the window pane, my heart goes out to you. But, "it always seemed to add, "you break, you pass, you go." And simultaneously it covered the intensity of both these states of mind with "I can't reach you - I can't get at you" ...

Miss Kingston seemed to hint at some "oddness" in Julius and hence Julia, which is emphasized in Fanny's mind by Miss Kingston's contrasting practical nature. Fanny sees that Julia and Julius want to possess life and beauty in all its evanescence and transience, but are too immersed in the static world of "Roman glasses" (p.102) and music which stabilize and give meaning to their lives. Miss Craye's experiences are enclosed by a glassy surface so that they too appear as a collection of permanent treasures: a visit to Hampton Court to see the crocuses "was something that lasted... forever" (p.107), her memories of Kensington Gardens, "'Much the nicest part of London... fifteen or twenty years ago'" (p.105), the views of birds for which "she felt nothing less than passion" (p.106), all are presented as attempts to confer on everyday life the intensity and permanence of art. While Julia supposedly adores beauty, "would give the whole world to possess it" (p.103), such memories are distanced from human experience, just as Julia seems distanced from life at the moment of her remark. Picking up the fallen carnation and crushing it, so Fanny feels, in her urge to experience beauty, Miss Craye sets off the flower's freshness and life by this very inability: she cannot "possess it, enjoy it, not entirely and altogether" (p.104). Self-contained in her world of music, Julia cannot respond to natural beauty.

Fanny's mind continually returns to the fact that "None of the Crayes had ever married" (p.102), interpreting this as further evidence of Miss Craye's living in a world separate from others. Family circumstances have left her alone, and the reason for her not marrying is a
central question in Fanny's reverie, coloured by her own expectations for the future. She wonders if perhaps the answer lies in Julia's remark that "it's the use of men, surely, to protect us" (p.104), said with some bitterness; but Fanny's mind moves on according to chance association, to develop Miss Craye's reference to Kensington Gardens in the past with what she now sees as the "problem" (p.104) of her not marrying. Having imagined "every sort of scene in her youth" (p.104), Fanny launches into a further romantic projection of Julia's past life on the basis of her description of Kensington Gardens. She constructs a love scene on the Serpentine, ending not in fulfilment but disillusionment and Julia's feeling "I can't have it, I can't possess it" (p.105).

Woolf carefully suggests that the scene is created entirely by Fanny. Recalling Miss Craye's remark about Kensington Gardens which implies none of the romantic circumstances Fanny assumes, she thinks, "One could make that yield what one liked" (p.105), and her mind picks up chance remarks to synthesize them into her own creation of Julia's life. The end of the love scene is marked by a similar indication:

The setting of that scene could be carried as one chose,... (Where had that pin fallen?)... The scene could be changed; and the young man and the exact manner of it all...

(pp.105-106)

The pin is now incidental to the creative faculty of Fanny's consciousness. Julia's repeated frustration of "I can't possess it" is similarly defined by Fanny, with the suggestion that Julia is also unable to give of herself. This frustration is later seen as relief, for Julia has not sacrificed her own pleasures. Again referring to Miss Craye's remark that men are "ogres" (p.106), Fanny is sure that she has now discovered the answer to her problem: Miss Craye did not want to endanger her habits by a greater participation in everyday life, against which she protects herself with the excuse of "those terrible headaches" (p.106).
Fanny sees her as protected from and even anxious about participating in the present moment. However, it must be remembered that this is Fanny's impression of Julia.

Her reverie is broken as she finds the pin. Certain that her conception of Miss Craye is complete, she measures this subjective image against the real person:

Was Miss Craye so lonely? No, Miss Craye was steadily, blissfully, if only for the moment, a happy woman. Fanny had surprised her in a moment of ecstasy.

(p.106)

Julia is experiencing a moment of heightened consciousness. Such intensity of feeling does not verify Fanny's projection of Miss Craye's sad, lonely life devoted to music; instead, the movement of her consciousness from its internal reverie to an external perception of Miss Craye causes a reorganization of Fanny's impressions and hence a new conception of her teacher. The circumstances which led Fanny to assume a lonely, disappointed life for Miss Craye are now seen in a different perspective, as indicative of her independence. Despite the limited nature of her life, Miss Craye has succeeded through willpower in maintaining her independence, allowing her some fulfilment:

...cleaving her way ever more definitely as her will stiffened towards her solitary goal... obstinately adhering, whatever people might say, in choosing her pleasures for herself.

(p.108)

Fanny has ignored the possibility of Miss Craye's independence despite the fact that it is implicit in her own reverie: Miss Craye has not "endangered her habits" (p.106) through marrying, she "has not sacrificed her independence" (p.106); she does not ask pity."for always doing everything alone" (p.107); such willing independence is hinted at even in the imagined love scene by her not wanting to depend on someone, even to row across the Serpentine. Julia has not acknowledged the aspirations,
of marrying, of participating in life, which Fanny ascribed to her; the pathos Fanny feels now emerges in a different light as strength of character and fulfilment within limited circumstances.²

In creating a life for Julia, Fanny has in fact characterized herself. She consistently sees Miss Craye as attempting "to break the pane of glass which separated them from other people" (p.102), but the complexity of this image allows Woolf a subtlety of implication.³ Fanny sees that there are two sides to the pane of glass, Miss Craye being separated by it from everyday reality; she fails, however, to realize that glass is also a reflecting surface. By immersing herself in her own impressions, Fanny perceives not the "glassy surface" (p.102) of Miss Craye, but primarily a reflection of her own mind, a conception separated from the real person. As her reverie progresses, it is Fanny who separates herself from reality behind the pane of glass, and the ambiguity of this central image becomes apparent to the reader. The way in which Fanny perceives Miss Craye is in fact the most truthful expression of herself. When her reverie is broken by finding the pin, Fanny sees Julia in front of "the sharp square of the window" (p.107), placed exactly as Julius's vase was in her tableau, so crystallizing Fanny's

2. Guiguet (Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p.333) points to this reorganization of impressions, but unfortunately does not extend or qualify his interpretation with further analysis.


Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it. The pane of glass functions similarly in this story, as an image of the filtering of experience through the past and future, and an indication of changing perspective. Fanny's view of Julia's past life, and hence of her moment of being, is disturbed by her own expectations for the future, while the experience of the moment is perhaps a significant basis for her future in its revelation of feeling.
relationship to Julia as to a treasure, separated from everyday life by
the young girl's admiration. However, in attempting to understand
Miss Craye's moment of being, Fanny begins to see through the surface
she herself has created:

All seemed transparent, for a moment, to the gaze of Fanny
Wilmot, as if looking through Miss Craye, she saw the very
fountain of her being spurting its pure silver drops.
(p.108)

The word "seemed" allows some ambiguity, as it had earlier defined Fanny's
impressions, but she has now broken the pane of glass which separated
her from reality. No longer a reflecting surface, the transparent
glass aids her clearer sight and perception.

Like those of the narrator in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass",
Fanny's subjective impressions give way to an objective vision as,

She saw Julia --

Julia blazed. Julia kindled. Out of the night
she burnt like a dead white star. Julia opened her
arms. Julia kissed her on the lips. Julia possessed
it.
(p.108)

Julia's moment of being is described in Fanny's terms, as in direct
contrast to the imagined love scene, Miss Craye here possesses "life"
in a moment of human sympathy. Instead of the stars fading to mark
the frustration of her attempts (p.102), Julia herself is now seen
blazing as a "dead white star", but here lies the essential ambiguity
of the moment, as defined by Fanny's consciousness. On the one
hand, the image describes Julia's intense emotion, as she experiences
the wholeness of the moment, passing beyond the pane of glass to be
united with the night which "seemed in its bareness and intensity,
the effluence of her spirit" (p.107-108). On the other, if "dead"
refers directly to "star" the meaning of Julia's moment is not an

4. She is closer to Fanny, who now sees her as "Julia" rather than
Miss Craye.
5. James Hafley defines the ambiguities of "Moments of Being" in his
searching study, "On One of Virginia Woolf's Short Stories,"
Modern Fiction Studies, 2 (Feb. 1956), 13-16.
intense realization of life in the broadest sense, but rather the loss of her own life. Miss Craye existed in a world separated from the real one, and in embracing everyday reality, she has lost the special quality which defined her for Fanny. This is not to say that Julia's experience of the moment of being involves personal loss; the sketch is seen through Fanny's consciousness, so that no understanding of Julia's experience is gained. Her moment is real, but as we do not know what occasioned it, it remains undefined. Fanny's moment is separate, marked by the synthesis of her fragmented impressions into a whole, which is not undercut by the ambiguous reaction to this new perception of Miss Craye. The final communication between Fanny and Miss Craye is based not on understanding, but on intuitive feeling. This is the essence of a moment of being. Defined by Julia's repeating her remark that "Slater's pins have no points" (p.108), the moment of being resolves both tensions, between Julia Craye and Fanny's image of her, and between the ambiguity of Fanny's final perception of Miss Craye, through the sharing of emotion. If there were no paradox or double view, this emotional experience of time defined as a "moment of being" would not be possible.  

Woolf's vision in her novels and short fiction is based on the primary unit of the "moment". For her, the moment of being marked an experience of reality when fragmented impressions, experiences and images for one moment became round and whole in the consciousness, revealing a significance not normally experienced in life. Woolf is endeavouring
to catch and enclose certain moments which break from the mass, in which without bidding things come together in a combination of inexplicable significance to arrest those thoughts which suddenly, to the thinker at least, are

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6. Hafley makes this point, but sees Fanny's moment as based on false truth and self-deception. Surely she experiences the moment of being through the very discovery of her false conception.
almost menacing with meaning. Such moments of vision are of an unaccountable nature; leave them alone and they persist for years; try to explain them and they disappear; write them down and they die beneath the pen. It is important to note that the moment of being is an experience of wholeness, but does not necessarily bring immediate understanding; though Fanny and Miss Craye do not understand the nature of each other's moment, they communicate through their shared emotional experience and the moment is defined essentially in this way. Woolf's essay "The Moment: Summer's Night" describes the experience thus:

... the moment becomes harder, is intensified, diminished, begins to be stained by some personal juice; with the desire to be loved, to be held close to another shape; to put off the veil of darkness and see burning eyes, but this light is extinguished by everyday reality. The images used here are very similar to those describing Julia's moment of being; the essay further defines the visual and sensory impressions which make up a moment, and the resulting unity between the personality and its surroundings, a unity experienced by Julia. Julia's moment of being is undeniably real; the fact that it is undefined does not detract from its significance.

In her letters to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf referred to "Moments of Being" as "my little Sapphist story". There is little evidence in the sketch for such an interpretation. Julia's remark that "it's the use of men, surely, to protect us" (p.104) does hint at her having none but utilitarian feelings towards men, but when, immediately after, "Fanny positively blushed under the admiration in her eyes" (p.104), the reference is simply to Julia's admiration for Fanny's independent attitude at not wanting protection. The only other possible hint of

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9. Letters, II, p.431, also p.397. The story is here referred to under its original title, "Slater's Pins have no Points".
"Sapphism" is in Julia's opening her arms and kissing Fanny, but this marks an attempt to share her emotional experience of the moment of being with another person. Perhaps "feminist" would be a more accurate word to describe the story, if the emphasis is seen as being on Julia's independence. It is probably significant that Woolf made such references in her letters to Vita. In her diary, a more accurate portrayal of Woolf's mind than her letters which were intended primarily to amuse and flatter the recipient, she refers to

a book of characters; the whole string being pulled out from some simple sentence, like Clara Pater's "Don't you find that Barker's pins have no points on them?"10

Here the emphasis is placed on character, portrayed through a significant scene, and this seems a far more satisfactory interpretation for the sketch's central concern is surely the analysis of the moment of being and its significance as an experience of the consciousness. "Moments of Being" shows an attempt to capture a state of mind, the quality of feeling which defines a living moment. The form of the sketch expresses the unity of this experience, as the repetition of Julia's remark represents both the stimulus to Fanny's reverie and its resolution in a moment of being. Thus the refrain contains the moment and lends unity of impression to the sketch. Whereas Woolf's novels describe an intersecting pattern of moments to provide form and meaning in the work, this short work ends once the moment is achieved. One criticism of the short fiction derives from this difference, maintaining that the resonances of a momentary revelation are not developed.11 In the novels, such moments are an intimation of the meaning of life. However, while the short fiction is less visionary, Woolf is here exploring personality and consciousness for their own sake, not as a means to an

11. As Beja discusses in Epiphany in the Modern Novel, pp. 132-133. Jacob's Room fails as a novel because it lacks the necessary integration of fragmentary moments into a unified vision.
end; rather than an explanation of a character, the momentary revelation is enough. Seen in this way, "Moments of Being" is a highly accomplished piece of prose which defines personality through the interplay of images in a perceiving consciousness. The central image of the pane of glass, through its very ambiguity, allows a range of insights into Fanny's perception of Julia Craye. Woolf shows that ambiguity is a necessary condition for the moment of being, and a fact of life, as even "Slater's pins have no points".  

The form of the sketch captures the experience of a moment in the consciousness. "Moments of Being" is a fictional development of the form of "An Unwritten Novel"; in both sketches Woolf explores a consciousness attempting to define another character, so exposing itself in the process. Whereas in "An Unwritten Novel" the guiding consciousness is that of a writer so that the very process of creation is explored, in "Moments of Being" the narrator becomes a character. Julia's life is seen totally through Fanny's impressions, allowing insights into her own character. Such indirect revelation of character cannot be developed in the conventional short story which relies on action rather than the subtle fluctuations of subjective impressions. Woolf's interest in personality and perception is further explored in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" where character is defined not by the creative workings of the mind but by the basic process of perception. "Moments of Being" is the intermediate, fictional form between the critical, essayistic style of "An Unwritten Novel" and the complete subjectivity of "The Lady in the Looking-Glass". All explore the difficulty of knowing another person when limited to one's own perceptions and impressions, through the translation of consciousness.

12. As Hafley notes, p.16.
CHAPTER SIX

PERSONALITY AND PERCEPTION:
"THE LADY IN THE LOOKING-GLASS"
In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" (1929), Woolf's formal experimentation achieves its greatest sophistication. While extending the interest in character perception begun in "An Unwritten Novel", this sketch does not rely on a defined narrator to provide formal unity; nor does it base its character development on a sequential human action and interaction with other characters. All provisional leanings towards narrative development are abandoned. Instead, Woolf defines her character through an analogy to the process of perception, subjective impressions being gradually organized into a final objective vision.

Such an interest in mental processes for their own sake rather than in relation to a primary concern with the revelation of a character from within the consciousness, as seen in many of Woolf's novels, is specifically limited to the short fiction, and here emphasized by the subtitle, "A Reflection".

The mind's movement was earlier explored in "The Mark on the Wall", but in this later sketch the technique is further refined and subtly unified with an interest in character. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" traces the flow of impressions and perceptions which filter through the narrator's mind as she waits for her friend, Isabella Tyson. This mental flux provides a subtle, easy approach to the character of Isabella, as the narrator attempts an imaginative grasp of her true nature, her "profounder state of being" (p.90). Some knowledge of Isabella is gained when she is finally "caught", but in place of a clearly defined character sketch, Woolf emphasizes the basic difficulty of knowing another person. While it focuses on Isabella's character, this is an exploration of personality in the wider sense.


2. Jacob's Room, for example, explores a variety of outer viewpoints to define the central character.
Throughout the sketch Woolf works against the definite form of a conventional "well-made" short story. She questions not only the nature of character, but the basis of a narrative framework. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" opens with an objective statement, that "People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms" (p.86), then moves directly into the narrator's impressions of the central image of the looking-glass. The narrative voice is unusually perceptive but has no definite form or personality: it exists rather as a cipher, an impersonal filter to convey the flow of impressions. This is emphasized by the sustained use of the indefinite pronoun "one", and the constantly shifting tone of the narrative voice. These tonal shifts convey not only the flux of impressions where "nothing stayed the same for two seconds together" (p.87), but more importantly, the varying distance between the narrator's attempts to empathize with Isabella, which assume a more personal tone, and the final objective reality of Isabella's character which is achieved with distancing.

Lacking a traditional narrative basis, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" also defies provisional narrative constructions, as evident by the very difficulty of describing the content of the sketch. To the extent that is concerned with character, this is not in terms of human action, but in terms of "inner being". This deeper reality below the surface facts of Isabella's life cannot be reduced to a developing action. Instead, the exploration of her personality is attempted through an imaginative grasp of her inner-most feelings. The narrator attempts to empathize, with the conscious aim of penetrating Isabella's character:

3. It is obviously a feminine voice in Woolf's terms, as it attempts perception intuitively rather than by the masculine dependence on fact.
Isabella did not wish to be known - but she should no longer escape. It was absurd, it was monstrous. If she concealed so much and knew so much one must prise her open with the first tool that came to hand - the imagination. One must fix one's mind upon her at that very moment. One must fasten her down there.

(p.89)

However, in using the imagination to search for the true self below her daily appearance, the narrative mind continually flies off in a different direction according to the impressions of the moment and the nuances of the mind's associations.

It is this movement of the mind which gives form to "The Lady in the Looking-Glass". Each flow of reflections follows a repeated movement from objective fact to subjective impressions and projections, in the narrator's attempt to empathize. This is evident from the opening paragraph of the sketch; the image in the looking-glass is objective, but its range is limited:

From the depths of the sofa in the drawing-room one could see reflected in the Italian glass not only the marble-topped table opposite, but a stretch of the garden beyond. One could see a long grass path leading between banks of tall flowers until, slicing off at an angle, the gold rim cut it off.

(p.86)

Once the limit of the gold frame has been reached, this objective description gives way to the more shadowy impressions of the room which are readily absorbed by the narrative consciousness; the mind is not content to confine itself to facts, as facts by themselves offer no deeper insight into Isabella.

Woolf does not report Isabella's consciousness directly; instead there is an attempt to infer her inner life from its outward manifestations. Her room is full of lights and shadows; these are imbued with life by the narrator's fancy to become exotic creatures which reflect the mystery of Isabella's life. Only vaguely realized itself, the room becomes increasingly subjective as it takes on a personality: "the room
had its passions and rages and envies and sorrows coming over it and clouding it, like a human being" (p.86). In her diary, Woolf wrote "such is my brain to me; lighted rooms", and Isabella's room is similarly identified with her mind, the source of her inner being. Its state of flux is characteristic also of the flow of impressions in the mind. The introduction of the looking-glass image brings this subjective identification to a temporary halt, providing the only fixity outside the room: "It was a strange contrast - all changing here, all stillness there" (p.87). However, Isabella still eludes placing; she has gone into the garden and "vanishes, sliced off by the gilt rim of the looking-glass" (p.87). She is outside this objective range and any attempt to understand her at this stage must rely on a subjective flow of impressions. This very subjectivity is emphasized by the indefinite quality of the description:

She had gone presumably into the lower garden to pick flowers; or as it seemed more natural to suppose, to pick something light and fantastic and leafy and trailing...

(p.87; my emphasis)

Once again she is identified with her environment, now with the "tremulous convolvulus" (p.87); again the image captures the air of mystery which surrounds her, as the convolvulus' growth comes "between one's eyes and the truth" (p.87). The realization that "There must be truth; there must be a wall" (p.87) below such fanciful images, points to the inadequacy of a purely subjective attempt at knowing a person.

As an alternative, the narrative mind attempts a more objective understanding of Isabella by considering the social facts of her life: she is a spinster, rich, and has a personal collection of exotic objects. However, there is no real development from the identification of Isabella with her room. Once again there is a subjective association of her belongings, particularly the drawers full of letters, with her inner self.

The letters are supposed to reflect a full and intense emotional life, as is her conversation, but "the things she talked about at dinner" (p.90) are the social fabric of her life and do not necessarily reflect her true feelings:

... one was tired of the things that she talked about at dinner. It was her profounder state of being that one wanted to catch and turn to words, the state that is to the mind what breathing is to the body, what one calls happiness or unhappiness.

(p.90)

From the outer facts of her life it seems obvious that Isabella is happy, but her face is repeatedly pictured as veiled by clouds "making the expression of her eyes doubtful" (p.90). Even her expression is impenetrable, allowing no measure of the validity of such assumptions.

Thus the sketch traces the narrator's building up of a series of reflections, each one an attempt to empathize with Isabella. As in "An Unwritten Novel", these trains of thought go some way towards a provisional plot construction, but such leanings towards traditional narrative expectations are continually thwarted. As soon as the narrator moves closer to Isabella, the imaginative attempt to penetrate her is shattered. Chapman sees this repeated breaking down of any progress towards knowledge of Isabella as the limitation of the reflecting mind which cannot stay with facts; it runs on (in the manner Virginia Woolf characterized as typically "feminine"), to associate, conjecture, surmise, and fill in for itself the missing pieces. It is as though the feminine mind cannot bear too much reality.5

To some extent, the false assumptions made about Isabella are due to the narrative mind shifting to its own reverie which does not necessarily have any validity in relation to Isabella's true self, nor any power to provide insight. The mind's wanderings on the basis of simple word association, from a serious consideration of character to trivial details, can become extreme:

One must put oneself in her shoes. If one took the phrase literally, it was easy to see the shoes in which she stood... They were very narrow and long and fashionable...

(pp. 89-90)

At the same time, a supposedly fact-based attempt can prove equally inadequate in revealing her emotional life:

For it was another fact - if facts were what one wanted - that Isabella had had many friends; and thus if one had the audacity to open a drawer and read her letters, one would find the traces of many agitations, of upbraidings for not having met, long letters of intimacy and affection...

(p. 88)

In spite of the factual presentation of Isabella's having had many friends, and the logical conclusion of what her letters "would contain", this is later revealed as the romantic projection of the narrator. The letters themselves are assumed, rather than actual: "In each of these cabinets were many little drawers, and each almost certainly held letters..." (p. 88). Facts by themselves reveal nothing about Isabella and any attempt to go beyond the observable reality of her life through narrative empathy has no validity in relation to her "inner being".

As in "An Unwritten Novel", and more obviously in Woolf's criticism of Bennett in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", the external fact is shown to be an unsatisfactory basis for character development. In "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", this problem is related to the wider questions of perception and the ultimately unverifiable nature of character.

Both fact-based and intuition-based ways of knowing having failed, Woolf uses a subtle analogy to the process of perception to reveal Isabella. Throughout the sketch there is a complex and masterly patterning of images; it is through the correlation and paralleling of such images that the wealth of impressions is ordered and organized into a significant vision of Isabella. From the opening, there has been a clear distinction between the subjective, imaginative impressions of life, the naked sense data as filtered through the narrative conscious-
ness, and the objective image of life in the looking-glass. Perception involves the constant ordering of such a flux of subjective impressions into an objective vision which can be assimilated by the mind as verifiable knowledge.

The image of the looking-glass performs such a function in the sketch, imposing order on the changing impressions of crude experience. This assimilation of sense data into a significant pattern is first described with the delivery of Isabella's letters. The narrator's reflections about Isabella are abruptly disturbed and the vision altered by the intrusion of these "tablets veined with pink and grey" (p.88). However, "some logical process" (p.88) in the mind gradually orders this basic impression to allow its assimilation into "the fold of common experience" (p.88), with the recognition "that they were merely letters" (p.89). The looking-glass describes a parallel process of ordering. At first "crude and unabsorbed", the tablets "were drawn in and arranged and composed and made part of the picture", and so "invested with a new reality and significance" (p.89). The process of perception in the mind is exactly the same as the ordering process in the looking-glass: both involve a focusing of new subjective impressions into a significant pattern which is verifiable to both the eye and the mind as the objective fact of the letters. Letters are continually identified with Isabella's inner life, and they do provide a key to the interpretation of her character, not through the subjective reverie which they again occasion, but through a parallel perception of Isabella in the looking-glass.

A flow of reflections precedes this moment of insight, in contrast to, and so heightening, the ordering process in the mind which results in clear perception. The narrator is again trying to penetrate Isabella's thoughts as she gathers flowers in the garden; she is seen as immensely
sympathetic to all life, "filled with tenderness and regret" (p.90) at the evanescence of life as she cuts a branch. Once more this is the imaginative projection of the narrator as Isabella's true thoughts remain veiled:

... she was one of those reticent people whose minds hold their thoughts enmeshed in clouds of silence - she was filled with thoughts. Her mind was like her room, in which lights advanced and retreated...

(p.91)

The identification of the room with her mind is complete, as she remains "full of locked drawers" (p.91); despite the image of light, there is no true perception of Isabella until she is captured in the reflected image of the looking-glass.

Isabella approaches the house, interrupting the narrator's thoughts as she appears in the glass. Perception involves a continual organization of impressions, and Isabella is similarly defined as she gradually moves from the vaguely realized garden into the clearer image of the hall which the glass describes. The narrative mind recognizes by degrees the various aspects of her appearance which define her outer self as they move in and modify the reflected image:

She came so gradually that she did not seem to derange the pattern in the glass, but only to bring in some new element which gently moved and altered the other objects as if asking them, courteously, to make room for her... the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her; that seemed like some acid to bite off the unessential and superficial and to leave only the truth. It was an enthralling spectacle. Everything dropped from her - clouds, dress, basket, diamond - all that one had called the creeper and the convolvulus. Here was the hard wall beneath. Here was the woman herself. She stood naked in the pitiless light. And there was nothing. Isabella was perfectly empty. She had no thoughts. She had no friends. She cared for nobody. As for her letters, they were all bills.

(p.92)

Here the mind moves from subjective impressions to an objective vision, marked by short, crisp phrases; previous attempts to penetrate Isabella...
have been based on subjective conjectures, but separated from the shadowy impressions of the room, the actual person is seen in the clear light of the looking-glass. As Isabella's outer form moves into the reflected image, it modifies the other elements and completes the picture. Such a clear perception of the outer self is combined with an imaginative grasp of her inner feelings. The significant pattern in the glass conveys a new reality, allowing a direct apprehension of Isabella's nature through the complementary workings of the intellect and the imagination. The "mask-like indifference of her face" (p.88) does not conceal a full emotional life, as the narrator had speculated, but rather reflects her inner emptiness; her letters are merely bills which she does not bother to open. The looking-glass is an organizing principle, a metaphor for the process of perception where impressions are ordered by the eye, allowing the mind to assimilate such impressions as knowledge.

However, this moment of insight rests on a basic ambiguity. Despite the careful revelation of Isabella in terms of perception, the final image is a reflection. The looking-glass does provide an objective vision, but as earlier stressed, it is limited; the reflected images are ordered, but lack the vital quality of life: "in the looking-glass things had ceased to breathe and lay still in the trance of immortality" (p.87).

6. Guiguet, Virginia Woolf and Her Works, p.335, rightly emphasizes that the looking-glass "captures the essence of reality and reveals it". However, he places undue importance on light as revealing Isabella, giving no recognition of the more innovative technique at work in the analogy to perception.

7. Woolf refers to a similar momentary insight in a letter to Ethel Smyth, Letters, V, p.70:

you cant think what a shock of emotion it gives me - seeing people among their things - I've lots of such scenes in my head; the whole of life presented - the other persons life - for 10 seconds; and then it goes...

(18 & 19 June 1932.)

8. The subtitle "A Reflection" can be seen to support this emphasis.
It follows that the reflected image of Isabella is not necessarily verifiable reality. Every attempt to project her feelings having been thwarted, the insight is based on external patterning; her mind is never penetrated. However, the final objective vision in the glass is combined with an imaginative grasp of her inner self; the resultant understanding of Isabella is as true as perception allows. Significantly, the opening statement of the sketch points to the looking-glass as a means to interpret reality:

People should not leave looking-glasses hanging in their rooms any more than they should leave open cheque books or letters confessing some hideous crime.

(p.86)

Echoed at the close of the sketch, the statement forms a significant frame, suggesting that the perception it contains of Isabella is true. The fact that a parallel image of patterning in the glass is applied to the narrator's recognition of the letters also implies that this way of knowing is valid, in fact is exactly analogous to perception. Richter explains such an interpretation:

Since the mind-eye is a camera lens in which the image is reflected, the picture in the mind (the way we know the object) is the reality, rather than the object itself.

It seems correct to accept that the reflected vision is true. Nevertheless, this sketch ends with an implicit ambiguity not found in earlier writers of short fiction.

"The Lady in the Looking-Glass" does not supply a set of answers in a definite ending as expected in the short story form at the time. In fact Woolf rejects all conventions of the short story, as far as narrative structure is concerned. In place of character development and action, she provides a clear sense of the mind's workings, largely

9. Significantly, in "The Mark on the Wall", Woolf also suggests that the looking-glass reveals not the outer person but the inner being by its reflections:

Supposing the looking-glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people... (p.43).

for their own sake. However, there is no direct translation of Isabella's mind. Rather than an attempt to convey psychological insight into a character as was the primary concern of Joyce or Mansfield, or of her own "Mrs Dalloway" stories, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" is an attempt to explore the limited nature of personality through a series of related images and perceptions; character is described not through narrative, but in terms of the mental processes which define another person. Woolf is also questioning the basis of character development and analysis in fiction by her contention that external facts are inadequate to define Isabella's inner feelings and thoughts. She points to the ultimately unverifiable nature of character, as of perception, through the irreconcilable ambiguity that the final reality of Isabella is a reflection. "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" can therefore be seen as Woolf's most innovative and sophisticated short work. It unifies an interest in perception with the problem of defining a character; both are achieved through the skilful patterning of impressions into meaningful images within a fictional framework. No narrative explanation is necessary as all attention is focused on the processes at work in the mind. The sketch therefore achieves a unity of content and form completely outside the conventions of the orthodox short story.

"Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" follow on from "An Unwritten Novel" in their exploration of personality through the interplay of images in a perceiving consciousness. In each case there is an imaginative attempt to gain insight into another person through empathy, projection from external details and remarks, and personal reflections. These sketches explore a continuing concern with the problem of knowing another person, as the character created by the narrative mind is referred to reality which provides a contrasting revelation, so causing
a rearrangement of impressions. Such insight develops with each sketch: "An Unwritten Novel" closes with a simple revelation of the woman's circumstances; in "Moments of Being" there is some understanding of Julia's emotional experience of the moment; while in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" the reflected image seems to capture the essence of Isabella's life. Nevertheless, any insight into character is intuitive or ambiguous as the narrator never penetrates the consciousness of the woman she describes. The constant use of glass and reflective images emphasize the limitation of reflections as a means to perceive character. Such a concern with the unverifiable nature of character, as of reality itself, is given its fullest expression in Jacob's Room, as Jacob is never penetrated but instead created from other's impressions of him.

"An Unwritten Novel" is often seen by critics as the experimental basis for Jacob's Room in both its concern with the problem of knowing another person and its lack of a plot-based structure. However, to see "An Unwritten Novel" as simply an experiment for the novel is too limiting an interpretation. Woolf's awareness of the problems of personality and perception is in fact given its fullest expression in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", where a character is defined in terms of the spatial relationship of images. The form of short fiction, with its limitation to a single incident, offered her the means to explore such concerns with an intensity and precision impossible in the longer form. Jacob's Room fails to achieve the unity necessary to the novel partly as a result of its problematic presentation of character, whereas in short fiction Woolf found the ideal mode to present such critical insights. As in each of these sketches chronological time, marked by a train journey or the repetition of a phrase, contrasts with the inner freedom of the "pure" time of consciousness, so the basic form of short
fiction allowed Woolf the freedom to explore new areas within this framework. In these three sketches she extends the fictional boundaries of the short story to include critical concerns, an exploration of consciousness and a direct expression of the process of visual perception. Rather than revealing character, she explores the fundamental condition of character, of the self which is limited by its own perceptions and impressions. Such an awareness demanded the rejection of conventions in an innovative development of form.
CHAPTER SEVEN

SURROUNDING THE NOVEL:

THE "MRS DALLOWAY" STORIES
A party is the focus of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), connecting the various strands in the novel and allowing Clarissa a momentary insight which enables her to reconcile life with death. However, Woolf's concern with the party as a microcosm of social relationships and with individual responses to the party situation continued beyond the novel to a sequence of short stories. Here the Dalloways fulfil the secondary role of hosts as the stories focus on their party as it is experienced by other characters, revealing through their brief encounters insights into their own lives.

The "Mrs Dalloway" stories form a distinctive group which is related more closely to the development of Woolf's novels than her short fiction; hence it is appropriate to consider them separately here. They surround the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, not only in that they were written in this period, but also in their concern with the Dalloways and their party. More importantly, these stories relate directly to the form of the novel which Woolf was developing in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. Unlike her other short fiction to this point, the "Mrs Dalloway" stories take the form of character revelation from within the individual consciousness. The character's experience of life is revealed directly through a concentration on his or her inner thoughts and emotions, so allowing significant insights for both character and reader. To this extent the "Mrs Dalloway" stories are more conventional than the earlier sketches or the experimental "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" which followed.

*Mrs Dalloway's Party*, edited by Stella McNichol, collects the seven complete stories related to *Mrs Dalloway* in one volume. "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street", published in *The Dial* in 1923, was originally conceived as the first chapter of *Mrs Dalloway* and so precedes the novel;

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1. Woolf's preoccupation with the Dalloway's began with *The Voyage Out*, while her exploration of the party extends beyond *Mrs Dalloway* to the dinner party in *To the Lighthouse*.
the other six stories, four of which appeared in *A Haunted House*, were written together after Woolf completed the novel. In fact these stories provided Woolf with the opportunity to extend her exploration of the party, begun in the novel, to a variety of viewpoints.

"Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" relates directly to the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Although it was rejected as the first chapter of the novel, Woolf must have been sufficiently satisfied with its independent merit to publish the short story separately, after she had revised it and the second chapter, "The Prime Minister" for the novel. Guiguet refers to "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" as a sketch "analogous to those that appeared in *Monday or Tuesday*", but in fact the story relates more closely to the novel than to her earlier short fiction. The only analogy appears to lie in the mode of a short fiction. In place of the indefinite reverie of "Monday or Tuesday" or "The Mark on the Wall", the story is centred in the consciousness of its main character, and external action is registered through her thoughts and feelings. Apart from this basic technique of presenting character and action through the consciousness, the story also shares several concerns which were later developed in the novel.

Thus, despite its standing independently as a short story, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" invites comparisons with *Mrs Dalloway*. Like the novel, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" opens with the immediacy of being

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3. McNichol's editing of *Mrs Dalloway's Party* was attacked by John Hulcoop in "McNichol's *Mrs Dalloway*: Second Thoughts" (*Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 3 (Spring 1975), 3-5, 7) on the basis of her including "The Introduction" and "Ancestors" which he claimed were not new Woolf texts but rather "McNichol's version of two hitherto unpublished texts", and of her omission of two other fragments of stories. However, McNichol later justified her edition in "A Reply" (*Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, 9 (Winter 1977), 3) by stating that she had access to a previously unavailable typescript of "The Introduction" and had compiled a complete text of "Ancestors" from three fragments. As this text has been validated as well as any collection not originally published by the author, *Mrs Dalloway's Party* will be used in this discussion.

4. As Jacqueline Latham was first to recognize, "The Origin of Mrs Dalloway," *Notes and Queries*, 211 (March 1966), 98-99.

at the centre of a situation: - "Mrs. Dalloway said that she would
buy the gloves herself" (p.19) - a slight difference being that "flowers"
are substituted for "gloves" in the novel. However, the short story
lacks the sense of Clarissa's joy in living which pervades the opening
of the novel; instead she notices the solemnity of Big Ben's strokes
and this sets her thinking of the sadness and sufferings of life. The
narrator's assurance that "for Mrs Dalloway the moment was complete"
(p.19) does not seem justified as there is no continuing sense of joy
in the present moment; after brief thoughts of her own happy childhood,
she returns to the melancholy vein which colours her whole reverie.
Despite such recollections of her youthful love of riding and dancing,
she is now immersed in middle-age; her thoughts as she walks through
London become a meditation on death and suffering, external impressions
only serving to reinforce the sense of "how people suffered" (p.20).
As Clarissa sees different social acquaintances she recalls their losses
in the war, while her own personal sense of loss is implicit in her
recalling Shelley's Adonais. As she glances in the window of a bookshop
she repeats the lines of the elegy which, reinforced by Shakespeare's
"Fear no more the heat o' the sun", serve as a focus for the tone of the
entire reverie.6

As Clarissa enters the shop to buy her gloves, she leaves the sights
and sounds of Bond Street to become more immersed in her own thoughts.
There is a sense of incongruity in the fact that while she is outwardly
occupied with buying gloves, her thoughts move from preparations for her
party to an inner preoccupation with death. It is now considered in
a more personal way; she ponders Dick's death and after noticing that
the girl in the shop has aged, tries to resolve her feelings about her
own advancing age as witnessed by the brown spots on her arm. "Fear

6. In Mrs Dalloway, Clarissa reads the dirge from Cymbeline in the
bookshop, but in the short story both these lines and Shelley's
Adonais are already present in her thoughts.
no more" becomes a refrain to quiet her own fears of ageing and death, but an explosion in the street breaks her reverie, jolting Clarissa from her inner thoughts to recognize the other customer in the shop.  

This ending to the story seems unsatisfactory. Despite the final recognition of life outside Clarissa's consciousness, she does not achieve any real reconciliation of life and death. In The Voyage Out, Clarissa says "I always think it's living, not dying that counts", but the story lacks any sense of the value of life, the sense of loving life which is found in Mrs Dalloway. Without such awareness, the fact that death endows life with meaning through its very limitation to the present moment is lost, and Clarissa cannot reconcile her own feelings about death. Whereas at the end of Mrs Dalloway she forgets her own concerns to empathize with Septimus's experience of death and so accept her own, the story shows no such resolution. Clarissa's thoughts are merely jolted into the present situation without any inner acceptance of death as an inevitable and necessary aspect of living.  

"Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" nevertheless marks an important stage in the development of Mrs Dalloway, illustrating Woolf's experimentation with interior monologue as a method of character development. The short story does not penetrate Clarissa's consciousness to the extent that it is explored in the novel; her thoughts are more a response to external

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7. In Mrs Dalloway, the explosion allows the introduction of Septimus whose suffering counterbalances Clarissa's joy in life.  
8. As Tadanobu Sakamoto concludes, "Virginia Woolf: 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street' and Mrs Dalloway," Studies in English Literature (Japan), 1974, 75-00. His interpretation of the imagery of the short story is based on fairly tenuous links.  
10. In Mrs Dalloway (1925; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), Clarissa's thoughts imply such significance from the finality of death: did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely... did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? (p.11)
life, both social encounters and political affairs, than the personal introspection of Mrs Dalloway where Clarissa ponders the limits of self and her own inner identity. "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" portrays a Clarissa much closer to that of The Voyage Out in her English upper-class conservatism, her acceptance of tradition, her social and political interests influenced by her husband (referred to as "Dick" rather than Richard), her love of Shelley's Adonais and in the brief reference to her ringed fingers. Her thoughts touch on the past and her youth: "there is nothing to take the place of childhood. A leaf of mint brings it back: or a cup with a blue ring" (p.19), but despite the evocative image, there is no full development of her emotional response to such recollections as play an integral part in the novel through the introduction of Sally and Peter as characters.

Not only in the concerns, but also in the form of the short story does "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" register the outer life of impressions directly rather than through the inner emotions of the character. All the elements of Mrs Dalloway are present: the shops, the car from the palace, Scrope Purvis's impression of Mrs Dalloway, the explosion in the street, but all lack integration into Clarissa's consciousness, remaining instead as external impressions dissociated from her reverie. Clarissa's thoughts do respond to her conversation with Hugh, leading her to consider menopause and the essence of being a woman, but only as she walks away; the conversation itself is presented by the narrator rather than through her emotional response to meeting Hugh. Whereas the interior monologue of Mrs Dalloway follows the inner time of consciousness where recollections of the past and present impressions flow together as one continuum, Clarissa's thoughts are registered in the short story as a more direct response to the external impressions and actions which follow the chronological progress of her walk through London. Clarissa's stream of consciousness is the

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11. As seen in her attitude to people and the arts - she looks to the past for great literature and sees the new French Impressionism as "one of those odd French pictures... as if people had thrown confetti" (The Voyage Out, p.24).
common subject matter and in both pieces is presented as an indirect interior monologue,¹² but instead of the internalized personal response given in the novel, the use of an omniscient narrator in "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" limits the depth of insight into Clarissa's own sense of identity. The short story is obviously Woolf's first experimentation in a form of interior monologue from which Mrs Dalloway grew.

For this reason "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" stands apart from the other "Mrs Dalloway" stories. It marks a preliminary stage in the development of the novel, which intervenes between this story and the others which follow. Within the collection Mrs Dalloway's Party, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" sets the social situation for the other stories by presenting Clarissa's preparations for her party, but within the wider scope of Woolf's work, this function is fulfilled by Mrs Dalloway where the party is a more constant preoccupation with Clarissa and is given its fullest expression at the end of the novel. More importantly, this dichotomy is also true of the form of the stories. While all rely on interior monologue, the later stories follow the novel rather than the short story in the specific use of this form of narrative; the third person mode is maintained, but the role of the omniscient narrator is replaced by a portrayal of external relationships through the inner emotional response of the characters. The result is a greater depth of insight into the character's personal response and sense of identity. "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" lacks the sophisticated integration of stream of consciousness and external impressions found in Mrs Dalloway on the one hand, and the precise momentary insights into character found in "The New Dress" or "The Man Who Loved His Kind" on the other.

Thus it was through the writing of Mrs Dalloway that Woolf came to develop the later sequence of stories. In fact several exist in draft form in the Mrs Dalloway manuscript, and after finishing the novel Woolf wrote,

I have now at least 6 stories welling up in me, and feel, at last, that I can coin all my thoughts into words. These stories form a coherent group which allowed her a fuller exploration of her continuing preoccupation with the party than was possible within the limits of the novel. In Mrs Dalloway, Clarissa gives her party because of her inherent love of life:

What she liked was simply life...

But to go deeper, ... what did it mean to her, this thing she called life?... someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create...

This attempt to combine people, to create some harmony in human relationships is her offering to life. For Clarissa, the party becomes the focus for a personally meaningful experience; the stories on the other hand provide a more diverse view of the party as experienced by her guests. Instead of being centred in Clarissa's consciousness in the way that the novel is, the stories are separate brief insights into other characters' responses to the party situation, registered through their individual consciousnesses. As such these stories allowed Woolf an opportunity to explore character as presented through the "party consciousness", as she explained it in her well-known diary entry:

13. McNichol and Hulcoop, see note 3.
16. Mrs. Ramsay makes a similar attempt in To the Lighthouse but with different motives. In fact the party is a continuing preoccupation with Woolf in To the Lighthouse, The Years and Between the Acts.
But my present reflection is that people have any number
of states of consciousness: and I should like to investi-
gate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness
e etc... where people secrete an envelope which connects
them and protects them from others, like myself, who am
outside the envelope, foreign bodies. These states are
very difficult (obviously I grope for words) but I'm
always coming back to it. The party consciousness,...
It is something real. You must keep it up - conspire
together. Still I cannot get at what I mean.¹⁷

The state which was so difficult to explain is explored artistically
in the short stories. In all these stories there is an awareness of
the dichotomy between the opportunities for communication through the
physical and social unity of the party, and the individual who is funda-
mentally isolated to his own inner experience and limited self-image.
The artificial situation of the party results in a contrasting intensifi-
cation of reality for the individual characters; while they are outwardly
"conspiring" to keep up the social situation, their inner anxieties and
vulnerabilities are given full play. Frank Baldanza, in his perceptive
analysis of party consciousness as revealed in the short stories, notes
that such a state of heightened awareness brings "an acute suspension
between two or three different emotions";¹⁸ this fluctuation of thoughts
and feelings corresponds to different levels of the character's responses,
providing ample opportunity for self-revelation. Like Clarissa, all
the characters are concerned with life, and their own failure or success
is revealed starkly within the context of the party.

Thus the "Mrs Dalloway" stories show a concern to explore theme
rather than form, as it is the theme of party consciousness which gives
unity to the sequence. Nevertheless, as a consequence of this unity of
theme, the form of the stories is determined by the party situation.
These are truly short stories in the modern sense; they do not follow
the traditional plot-based form, but instead deal with a full emotional
exploration of a single situation. Each story describes a brief encounter

¹⁸. Frank Baldanza, "Clarissa Dalloway's 'Party Consciousness'," Modern
Fiction Studies, 2 (Feb. 1956), 25.
between characters, complete in itself yet one of a sequence which recreates the party situation. Clarissa gives her party "to kindle and illuminate", but more important than the possibility of communication, Woolf focuses on the brief encounter as registered through the interior monologue of one or both characters. Such an emphasis allows her to reveal character through a particular, significant emotional moment as is typical of the short story; as with Joyce's epiphanies, this may be a significant revelation of character only for the reader, or may mark a new awareness or insight attained by the character himself. Such a portrayal of character is distinct from that found in "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" where Isabella is revealed in terms of an image of perception. Instead, the "Mrs Dalloway" stories rely on a new element of tension between outer social conventions and the inner emotional response which serves the same function as dramatic conflict in providing the means to reveal character. The "Mrs Dalloway" stories therefore fulfil the modern definition of short story form in that they explore character through the focus of a single situation. Because they are a more homogeneous group formally, it is difficult to discuss these stories without an examination of their thematic links as it is variations of the central theme, rather than form, which distinguishes the individual story.

In "The Man Who Loved His Kind" both characters are revealed directly through the tension between outer social behaviour and their inner personal sense of values. Prickett Ellis is at first outside the party atmosphere, immersed in his own preoccupations and highly critical of the superficiality of social pleasures. His own priorities are defined by his work for the poor, his choice of the cheapest tobacco and his borrowed clothes, but such values become exaggerated in response to the contrasting display of wealth at the party. Ellis feels superior.

20. Like Charles Tansley in To The Lighthouse (1927; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) who "smoked the cheapest tobacco, shag" (p.16). Ellis seems to be an early version of a Tansley-like character. Both men define their life by their work and are largely isolated from the social intercourse of which they are so critical.
to the social clique by virtue of his sacrifices, but the feeling becomes decidedly unpleasant and intense:

... he felt himself grow more and more shocking every instant. And it was a very disagreeable feeling. He did not feel this - that he loved humanity, that he paid only fivepence an ounce for tobacco and loved nature - naturally and quietly. Each of these pleasures had been turned into a protest.

(p.32)

He feels forced to justify himself against the superficiality which surrounds him, a need which is met by Richard's introducing Miss O'Keefe. To this point Ellis has been treated sympathetically, but the encounter with Miss O'Keefe allows a different perspective to balance his personal point of view. The internal conflict of values which each is experiencing is brought into focus by the encounter and its resultant external conflict of attitudes. Both characters are preoccupied by the day's events and their present emotions are a direct reflection of their experiences with poor people, but in both cases their response is limited. Ellis gains genuine satisfaction from his work but allows his prejudice against social ills to restrict his response to others, while Miss O'Keefe, like Clarissa in "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street", allows social differences to limit her natural impulse to give, and so suffers frustration. Even their mutual love of nature is manifested differently, according to their own biases; as Bennett recognizes, the story is

a study of the active and contemplative philanthropist, moving within the mind of each and revealing their mutual incomprehension.21

Their encounter at the party brings these different attitudes into sharp contrast.

The inner conflict of values which each is experiencing surfaces in an external clash of attitudes; as a result, the response of both characters to their own feelings and to the encounter undergoes a significant change which proves revealing. Ellis' sense of injustice

finally bursts from within him as he gives an account of the gratitude
he has earned, something which he has previously wished to remain his
memory alone. In the context of the party his simple pride has changed
to an unpleasant sensation of self-satisfaction in his own humanitarian
sacrifice, which negates his original happiness. The incident provokes
mixed feelings which are self-revealing too for Miss O'Keefe, as she feels
alternately disgust at what she sees as Ellis' conceit, and envy of his
actions. Thus the characteristic fluctuation of intense emotions is
brought to a sharp climax but ends in disillusionment for both; neither
can fully understand the other's point of view nor hold to his own with
the same certainty. The function of the party has failed: the encounter
is hateful and they part without communication. Their own level of
awareness is uncertain as there is no clear development of increased self-
knowledge; instead their inner feelings remain unclear and unsettled. The
irony of the encounter is that while both profess to "love their kind" they
cannot respond to one another. Nevertheless, the story is formally perfect:
the characters come together to reveal themselves through their very lack
of understanding, before they part, both in the same disturbing state of
disillusionment. Their momentary encounter nevertheless yields an insight
into their individual psyches.

"Ancestors" takes the form of an interior monologue centred continu-
ously in one mind. Although the story shares some themes with "The
Man Who Loved His Kind", the encounter of Mrs. Vallance with Jack Renshaw
is registered through her personal response which is sharpened, rather than
changed, by the party situation. The contrast between his brief and
superficial remarks made in conversation and her inner emotional response
defines her sense of being outside the triviality of social behaviour.
Like Prickett Ellis, Mrs. Vallance withdraws from the inadequate social
situation, and she returns in thought to her more meaningful past which seems "so much more real than the present" (p.46) as it has yielded her lasting personal values. Looking back to this idyllic time, she recalls the youthful sense of her own potential, now lost to the harsh present, and she too experiences a mixture of emotions, both regret and scorn. Like Ellis, she feels that she owes it to others to show them this more meaningful existence, but unlike him, her response remains personal and is not verbalized. While the party situation provokes an intensification of her inner values, it does not change the essential nature of her emotional response; instead of protesting, she feels a sharp sense of personal regret which remains clear and unchanged precisely because she does not attempt to communicate. Rather than a conflict of attitudes, "Ancestors" presents a double view, revealing Mrs. Vallance through her own personal and meaningful values which are clearly defined by the contrasting social situation.

"The New Dress" is also centred in a single consciousness, but here the dramatic tension between Mabel's outward social conduct and her inner sense of failure is developed both to reveal her character and to define her momentary insight into her own sense of inadequacy. In this story, Woolf explores "frock consciousness", in that from the moment she enters the party, Mabel's sense of inferiority focuses on her dress. In contrast to her happiness planning the dress and the blissful moment when she first tried it, she is "woken wide awake to reality" (p.59) and feels the dress is dowdy and old-fashioned. She senses that "a party makes things either much more real, or much less real" (p.58), but in fact the heightened awareness engendered by the party situation is merely the means to expose Mabel's limited image of self, her own inner shame and humiliation. This is made clear by her image of herself as a fly

22. These values possibly refer to Woolf's own childhood.
23. Diary, III, p.12, 27 April 1925. Hulcoop refers to the complicated genesis of "The New Dress" and to an unpublished diary of 1903 as containing much of the material included in the story.
trying to crawl out of the saucer; while the other people are seen as beautiful creatures, butterflies, she is immersed in her own self-loathing. External conversation only affirms her own feelings of inadequacy. She sees herself as physically reduced to the size of a yellow button in the looking-glass, this image of visual perception corresponding to her own diminished self-image:

... it was amazing to think how much humiliation and agony and self-loathing and effort and passionate ups and downs of feeling were contained in a thing the size of a threepenny bit.

(pp.61-62)

The basic contrast between the outer appearance and inner emotional response is made very real for Mabel.

As in "Ancestors", the party brings the more meaningful moments of life into focus. While the party is an experience of humiliation and self-hatred for Mabel, her mediocre ordinary life yields moments of ecstasy, an intense awareness that "This is it!" (p.64). Her response to such heightened reality is emotional and transcends her ordinary existence. However, such moments are random and do not occur when she most expects them, as at the party, resulting in self-recrimination. Mabel finally resolves to struggle from the saucer, to gain salvation from the negative experience of the party by valuing her moments of ecstasy above the superficial values of people and dress. In this she is asserting the primary value of the personal rather than the social experience. Unfortunately, social necessity wins as she escapes with a polite lie, "I have enjoyed myself enormously" (p.65), and so is damned to further recrimination. Through the constant tension between social behaviour and inner feelings, Woolf gives a poignant insight into Mabel's own sense of inadequacy as well as an awareness of what is meaningful to her. At the same time, this skilful modulation of tension both deter-

24. In her diary Woolf asks, Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay one's hands on and say "This is it"? (Diary, III, p.62, 27 February, 1926).
25. In a seemingly deliberate reference to Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly".
mines the form of the story and allows Woolf to explore the moment as a personal apprehension of reality.

"The Introduction" is a lesser story which deals with a similar experience to that in "The New Dress". Lily Everit responds to an encounter at the party with an intense feeling of inferiority, but her response is sex-based as well as social. She enters the party intoxicated with pride in her essay, by which she defines her individuality, only to face disillusionment and a sense of inadequacy against "the massive masculine achievement" (p.40) as represented by Bob Brinsley, a young Oxford scholar. Her social awkwardness and inferiority are increased as Brinsley's direct descent from Shakespeare plays on her mind, but in contrast to Clarissa's romantic view, the introduction brings a painful realization for Lily. Water images dominate her thoughts as she is swept from the crest of a wave to feel as if she is drowning, her own small achievement swallowed by the whirlpool of masculine authority. Her feelings are in transition, so the prose follows an ebb and flow from her opening ecstasy, through shame to disillusionment at the masculine dominance signified by Brinsley's action in tearing the wings off a fly. Though tempted to accept the stereotype of a butterfly, that of the traditional feminine role, Lily, like Mabel, identifies with the fly and attempts to protect her own wings, her own individuality and potential as a woman from the masculine assault. In fact the story marks a process of maturation in Lily, both socially as this is her first party, and emotionally as her response changes from girlish pride through disillusionment to a final acceptance of her new responsibility as a woman. The theme is similar to that of "A Woman's College from Outside", but here the form is that of a dramatic encounter provoking realization, rather than an awakening from a dreamlike reverie. The story shares images
with and takes the same form as "The New Dress", that of increased awareness provoked by the contrasting external social values, but the intention here is subtly feminist.

One encounter which brings real communication is "Together and Apart" and the form is correspondingly different. The claustrophobic party situation is alleviated as Ruth Anning and Roderick Serle meet outside; at first both contemplate the sky as if it is pouring some universal meaning into their separate minds as each considers his personal life and values. Despite his pride and her diffidence, their tentative feelers of conversation cause deep emotions in each: for him the hope of a new start after the failures of his life, for her the realization that her life is "a cluster of miracles" (p.49). However, these personal memories coalesce as they discover their mutual love of Canterbury, something meaningful to both. From this shared emotional base they experience a true spiritual communication as their individual selves unite in a moment of ecstasy which appears to occupy a physical space in time, defined by external remarks. The form of the story is based not on tension but unity, an experience bounded rather than provoked by external circumstances. Words are illusory, but their emotional communication is real; the moment seems timeless, as within its brief course both review their own lives and realize their individual potential with an intensity of emotion. A further remark breaks the momentary emotion, leaving both with a "paralysing blankness of feeling" (p.54), but it is only after an external character imposes on their silence that they can free themselves to part in full understanding of one another. The completeness of form derives from the wholeness of the emotional moment which is explored for its own sake as well as for character revelation. The social occasion has here brought
a satisfying inner experience as both characters gain insight while sharing what is personally meaningful. In place of the conflict of forces in the other stories, "Together and Apart" is more subtle and resolves the double view of social and individual needs in a moment of emotional unity.

"A Summing Up", true to its title, is a fitting end to Mrs Dalloway's Party. The story takes the form of Sasha Latham's inner reflections about the party during an interlude in the garden. As her companion's inconsequential conversation requires no response, she is free to ponder the essential nature of the party. She herself represents the basic conflict implicit in the situation, as her outer majestic bearing belies her inner sense of inadequacy. At first the party seems an achievement of civilization and she pays tribute in her mind to Clarissa's creation as "the greatest of marvels" (p.67). However, after a brief look over the wall, away from the golden haze of the social atmosphere, she is met by a conflicting view that the party is an illusion, "nothing but people in evening dress" (p.69). In trying to resolve this double view, Sasha realizes the basic truth of the individual's experience of a party. She sees a tree as symbolic of the self, capable of integration into the golden haze yet ultimately isolated by nature. Through the image of the soul as a widow bird, she recognizes the essential isolation of this inner self as opposed to the outer social being which is reintegrated into the party as they go indoors, so frightening the bird off. Once again the story follows the form of awareness provoked by the tension between outer social behaviour and inner feelings, but here Sasha's realization uncovers the basis of that tension. In fact her awareness of the impossibility of any real integration of the soul and the outer self is also a recognition of the basis of more complex responses to the party situation. Although in "Together and Apart" a spiritual communion
bridges the isolation of the soul, "A Summing Up" is more consistent with the other "Mrs Dalloway" stories.

Thus the "Mrs Dalloway" stories are a related group in both form and theme. Each story takes the form of character exploration through a single situation so that together they provide a sense of the party as a collection of individual responses. The stories relate thematically with their common exploration of party consciousness and their many shared themes: the artificiality and consequent heightened awareness of the party situation, the deep sense of inferiority shared by the female characters and common superiority and superficiality of the male characters, as well as the sense of a collective consciousness founded in the past and recollections from literature (especially Shakespeare and Shelley). Together, the stories "form a fluid sequence chronicling the anticipation, intimacies, disappointments and dissolving illusions of the party". They follow the progress of the party from Clarissa's preparations to Sasha Latham's final "summing up".

In her Introduction, McNichol points to the unity of Mrs Dalloway's Party as being on both the thematic and narrative levels. While this is obviously true, her assertion that

The form it [Mrs Dalloway's Party] takes, or which I have given to it, was that intended originally for the novel Mrs Dalloway.

(p.15)

is not readily justified. McNichol quotes as evidence Woolf's manuscript notes for the composition of Mrs Dalloway:

This is to be a short book consisting of six or seven chapters, each complete separately.
Yet there must be some sort of fusion!
And all must converge upon the party at the end.

(p.15)

However, Mrs Dalloway's Party does not fulfil Woolf's original intention as stated here. While the stories are separate incidents, they do not

"converge" or find narrative unity in the party but rather share a common party situation. In fact, the original intention is fulfilled by the novel, where various strands of narrative development do converge at the party to attain unity through Clarissa's empathy with Septimus's death. The ultimate focus here is not party consciousness but the relationship between life and death, and the party is simply an image which allows the final resolution of the two separate lines of narrative and character development. That McNichol's assertion is incorrect is further demonstrated by John Hulcoop in his critique of her edition. Hulcoop notes that in her original plan Woolf listed not "six or seven" (as above) but eight chapters, whose titles do not relate directly to the short story sequence with the exception of "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and "Ancestors". As the first two chapters listed, "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" and "The Prime Minister" were revised to become the opening sections of Mrs Dalloway, it seems likely that the other sections were similarly integrated into the novel. The stories are undoubtedly a separate sequence and Woolf's diary affirms that apart from "Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street" they developed after the novel. More importantly, they have a different intention from that of the novel and were written together as an exploration of party consciousness.

Nevertheless, the "Mrs Dalloway" stories are closely related to the novel. In both concerns and form, they surround Mrs Dalloway while also looking forward to To The Lighthouse which Woolf was planning simultaneously with writing the stories:

I've written 6 little stories, scrambled them down untidily and have thought out, perhaps too clearly, To the Lighthouse.

The relationship of the stories and the new novel is obvious through their shared concerns: Mrs. Ramsay too experiences a state of heightened consciousness and moment of awareness at her dinner party, Charles Tansley is

28. As Hulcoop notes, p.4.
29. Diary, III, p.29, 14 June 1925.
anticipated by Prickett Ellis, while Lily can be seen as a development on the perceptions of Lily Everit and Sasha Latham with their awareness of the double view implicit in life, and finally the general examination of the relationships between men and women introduced in the stories is carried on in the novel. In fact these stories explore theme rather than form, as they adopt the form already developed in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Woolf herself was uncertain about their form:

> I am less and less sure that they are stories, or what they are. Only I do feel fairly sure that I am grazing as near as I can to my own ideas, and getting a tolerable shape for them. I think there is less and less wastage. 30

These are stories as much as *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel; Woolf is conveying her ideas about personality and self-perception in a form which is true to the individual experience of life. The stories are character studies, not plot-based, but revealing from within the individual consciousness of the characters. As such, they are a development on the earlier sketches which explored consciousness: whereas in both "An Unwritten Novel" and "The Mark on the Wall" the narrator is dramatized and the stream of consciousness is her own, in the "Mrs Dalloway" stories the flow of thoughts is centred in the character. There is also an integral relationship between theme and content which is not necessarily true of the earlier sketches, such as "The Mark on the Wall" which is concerned to present a dichotomy. However, this development from a dramatic narrative to an indirect interior monologue follows directly from Woolf's experience in writing *Jacob's Room* and then *Mrs Dalloway*, rather than through the development of her short fiction. As well, the stories move away from the problematic presentation of character as explored in "An Unwritten Novel" and *Jacob's Room* towards a more concrete presentation of life and relationships between characters. Again this reflects the development from *Jacob's Room* to *Mrs Dalloway* rather than

that of the short fiction where Woolf is still concerned with the problem of personality, of knowing another person in the later stories, "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass".

The "Mrs Dalloway" stories are therefore separate from the development of Woolf's other short fiction. They are not innovative short stories but rather follow the form of the novel Woolf was developing at this stage of her career. The stories are an extension of the form she discovered in Mrs Dalloway; rather than experiments for novel-writing they are in fact the product of her experimentation in the novel. Nevertheless, Mrs Dalloway's Party represents her most successful exercises in the more conventional mode of the modern short story, as practised by Katherine Mansfield and James Joyce, reaching formal perfection in "The New Dress" and "The Man Who Loved His Kind". They are not so experimental and therefore so tentative as the early sketches, but on the other hand, while they lack the formal sophistication of a piece such as "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", they do provide perceptive insights into character. In fact these short stories illustrate the limitations Woolf felt with this form of narrative by their very relationship to the novels. The stories can reveal only brief insights and individual moments of being, while the novels, by their very scope, allow the complex interplay of related consciousnesses to produce a web of perceptions which is resolved in a final climactic insight in both Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. It is obvious why Woolf chose to divert her greatest energies to writing in the novel form, as this held far greater possibilities for her development as an artist.

After Mrs Dalloway, Woolf turned increasingly to the novel form as a vehicle for her fullest experimentation. This finds its final expression in The Waves and Between the Acts. While she continued her
search, begun in "An Unwritten Novel", for a form to reflect the nature of character in "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", these are the only experimental short works after this time. Nevertheless, the extent of such experimentation is never matched in the form of the novels. The "Mrs Dalloway" stories are experimental in the same way that *Mrs Dalloway* is innovative, yet mark the beginning of a compromise with convention in providing insight into character. However, this form based on interior monologue gives no indication of the total reversion to a conventional plot-based form which was to follow "The Lady in the Looking-Glass". Against such formal perfection the later stories can be seen only as a severe anticlimax.
Woolf's experimentation in form is presented at its fullest extent in her short fiction. Here she rejects the traditional plot-based structure as an adequate expression of human experience and searches for a form to contain her individual vision of life. Many pieces explore the problems confronting the writer who, "desiring truth", attempts to capture the randomness of the mind's impressions and the elusiveness of external reality within the order of art. However, rather than adopting a critical mode, Woolf defines the essential quality of the individual's perception of reality in the form of her short fiction.

She introduces elements from other genres into the basic focus of a fictional mode. "The Mark on the Wall" can only be described as a reverie or reflective essay. In this piece, the fluid associative prose creates a diary-like meditation which, while centred on the mark, reveals a basic discrepancy between external action and the theme of the reverie. The early sketches render the fleeting impressions and half-formed thoughts of the consciousness in the shape of prose. Here the patterning of images and exploration of perspective both define the lyrical form and convey the impressionistic texture of life. These sketches are generally slight after the fullest expression of the form was given in "Kew Gardens", a perfectly realized prose poem. "An Unwritten Novel" explores the problems of representing character in fiction by combining critical concerns and tone with a fictional situation. In its rejection of an omniscient narrator and character revelation, it points instead to the essentially unverifiable nature of character, as of reality, a realization which could not be contained in the conventional form of the short story.

These early works are often seen simply as brief experiments in new designs to be developed in the novels. Woolf herself refers to
the initial conception of Jacob's Room in terms of the short fiction:

[I'm] happier today than I was yesterday having this afternoon arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another - as in An Unwritten Novel - only not for 10 pages but 200 or so - doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want; doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything?... conceive... Mark on the Wall, K.G. and Unwritten Novel taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover; the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance two weeks ago.1

While it cannot be denied that Jacob's Room combines the impressionism of "Kew Gardens", the exploration of consciousness of "The Mark on the Wall" and the problematic presentation of character explored in "An Unwritten Novel", this is not to say that the short fiction represents experiments for novel-writing. The difference in form is significant; Jacob's Room fails as a novel because its impressionistic vision is fragmented, whereas in "An Unwritten Novel" the unverifiable nature of character is accommodated in the single vision of a writer attempting to come to terms with a problem. It seems that such basic truths of experience can be best conveyed in a form which moves from manifest fiction towards an essay. That Woolf continued to develop the experimentation first defined by "An Unwritten Novel" in "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass" is further evidence that she saw short fiction as distinct from the longer form. These are explorations of personality as Woolf traces the impressionistic movement of a consciousness seeking to define another person. In "Moments of Being" the attempt takes the form of an emotional experience of a moment in time. "The Lady in the Looking Glass" marks the final sophistication of Woolf's formal experimentation as personality is defined by the process of visual perception; the patterning of images

and reflections determines the form of the sketch and provides an intuition of the inner being through an external perception.

Separate from this development are the "Mrs Dalloway" stories. While closer to the form of the modern short story in their revelation of character at a significant moment, these stories are occasional pieces surrounding the development of the novel Mrs Dalloway. While preceding the more experimental "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", the "Mrs Dalloway" stories mark the beginning of a compromise with tradition. Whereas the early experimentation was in the mode of short fiction, as the novels became more experimental, Woolf adopted the traditional narrative basis in the later stories. Having found the fullest expression of her genius in the novel, her experimentation was transferred to this form. Contrary to Guiguet's claim that the publication of her short fiction marks the three "periods of exploration in Virginia Woolf's career" and therefore represent experiments for her novels, these later stories show none of the poetic concision or formal experimentation of Between the Acts. Apart from the fact that Guiguet relies on publication dates (and "Lappin and Lapinova" for one proves the falseness of such a basis for criticism), the later stories, like the early sketches, explore a form opposite to that of the novel in these periods.

Woolf reveals the true place of her short fiction in a letter to Ethel Smyth:

These little pieces in Monday or (and Tuesday) were written by way of diversion; they were the treats I allowed myself when I had done my exercise in the conventional style. I shall never forget the day I wrote The Mark on the Wall - all in a flash, as if flying, after being kept stone breaking for months. The Unwritten Novel was the great discovery, however. That - again in one second - showed me how I could embody all my deposit of experience in a shape that fitted it - not that I have ever reached that end;

but anyhow I saw, branching out of the tunnel I made,
when I discovered that method of approach, Jacob's
Room, Mrs Dalloway etc.\(^3\)

In contrast to her "exercise in the conventional style" in Night and
Day, the early short pieces represent innovative formal experimentation
as Woolf seeks a "shape" true to the experience of the mind and her
perception of character. While she acknowledges that such experi-
mentation was used in the later novels, on the other hand she refers to
her attempts to develop the form of "An Unwritten Novel" as unfinished:
"not that I have ever reached that end". Here, while writing The Waves,
the most experimental of her novels, Woolf feels that she has not reached
the end of the formal experimentation begun in "An Unwritten Novel".

This form was extended in "Moments of Being" and "The Lady in the Looking-
Glass" but finds no corresponding expression in the novel after Jacob's
Room. The Pargiters was a similar attempt to combine fact and fiction
in the form of a "novel-essay", but this experimentation ended in compromise
in the traditional form of The Years.

It is in the short fiction that Woolf's formal experimentation is
presented most provocatively. In her rejection of plot, character
and an omniscient narrator, Woolf expresses a new perception of reality.
In place of logical sequence, chronological time and factual description,
she traces the nuances of the mind's impressions to define form in terms
of visual and spatial perception. While Lawrence and Coppard express
their interest in relationships in their short fiction, and Mansfield
and Joyce define the form as illuminating moments of personal insight
or character revelation, Woolf rejects the traditional elements of
fiction in seeking to capture her individual experience of life in prose.
Few of her critics have realized the extent of such experimentation or
that in her rejection of a distinct genre, Woolf was instrumental in

\(^3\) Letters, IV, p.231, 16 October 1930.
shaping the contemporary short story. Eileen Baldeshwiler, writing about the "lyric short story", is one critic who does recognize Woolf's significance:

Mrs. Woolf definitely abandoned the conventional short story to choose new subjects, new themes, new structures, and new language. Like that of Turgenev, her work marks an almost total break between old and new.4

It must be conceded that Woolf's short fiction is not totally successful, although the more fully realized of the short works capture moments of particular insight. Often, however, the experimentation is not thorough enough and the piece remains puzzling, or fails to engage the imagination beyond the recognition of its innovation in form. "Desiring truth", Woolf succeeds in conveying the randomness of the mind's impressions in a form which is aesthetically conclusive in only a few pieces; even here she must be "content with closeness" since an artistic form which accurately retains the fleeting associations of the consciousness is impossible to achieve. The short fiction by its nature can only elucidate fragments of time; the longer form of the novel allows the complex interplay of related consciousnesses to convey a deeper understanding of the nature of experience.

However, while the novels consistently capture the life of the mind in an aesthetic form, at the same time they are more of a compromise with the traditional novel where there is some narrative basis in the pattern of characters and images which finds resolution in a moment of insight. In essays such as "The Narrow Bridge of Art", Woolf speaks of the form of prose being extended to encompass some of the attributes of other forms, poetry and drama; again in her diary she searches for "a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'... But what? Elegy?"5

Her work is generally recognized as poetic or lyrical prose, but such terms are inadequate to describe the introduction of other genres into the basic form of short fiction. As one of Woolf's contemporaries wrote, this "writing...is significant in itself and does not conform to any class". The total lack of a distinct generic basis is evidence of formal experimentation that is more far-reaching than any found in the longer fiction. Ultimately, the success of the sketches relies on their rejection of the conventional elements of fiction, defining form instead by the individual's perception of reality.

APPENDIX

PUBLICATION OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S SHORT FICTION

Virginia Woolf's short fiction was published in various forms: as pamphlets, in periodicals and as collections. The following chronological list records details of the first publication of each short work as well as a complete list of the pieces included in each collection. The source for publication details up to and including A Haunted House, unless otherwise stated, is B.J. Kirkpatrick, A Bibliography of Virginia Woolf, revised edition, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967).


1921 Monday or Tuesday. Richmond: Hogarth.

Contents: "A Haunted House"
"A Society"
"Monday or Tuesday"
"An Unwritten Novel" reprinted
"The String Quartet"
"Blue and Green"
"Kew Gardens" reprinted
"The Mark on the Wall" revised and reprinted

1923 "In the Orchard." Criterion, April 1923, 1, No.3, pp.243-245.

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"A Summing Up"


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