

HOUSING IDENTITY: RE-CONSTRUCTING FEMININE SPACES  
THROUGH MEMORY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *THE YEARS* AND  
DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S *REBECCA*

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

May 2012

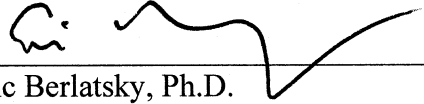
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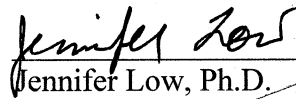
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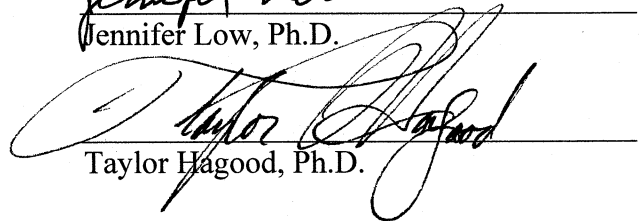
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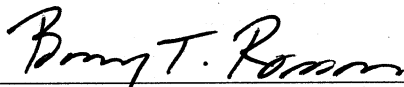
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the fundamental assistance of Eric Berlatsky and Jennifer Low. The candidate could not have achieved this academic goal without the continual support and encouragement from Taylor Hagood. The candidate wishes to express her sincere thanks and patience to Deryck Lance throughout the writing of this manuscript.

## ABSTRACT

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Title: Housing Identity: Re-Constructing Feminine Spaces through Memory in Virginia Woolf's *The Years* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*

Institution: Florida Atlantic University

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Eric Berlatsky

Degree: Master of Arts

Year: 2012

This thesis represents a study of *The Years* by Virginia Woolf and *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier. Both novels attempt to redefine the role of women in patriarchal society during the 1930s. The domestic role women had to fill within a masculine household constrained their ability to form an independent “self,” apart from fathers and husbands. I argue that these novels articulate the possibility for women to access an independent self by examining the meaning behind domestic objects in and of the house. Lucy Irigaray asserts that women were, and still are, associated with being valued as a desirable “commodity.” Since women have no choice but to work within the symbolic order and are already labeled as “object,” women writers have manipulated the system by examining the subject/object dichotomy. The relationship women have with inanimate, and particularly domestic, objects shows how time (the past and the future) manipulates freedom in the present moment. Woolf’s reflection on how “moments of being” function as gateways to a heightened sense of awareness is

prevalent in her last published novel, *The Years*. I invoke Friedrich Nietzsche to consider notions of how an antiquated past hinders identity in du Maurier's *Rebecca*. In the literary texts of Woolf and du Maurier, women have a unique relationship with material objects in relationship to subjectivity. By examining the spatial constructs of the home, women are able to construct themselves as free "subjects" in a male dominated world.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, Anne and Ben Favazza.

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## INTRODUCTION

### A FRAGMENTED HISTORY: THE SUBJECT/OBJECT DICHOTOMY

Society often views women as objects, defining them by their roles as wives and mothers, but many times, not as independent subjects. If women are labeled as objects, it is through a history that has been dominated by masculine thought and power. How do women redefine their subjectivity in order to break out of patriarchal constraints? Many women writers of the twentieth century tried to write their way out of patriarchal representation to present new ways for women to revise their own history. Women have been struggling to find a space where they can write their own narrative, where freedom can be gained without having to live within the strict boundaries of societal expectations.

Men are often the creators of historical narratives, and they often construct subjectivity around them. One continuously debated issue is women's role within patriarchal society. Two prominent women authors who explore women's roles through their writing are Virginia Woolf and Daphne du Maurier. In their novels, they attempt to redefine the role of women in patriarchal society during the 1930s. The domestic role women had to fill within a masculine household constrained their ability to form an independent "self" apart from fathers or husbands. According to Carol Dyhouse, "many feminists have adopted Kate Millett's term 'sexual politics' to indicate their understanding that power determines the structure of private, sexual, and familial relationships and is not only contested in the public, more conventionally delegated

‘political’ arenas of social life” (6). Not only do “sexual politics” construct the domestic environment, power struggles also affect female subjectivity. Michel Foucault offers an intricate view on the notions of power and the subject in *The History of Sexuality*. He asserts that the power behind a society’s structure determines the means for constructing an identity. The power structure that Foucault discusses is almost always male-dominated. I concentrate on the space that society constructs for women and how women work within that space to designate a new subjectivity in order to prevent patriarchal intrusion. To attain their goals, women writers explored the spaces surrounding those that women were allowed to occupy. By investigating the inner working of the home, we can see that the possibility for women to assert independence is often linked with inanimate objects in and of the domestic environment.

To begin, one way of exploring women’s position within society is to focus on how they are viewed within a contemporary capitalist world. Material objects are viewed purely as commodities: things of use or advantage in order to make a profit (OED). Throughout history, women were and still are often valued as a desirable “product” and/or object. According to Luce Irigaray, “the passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves” (174). Women are always “put on display.” In advertising, women are used as “bodies,” marketing tools, to sell more than just the product. They use women deemed by society as “beautiful” to sell a household cleaning product, or promote a sexier male-driven campaign for products like beer, cologne, or sporting goods. What advertisers sell is an image. Images and conceptions of what society deems ideal beauty and success result in the phenomenon of women being

viewed as either housewives or sex objects. Society does not see a subject, they see an object. In order for women to find their identity and place within this distorted reality, they must work within a masculine space to gain freedom from it. In literature, many women writers have commented on these social issues. "The Yellow Wallpaper," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, is one prime example of how the female narrator is repressed within the patriarchal structure of the home, and yet still finds a way to destroy the walls from within, to break the bonds that chain her to the home. In the novel, John, the narrator's husband, treats her like a delicate ornament, as she notes: "John is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special attention" (43). The narrator is not a subject, but an object, handled with care, directed by John to remain stagnant and solid. Irigaray asserts that "socially, they [women] are 'objects' for and among men and furthermore they cannot do anything but mimic a 'language' that they have not produced" (Irigaray 187).

Since women have no choice but to work within the symbolic order and are already labeled as "object," women writers have manipulated the patriarchal system through an exploration of their designated space, the domestic household. In this space, women are able to connect with their past histories. Often, women tap into childhood memories and past experiences by exploring the domestic objects of the house, the objects they come into daily contact with, just as the narrator from "The Yellow Wallpaper" develops a relationship with the tattered wallpaper in her room. Merging with these objects gives women an opportunity to grow out of their expected roles. These explorations function as pathways to a 'new' feminine space in the midst of male domination, means of escaping the old feminine space, meaning a place outside of the

boundaries of what is expected of them, an opportunity to explore new opportunities (a life beyond marriage, a life without children, a life with a career, or both).

Instead of seeing material objects as purely lifeless and helpless, I characterize them as an extended part of the self and show how this perception affects the identity of the characters in *The Years* by Virginia Woolf and *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier. Material objects are prominent fixtures within these texts. The characters' connection with inanimate objects helps them gain a sense of freedom in many literary works of the Modernist period. During this time, objects ceased to be seen purely as commodities; we can now note the "peculiar bond that each writer shares with the figurines themselves, quite apart from their status as goods" (Mao 4). This relationship with material objects clearly "exceeds the commercial" and instead returns to a way of illuminating human existence in the world. Douglas Mao articulates the point that "this feeling of regard for the physical object-as not-self, as not-subject, as most helpless and will-less of entities, but also as fragment of Being, as solidity, as otherness in its most resilient opacity" as a twentieth century phenomenon is discussed, but rarely in its entirety (4). Even though there are countless authors who discuss the subject and object relationship, I feel that analyzing Woolf and du Maurier together adds a new dimension to the abundant scholarship on women's issues.

Daphne du Maurier and Virginia Woolf fill their novels with imagery and metaphor to connect their characters to domestic objects, shaping how their characters experience life. Within *The Years* and *Rebecca*, images of constraint and belittlement, claustrophobia and confinement present a wide range of familial and domestic elements that mold a woman into a socially acceptable model for the household. The female

characters in the novels are objects- at first portrayed as stagnant, silent models shaped and molded for domestic life. Woolf and du Maurier recognize the fate of women in the twentieth century and try to rewrite their history by navigating their characters out of this fate. Du Maurier recognizes that the historical past of domesticity is a burden for women and must be destroyed for any type of “new” subjectivity to emerge. Woolf reflects on both the past and the present as doors representing a freer future.

In connection with the subject and object dichotomy, time is as important as the way objects function in the two novels. In chapter one I demonstrate how Woolf deconstructs the past through her novel. I also explain how Woolf acknowledges that a total annihilation of the past is problematic in her novel *The Years*. Although the narration of *Rebecca* alludes to a total destruction of the past, a nostalgic longing for it is present as well. Woolf’s philosophy on the importance of differentiating being and non-being sheds light on the structure of *The Years*. In congruence with Woolf’s notions of being, Heidegger’s philosophy on experiencing Being sheds light on time’s role in the novel. Woolf suggests that memories might be frozen in time and should be used to contemplate the future. These two elements, being and time, formulate a path to freedom. In chapter two I cite and discuss the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche to explore the antiquity of the past in connection with *Rebecca*, and to consider how false notions of a monumental past produce a repetitive pattern within the mind of the female narrator. Once the relentless cycle of the past is destroyed, a new self emerges from the destruction. This regard for the past affects the agency of the female characters in her novel, and from this connection with memories, a momentary, freer self emerges.

In Woolf's works, in order to capture what she describes as a "moment of being," material objects serve as portals to memories. In the collection of autobiographical writing titled *Moments of Being*, put together by Virginia and Leonard Woolf along with later editors, Woolf reflects on memories from her life. This collection of essays was published shortly after the publication of *The Years*, which highlights important narrative elements within the novel. In the section titled, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf contemplates the meaning of life and how memories remain forever inscribed within our memory. Woolf acknowledges that a "strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start" (67).

Woolf describes a moment of being, or moment of lucid thought, as a pathway to realization, and "it proves that one's life is not confined to one's body and what one says and does; one is living all the time in relation to certain rods or conceptions. Mine is that there is a pattern behind the cotton wool" (73). Woolf describes a feeling of self-realization that comes from a moment of pure rapture or a moment of pure horror, proving that these moments are not "confined to one's body," but an ability to step outside of that body for a moment. This moment of noticing the fullness of life comes when "one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present" ("A Sketch of the Past" 98). This sense of fully living in the present equates to a type of freedom. Freedom, within this context, is defined in

many ways. From a Hegelian perspective freedom<sup>1</sup> “is nothing more important for us to understand, and nothing that we understand more poorly” (15). There are social and material standards of what freedom should be, but freedom is more than a word. Freedom is a feeling that can only be experienced subjectively. Although Woolf and du Maurier acknowledge that social freedom is a goal worth attaining, they also look towards an existential type of freedom. What women can gain in searching for the feeling is their ability to transcend their existence in the present through experience of a “new reality.” A “new reality” is defined by Yi-Fu Tuan as a reality where humans are able to tap into a heightened sense of Being: “all too often we sleepwalk through life, turning right at this store, left at that tree, nodding to someone here, chatting with another person there, our sensorial and imaginative powers barely tapped. What if these powers were fully tapped? What would reality be like then? Strange to think that the familiar path of learning might just conceivably raise one to transcendent heights” (159). Likewise, Woolf suggests that “a great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing cooking dinner; bookbinding” (“A Sketch of the Past” 70). Even if a day is “a good day,” as Woolf would describe a normal, uneventful day, she suggests that “the goodness was embedded in a kind of nondescript cotton wool” (70). These unconscious moments are broken up by moments that are described by Woolf as “violent shocks;” “something

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<sup>1</sup> In defining the abstract term “freedom” I turn to the existentialist philosophical beliefs. For Hegel, Heidegger, and others, freedom is achieved from a heightened understanding of Being. The extraordinary phenomenon which transcends the Spirit can only be experienced through consciousness. These notions are discussed in Will Dudley’s text: *Hegel, Nietzsche, and Philosophy: Thinking Freedom*.



happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life” (71). Woolf remembers a moment when she fought with her brother Thoby and just as she was about to hit him she thought: “why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there and let him beat me” (71). Instead of the moment making her feel completely helpless, she felt a deep sadness, and that moment never faded.

In connection with Woolf’s philosophy on moments of being, inanimate objects play an important role in tapping into these past experiences. Inanimate objects within this context represent nostalgia for a time that has passed. In *The Years*, Eleanor, the eldest daughter of the Pargiter family, links her childhood to an association with things around the house, such as with Martin’s walrus, the tea kettle, and china, all of which anchor her in the past. In *Rebecca*, the narrator resembles Eleanor in the sense that she is anchored to the past when surrounded with objects in her house. Like Eleanor, the narrator from *Rebecca* is the replacement wife and caretaker of the household. Both women take on the role of mother and housekeeper in lieu of the first mistress of the house. I would like to link this repetition with the idea of how women function in time and within the social order. This idea suggests that women can always be replaced. Julia Kristeva has articulated her views of women’s time and how its movement is cyclical; however, Martin Heidegger suggests that all time is cyclical since the clock “provides an identical duration that constantly repeats itself, a duration which one can always have recourse” (4E). Since the image of a clock is known to represent “father time,” and it is cyclical, how then can women’s time represent time in the same way? The only way for women to escape “father time” is to manipulate time within time itself. Through repetition and replacement, Eleanor is trapped within patriarchal time, but through her

manipulation of it, she is set free. The narrator from *Rebecca* also manipulates time by freeing herself from Rebecca's ghost. However, she forever remains under Mr. de Winter's patriarchal gaze as the events of the story unfold, constituting the remnants of a repetitive cycle.

### **Escaping Madness: The Shadow of the Object**

Du Maurier published *Rebecca* in 1938, the same year Woolf published *The Waves*, a novel that depicts similar environments with different outcomes. The narrator of *Rebecca*, the second wife of Maxim de Winter, is placed in a new environment at a time and place when women did not have the power to choose their future. Stuck in the confines of the Manderley estate, the narrator is faced with shadowing Maxim's former wife, Rebecca. By becoming obsessed with the objects around the estate, the protagonist projects false notions of a constructed past onto these objects and creates a psychological turmoil from which she cannot escape. At the Manderley estate, material things become receptacles which house memories. Tapping into these memories leads the narrator to blur the present moment. This fuzziness is the part of the narrator's consciousness where distorted memories live and are able to materialize, causing the narrator's inability to focus on the 'now.' The false associations projected onto material objects will prove problematic when the narrator tries to capture a "moment of being."

In order for the women of these novels to grapple with ideas of freedom, the material objects that surround them in everyday life serve as more than stagnant dust collectors. Objects come alive by acting as gateways to the past. When the characters of the novels focus on an object, they become transfixed by a time outside of the present moment and these connections form a moment of being. According to postmodern

philosopher Eckhart Tolle, the self “will always try to squeeze [being] into a little box and then put a label on it. It cannot be done. It cannot become an object of knowledge. In Being, subject and object merge into one” (107). As Tolle suggests, Being cannot be consciously discovered or separated from the self. Only in the “now” moment can Being be experienced and examined as such. If there is a metaphysical connection between the subject and the object, a heightened sense of self emerges and the destruction of the damaging images that are imprinted within the mind are shattered. For example, the idea that women can only be seen and not heard, or that a woman’s place must only be in the home to nurture and care for the husband and children, can be discarded once there is a desire to break away from these restrictive barriers.

The subject has everything to do with the object and vice versa. Without imputing any direct influence to Woolf, du Maurier also explores the role objects play in defining subjectivity. What Woolf has defined as a moment of being can be used as a lens through which to examine du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. *Being* female and moving through linear time affects women’s agency, and reading their relationship to objects as a purely positive escape from the four walls of the home is problematic. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, escapism “is human--and inescapable. There is nothing wrong with escape as such. What makes it suspect is the goal, which can be quite unreal” (xvi). Escape as illustrated by Tuan is defined by imagination and fantasy, and if that fantasy “is shut off too long from external reality risks degenerating into a self-deluding hell” (xvi). Escape in this definition can work in two ways. Escape can alleviate stress for a moment or can drive one to the point of madness.

## **Theoretical Possibilities: Framing the Subject**

Critical theories regarding the subject/object relationship have generated a multitude of conversations within cultural studies. I concentrate on a few notable theorists who work within the scope of my project. In his overview of definitions of what constructs a “subject,” Nick Mansfield notes that “the theories of subjectivity that have dominated the last thirty years of literary and cultural studies all agree on one thing. They reject the idea of the subject as a completely self-contained being that develops in the world as an expression of its own unique essence” (13). During the Enlightenment, the one consistent factor in theories on this issue was that a subject can be autonomous and free. Mansfield states that at that time, philosophers who addressed this subject focused on the question of a free “autonomous and rational being (what we call the individual)” (13). The types of subjective models that Descartes and Rousseau developed centered on the “I.” According to Descartes’ philosophy, the key “to knowledge was to be found in a formulation about the word ‘I’ [which] shows the beginning of a new understanding of the human place in the world” (Mansfield 14). Although the emphasis on the self as the origin of all experience and knowledge is nothing new to critical thought, these types of beliefs provided the germination from which philosophy on subjectivity grew. The self as ‘individual in the world’ has been theorized by most philosophers of the twentieth century; however, how subjects function within society, and moreover how men and women formulate their identities as individuals, is a topic still debated today.

Michel Foucault argues against Enlightenment ideals of selfhood: as Mansfield suggests, “Enlightenment ideas are seen by Foucault as trapping us in a selfhood that

we convince ourselves is our most precious possession and freedom-our truth, in fact-but that actually functions to imprison us in a set of practices and routines that are determined for, rather than by, us” (24). What is suggested by the philosophers of the Enlightenment era is that we can find truth and freedom within ourselves to overcome the input of society. However, theorists such as Heidegger and Foucault suggest it is not the self, but rather the world and society that control who we are as individuals. Mansfield concludes that Heidegger’s theories on subjectivity offer a new way to understand how life affects the subject. Foucault and Luce Irigaray include gender differences within the context of their discussions. According to Irigaray, the feminine subject differs greatly from her male counterparts. Differences in sexuality, power, and position in society shape the way female subjects perform in daily life. As Foucault suggests, in order to “know oneself” one must hold a position of power (87). For women, according to Irigaray, “the feminine stands against identity and definition, [and] it is important not to allow her insights to petrify into fixed and predictive categories, insisting on what women are and should be everywhere” (Mansfield 72). The differences and similarities between the male and female subject are important issues that Woolf and du Maurier grapple with in their lives and writings. In *Rebecca* and *The Years*, the female characters are in constant battle over trying to find their place in the world. What makes these texts different from earlier works from authors, like the Brontë sisters, who discuss the same issues, is that the environment surrounding twentieth century works was changing along with the novels. The notion of modernism and the “new woman” was beginning to be recognized as an alternative way of life.

Women were starting to work outside the home, and in turn experiencing a small portion of independence in society as well as in the fiction these women were writing.

Instead of thinking that identity forms naturally, as suggested by some Enlightenment philosophy, Foucault suggests that “the subject does not exist as a naturally occurring thing, but is contrived by the double work of power and knowledge to maximise the operation of both” (Mansfield 59). Foucault’s definition of subjectivity is crucial to understanding how the women in *Rebecca* and *The Years* come to terms with their own identities. Within the domestic environment of these novels, power struggles occur between male and female, mistress and servant, man and wife, which perpetuate the need for shifts in power. The desire for a woman’s identity stems from masculine notions of subjectivity and what Woolf and du Maurier do is formulate a new way that women can work with and around these identity boundaries.

In order to construct a new identity, a discussion of what “I” is and how that “I” constitutes Being-in-the-world is necessary. Martin Heidegger asserts that “‘I am’ is the authentic assertion of Being pertaining to the Dasein of man,” which suggests that Being is ultimately experienced in the ‘now’ illustrated by Heidegger’s use of the present tense of the phrase ‘I am’ (5). Similarly for Woolf, moments “come to the surface unexpectedly” and it is in the experience of the unexpected moment where the emergence of Being happens, as in the instance where Woolf decides not to hit her brother (“A Sketch of the Past” 71). These moments of being occur when objects act as vehicles for the subject to acknowledge the now moment, which gives them the ability to transcend that moment or, more importantly, to escape from a present moment. I show that, in Woolf’s texts, the subject’s ability to step into the object might be

considered a moment of being that stimulates a freedom from the constraints of westernized patriarchal time. A large part of Woolf's ideology searches for the ability to escape from the confines of patriarchal time. By offering examples of this ability in Woolf's novels, focusing on the female characters in *The Years*, we can see that escape from the present is determined by the characters' ability to break away from their memories of a haunted past. In *The Years*, inanimate objects represent freedom from the constraint of patriarchal time. Unlike *The Years*, Du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* suggests that such an escape is impossible, and yet the novel shows that women are nevertheless able to gain some measure of freedom within a male-dominated environment, though they can never completely leave it. These two opposing views of objects are reconciled by the idea that women, regardless of their placement in the world, are still able to manipulate their movement to gain some form of a liberated existence.

### **Ornamental Obsession: Woolf's and du Maurier's Role**

In the conclusion of this thesis, I tie together the subject and object dichotomy in terms of how these two entities become parts of a bigger whole. It is not enough to show how these two works by du Maurier and Woolf provide deeper answers to age old questions. However, what these two authors prove is that there is meaning behind our existence. Du Maurier and Woolf give weight to inanimate objects in a way that makes them worthy of further discussion. I provide connections that strengthen the relationship between Woolf and du Maurier. These meaningful connections show how material objects play a key role in how time and memory develop a new subjectivity for women. Many critics like Douglas Mao have warned that, "it would be a mistake...to assume that an interest in the subject somehow preclude to an interest in the object" (16). With

Mao, I would suggest that the fascination with the other, or external world, complements the search for moments of being in daily existence, in regards to how one perceives the past and strengthens the future. Through their writings, Woolf and du Maurier have shown how women perform in society, as well as exploring ways in which women can break the molds of domestic conformity.



## CHAPTER 1

### LIBERATED MOMENTS:

#### THE PAST RECYCLED IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *THE YEARS*

This is the use of memory:  
For liberation-not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation  
From the future as well as the past.

--- T.S. Eliot

“...That things have changed for the better...  
What I mean is, we've changed in ourselves,” Eleanor was saying.  
“We're happier-we're freer...”

--- Virginia Woolf

Many writers of the modernist period have examined the nature of our attachment to inanimate objects and the role they play in everyday life. Authors like T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf have shown what happens when the boundaries of subject and object blur and how this intimate merging creates a sense of liberation from everyday existence. In *The Years*, Woolf's last novel published in her lifetime, the past plays a complicated role in regards to time. *The Years* was published in 1937, partnered with *Three Guineas*, published in June 1938. In the early developmental stages of this novel, *The Years* and *Three Guineas* were both one work, titled *The Pargiters*. Many critics have argued that *The Years* is too politically charged and is thus “the least successful...or at least weaker than the ‘great’ novels *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the*

*Lighthouse*, and *The Waves*” (Saariluoma 278). Leonard Woolf commented that even though *The Years* was one of the most successful of her novels, it was “the worst book she ever wrote—at any rate, it cannot compare, as a work of art or a work of genius” with her other novels (*Downhill* 145). Regardless of what others thought, Virginia Woolf’s focus was to incorporate some of her own “psychology” in this novel, what she called moments of being and non-being. Woolf laments: “the real novelist can somehow convey both sorts of being. I think Jane Austen can...I tried in...*The Years*” (“A Sketch of the Past” 70). All of Woolf’s novels reflect upon the importance of differentiating special moments from the cotton wool of daily existence: however *The Years* focuses on the development of one family through trials and tribulations over a long period of time, which helps in showing how the characters cling to moments, how they grapple with their memories and how their childhood home has anchored them to their past.

Many believe that Woolf’s decision to leave out the more politically charged material of *Three Guineas* was to protect the art-form of the novel itself. As Liisa Saariluoma notes, “if one compares *The Pargiters* with the corresponding part at the beginning of *The Years*, where only fiction is retained, one notices that Virginia Woolf has made the text more elliptical, less explicit” (278). Saariluoma’s comment is derived from Mitchell A. Leaska’s examination of the drafts of *The Years*. He asserts that “we shall also see how at times she was to communicate to her reader through implication those controlling ideas which were originally either more explicitly set down, or, if not, could be explained in the Essay [*Three Guineas*] which was to follow (xxi). However, novel and essay do go hand in hand with each other. *Three Guineas* is famous for its

political content regarding women's issues and is included in *The Years*, although covered up by the blanket of fiction.

Through analysis of *The Years*, this chapter examines the professional spaces dominated by men and how women did not fit into this societal space. Woolf explores the confinements of the Victorian bourgeois household and challenge women to rise above their inscribed roles as wives/mothers. Through careful interpretation of *The Years*, we can see how the abandonment of the past is useful, but at the same time also see how a connection to the past-or atomistic moments in the past-paves the way for a moment of freedom. This chapter will show examples from both philosophical possibilities for freedom in *The Years* and how notions of interpreting the past, using inanimate objects as the focal point, are meaningful to the subject's ability to form an independent identity.

I begin with T. S. Eliot's poem "Little Gidding," a selection from the "Four Quartets," to introduce the link between modernism and freedom. In this poem, Eliot evokes the emotion of "one man's localized experience" by focusing on a particular place. Little Gidding is "the site of an Anglican religious community founded by Nicholas Farrar in 1625," ruined by fire after the English Civil War and rebuilt in the nineteenth century (Traversi 182). This place "has become an object of pilgrimage, a symbol of spiritual reality" that invokes a timeless quality in regards to the object in which memory is "what grants us freedom from time" (McIntire 99). In other words, memory is the key to gaining freedom from a weighted past and an already written future. The phrase, "an already written future" refers to the demands of western society's preconceived notions that place men and women in gender specific positions.

For the use of this project, an already written future is examined through the lens of how women were perceived in Victorian England. Woolf experiments with ways women are able to break free from the future that they were supposed to fulfill. By viewing a place, in this case Little Gidding, as the object of focus, the narrator of this poem is able to seize memory and gain a heightened sense of self. Here memory “involves recognition-literally a *re-cognizing*- of the past, whether personal or historical; it grants the subject a freer futurity” (McIntire 99). In memory, the past comes to the surface through viewing a recognizable location, a some “where” where one has been before, and this re-cognition is the focal point for a remembrance of the past. Liberation, for Eliot, is a freedom from time’s constraints “with stepping outside of the strict logic of chronos, causality, and subjective want” toward a new, present reality (McIntire 99). By reflecting back, one can step outside of time in order to pave a freer future.

In my own epigraph of this chapter, the eldest daughter of the Pargiter family, Eleanor states that “we’ve changed in ourselves” (*The Years* 386). In the “Present Day” section of the novel, Eleanor is reminiscing dreamily upon the past, at the Pargiter family reunion. The time is late, but Eleanor says that she had “forgotten the time” (384). Time holds no meaning for Eleanor, as she comes in and out of consciousness, connecting the past with the present moment. This type of connection recalls a modernist preoccupation of twentieth century thought, where self-reflection leads to a heightened sense of connectedness to the present moment. Gabrielle McIntire argues that “modernism’s looking to the past as both a return *and* a departure, involving marked historiographical commitments to thinking the relations between memory, time,

desire, and subjectivity, where present and past time are dialogically and endlessly engaged in a rearranging of the past's significations" (author's emphasis 5) are vital to understanding modernism's reflections of how time is used within the framework of the twentieth century novel. McIntire claims that Woolf "played with the vagaries of recollection, but still proposed that the past remains a fundamentally vital, retrievable, reinscribable, and often *pleasurable* residue" (author's emphasis 5). Eleanor's use of the word *change* describes the death of an old self and the birth a new, freer self. On one hand, Eleanor's momentary epiphany happens towards the end of her life, at the age of 70, which could be considered too late to make any long-term changes. Some critics argue that "you can grasp neither the life of an individual nor the history of humankind...as a meaningful temporal totality" (Saariluoma 296). However, if McIntire's idea that the past leaves a retrievable residue on the present moment in order to rekindle something meaningful in the present, then Eleanor's past recollection ruptures the "cotton wool of daily existence." *Then* and *now* collide within Eleanor's mind, creating an engagement with something bigger: "It seemed to [Eleanor] that they were all young, with the future before them. Nothing was fixed; nothing was known; life was open and free before them" (*The Years* 382). Here the past is "cherished...[and] occasionally [a type of] dangerous material that is urgently required to flesh out-sometimes in a flash-the fragile and fleeting (almost absent) fullness of the present" (McIntire 6). This statement suggests that if Eleanor cannot look back upon her life as a whole, because memories from her past come in flashes and segmented moments, how, then, can this meaningful moment from her past translate into a moment of liberation? On the other hand, if Eleanor's sensation for freedom is experienced in fragmented

moments, then perhaps not being able to see her life as a whole is not what is important, but the ability to find happiness in the present moment is all that matters. These fleeting moments within *The Years* are not happenstance, but important connections that perforate the “cotton wool.”

Woolf suggests that moments of freedom can be re-experienced through our memories. The family house and the objects within it seem to encapsulate memories and when the members of the family reconnect with these objects, a change happens within them. This moment of connection between the subject and object may only be possible outside the continuum of time. Saariluoma agrees that “happiness is, maybe, not to be seen as a quality of life; instead it might exist only momentarily, here and now, or in an experience outside of time” (296). I add that freedom is also a form of happiness and perhaps then, also, not a quality of life, but a momentary state of mind viewed in fragmented experiences.

Eliot and Woolf both experiment with these notions of remembrance to retrieve the past in order to gain knowledge of a potentially freer future. Eliot and Woolf use specific places, spaces, or things to manipulate how memories are perceived and these images represent moments of liberation. In merging with the world around them, Woolf is able to experiment with ways for women to transcend the bondage of their weighted pasts to develop a ‘new reality’ ultimately escaping patriarchal time. This chapter will explore these notions of how merging with the material world leads to the formation of a new type of subjectivity, which leads to this escape. What critics have yet to explore fully is how this escape is possible. Through focusing on the domestic environment to

which women are exposed in everyday life, a heightened understanding of Being may be gained.

### **Social Atmosphere surrounding *The Years***

In the wake of the women's suffrage movement and social atmosphere surrounding the two World Wars, modernist writers used these influential events to experiment with memory and address the need to escape the past. T. S. Eliot's poem "Little Gidding" was published in 1930 and Virginia Woolf's long, arduous journey in developing what later became *The Years* started in 1931, when she gave a speech to a group of women from the London and National Society for Women's Services (Radin 2). The 1930s were a significant time period for writers to promote change within a male-dominated historical narrative. For Woolf, this decade was a period where she could freely discuss women and fiction in the hopes that the "improvements in the economical and educational conditions of women would encourage 'the greater impersonality of women's lives' and result in 'poetry' in women's fiction" (Pinkney 3). Woolf had hoped that women would be able to look past the "personal and political" to discover answers to the questions poets like Eliot tried to answer "of our destiny and the meaning of life" (3). However, for women writers, the struggle to find their own space inside the symbolic with the convergence of modernism and feminism in the 1930s was not without difficulty. The personal and political pressures of this time period "prompted Woolf to write her most outspokenly feminist books," which included *The Years* and *Three Guineas* (187). The most common themes written about in this period were class divisions and the burden of sexual repression. One of the main reasons for Woolf's struggle in developing *The Years* was that she wanted to balance her ideas with

her art. According to Grace Radin, "*The Years* becomes the story of a struggle to embody ideas and imaginative fiction, to write a work that expresses the deepest beliefs of its author without losing its balance and integrity" (xvii). In writing *The Years*, Woolf wanted to include all of her beliefs on politics, art, fiction, and freedom without sounding like she was advocating a didactic political stance.

The pressures of the 1930s, which led modern writers to pay special attention to the effects of sexual oppression, opened avenues for Woolf to explore experience in new ways. Like Eliot, for Woolf "there is memory; but there is nothing to check that memory by; nothing to bring it to ground with" ("A Sketch of the Past" 85). Woolf's acute exploration of what kinds of things allow one the ability to experience the past as if it took place in the present is introduced by her comparison between "non-being" and "moments of being." Non-being, says Woolf, is the ordinary, mundane routine of everyday existence, what she calls the "cotton wool of daily life." Woolf illustrates that "every day includes much more non-being than being" ("A Sketch of the Past" 70). However, moments of being are those rare encounters with some-thing enabling one to reconnect with the past. Woolf illustrates that "memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen" (67). According to Woolf, the past is a constant flow which intermingles with the present that can be exposed if "independent of our minds" (67). These moments of being are timeless and can be tapped into through sensory images. These moments that reflect on the past, present, and future are the parts that make up the whole self. An individual may not be able to see him-or-herself as a whole because time stands in the way. Daphne du Maurier comments on how the different aspects of time come together



and in some ways, the following comment complements what Woolf has accomplished in her writing: “We are none of us isolated in time, but are part of what we were once, and of what we are yet to become, so that these varied personalities merge and become one in creative thought” (*Myself When Young* 64). This explanation of how time affects us may supply an even greater meaning when examined within the context of *The Years*. The notion that external and internal time are experienced differently helps us to understand how Woolf complicates the importance of the past within the novel.

### **The Pargiters**

*The Years* entertains the idea that freedom from Victorian conservatism is possible. By focusing her creative lens on one family, the Pargiters, Woolf is able to explore how each member of the family tries to fight for independence from the Victorian norm. We, as readers, are introduced to the Pargiters in the chapter entitled ‘1880,’ which spans from the night of their mother’s death until her funeral. We become acquainted with the head of the family, Colonel Abe Pargiter, on his way to visit his mistress Mira. From the outset of the novel, we see the illness of the mother, Mrs. Pargiter, mother to seven children, as a burden for the family, and we sense that her death is awaited not with fear but with impatience. In this first section, time seems to drag on, as well as halt conversations, appearing stagnant. For the Colonel, the hustle and bustle of daily life keeps moving without him. And for him, “there would be no season; for him there was nothing to do. His wife was dying, but she did not die” (5). Colonel Pargiter seems always to feel ‘out of place’ and far away from reality. Similarly, at home, Milly and Delia, the colonel’s daughters, in their teens, watch the tea kettle boil and lament that “everything seemed to take such an intolerable time”

(10). Eleanor, Milly and Delia's sister, also feels the lag of time as she notices that "there was something strained in the atmosphere" (17). The entire first block of time, 1880, reflects on the restraints of being tied down to a family. The mother's death represents the possibility of freedom. Eleanor tells Delia: "'Look here...you've only got to wait...she meant but she couldn't say it, 'until Mama dies'" (19). Freedom can only be attained after the death of the family structure. Saariluoma also notes that "the rules and restrictions of the patriarchal family influence the emotional ties between sisters and brothers," that "even love cannot be free and equal" (284). As well as time being a restricting factor, "one social institution more than any other impedes a person from the realization of his or her real self: the family" (287). Throughout the rest of the novel, through the years and generations of family members, the recycled elements of the past and of the family affect subjectivity, meaning the family members never completely form an independent self apart from their familial ties. Even after the mother passes on and they eventually leave Abercorn Terrace, the trace of the family still exists within themselves and with their childhood memories, which seems to be bottled up inside the material objects from their childhood home.

Woolf's fascination with objects in *The Years* takes on more importance than most critics allow. The familial environment lingers on in the minds of the characters which spark moments of a time remembered and also promotes personal change. Many critics have explored issues on the thematic level of the patriarchal family regarding political, feminist, and familial space in this novel. Some have argued that the members of the Pargiter family, especially the women, cannot "realize themselves freely and genuinely" inside the continuum of temporal reality (Saariluoma 287). As quoted

earlier, “happiness[...] might exist only momentarily, here and now” (296). This statement promotes the general understanding of how time functions in this novel. Rachel Bowlby, author of *Feminist Destinations*, suggests that in *The Years* the family domestic environment plays an important role in defining subjectivity. Bowlby argues that in this novel “the objects refound from the past tend to appear in unlikely places, moved from the original family lodgings occupied by unmarried daughters in obscure parts of London...they stand as parts for whole...and also for the time remembered as a long-forgotten and buried past of childhood” (120). However, Bowlby does not devote much time to this idea in relation to *The Years*. It seems on both sides of the argument there is a paradox. One cannot form a whole self because of the family, but in turn, the familial bonds *do* play an important role in forming subjectivity. Woolf tries to tackle this paradox through the journey of the family.

I pair Eliot’s definition of freedom with *The Years* because one of Woolf’s preoccupations with this novel was to show how recognition of the past produces liberation from patriarchal time, which often leads to liberated moments. However, comparing Eliot with Woolf is unusual, as critic Gabrielle McIntire illustrates. McIntire suggests that “Eliot’s conservatism and (late) religiosity have seemed to make his corpus incompatible with the work of a feminist, atheist, and avowedly leftist writer like Virginia Woolf” however, they were both supportive of each other’s work and “close friends for over twenty years” (3). Both Eliot and Woolf experiment with literary forms and explore “what kinds of work memory does” to the subjective consciousness when focusing on specific material objects. Likewise, Daphne du Maurier is never directly connected to Woolf’s work except among critics, and yet their love for the environment

and their ability to show how time and memory function within their lives and works are meaningful. It would seem that the modernist canon focuses on these types of issues and expresses them in many different ways.

In Woolf's writings, vivid colors, solid images, and the domestic environment spark, what she later called, 'moments of Being,' bringing the past to the forefront of our minds. Like Woolf, modern philosophers like Martin Heidegger and post-modern thinkers like Yi-Fu Tuan and Eckhart Tolle have uncovered significant discoveries by studying people and their surroundings. Yi-Fu Tuan notes that "all too often we sleepwalk through life, turning right at this store, left at that tree...our sensorial and imaginative powers barely tapped" (159). Woolf articulates a method for one to tap into these imaginative powers to bring back a memory, as if it were sitting next to us. For instance, in *The Years*, Martin Pargiter, one of the Colonel's younger sons, remembers an image from his childhood, an image of a "little blue flower" which triggers the memory of his younger sister Rose, "standing with her back to the schoolroom door; very red in the face, with her lips tight shut as they are now" (159).

In Woolf, the past often functions through the subject's connections to inanimate objects. These atomistic moments of the past, recalled from memory, gives significance to the present moment. Furthermore Woolf suggests that the past, if dwelt upon, can become a burden or a nuisance in regards to living in the present moment. Woolf recalls the past as "only com[ing] back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river" ("A Sketch of the Past" 98). In this passage, Woolf suggests that the past and present run together and are fluidly connected. Moreover, the past also functions as a weight, constantly interrupting the harmony of the present

moment, as illustrated in Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. The repetitiveness of the past for Clarissa gets interrupted by the chimes of Big Ben as the "leaden circles" of the past "dissolve in the air" (4). These lines suggest that in order to escape the confines of a repetitive 'mechanical' existence, only a transcendental state of awareness can be achieved through a timeless heightened sense of self.

These notions of experiencing a heightened understanding of Being are a prominent factor in the lives of the Pargiter women as they focus on material objects of the house to transcend their experience into a realm outside of linear time. For Heidegger, Being is the very essence of that which is. His use of the word *Dasein* literally means "being there."<sup>2</sup> According to Heidi Storl, *Dasein* represents not the Cartesian phrase "'I think, therefore I am,' but rather that my being (the fact that I *am*) makes possible my various modes of being, including that of thought or thinking" (306). From this reversal of meaning, a form of life emerges. Storl explains that "this emergent form of life, one with its surroundings-the 'subject' or 'ego' merges with the 'objects of its surroundings'" (306). One of the most significant functions of Heidegger's thoughts on Being is that the only way to fully experience Being, a moment quite out of the ordinary must happen. As mentioned earlier, the most extreme possibility of Being, for Heidegger, is in its death. Through death, "the most extreme possibility of itself [*Dasein*], which it can seize and appropriate as standing before it" can materialize (11E), as in the duality between Septimus Smith and Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Through Smith's death, Clarissa feels more alive, more of an urgency to

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<sup>2</sup> Definition taken from Heidi Storl's interpretation of Heidegger in her article "Heidegger in Woolf's *Clothing*" (306).

enjoy the party. She claims, “Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate...there was an embrace in death” (184). When the clocks strike and she knows she must return to the party, she realizes that Smith has made her “feel the beauty; made her feel the fun” of life (186). The same instance can be seen in “A Sketch of the Past,” when Woolf overhears her parents say that Mr. Valpy, a family whom the Woolf’s were acquainted, killed himself. She overhears this while walking on the path by the apple tree and in this moment she is paralyzed. She states, “I could not pass it...in a trance of horror. I seemed to be dragged down, hopelessly, into some pit of absolute despair from which I could not escape” (71). This instance of being Woolf describes is a moment of despair, but also a moment of realization. She states: “I was quite unable to deal with the pain of discovering that people hurt each other...the sense of horror held me powerless” (71). This despair turns into a revelation about life, which turns into power. Similarly in the way Clarissa deals with Smith’s death in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf revels in the surprise of these moments of being that separate themselves from the “cotton wool of daily life” (72). This relationship with death is necessary in order to gain some sort of meaning to life, even if the moments are ones that are particularly hard to face.

In *The Years*, the first event that takes place is the death of the mother. Each member of the family is affected by this death in a different way. For Colonel Pargiter, his wife’s death meant that there would be “no season; for him there was nothing to do” (5). The lengthy process of Mrs. Pargiter’s death imprisons the rest of the household. She was dying, but not yet dead. Delia’s longing for her mother to die leaves her empty in the present in search of something else: “there was nothing to do but to look” (22).

As she focuses on her grandfather's portrait, she dreams of liberty and freedom with thoughts shifting to Charles Parnell. However her dreams are interrupted by her mother's abrupt awakening. Eleanor also had dreams and plans for the future, but could not discuss them at the present moment (31). In the wake of death, the physical objects around the house come alive. As Delia illustrates, there is nothing to do but to look, and when the members of the family "look" they are associating their mother's death with their environment. These objects, like Martin's walrus, the tea kettle, and other things around the house will eventually become nostalgic representations of a self that has died, once the family members leave their home, Abercorn Terrace. Heidegger suggests that *Dasein* is recognized when it is "running up against its most extreme possibility" (13E). *Dasein's* ability to run back to the past allows us freedom from it. Heidegger notes that "running ahead seizes the past as the authentic possibility of every moment of insight, as what is now certain" (15E). What is certain in the case of the Pargiter women is that knowledge of the past allows a significant change to happen in their future. This significant moment could not happen if there were nothing to project the past into. That is why objects of the house become a significant part of the Pargiter women's lives.

### **The Domestic Environment: The Significance of Inanimate Objects**

The summer of 1905 proved an important moment in Virginia Woolf's personal life. A year after her father's death, she returned to her childhood summer home, Talland House, in a village just outside of St. Ives. Talland House was the Stephen's family home where its members spent summers between 1882, the year Virginia Stephen was born, and 1894 (Lee 21). Virginia Woolf made many trips back to Cornwall, "but this is the symbolic one, that gathers up her feelings about her

childhood” (Lee 22). Woolf drew on many memories of Cornwall for novels like *To the Lighthouse*, *Jacob’s Room* and *The Waves*. The memories hidden in the home are brought back to life in her writing. She rediscovers a sense of self, a self that is separate from the present self. The desire to find that childlike self and to write not just about, but “*as if a child*, is one of the most powerful impulses in her writing” (Lee 23, author’s emphasis). In *The Years*, the house on Abercorn Terrace exemplifies the type of strong connection among its family members as Woolf’s Talland’s House had on her life. Woolf searched for her past visiting Cornwall. Like Daphne du Maurier, Woolf found her “Time” within a house and in turn, her creativity soared.

Woolf’s ability to draw from her past for personal connection is mirrored by the characters in *The Years* because of the emphasis on the household. The members of the Pargiter house are in constant conflict with the socially constructed external world. This is another example of how the external interferes with internal experiences of time. This conflict is one that Woolf tries to reconcile. Makiko Minow-Pinkney notes that “in both spheres it is the ‘infantile fixation’ of the Father that destroys ‘freedom and justice’” (187). Woolf laments that “savages I suppose have some tree, or fire place, round which they congregate...that sacred spot” of the house (“A Sketch of the Past” 118). This meeting place within the private space of the house “makes the most private being of family life” (118). Woolf’s main focus is on the private sphere in *The Years* and how the public sphere interferes with the female characters’ ability to achieve freedom and justice while residing at Abercorn Terrace. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that a structured landscape “is made up of ‘place’ and ‘space,’ the place of stability and confinement and the space of vulnerability and freedom” (175). When the Pargiter daughters are



enclosed within the walls of Abercorn Terrace, there is a sense of stability; however, there is also a confining quality about the house. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf remembers how the tea table...“was the centre of the Victorian family life-in our family at least,” the same way that the tea kettle is such a significant factor in the Pargiter household (118). When the kettle boils, the Colonel comes home, “letting himself down in one solid mass into the big armchair” and reluctantly sipped his tea, as he asks his children about their day (12). Pouring tea was a sacred act that kept the family together.

The shift from the internal space of the home to the external world was a difficult one. The brothers, Morris and Martin are strained and perhaps pushed into work that they did not want to do: “the father has the authority to command Martin to stop eating and to go and do his prep for school” ( Saariluoma 284). The women are not allowed to involve themselves freely outside of household traditions: “household work or a music lesson at the most” (Saariluoma 284). However, at least the boys of the family learned about sexual freedom from “being allowed to move rather freely in the streets,” (Saariluoma 285) whereas the women of the family tended to experience sexuality as a form of male aggression, as in Rose’s venture outside of the house, where she comes into contact with a male exhibitionist, as he “put out his arm as if to stop her. He almost caught her” (*The Years* 28).

Scholars like Michel Serres have given significance to physical objects in Woolf’s works. Serres illustrates how objects come to life: “just as the faces and hands of old men become wrinkled, so the rooftop and walls of the house come to bear marks of bad weather and passing weeks, that is, of tempests and time” (110). In *The Years*, Woolf’s artistic choices regarding the house play an important role in the formation of

freedom. In the 1880 section of the novel, Crosby, the housekeeper, takes pride in upkeep of the house. The dining-room, “with its carved chairs, oil paintings, the two daggers on the mantel- piece, and the handsome sideboard-all the solid objects that Crosby dusted and polished every day-looked at its best in the evening” (35). Even though the house was sparkling and full of pretty things, Eleanor, Delia, Milly, and Rose are confined within its walls. The events taking place outside the house are more provocative for Delia and Eleanor: “...for the moment the two girls stood at the window looking into the street. The crocuses were yellow and purple in the front gardens. There was a wildness in the spring evening; even here, in Abercorn Terrace the light was changing from gold to black” (19). The hope for something better is a longing that never materializes while the girls still reside in their childhood home as the color for hope is gold and its inevitable fade to black representing a long-lost future.

Once Mrs. Pargiter dies, things in the house change; things are misplaced. Even the house itself is described by Woolf as being “very dark” (83). Objects in the house are not just pretty things that are shown for aesthetic value, but are given life by the lamenting family members. Eleanor touches the “ink-corroded patch of bristle on the back of Martin’s walrus” and thinks that this one “solid object might survive them all. If she threw it away it would still exist somewhere or other. But she never had thrown it away because it was a part of other things-her mother” (91). After Colonel Pargiter’s death, the house on Abercorn terrace is sold and the house becomes like ‘a scene in a play;’ a distant memory. This disconnect from the home is described by Woolf in a more personal context in “A Sketch of the Past.” She notes, “any break-like that of house moving-causes me extreme distress; it breaks; it shallows; it turns depth into hard

thin splinters” (98). This type of reflection can be seen through Eleanor and Crosby, as they take a last look at the house and recognize its emptiness: “Eleanor look[ed] in at the empty drawing room. The white light of the snow glared in on the walls. It showed up the marks on the walls where the furniture had stood, where the pictures had hung” (215). The emptiness of the house represents a new beginning; everything in it “had been shared out and separated” (216). Each family member took a piece of furniture, a piece of their past, to bring with them into the future. Martin separates himself from the past and the house by describing family life as being an “abominable system. No wonder the house would not let. It had one bathroom, and a basement; and there all those different people had lived, boxed up together, telling lies” (223). All of the Pargiter children carry with them the burden of Abercorn Terrace. When it is sold, the only person who fears the unknown future seems to be Crosby as “she stood for a moment, like a frightened little animal, peering around her before she ventured to brave the dangers of the street” (223). However, even after the death of Colonel Pargiter, the institution of the patriarchal family still dictates the children’s actions, to do things that they do not want to do. Martin’s military career is something into which his father pushes him. He really wanted to be an architect (Saariluoma 288). The daughters could have a life of their own only if they married, but Delia’s and Milly’s marriages do not make them truly happy or free.

Eleanor does not get married and even though this would make her a spinster in the eyes of the social institution of the era, it seems that Eleanor is free to roam about, travel the world, and reflect on the happiness she feels in the present moment. At the start of the “Present Day” chapter of the novel, Eleanor, probably well over 70 years

old, comes out of *her* flat, “her face was lit up by the glow of the sun...she was dazzled” (*The Years* 306). Her healthy glow and unchanged features are characteristics that North, her brother Morris’s son, notices. North thinks, “she looked vigorous. She had been in India. Her face was tanned with the sun. With her white hair and her brown cheeks she scarcely looked her age” (307). At the closing of the chapter and the novel, Eleanor is at the Pargiter family reunion and falls in and out of sleep, in and out of consciousness. At one point she clutches on to some “coins she was holding...and she was suffused with happiness” (426). She asks herself if this feeling of happiness, this “keen sensation” survived because of the memories of the solid objects that now have become a faded memory? She recognizes that “here she was; alive; in this room; with living people,” as the images from her past quietly fade away into the distance. Eleanor’s contact with tangible coins seems to make a connection with the objects from her past as this past is disappearing. This moment reflects on how the importance of the past dissolves, fragments into the ever-changing present. At that moment, Eleanor’s hands “hallowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller” (428).

Also in the “Present Day” chapter, the newer generation seems to lament these social institutions and cannot see that the present moment is as free as Eleanor claims it is. North, upon his return from Africa, experiences London in amazement and is confused at how different life is now. Reflecting on his environment, he notices the objects around him: “looking at a floating banner of transparent silk, he had been used to raw goods; hides and fleeces; here was the finished article. A dressing-case, of yellow leather fitted with silver bottles, caught his eye” (309). The contrast of African

and English goods shows how people take things for granted in modernized cities. It is almost as if he experienced Africa as being part of the past and London as the “finished article” of his future. He is at odds with the hustle and bustle and has to reflect and ask himself: ““What, what, what do they mean by it?”” (309). Peggy, North’s sister and Eleanor’s niece, also does not believe that the present moment produces any sort of substance for happiness or freedom. She glances at Eleanor when they get into a cab that will take them to the reunion, at the conclusion of the novel, and she thinks: “It was as if she [Eleanor] still believed with passion-she, old Eleanor-in the things that man had destroyed. A wonderful generation, she thought, as they drove off. Believers...” (331). But in the same way that Eleanor felt that her freedom was restricted in 1880, Peggy feels the same restriction in the present moment and thinks upon the past “because it looks so peaceful and so safe” (Saariluoma 295). This example of how Eleanor and Peggy feel leads one to believe that time repeats itself. Eleanor reflects on the repetition of time in the “Present Day” section of the novel, when she talks with Nicholas and remembers a phrase that he has said before, only a phrase from the past: “Does everything then come over again a little differently?...if so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? ...a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?” (369). Eleanor’s reflection on the repetition of time is a reflection on reality and on the structure of the novel itself. The fragmented moments and repetitious words and memories all relate to Woolf’s experimentation on how life truly functions, in circular patterns of representations. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf states that remembering the past is like creating scenes. She asserts that

“scene making is [her] natural way of marking the past. A scene always comes to the top; arranged; representative,” it allows “reality” to flood in (142).

### **Time: The Circularity of a Repetitious Past and the “Now-ness” of the Present**

For Woolf, physical objects share an intimate relationship with each member of the household. Every object embodies a moment of being which links the family to the passage of time. That is why time is one of the major themes in most of her novels. Particularly in *The Years*, the chapters are structured around blocks of time, in chronological order, which seem to be ambiguous because of the jumps in years. The first ten chapters cover moments from 1880 to 1918. The last and longest chapter is ‘Present Day’ which takes place in the 1930s. What makes the novel somewhat confusing is that these chapters only focus on glimpses of the Pargiter family members. Aside from the 1880 chapter, which functions like a linear narrative, the rest of the novel seems disjointed. We catch moments and experiences which seem out of place and ordinary. Saariluoma comments that these moments “do not reveal turning points in their lives, but ‘ordinary’ encounters” (290). However, these encounters represent significant moments within the lives of the Pargiters which constitute a transcendental shift within their understanding of life.

Each chapter begins with a detailed description of the external environment. These asides describe the changing seasons and, I would argue, the changing of mood of the family within the context of that particular section. For example, the beginning of the first chapter states: “It was an uncertain spring. The weather, perpetually changing, sent clouds of blue and of purple flying over the land...Slowly wheeling, like the rays of a searching light, the days, the weeks, the years passed one after another across the

sky” (3). The scene starts with a description of nature out in the countryside and then focuses more closely on the hustle of London daily life. This scene is typical of each chapter, reflecting on time’s movement and position in relation to the mood of the Pargiter family. As mentioned above, the 1880 chapter involves death and a lag in time. The beginning description mentions an uncertainty in the air and a “slowly wheeling” repetition of time, which encompasses the mood of the family as they impatiently await their mother’s death.

The 1913 section begins with a snowy scene somewhere in London in the month of January. In this block of time, Eleanor and Crosby hand the house on Abercorn Terrace over to the housing agent. The description of the nature scene mirrors the attitude of the house:

It was January. Snow was falling; snow had fallen all day. The sky spread like a grey goose’s wing from which feathers were falling over England. Lanes were levelled; hollows filled; the snow clogged the streams. Obscured windows, and lay wedged against doors. There was a faint murmur in the air, a slight crepitation, as if the air itself were turning to snow; otherwise all was silent...But as the night wore on, snow covered the wheel ruts; softened to nothingness the marks of traffic, and coated monuments, palaces and statues with a thick vestment of snow. (214)

The house is empty; Eleanor and Crosby stare into its nothingness like the absence of the “marks of traffic” (214). The white, hard glare of the snow reflects in the empty rooms of the house as “the snow cast a hard white glare on the walls of the

bathroom...the cracks on the enamel bath, and the stains on the wall” (214). The house is likened to a tomb or a “coated monument...with a thick vestment of snow” (214). The mixture of emotions felt by Eleanor fit with the natural flow of winter’s harsh reality. The seasons change and so do the lives the family. Woolf explores how the natural environment resembles a human being: alive, breathing, and constantly changing.

Woolf also explores how time affects the way memories are expressed by experimenting with atomistic moments in relation to time. Experiencing memories in repetition leads Woolf to suggest that perhaps these moments live outside of linear time. This belief has significant meaning in Greek mythology. Woolf’s familiarity with Greek mythology is explained in her short essay “On Not Knowing Greek.” In this essay, Woolf begins with her strange attraction to all things Greek: “All the more strange, then, is it that we should wish to know Greek, try to know Greek, feel forever drawn back to Greek, and be for ever making up some notion of the meaning of Greek” (23). Her knowledge and imagination spark an interest that becomes clear in her usage of Greek concepts in *The Years*. Saariluoma adds that the “use of cosmic framing and the circular concept of time of the ancient Greeks” can be supported in its importance of understanding meaning within *The Years*. Woolf states “...and it is to the Greeks that we turn when we are sick of the vagueness, of the confusion, of the Christianity, and its consolations of our own age” (38). Moreover, Saariluoma suggests that “the life of modern man living in a big city is only to a relatively small extent determined by the cosmic event of the course of the year. Whereas the course of a year, including all the seasonal agricultural work, was once coterminous with the content of the life of men,



the life of modern city-dwellers is detached from this” (291). I would also add that vagueness and confusion of the fragmentary events within the body chapters come together as a whole when put into perspective against the description of the seasons.

The Greeks show a definitive split between two different times. Perhaps in *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Evans sings from the dead an ‘Ode to Time’ for Septimus Smith, he says “the word ‘time’ split its husk” (69). This passage offers a way to understand these two types of times. In Greek mythology, the word “kronos” is the ancient Greek word “which refers to sequential or linear time...the god Chronos, pictured as elderly, gray-haired and bearded, was the personification of time...Father Time” (Freier 2). We know Father Time as linear time, a time that is measured in seconds, minutes, and hours, by appointments and clocks, also known as Standardized time, which is known as masculine time. However, there is also an ‘Other’ time known to the Greeks as kairos, or opportune time. This type of time “cannot be measured...it is the perfect time, the qualitative time, the perfect moment, the ‘now’...Kairos brings transcending value to kronos time” (Freier 2). According to Mark Freier, “these moments transcend kronos, stirring emotions and realities to cause decisive action. It is not an understatement to say that kairos moments alter destiny” (2). These two distinctly different times may differentiate what Woolf defines as moments of non-being and moments of being. Non-being is the mundane, the everyday unconscious motions one performs throughout the day, all done within the patriarchal structure of time. Moments of being, the moments outside of the “cotton wool” can be distinctly viewed as kairos time, “as Freier notes, “there is no better time to apprehend kairos than the exact moment in time in which a person lives: the present moment. Simply put, the past is over; the future has yet to be

written” (11). This moment, extended in time is considered feminine moments outside of the patriarchal narrative. The sections of *The Years* are measured by dates acknowledged by kronos time, by a patriarchal inscribed clock, however, the rare moments that happen within these instances take place in a time which cannot be measured chronologically, but perhaps only by experience: kairos time. I argue that this time represents the break within patriarchal discourse.

Specific moments of being that take place within *The Years* add significance to kairos in connection with experience of a new subjectivity. Rose reflects on herself as splitting as she contemplates her conversation with Sara and Maggie at their apartment:

They talked...as if Abercorn Terrace were a scene in a play. They talked as if they were speaking of people who were real, but not real in the way in which she felt herself to be real. It puzzled her; it made her feel that she was living at two different lives at the same moment. She was a little girl wearing a pink frock; and here she was sitting in this room, now.

(167)

In this passage, Rose wonders how the past could “rise above her present” (166). Rose is experiencing a moment of time from her childhood which is taking over her present, making her feel like she is two people at the same time. The self of her past, wearing the “pink frock,” the helpless young girl chained to the house is very different from her present self. The girl that was frightened by the man, who revealed himself to her, is not the same person she has grown into. Likewise, Woolf recalls a moment in her past when she dreams that she was “looking in a glass when a horrible face—the face of an animal—suddenly showed over my shoulder...I cannot be sure. But I have always remembered

the other face in the glass, whether it was a dream or a fact, and it frightened me” (“A Sketch of the Past” 69). This recognition is a moment of being. The image of the person in the glass is separate from the individual having the experience. However, Rose’s thought is interrupted when a distraction from outside rattles the windows, which she then connects with an object to stake her claim on the situation: “she started slightly, roused from her thoughts about her childhood, and separated the glasses” (167). Her movement to separate the glasses is significant in that as she separates the glasses she is actually separating her old self from her *now* self. Before she leaves Sara and Maggie’s small apartment she states: “‘I never liked being at home’ ...I liked being on my own much better” (170). Here Rose strongly claims the part of herself which is on her own, liberated from her childhood. She tries to distance herself from the house she grew up in, yet still uses the past in order to move past it.

In *The Use and Abuse of History*, Friedrich Nietzsche suggests this about the past: “Man must have the strength to break up the past, and apply it, too, in order to live. He must bring the past to the bar of judgement, interrogate it remorselessly, and finally condemn it” (21). In the scene with Rose, Woolf exemplifies the function of a split time and shows how Rose chooses to gain knowledge from her past to liberate herself in the moment. This feeling of liberation may not last long, but in the moment an empowering self emerges. Freier notes that “either we proactively seize kairos time or we, by choice, choose only to live in kronos time, which tempts us to reshape the past or lures us to bring unwarranted assurances to our future” (9). Moreover, according to Shoukri, “what it means to be a woman is already defined in her mind: it is ‘to be

chosen” (318). These small realizations helps Rose come to terms with her future and grow from the shame of her past experiences.

Eleanor also meditates upon her existence in the world and on the importance of objects, which leads her to question her identity while living in her childhood home. Eleanor questions her identity by relating herself to a piece of china. The tiny atoms that make up the cup mirror the questions she has about what defines her-self: “take this cup for instance; she held it out in front of her. What was it made of? Atoms? And what were atoms, and how did they stick together? The smooth hard surface of the china with its red flowers seemed to her for a second a marvelous mystery” (155). These objects can be interpreted subjectively by the characters in order to house memories. They are keepers of a lost time, and for Eleanor, the answers to the experience of existence. In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf remembers a moment when she was walking around the garden near her home in St. Ives and by focusing on one flower, her knowledge of the world became brighter, stronger: “I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower. It was a thought I put away as being likely to be very useful to me later” (71). This “violent shock” as Woolf calls it, occurs outside of the cotton wool of daily life to bring about some form of awakening (71). Eleanor’s experience with the cup is the type of personal experience that brings her closer to the nature of being-in-the-world, an instance where the cotton wool of daily life is removed to reveal something bigger.

On the surface, Time moves in a linear fashion, which leads us to believe that once the moment is gone, we can never repeat it. Time moves forward, but seasons,

months, and years repeat. Even though these markers of time repeat, there are fragments of difference within these repetitions. The popular catch-phrase of historic recurrence, “history repeats itself” may be true, but *how* it repeats itself is the difference. The theory of historical repetition has been discussed by such philosophers as Soren Kierkegaard in his work titled *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*. In his philosophical interpretation of Constantin Constantius’ experiments with repetition, Kierkegaard suggests that “Constantine tells us that repetition and recollection are the *same* movement, but in opposite directions” (author’s emphasis xiii). He continues to say that “meaning or value might collect or gather as it is unearthed from the past; but it might also gather as it arises anew” (xiii). Mark Twain also comments on the circularity of time in reference to his famous short story “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”:

November, 1903: When I became convinced that the ‘Jumping Frog’ was a Greek story two or three thousand years old, I was sincerely happy, for apparently here was a most striking and satisfactory justification of a favorite theory of mine-to wit, that no occurrence is sole and solitary, but is merely a repetition of a thing which has happened before, and perhaps often. (116)

In this passage, Twain reinforces the repetitious cycle of time, but of course, his story and the story told few thousand years previous by the Greeks, are not identical. A similar thing occurs in Kierkegaard’s accounts of Constantin’s reports: a young man travels to Berlin to try to relive his first experiences there; he comes to this conclusion:

... ‘there is no repetition at all. This made a deep impression on me. I am not so very young am not altogether ignorant of life, and long before my

previous trip to Berlin I had cured myself of calculating on the basis of uncertainties.' He went home...everything was out of place-My home had become dismal simply because it was a repetition of the wrong kind.

(Repetition 169)

Kierkegaard's young man tries to force previous events in time to repeat themselves and fails. In *The Years*, the circularity of time naturally repeats itself, but I argue that it repeats itself with a difference. If the past continues to recycle in the minds of the Pargiter family, how do they eventually escape it?

In the novel, time is repetitive, not only in Woolf's description of the passing seasons but in events, dialogues, and the appearance of the same objects. All of these repetitions are written within the patriarchal structure, making it difficult for the characters of the novel to break out of this oppressive discourse. For instance the members of the family come into contact with various items from their past, like the "crimson-and-gilt chair...that used to stand in the hall," and the "old Italian glass blurred with spots that hung between windows," all used as reminders of a past that they assess in the present moment (165). Moreover, throughout the entire novel, fragmented phrases repeat, leaving thoughts unfinished. Although time and space limits me from revealing every instance where these repeated events occur within the novel, we can explore a few instances where these repetitions seem most vital to the nature of this project. Thoughts and dialogue, as well as actions and dreams, are interrupted by some outside force within a patriarchal time frame. Thoughts are interrupted by the sounds of the house, to remind one of its patriarchal significance. Delia "thought, 'somewhere there's freedom, and somewhere, she thought, *he* is-wearing his white flower...But a

stick grated in the hall” (author’s emphasis 12). For Delia, the image of the white flower represented a “portrait of a red-haired young woman” then changed to reflections of Parnell with the ““white flower in his button-hole,”” her idolized version of freedom (22). Time is also repeated in sounds of other masculine representations of time, like the train in which Kitty rides. The sound of the “continuous roar” that keeps Kitty awake causes her to reflect on the repetitious use of the word “now” (271). Here, lines written into the novel itself are being repeated. She thinks, “*Now*...Where is the train at this moment? *Now*...we are passing the white house on the hill; *now* we are going through the tunnel; *now* we are crossing the bridge over the river...” (author’s emphasis 271). Here Kitty thinks of time spatially, at this moment, the “past and the present jumbled together” causing an interruption in the logical ordering of time. This use of the word “now” is also repeated in the last words that Eleanor says at the conclusion of the novel, “And now?...And now?” (434). *Now* is reflective of a type of questioning where the position of the female subject stands within the framework of patriarchal society.

Time is also repeated within the careers of the Pargiter men, revealing that men, as well as women, feel subjugated in this masculine structure. Colonel Pargiter’s life is repeated by Martin, who joins the military, but he laments that he “wished he had been an architect” and in North who follows the same militaristic path (271). Each of these instances shows the difficulty of escaping the patriarchal oppressive past. Even in the present, the past always comes back and remains in some form, always present. In *Three Guineas* Woolf grapples with problems of patriarchal oppression towards the “daughters of educated men” (52). This critique on patriarchal oppression is clearly present and reflective of the male and female characters in *The Years*. Woolf declares

that the “Dictator as we call him,” believes that he can inscribe upon “other human beings how they shall live, what they shall do” (53); how the world “is divided into two services; one the public and the other the private. In one world the sons of educated men work as civil servants, judges, soldiers and are paid for that work; in the other world, the daughters of educated men work as wives, mothers daughters-but are they not paid for that work?...is [this] work worth nothing to the nation in solid cash” (54). This clearly links Colonel Pargiter and Martin’s military careers and Morris’s active career in law. Woolf quotes, ““The woman’s world is her family, her husband, her children, and her home”” (53). This strict instruction is challenged by Woolf as she writes Eleanor outside of this rule, for Eleanor never marries, she pays for her own apartment and travels the world on her own terms. Although Woolf is aware of this positioning problem, she clearly uses *The Years* to fight against societal norms by experimenting with the roles that women had to fill, through Delia’s strong political devotion to Parnell, through Rose who remains unmarried and joins the suffrage movement, through Maggie and Sara whom both share an apartment together at one point, and through Eleanor’s “free” lifestyle. Moreover, Woolf also suggests that even repetitions have deviations from this restrictive positioning structure and these deviations are experienced in “moments of being;” therefore producing an opportunity for freedom from these strict binaries.

The difference in repetition stems from the possibility of escaping the repetitiveness of patriarchal time by blurring the boundaries of the past and the present. According to McIntire, Woolf’s fiction “repeatedly insist[s] that the backward glance re-affiliates the present with the past, bringing the past, bodily, into the spectrum of



contemporary existence. As such, it would be incorrect to say merely that the past is granted new life in their reflections. We would also have to say the reverse; knowing the past grants life to the present” (210). Within *The Years*, the past is reflective of oppression for the Pargiter family. By acknowledgement of this oppressive past, there is a self-conscious effort to grapple with it. The following section provides examples which show how moments of being serve as a mode for experiencing freedom from patriarchal time’s restraints, as these moments of being can only be ‘experienced’ outside of progressive time.

### **Freedom and Identity- What Does the Future Hold?**

The only way to escape time is to transcend it. In *The Years*, the women are dominated by the family sector and can only be transformed later into independent selves, to selves not defined by the socially constructed environment that constricts them from being free. Freedom, defined by T. S. Eliot, relies on objectifying the past through memories. In order to gain knowledge of a new reality, freedom must be defined as the death of an old self and the birth of a new one. As stated before, Heidegger illustrates that death is the extreme possibility of realizing the self. Yi-Fu Tuan also notes that death can promote a positive function. Tuan demonstrates that death “gives an extra edge to life, and it is the ground of virtue” (67). Woolf also identifies violent moments as giving an “extra edge to life.” In accumulating events from her life, Woolf acknowledges the “many bright colours; many distinct sounds; some human beings, caricatures; comic; several violent moments of being, always including a circle of the scene...all surrounded by a vast space” (“A Sketch of the Past” 79). All of these vibrant images transpire into events from the past, which can in turn,

transform the self. In order for a metaphorical death of self to happen, there has to be a shift in time's function. According to Bernhard Waldenfels:

Time is henceforth more than an attribute of things or a way of experiencing the soul; it is also more than the form of intuition for a transcendental subject. Time is no longer reduced to mere modality, since it has a decisive part in the formation, shaping, and realization of something (object), of someone (subject), and of meaning (orderings).  
(108)

For Waldenfels, the classical ordering of time shifts from being a mere accent in the formulation of the self to being an active agent in subjects and in material objects of the environment around us. There is a self-conscious awareness of time which "takes on a particular weight" (109). In order for the death of a self to occur, the weight of the past must be acknowledged, used, and forgotten, in accordance with Nietzsche's theories. This weight "repeats itself with particular intensity in the belated effect of those traumatic experiences that shackle us to the past" (115). As in the prior example, Rose claims a liberated present; however the traumatic encounter with the "pock-marked" face of a man who flashed her on her way to the shop was a burden which she carried into the present (28). This event occurs twice in the 1880 section of the novel, when Rose is a young girl, riding on horseback to Mrs. Lamley's shop. Again, in her dreams, the pock-marked man comes to her, but in the end it is only her big sister, Eleanor. The memory comes again in the sections of the novel when Rose is older. Within the novel, especially when Rose is older, she must decide how to break her emotional responses of

this event in order to rise above it. Later, in the 1910 section, the shadow of the “man at the pillar-box” (42) shows up in the external environment, the dangerous streets, the plain clothes Rose wears, and her visit her cousins, Sara and Maggie, when she suddenly wants to reveal “something hidden” from her past (167).

The concern with time and its relation to being-in-this-world, for Woolf, takes on an existential solution to woman’s fate. According to Shoukri, “Virginia Woolf studies the moment in time because she believes that in the moment, individual vision tapers to a point and is best revealed” (326). Since time embodies all subjects and objects, how does it manifest itself within these two structures? Martin Heidegger defines being in relation to how time functions within it. Heidegger suggests that “since time itself is not movement, it must somehow have to do with movement” (3E). For Heidegger, time is measured in things that change. In *The Years*, the characters’ lives do not significantly change, but yet externally, the world is changing around them. In *The Years*, Eleanor retires to her room in Celia’s house after arriving home from Spain and wonders:

perhaps because she had been travelling; it seemed as if the ship were still padding softly through the sea; as if the train were still swinging from side to side...she felt as if things were moving past her as she lay stretched on the bed under the single sheet. But it’s not the landscape any longer, she thought; it’s people’s lives, their changing lives. (211)

This passage illustrates that Eleanor is aware of change, not just in society, but within herself. Thinking about where her future is headed, she wonders, “after I’ve pensioned Crosby off, when...Should she take another house? Should she travel? Should she go to

India, at last?" (213). She mentions that Sir William's life is over and "hers was beginning" (213). After selling the house and separating herself from Crosby and the memories that have weighed her down, she now has the freedom to do as she pleases. She realizes that "things pass, things change, ...And where are we going? Where? Where?" (213). What seems like a terrifying thought, not knowing where her future may lead her, it is also a liberating experience. It doesn't matter where she is going; but that she is free to 'choose' where to go.

People change, objects even change, such as houses decaying, or stuffed animals becoming worn and tattered. The measurement of time within human existence lies in the fact that humans "already [have] procured a clock prior to all pocket-watches and sundials" (Heidegger 5E). If time is movement within things that change, then an exploration of things in *The Years* generates numerous examples of how these changes represent a metaphorical death of the self, to leave space for women to freely explore an unwritten future.

Heidegger's phenomenological representations of being and time have opened doors for post-modern philosophers such as Eckhart Tolle, who suggests that "the essence of all things is emptiness" (137). If this is the case, subject and object must merge together in order for the thing to become meaningful. Tolle further illustrates that "in Being, subject and object merge into one" (107). This notion of merging with the object formulates a way for one to experience a heightened sense of self. For example Sara touches the pepper-pot as Eleanor quickly relates this object to her personal sense of what it means to be free: "The pepper-pot's dark moor...a little blur had come round the edges of things. It was the wine; it was the war. Things seemed to have lost their

skins; to be freed from some surface hardness; even the chair with gilt claws, at which she was looking, seemed porous.” (287). In this passage, Eleanor reflects on these domestic objects to realize the effects of the war and how society is changing. People, especially women, are living freer lives, peeling away the layers of the past, separating from the hard structure and blurring the “edges” of patriarchal time. The pot seems to “radiate out some warmth, some glamour, as she looked at it” (287). Eleanor’s thoughts on the warmth and glamour of the pot stir a memory of Maggie’s mother, Eugenie who was in constant motion: “But she always saw Eugenie not sitting but in movement... ‘dancing’” (287). Eugenie’s movement is reflective of time’s natural flowing movement, circulating around the characters’ thoughts and decisions.

Earlier in the novel Eleanor again links herself directly to the house on Abercorn Terrace. The house seems to speak to Eleanor, the same way that Talland House spoke to Woolf about her childhood. A sound interrupts her reading. The wind rattled through out the house, “gripped it tight, and then let it fall apart” (155). The door slamming, the blind tapping, all brought Eleanor closer to examining how objects take form in the world around her. The same way that Woolf catalogued the “real sounds, smells and sights which act as pointers to childhood” (Lee 30), for example, the “click of the garden gate...the cawing of the rooks, the boom of the buoy” (Lee 30) is the same way that Eleanor reflects upon the sounds of her house. In Abercorn Terrace, Eleanor sees the china cup in the cupboard as having an exact structure, sticking together, forming a “smooth hard surface.” Later, when she focuses her attention on to the “pepper-pot’s dark moor” she finds the hard surface blurring, not taking on a definite shape. Her different approach to these two objects is reveal that she has changed from the self who

was constrained inside the Pargiter household into a self that is free to live out the rest of her days as she pleases. Her freedom reflects on her decision to think that the pepper-pot has been “freed from some surface hardness” (287).

For Eleanor, the events at Abercorn Terrace restrict her from realizing any sort of disconnection from her familial self:

A blankness came over her. Where am I? She asked herself, staring at the heavy frame. What is that? She seemed to be alone in the midst of nothingness; yet must descend, must carry her burden-she raised her arms slightly, as if she were carrying a pitcher, an earthenware pitcher on her head. Again she stopped. The rim of a bowl outlined itself upon her eyeballs; there was water in it; and something yellow. (43)

At first glance, Eleanor seems to be struggling to make her way through the house at night while all are asleep. However, the “blankness” that comes over her while staring at a solid structure of the house confuses her sense of self. She imagines the weight of a domestic “earthenware pitcher” signifying that this object is a burden, a weight from which she cannot break free. The burden of not recognizing herself and the presence of her dying mother in the next room are all linked to the domestic structure of the patriarchal household. The “rim of a bowl” in this passage is reminiscent of one of the most-used quotes from Woolf’s autobiographical writings: “If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills-then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory” (*Moments of Being* 64). Likewise, Woolf conceives of her childhood born out of a “bowl” a memory that is “separate and inviolable (Lee 23). When Eleanor focuses on the bowl, she sees water and “something yellow,” a past that

is not fully recognized until later in life. Once moved out of their childhood home, the Pargiter children experience a type of freedom from the constraints of the household, a break from Victorian conservatism that is only possible with the death of their mother and father. The Pargiter children experience two selves; the selves of their childhood and the selves after the split from their childhood home.

### **Conclusion: The Dawn of the New Day**

In order to gain knowledge of the past one must first reflect upon it through the surrounding environment which holds weight, and then let go of the past in order for an escape to be possible. Woolf is preoccupied with both notions of how the past can be used in the novel. Fusing with one's environment defines what a 'moment of being' means to the transcendence of subjectivity for women. In the closing chapter of *The Years*, Eleanor looks at her surroundings and notices that "objects seemed to be rising out of their sleep, out of their disguise, and to be assuming the sobriety of daily life" (431). This final moment where objects are awakened represents a new relationship, a freer future. Delia, Nicholas, and Renny repeatedly triumph in "the dawn-the new day" (431). Similarly in *Three Guineas*, Woolf asserts that once the "smoke has died down; the word is destroyed...the word 'feminist' is destroyed; the air is cleared; and in that clearer air what do we see? Men and women working together for the same cause" (102). In *Three Guineas*, even though Woolf identifies the problems women face in terms of their rights in the eyes of men, Woolf does point to a glimmer of hope, a celebration of the possibilities of what life could be like if women were given the same opportunities as men. Woolf states that since women have gained the right to "earn a living" the word 'feminist' has no meaning (101). The term free for Woolf means

something that may be given without anything being asked in return (101). The women from *The Years* have earned that right at the end of the novel, so the slate must be cleaned so that men and women will be able to celebrate victory in working together, not against each other; that freedom is “given without fear, without flattery, and without conditions” (101). Eleanor peers out of a window, but this time sees “the curtained house across the square. The windows were spotted with gold. Everything looked clean swept, fresh and virginal” (*The Years* 433). She repeats, “and now?” which sums up the meaning behind the dawn rising. It is and it is not just another, ordinary day. The sun is rising for a new subjectivity. The last few passages in this novel celebrate the “now” as representing a new beginning. Woolf closes the novel with hope for future generations. Delia’s reflections outside of the window of Abercorn Terrace in the 1880 section change for the better. Her unfinished statement, “It’s hopeless...” changes and becomes hopeful. So does the environment change with the character’s feelings: “the sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity, and peace” (435). The women of this novel eventually escape, for a moment, the confines of patriarchal time. Woolf leaves the ending open, without answering the “and now” to demonstrate that freedom is possible in the now. Similarly in *Three Guineas* Woolf states, “put this penny candle in the window of your new society, and may we [men and women] live to see the day when in the blaze of our common freedom the words tyrant and dictator shall be burnt to ashes, because the words tyrant and dictator will be obsolete” (103). This statement is reflective of the *now* moment from *The Years*. Once we take what we know about the past and let it go, what matters is how we celebrate the now moments that determine our future.



## CHAPTER 2

### IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK?: DECONSTRUCTING DOMESTIC ROLES IN

#### DAPHNE DU MAURIER'S *REBECCA*

We are none of us isolated in time, but are part of what we were once, and of what we are yet to become, so that these varied personalities merge and become one in creative thought.

--- Daphne du Maurier

#### **Dark Halls and Haunted Corridors: The Mysteries of the House**

In *The Years*, Virginia Woolf builds a case against patriarchal and oppressive narratives written around female subjectivity. She advocates gaining the possibility of freedom through fragmented moments outside of the strict boundaries of time. Woolf's experimentation with narrative form highlights the urgency of breaking out of the cotton wool of daily existence. Unlike Virginia Woolf, Daphne du Maurier did not experiment with stream-of-consciousness narrative form; however memory and consciousness are a prominent part of du Maurier's writing form. In this chapter, I focus on Du Maurier's novel, *Rebecca*, which is a carefully crafted narrative structured around one woman's memory.

According to Richard Kelly, *Rebecca* is "the first major gothic romance in the twentieth century and perhaps the finest written to this day" (54). Even though critics label the novel as a gothic romance, it is anything but a simple thriller or mystery (Kelly 54). This novel is a "profound and fascinating study of an obsessive personality, of

sexual dominance, of human identity, and of the liberation of the hidden self” (Kelly 54). The fantasy-like structure of the novel opens with what many critics call a “dream sequence” or “fantasy structure.” Kelly describes the novel as dealing with “wicked witches...the narrator, recording her memories many years hence, is still obsessed with the profound malignancy of Rebecca and is compelled to tell her story in the hope that the demon can be contained within the prison of her narrative” (Kelly 62). In fact, the demons exorcised by the narrator are not necessarily Rebecca’s but are her own.

The novel centers around a young female narrator who meets and marries Maxim de Winter, who appears to be an unhappy widower “obsessed with a secret from his past” (Kelly 54). Maxim is a popular socialite who owns “one of the finest country houses in the south of England” (Kelly 54). Once the two marry and they return to the estate, the narrator obsesses over the memory of Maxim’s first wife Rebecca. Rebecca’s legacy is kept alive through the dedicated housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, who protects the memory of Rebecca from this “innocent new mistress of the house” (Kelly 54). Only at the end of the novel does the narrator discover that her jealousy towards Rebecca is unwarranted when she discovers that Maxim never loved Rebecca and that Rebecca taunted him into murdering her. Once the truth is revealed and Manderley is burnt to the ground by the disdainful Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca’s vengeful cousin, Jack Favell, the fixation the narrator had on Rebecca becomes a distant memory, and Maxim and his new wife are allowed to begin again.

As in the previous chapter, the house is one of the main components of interest in the narrative structure. Daphne du Maurier’s vision of the Manderley estate is taken from her personal experience with Menabilly (fig. 1), a dilapidated house she

discovered by accident while on vacation in 1926. Her fascination with the home led her to rent and restore it in 1943. Richard Kelly records du Maurier's astonishment over the decay encompassing the house:

I could scarcely see the soul of her for the despair. The mould was in her bones...It's wrong, I think, to love a block of stone like this, as one loves a person. It cannot last. It cannot endure. Perhaps it is the very insecurity of the love that makes the passion strong. Because she is not mine by right...and slowly, softly, with no one there to see, the house whispers her secrets, and the secrets turn to stories, and in strange and eerie fashion we are one, the house and I. (22)



Fig. 1. Menabilly, Rashleigh Estate, Gribben Peninsula, Fowey, Cornwall. Source: <http://www.mylusciouslife.com/SocialButterfly/Luxetravel/Literarytouring.aspx>

To bring the house back to life was a dream that eventually took shape, and what materialized from this experience was a deep sense of commitment to this house and a

desire to unravel the secrets which were buried within its walls. Du Maurier dedicated her time to this house, which was the object of neglect for many years. In her own description of the first time she encountered the house she illustrates that “with all of her faults she had a grace and charm that made me hers upon the instant” (*Myself When Young* 144). She claims that the house formed an independent personality out of the experiences of the families that had lived there before: “One family who had given her life. They had been born there, they had loved, they had quarreled, they had suffered...And out of these emotions she had woven a personality for herself, she had become what their thoughts and their desires had made her” (144).

Virginia Woolf also had deep connections to the family houses during her lifetime. The summer houses in Cornwall gave Woolf a strong desire to remember her childhood. Hermione Lee, in her biography of Woolf, mentions that “Virginia Woolf’s lifelong argument with the past took its central images from the leaving, and the memory, of the Victorian house” (46). Like du Maurier, who believed that the house formed a life-like personality from the experiences a family left behind, Woolf also looked at houses as though “their solid objects...[are]...an eloquent method of ‘thinking the matter out,’ the ‘matter’ of what use the traditional Victorian answers-the old mental furniture-can be for the next generation” (44).

After du Maurier discovered Menabilly in 1926, she was not to go back there for another year. Her dream to fix up the house could not become a reality unless she could think of way to accumulate the money herself. Du Maurier proclaims, “It’s no use. I *must* make money and be independent, but how can I ever make enough?” (145). Du Maurier’s connection to Menabilly represented her desire for freedom, a freedom to do

what she willed with the money she had made, recalling Virginia's Woolf's claim that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (*A Room* 2). Du Maurier's fantasies were not materialized until fourteen years later when she finally occupied the estate. She reflects on this time in her autobiography: "I could not know that in fourteen years' time, married, with three children, it was their voices I should hear calling through the house, that my own furniture would fill the rooms, and that all this would somehow be a sequel to a novel I should write in 1937-38 and call *Rebecca*-Menabilly itself fusing with the childhood memory of Milton" (153). For du Maurier, Manderley (fig. 2) was the gateway to examine the wonders of the house and the way secrets of its past linger and remain within its walls, haunting its current inhabitants.



Fig. 2. Manderley. Source:  
<http://www.readingrebecca.blogspot.com/2007/11/daphne-du-maurier-and-manderley.html>

The idea that houses are in many ways gateways to secret mysteries and dark pasts is explored by Gaston Bachelard. His phenomenological study of the psychology of the house partners well with du Maurier's fascination with this topic. Bachelard suggests that "the house furnishes" us with images which clings to memory and imagination (3). The attraction towards the images of the house transcends the boundaries of what these objects really represent. Bachelard notes that it is "not enough to consider the house as an 'object' on which we make our judgments and daydreams react" (3). One must look beyond the description of the house "in order to attain to the primary virtues, those that reveal an attachment that is native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting" (4). Du Maurier's strange attachment to Menabilly brings back memories of her childhood and the feelings of 'home' came rushing back to her. The urgency to claim this house as her own is rooted in a deep native sense of belonging to her childhood house. Moreover, Bachelard states, "from our standpoint of a philosopher of literature and poetry to say that we 'write a room,' 'read a room,' or 'read a house,'" will often lead one to reflect on rooms of his/her own past" (14). As a writer, Du Maurier's strong connections to house and home lead her to develop Manderley's power over its narrator in *Rebecca*.

Many critics have examined the dominant powers of the house in critiquing the novel. Gina Wisker notes that du Maurier's is "often a romance of place. Locations, houses, countryside and seascape, interiors and ornaments, clothes and objects all connote power and deception" (87). Judy Giles suggests that the domestic environmental sphere which encompasses women are representative of the feminine, "a refuge from modernity, a symbolic space of redemption, nature, and authenticity in

which the injuries of modern living can be healed” (37). Giles differentiates this feminine domestic space from that of the masculine realm which are the “key spaces of modernity,” dominating the public sphere<sup>3</sup>. In this explanation,

the apparently timeless feminine values of intimacy and authenticity are set against the masculine experiences of alienation and dehumanization that characterise modern history. This positioning of women, home and private sphere as beyond the logic of modernity not only denies women a place in the historical record but also represents the private/feminine as outside and untouched by the complex meshing of modern phenomena.

(37)

What Giles is suggesting here is a new way of exploring modern experiences through the lens of domestic life. Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* offers different “versions of the tensions of modernity than those produced by male-authored narratives and at the same time inscribe the home and the private in the historical record” (37). In other words, du Maurier revolted against the historical attitude of the period. Clearly, women writers like du Maurier have manipulated and maneuvered within the symbolic order to rewrite women’s history. Through the domestic environment, we are able to develop a different sense of how women were operating within the boundaries of modern history to rewrite their own narrative.

In *Rebecca*, du Maurier uses the power of the domestic object to engage in historical representation of past events. The narrator’s obsessive attachment to

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<sup>3</sup> The public sphere is that of the workplace, philosophical, literary and political fields, corporations, and even “city street[s] are also masculine” (Giles 37).

Rebecca's material belongings constitutes psychological damage. The inanimate objects take on a sinister and corrupting role, as the protagonist attaches false ideas to these things. Giles suggests that "'To reign as mistress of her own home' was a mark of maturity but also a position of, albeit limited power, power for middle-class women who were still precluded from public offices" (41). The power of the domestic object clearly reflects on the knowledge of how a woman runs her home. Manderley runs as if it is on autopilot. Mrs. Danvers and the other servants run the house as if Rebecca were still alive. However, the narrator feels as though she does not belong at Manderley and the house rejects her plea for help in the matter of ownership. Through the lens of the narrator, the domestic objects here are labeled as foreign.

Since the house is supposed to be the realm in which women dominate, according to male historical reference, women should feel 'at home' within these borders. Instead, the feminine space of domesticity takes on a sinister and inverted role for the protagonist; the feminine space of Manderley is a perversion of domesticity. Instead of the subject merging with the objects, as in Woolf's subject/object connection in *The Waves*, the objects in this context hinder the narrator's growth. Only when the "truth" of Rebecca's past is revealed do the objects lose their hold over her. And finally, when the house is burnt to the ground and the confines of the domestic sphere are destroyed, the narrator gains a sense of freedom and independence from Rebecca's memories and belongings.

Rebecca's ghost is strong and the powers of her ornaments are manifested within the walls of the house. For the purpose of this thesis, it is useful to point to a few specific rooms in which Rebecca's ghost is most prominent in representing how her



belongings somehow possess the narrator to the point of hallucination. Bachelard suggests that there is importance in where and how things are placed in the house. He asserts that “wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life” (78). Bachelard continues to suggest that metaphorically “the old house, for those who know how to listen, is a sort of geometry of echoes. The voices of the past do not sound the same in the big room as in the little bed chamber” (60). When the narrator explores the nooks and crannies of Manderley, she opens up a sort of Pandora’s box, granting the spirit of Rebecca free reign over her mind. The morning room at Manderley is a feminine space that rejects its new owner. The narrator surveys the room and notes, “this was a woman’s room, graceful, fragile, the room of someone who had chosen every particle of furniture with great care...” (84). Her recognition of Rebecca’s scribbling on the writing-table reminds her of the first encounter she has with Rebecca’s slanted hand at the beginning of the novel, in the book Maxim let her borrow. As she sifts through the drawers of the writing-table she comes upon little white ivory boxes:

I took one out and looked at it, unwrapped it from its thin tissue of paper. ‘Mrs. De Winter’ it said, and in the corner ‘Manderley.’ I put it back in the box again, and shut the drawer, feeling guilty suddenly, and deceitful, as though I were staying in somebody else’s house and my hostess has said to me, ‘Yes, of course, write letters at my desk,’ and I had unforgivably, in a stealthy manner, peered at her correspondence. At any moment she might come back into the room, and she would see me there, sitting before her open drawer, which I had no right to touch. (86)

The narrator's neurotic fantasy that the true owner of the house might at any moment walk in on her are reflected in the organization of this room. All of these delicate items are placed in specific areas of the room by Rebecca and the narrator feels as though she is being suffocated by these things. The narrator's anxiety over the echoes of the past becomes a reality as she sits at the foreign desk, touches the paper and pens for the first time, and carefully caresses the figurines. The morning room is supposed to be a woman's room; you are supposed to know what you are doing in this type of space. The narrator, however, does not. This form of displacement causes the narrator to restructure Rebecca's ghost as if she would once again walk through this room and catch the strange woman going through her things. The narrator sees the morning room as a space in which she does not fit. Even more so, the desk indicates the de Winters' social class, filled with correspondences and social interaction that are alien to the narrator. As Gina Wisker notes, "the places Rebecca filled cannot be similarly inhabited by the new wife but their seeming mystery, magic, and complexity is a deception" (91). This deception is a false perception of Rebecca on the narrator's part, which leads to the lack of identity needed to gain ownership of the house.

Another profound moment in which Rebecca's spirit is most powerful occurs when the narrator ventures to Rebecca's bedroom in the east wing. The room is preserved by Mrs. Danvers so every item is kept as if Rebecca would return at any moment. Instead of the room being "swathed in dust sheets...nothing was covered up" (167). Fresh flowers are placed on the mantel, "a satin dressing gown lay on the chair, and a pair of bedroom slippers beneath" (167). As the narrator reflects on these things, she seems to step outside of the present moment: "For one desperate moment I thought

that something had happened to my brain, that I was seeing back into Time, and looking upon the room as it used to be” (168). The images here are timeless. They symbolize eroticism and power. The narrator’s identity merges with Rebecca’s as she imagines the first wife coming into this room and performing the usual bedtime rituals. Silk and lace-trimmed dressing gowns are a luxurious foreign commodity which the narrator has never worn. Her awe at these things leads the narrator into despair and takes her into a past which is not her own.

The narrator cannot find comfort within the home because Rebecca was in the house still as Mrs. Danvers had said, she was in that room in the west wing, she was in the library, in the morning-room, in the gallery above the hall. Even in the little flower-room, where her mackintosh still hung. And in the garden, and in the woods, and down in the stone cottage on the beach. Her footsteps sounded in the corridors, her scent lingered on the stairs. The servants obeyed her orders still, the food we ate was the food she liked. Her favorite flowers filled the rooms. Her clothes were in the wardrobes in her room, her brushes were on the table, her shoes beneath the chair, her nightdress on her bed. Rebecca was still mistress of Manderley. Rebecca was still Mrs. de Winter. I had no business here at all. (237)

The overwhelming feeling that the woman who inhabited the place before her is still alive in some form is destroying both the relationship with herself and the relationship she has with Maxim. As long as Rebecca’s belongings continue to crowd the house, the narrator will never be able to function within the domestic realm. She will never be able

to find comfort in front of the fire in the library, or write carefree letters in the morning room, or smell the flowers she adores, pick food she enjoys, as long as Rebecca's presence strangles her thoughts.

### **A False Representation of History: The Narrator's Counterfeit Past**

Preoccupied with the notion of identity, the structure of the novel brings us back into the past, where the narrator retells the story of how she lived her most haunted memories of the Manderley estate before the fire. The truth about Rebecca's death is revealed to the narrator when the body of Rebecca is found rotting at the bottom of the sea, where Maxim left her after the murder. Maxim's dark secret is revealed. Rebecca and Maxim's marriage was a farce, a trick and a façade, as Rebecca would lie and cuckold Maxim. Rebecca found out she had cancer and taunted Maxim into shooting her. Mrs. Danvers and Favell burn down the Manderley estate out of anger and disbelief, for even they fell for Rebecca's charm. Even though the narrator eventually gains some form of liberation from the destruction of Manderley and all of the menacing objects within it, to retell the story seems to be the narrator's only way of reminding herself that the ghost of Rebecca is gone. The narrator laments that "there is a theory that men and women emerge finer and stronger after suffering, and that to advance in this way or any world we must endure ordeal by fire" (5). The advancement in this line signifies a type of transcendental shift from the young girl she was when she first met Maxim, to the new, experienced woman she has become after the battle with the demons which tormented her. However, if one takes a closer look at the text, one sees that the only ghost that tormented her was herself. She exclaims that "we have paid for freedom" and "our present peace" does not come without a price (6). She continues

to suggest that “happiness is not a possession to be prized, it is a quality of thought, a state of mind” (6). While these lines suggest that the narrator has finally gained a sense of freedom from the events that have transpired, if one reads between the lines what really disappeared is her false representation of what Rebecca was like.

Throughout the novel, the narrator brings Rebecca back to life by way of inanimate objects. She feels like a guest in her own home, “walking where she [Rebecca] had trodden, resting where she lain” (140). She [the narrator] is “biding her time, waiting for the return of the hostess” (140). These thoughts indicate that she feels estranged from the home and childlike in a place that had been occupied by someone older and wiser. Her ability to grow into an individual is clouded by Rebecca’s past life. At one point in the novel, the narrator loses complete identification with herself and instead, merges with her imagined version of Rebecca:

As I sat down to dinner in the dining-room in my accustomed place, with Maxim at the head of the table, I pictured Rebecca sitting where I was now, picking up her fork for the fish, and then the telephone ringing, and Frith coming into the room and saying, ‘Mr. Favell on the phone, Madam, wishing to speak to you,’ ... And when she came back, having finished her conversation and sat down at her place again, Rebecca would begin talking about something different, in a gay, careless way, to cover up the little cloud between them. At first Maxim would be glum...but little by little she would win his humour back again, telling him some story of her day.... (203)

Max disturbs her fantasy by exclaiming, “What the devil are you thinking about?” (203). The narrator has “so identified [her]self with Rebecca that [her] own dull self did not exist, had never come to Manderley. [She] had gone back in thought and in person to the days that gone by” (203). These types of “antics,” as Max calls them, causes her consciousness to disappear, falsifying her own existence.

Many critics and historians note the intrinsic value that the historical narrative can have on the present moment. A narrative “recounts or tells a story” (OED). However, how one recounts the story’s narration is something that Lawrence Stone clarifies through his view of the historiography of narration. Stone comments that a “narrative is a mode of historical writing, but it is a mode which also affects and is affected by the content and the method” (4). Stone continues to explain that a “narrative is taken to mean the organization of material into a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with sub-plots” (3). Here, Stone asserts that the organization of the material, or history, is what is important. In *Rebecca*, the story is told through one woman’s narration of events. The narrator seems unreliable because she does not have all the information needed to recreate a true history of Rebecca’s past, only remnants of objects and secrets exposed by friends and family.

Nietzsche suggests that the past can be useful if it has a positive impact. On the other hand, dwelling on the past can cause negative effects by those who seek it. In *Rebecca*, the narrator’s confusion with the past weighs her down, leaving her to drown in a false representation of history. The narrator’s fixation on the past is a fabricated version of actual events. Her invented narrative of Rebecca’s past prevents her from

establishing an identity. Only when she is able to liberate herself from the past, can she learn the truth about Rebecca and find a true identity. The narrator is a “monumental” historian, the enemy of her own mind. She creates the past around “little snatches of information to add to [her] secret store. A word dropped here at random, a question, a passing phrase” (124). She takes little pieces of information from the past and plots her own narrative around Rebecca’s history. A monumental historian is defined by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Use and Abuse of History*. He claims that monumental history can have both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of a monumental historian is the great strength “he will gather from the remembrance” of such a great culture that was in place before him (14). However, “as long as the soul of history is found in the great impulse that it gives to a powerful spirit, as long as the past is principally used as a model of imitation, it is always in danger of being a little altered and touched up and brought nearer to fiction” (15). The idea that one wants to live up to the greatness of past human beings, to imitate an idol from the past, leads the past to become romanticized. This “imitation” is the trap that the narrator falls victim to. She romanticizes Maxim’s first marriage, leading her to create her own version of the truth. This type of monumental history “lives by false analogy; it entices the brave to rashness, and the enthusiastic to fanaticism by its tempting comparisons” (16). By Nietzsche’s definition, it is meaningful and important to note that the narrator is representing the past by false analogy. She resembles the monumental enthusiast in regards to searching for an identity through past experiences, yet she creates a false analogy around the role that Rebecca was supposed to fill. The narrator does not know how to fill the role of mistress of the house, she can only imagine what needs to be done

and just assumes that Rebecca acted in the appropriate way, as she pictures “the type of girl who would play the part. Tall and slim, rather nervy,” something she could never be (149). The fanatical admiration she carries for Rebecca leads her to monumentify the past and believe that Rebecca is “in the house still as Mrs. Danvers had said, she was in that room in the west wing, she was in the library, in the morning room, in the gallery above the hall...Rebecca was still Mrs. de Winter. I had no business here at all” (237). The narrator’s objectification of Rebecca signifies that what was great that lived in this house has already been here and had already passed. She can never replace what once was. The narrator views the history of this house with an “extreme admiration” and as Nietzsche would suggest of a monumental past: “Monumental history is the cloak under which their hatred present power” (17). The narrator’s extreme anxiety over Rebecca leads the ghost to gain power over the present, “letting the dead bury the—living” (17).

The narrator struggles with her thoughts: “the little things, meaningless and stupid in themselves, but they were there for me to see, for me to hear, for me to feel. Dear God, I did not want to think about Rebecca. I wanted to be happy, to make Maxim happy, and I wanted us to be happy together...I could not help that she came to me in thoughts, in dreams” (140). The narrator’s failure to push Rebecca out of her mind causes her fantasies to worsen, ultimately contributing to her fabricated accounts of what life was like when Rebecca was alive. Only after Max reveals what his life with Rebecca was like does the narrator begin to understand how false her imaginings are. She wonders:



how many people there were in the world who suffered, continued to suffer, because they could not break out from their own web of shyness and reserve, and in their blindness and folly built up a great distorted wall in front of them that hid the truth. This was what I had done. I had built up false pictures in my mind and sat before them. I had never had the courage to demand the truth. (280)

The narrator's distortion of the past prevents her from knowing what she now realizes is "true." The narrator is seen as Nietzsche's monumental historian here. She distorts the truth by idolizing an idea about someone in which she does not really know. This idolization is the crime that is committed to the truth of the past. Her devotion to Rebecca's spirit perverts her knowledge, and the willingness to narrate the past with myths and lies is the danger that Nietzsche suggests against.

Moreover, according to Nietzsche, "the knowledge of the past is desired only for the service of the future and the present, not to weaken the present or undermine a living future" (22). The narrator, in *Rebecca*, does not allow herself to search for the truth of Rebecca's past, ultimately dwelling on lies and fabrications that she creates. One should not hold on, or dwell in the past, for this is where the danger lies. Nietzsche illustrates that the use of the past is to promote power "of specifically growing out of one's self, of making the past and the strange one body with the near and the present, of healing wounds, replacing what is lost, repairing broken molds" (7). After the fire at Manderley, the narrator is able to learn from the past and conclude that the horrors were "over now, finished and done with. I ride no more tormented, and both of us are

free...and Manderley is no more” (8). To the narrator, looking back on the events of the past “inspires me, if not with love, at least with confidence. And confidence is a quality I prize” (9). The narrator’s abandonment of the past does not come without a price, and whether the past is truly abandoned is questionable since “moments of depression” come upon their quaint life of “routine” in the present moment (6). The problem with destroying history is that, for us, it is never truly erased from our minds. The past seems to be repetitious with the struggle to escape it, as stated in the famous first line of the novel, “last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again” (1). The word “again” means that the narrator has dreamed, on more than one occasion, about the nightmarish events that took place at Manderley. She can never fully forget what happened, as “time could not wreck the perfect symmetry of those walls, not the site itself, a jewel in the hollow of a hand” (2). For the narrator, the past is never fully erased. Even though these events are continuously remembered, the difference lies in her new life, separated from Rebecca’s belongings. Her fight for independence from Rebecca is won, even if this independence is hindered by momentary lapses into the past.

### **A Sense of Place**

The narrator laments, “We can never go back again, that much is certain. The past is still too close to us. The things we have tried to forget and put behind us would stir again, and that sense of fear, of furtive unrest, struggling at length to blind unreasoning panic...might in some manner unforeseen become a living companion, as it had before” (*Rebecca* 5). This passage at the beginning of the novel represents the attitude of the narrator as she meditates upon the troubling events from her past while living in exile with Maxim. Maxim and the narrator move aimlessly through Europe,

living a rogue existence. Some critics have argued that the life the couple leads in the present moment illustrates “only a very uneasy, deceptive, partial, harmony,” which is a feminist political reading of the 1930s era as representative of “decayed place with decayed values” (Wisker 89). Teresa Peterson suggests that clearly the couple live “boring and mechanical lives,” existing within a repetitive routine, haunted by daily existence which represents a “living death because the vibrant and passionate presence of Rebecca has been extinguished” (56). Similarly, Giles’ analysis suggests that the “narrator has acquired the confident selfhood to which she aspired but does not possess a place in which this painfully achieved authority can be exercised” (42). Furthermore, Giles articulates that the de Winters do not have any children, homeland, descendants or possessions, the usual markers of middle class status, which leaves them in a “state of perpetual rootlessness in which their future is uncertain and the past traumatic” (42). Nevertheless, Giles does point to the sliver of hope in the midst of a critically doomed fate. Giles mentions that the second Mrs. de Winter is “freed from the obligations of motherhood and middle-class wifhood...[along with] the dictates of a certain form of middle-class femininity” (42). Giles represents the de Winters as freed from a prescribed future of typical domestic life, and it is this glimmer of hope that I shall build on. Other scholars, such as Richard Kelly and Susanne Becker, provide a similar conclusion to my own, that a “happy ending” is possible in the novel. Kelly suggests that it is “‘not simply marriage’ that brings the narrator happiness but the ‘symbolic death of Mrs. Danvers, the destruction of Manderley, and the exorcism of Rebecca’” that allows the narrator to feel as though she is the “‘solitary recipient of Maxim’s love and devotion’” (59).

This independence gained by the narrator was important for the readers of the 1930s and arguably also for contemporary readers. Giles suggests that “historically [women find] certain pleasures in the self-contained solitude of the second Mrs. De Winter” (Giles 42). The freedom to abandon an already written future alongside an actual past<sup>4</sup> has a certain liberating quality which is an idealistic fantasy for women. In this context, Giles mentions Virginia Woolf’s yearning for a ‘room of her own’ in which she was free to do what she liked. Giles suggests that many of Woolf’s ideals celebrated the “freedom of her own self-imposed routine [as opposed to] the inescapable burden of somebody else’s” (43), which means that while Peterson’s suggestion that the de Winters lead “boring and mechanical lives” is insightful, reading their routine as a form of liberation is also meaningful. Likewise, du Maurier asserts in her autobiographical sketch that “freedom is the only thing that matters to me at all....never to have to obey any laws or rules, only certain standards one sets for oneself...there must be a free way” (155).

Instead of reflecting on the de Winters’ life as being meaningless, rootless, and hopeless, one can see this type of everyday existence as a celebration of life. The repetitiveness of daily life for the de Winters is actually a breath of fresh air, a repetition that is welcomed. It is an escape from the circularity of a haunted experiential past. In the “now moment,” the “absence of time [is realized and] your problems dissolve. Suffering needs time; it cannot survive in the now” (Tolle 52). In the present moment,

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<sup>4</sup> I will be using two distinct definitions of the passage of time. An actual past refers to events that have happened in the present which move to the past, no longer part of the present. Later in the paper I will refer to an experiential past, which refers to the human experience of a past that is narrated, ultimately leading it to be known as a false representation of history, in reference to philosophical notions of the urgency to abandon the past by Friedrich Nietzsche and Hayden White.

Woolf suggests that existential 'Being' is possible. This 'moment of being' can be "felt with great intensity" which if tapped into, can exist outside of time (*Moments* 67). This type of Heideggerian notion stems from Woolf's connection with memories, the idea that memories can have an existence outside of linear time, which gives the present moment a richer quality. While a connection with the past is meaningful, Woolf also recognizes the past as a burden, which once realized, should be abandoned in order to achieve freedom from it. This notion of abandonment is the central concern in *Rebecca*. The fire at Manderley is symbolic in that it extinguishes Maxim's actual past, which in turn will lead him and his new wife into an unknown, but freer future.

The narrator's ability to realize her worth stems from the destruction of the socially constructed environment centered on the performance of domestic duties. The narrator's inability to perform her gender role 'properly' leads to her realization of self at the end of the novel. Furthermore, du Maurier never reveals the narrator's name and this lack of a name, or lack of subjectivity, is deliberate on du Maurier's part. On the one hand, the narrator's journey seems to build progressively towards a better life: her place in society escalates overnight; she marries a man of importance and gains an estate with servants to wait on her every whim. However, her lack of experience in the space of high society, along with the unwelcoming sentiments of the house, blocks her progress towards independence. The narrator is never given an identity apart from what society has constructed for her. Even the name of the novel gives credit to Rebecca, which is a significant factor when determining the narrator's identity. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy determines that there are differences between being a *what* and a *who*. With an obvious Heideggerian influence, Nancy suggests that "it is not a

question of essence, but one of identity...that is to say, a question of presence: Who is *there*? Who is present there? (author's emphasis 7). Without a name, an identity, or some sort of familial tie, one is not fully present. It is not enough to have an essence of being, because being, according to Nancy, is "simply existing withdrawn from every essence of Being and from every being of essence" (7). Existence in the world is not equal to being present in the world with an identity. Nancy also articulates that presence is the "presence of the existent" (7). This presence must attach itself to a home: "Present is that which occupies a place. The place is *place*-site, situation, disposition-in the coming into space of a time, in a spacing that allows that something come into presence, in a unique time that engenders itself in this point in space, as its spacing" (7). Without a name, there is no attachment to the world, to the place to which one *belongs*. In *Rebecca*, the nameless narrator struggles to find a place within the walls of Manderley in order to gain acknowledgement of some form of internal existence outside of the domestic situation which she is blindly thrown into.

At the end of the novel, as quoted earlier, the narrator experiences a shift within herself: "these two selves merged" which shows two different identities becoming one (289). This dual internal experience is the birth of new subjective acknowledgement; she then becomes her own version of Rebecca. She merges into the new and rightful Mrs. Maxim de Winter. This encounter with herself is the freeing event that determines how she will 'perform' in the future. Nancy defines the freedom of the subject "not as a property of the subject...but freedom as the very experience of coming into presence, of being given up to, necessarily/freely given up to...the *to* of abandoning to, of the offering to of 'to one's core,' of the 'with regard to,' of the 'to the limit,' and also of the

‘to the detriment of,’ ‘to the bitter end’: freedom is wherever it is necessary *to make up one’s mind to...*” (author’s emphasis 8). Once the narrator experiences recognition and separation of her selves, the self as young naïve caretaker, the self as Rebecca’s shadow, the self as Maxim’s wife, the self as independent, she is able to free herself from the anchors of the past. Du Maurier never gives her a name, but she is still able to identify with herself and free herself from a metaphorical nameless existence. By the end of the novel, the narrator states, “It was going to be very different in the future” (382). She sighs with relief: “At the moment it inspires me...at least with confidence. And confidence is a quality I prize, although it has come late in the day. I suppose it is his dependence on me that has made me bold at last. At any rate I have lost my diffidence, my timidity, my shyness with strangers” (9). The narrator sheds the baggage of her naïve past and revels in the new strong identity that she claims for her own.

The narrator’s struggle for an identity stems from her will to recall the past. She claims that once events have taken place, one can never relive them. However, she seems to differentiate between an actual past and a past felt as an experience. Even though an actual return to Manderley is physically impossible, the experience of the events which took place there still hold agency in the mind of the narrator, acting as a “living companion” if stirred once again from memory (5). The subjectivity gained by the narrator, according to Giles, is achieved but cannot be exercised due to a lack of permanent place. However, if a desire for freedom can only be achieved through a heightened sense of awareness, then it can be exercised wherever the de Winters locate themselves. Moreover, the more important issue lies in the creation of this “confident” self.

## **The Gothic Element**

Rebecca's modern ruthlessness is countered by the narrator's innocent and obedient nature. Her venture into the unknown eccentricities of upper class society, (which I would classify as *Rebecca's society*), is deconstructed through the structure of the "Gothic novel." Peterson notes that "one of the stock devices of the Gothic novel is the haunted house, and its gendered and ideological construction as woman's place is used by du Maurier to signify the containment of women within traditional power structures" (57). Manderley is/was Rebecca's playground. She ran the house and it runs smoothly even after she dies. When the narrator steps into Manderley for the first time, she steps into an alienated space. Gina Wisker illustrates the ways in which du Maurier "makes use of conventional genres [to show her to be] historically and politically engaged" (86). The narrator's oppression lies in being inexperienced at running a household. In order to experience freedom from domestic oppression, she must first develop a sense of what the responsibilities are.

## **Time Recycled: A Repetitious Past**

For Nietzsche, "the things of the past are never viewed in their true perspective or receive their just value; but value and perspective change with the individual or the nation that is looking back on its past" (19). In reliving the events of her past at Manderley, the narrator is in constant connection with these visions, even though she claims to have left them behind with the fire. Every time she recollects moments, the experience of them changes. The narrator, one day looking at the clock, thinks:



This moment now, at twenty past eleven, this must never be lost,' and I shut my eyes to make the experience more lasting...I wanted to go back again, to recapture the moment that had gone, and then it came to me that if we did it would not be the same...there was something chilling in the thought, something a little melancholy, and looking at the clock I saw that five more minutes had gone by. (37)

Once time has passed, one can only bring it back to life through memory. Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust have experimented with these types of notions of recollecting the past. The idea that a time's past can be somehow 'relived' in a sense shows the cyclicity and repetitiveness of time in the novel.

Woolf and Proust toy with the idea that the past can somehow regain its urgency through atomistic moments of recognition in the present moment. These frozen moments in time are transfixed outside of the linear progression on a continuum which can be reached by memory at any given moment. Woolf suggests that her memory "has supplied what [she] had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though [she] is making it happen" (*Moments* 67). She continues to wonder if "things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence?" (67). Moreover, Woolf also suggests that if memories do have a life of their own, outside the linear existence of time, "will it not be possible, in time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them?" (67). This type of longing, to tap into "real" memories, is also articulated by the narrator in *Rebecca*. Like Woolf, she exclaims: "If only there could be an invention...that bottled up a memory, like scent. And it never faded, and it never got stale. And then when one

wanted it, the bottle could be uncorked, and it would be like living the moment all over again” (37). Both Woolf and du Maurier seem to believe that memories need some form of concrete existence in order to be relived outside of time. Likewise, Proust theorizes the concrete material needed to produce such life-like creations.

Proust suggests that the intensity of the past is hidden “outside the realm of our intelligence and beyond its reach, in some material object (in the sensation that this material object would give us) (*Swann’s Way* 44). What can be concluded from these three authors’ assumptions is that the past lives outside of linear time and can only be summoned by way of sensation through the medium of a concrete object. Furthermore, time takes on a somewhat circular appearance, where events, dialogue, and relationships repeat themselves over and over. In *Rebecca*, the circularity of time in the novel, the dreamscape, ‘feels’ like a trap which the narrator repetitiously relives over and over. The sense of liberation reveals itself from within the walls of this repetition, as the value and perspective changes within the narrator’s view of the past.

Many theorists assert the circularity of time<sup>5</sup> and have even given it a “female”<sup>6</sup> name. However, in *Rebecca*, as in *The Years*, the repetitiveness of time is felt by all the characters, not just the women. This notion of circularity is clearly implemented at the outset of the novel when the narrator says: “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again” (1). This same notion of time is entertained in the beginning lines of Proust’s *Swann’s Way*: “For a long time, I went to bed early” (3). From both novels, these lines

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<sup>5</sup> For the sake of this project I include these theorists: Proust, Woolf, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Bachelard (in spatial terms).

<sup>6</sup> Julia Kristeva’s essay “Women’s Time” theorizes time’s circularity as relative to female subjectivity.

demonstrate an iterative narrative. This notion stems from Gerard Genette's definition of the term. He asserts that "this type of narrative, where a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event (in other words, once again, several events considered only in terms of their analogy), we will call *iterative* narrative" (author's emphasis 116). Both narrators continuously "perform" actions that promote awareness of a repetitious act, not necessarily every day, but frequently. The narrator, from *Rebecca*, performs the *mental* action of remembering, recycling past events over and over again. Similarly, in *Swann's Way*, the narrator's actions of going to bed early, take on the same type of repetitious act, only *physically*, instead of mentally. Hence, the reader feels right from the start that time moves in constant circularity within *Rebecca*. The duration of time, according to Proust is illustrated by "a sleeping man hold[ing] in a circle around him the sequence of the hours, the order of the years and the worlds" (5). What Proust suggests in these lines is that the circularity of the clock is in the hands of the individual that manipulates them. In *Rebecca*, the protagonist manipulates her sense of time, frequently recalling the past with great vividness: "How strange that an article on wood pigeons could so recall the past and make me falter as I read aloud" (7). Any connection the narrator has to a specific object via sense (touch, smell, taste, sound, and sight) catapults her experience back to the past.

Earlier, I mentioned that the circularity of time within the novel is not only experienced by the female characters. Maxim is also a victim to the repetitious cycle of time. He marries twice, even if the first marriage was deemed a farce filled with "shame and degradation" (279). In an attempt to start life anew, he returns to Manderley with

his new bride and performs the role of husband and wife again; however, not in the way that the second wife imagines.

The narrator's continual obsession with the past destroys Maxim's ability to begin again. His best friend and colleague, Frank, tries to make it clear to the second Mrs. de Winter that the cycle of the past must be broken: "We none of us want to bring back the past, Maxim least of all. And it's up to you, you know, to lead us away from it. Not to take us back there again" (136). The narrator serves as a catalyst for escape from the past for the men in the novel. In order for the ghost of Rebecca to be forgotten, the narrator must function as the vehicle that destroys the past. Instead, she brings the past back to life by letting Rebecca's belongings possess her:

Frank had told me to forget the past, and I wanted to forget it. But Frank did not have to sit in the morning-room as I did, every day, and touch the pen she had held between her fingers. He did not have to rest his hands on the blotter, and stare in front of him at her writing on the pigeon-holes. He did not have to look at the candlesticks on the mantelpiece, the clock, the vase in which the flowers stood, the pictures on the walls and remember every day that they belonged to her, she had chosen them, they were not mine at all. (139)

Day after day the narrator steps into the shadow of Rebecca. Each day she rises, as Rebecca had, eats breakfast using the same utensils Rebecca had used, sits in the morning-room which remains decorated as Rebecca had left it, and continues to fill Rebecca's shoes throughout the day, constantly surrounded by the objects of a woman whom she cannot escape.

Each time she stumbles upon a room of the house, she is “seeing back in Time, and looking upon the room as it used to be, before she died” (167). The rooms and ornaments within them would transfix the narrator and send her into a trance, imagining the woman who walked the halls before her. In one instance of fantasizing, the narrator’s trance-like state is disrupted by the clock forcing her back to reality: “it was the clock ticking on the wall that brought me to reality again...There was something sane and comforting about the ticking of the clock. It reminded me of the present” (168). The narrator’s awareness of the clock instills in her the reminder of the present and the ghost of Rebecca disappears. In Heidegger’s “Concept of Time,” he suggests that a clock “shows the time” arbitrarily, allowing for the “specific fixing of the now” (5E). He also writes that the clock is “a physical system in which an identical temporal sequence is constantly repeated, with the provision that this physical system is not subject to change through any external influence” (4E). To Heidegger, time’s repetition is indefinite, with one exception, death. The only possibility of change is through Being’s most extreme event. To show such drastic change functioning within *Rebecca*, du Maurier presents us with a literal and metaphorical death. The former paves the way for the repetitious patterns of the past, turned to a cinder when the house burns down, taking with it all of the objects of a previous life. Metaphorically, change happens when the narrator’s dominant side finally takes shape. Once she learns the truth about Rebecca’s death she “was not going to be nervous and shy of the servants anymore. With Mrs. Danvers gone I should learn bit by bit to control the house” (382). The shy and inexperienced girl dies, and a rebirth happens. The narrator is empowered with a

new sense of independence. Rebecca is gone, her most trusted servant is gone, and all that is left is him and her.

### **Conclusion**

Richard Kelly published the first analytical review of Daphne du Maurier and her writings in the late 1980s. In it, he states that “the literary establishment clearly wants nothing to do with Daphne du Maurier. There are no critical essays or books about her” (142). He also notes that “by the standards of contemporary literary criticism, most of du Maurier’s works do not hold up well” (167). His biography and critical analysis of du Maurier’s life and work have opened up many avenues of thought in critiquing du Maurier’s work. Even though her prose is “straightforward and clear...and her style is conventional, her sentences unmemorable, and her story lines contrived” there is a newfound appreciation of her work among critics within the last eight to ten years (Kelly 167). Her similarity to Virginia Woolf, in some ways, renders her worthy of critical recognition.

Richard Kelly, as much as he praises du Maurier, also downplays her abilities as “thinker” and “stylist,” which is not necessarily fair. Kelly suggests that she creates a “world that is simple, romantic, usually unambiguous, adventuresome, mysterious, dangerous, erotic, picturesque, and satisfying” (142). These adjectives, as much as they do hold some truth in reference to du Maurier’s writing style, do not characterize her as a writer who requires “the reader to suffer the pains of introspection and analysis” (142). Even if some believe that du Maurier’s style is primarily simple, Judy Giles’ suggests otherwise. Giles notes that *Rebecca* “is historically grounded in the specific social circumstances from which middle-class women’s subjectivities were shaped...the

emphasis on interiority and selfhood, the tension between autocracy and democracy, between authority and deference, between private space and public obligations, and between desire and duty” which are only ‘modern’ concerns (47). Gina Wisker also praises du Maurier’s work as “more than entertainment” it is a “radical, critical product of its time” (96). Writing during the 1930s, du Maurier and other modern women writers have recognized the struggles associated with ‘killing the angel in the house’ a phrase that Woolf discusses in her essay, “Professions for Women.” In the essay Woolf confronts the anxieties associated with being a woman who “never had any real existence” (Leaska xxx). The ‘angel in the house’ was “the ideal of womanhood created by the imaginations of men and women”, an ideal that was unattainable (Leaska xxx). The anxieties over the domestic responsibilities of the house were prominent in the minds of British society. Both Woolf and du Maurier acknowledge the tensions between class distinction and the desire for “individual fulfillment, growth, and development” apart from the unrealistic definitions that the ‘angel’ promoted (Giles 48).

The narrator in *Rebecca* finally gains a confident, subjective self once the destruction of domestic societal norms are burned and forgotten, when she remembers Manderley in the present: “I turn with relief to the prospect from our balcony” (9). Her confidence carries on into the future knowing that the ghost of Rebecca and her belongings are burnt to a cinder, no longer able to affect her ability to be free. The various hotels and cities to which the couple retreat are considered by some critics to lack meaningful existence; however, the lack of domestic restraints for both Maxim and the narrator is what gives them the ability to determine their future, instead of the house determining it for them.

Historically, du Maurier's writings brought "pleasure to millions of readers, especially women" (Kelly 142). I would argue that even in contemporary society, there are issues within her novels to which women can relate. Today, women still enjoy du Maurier's novels, and the new critical interest in her work shows that issues involving the growth of female subjectivity will continue to spark the interest and desire to break out of societal norms, regardless of time and place.



## CONCLUSION

A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.

--- Virginia Woolf

It's no use. I must make money and be independent.

--- Daphne du Maurier

### **Erasing Boundaries: The Androgynous Mind**

In the previous chapter, I argue that Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca* challenges notions of patriarchy by its characterization of domestic spaces. The narrator challenges gender roles, that of wife and mistress of the house, from her lack of experience within these domestic borders. In this context, inanimate objects are a dominating force affecting the narrator's subjectivity. The narrator's identity is lost without knowledge of how to handle the objects of the home. Rebecca's belongings come alive through Mrs. Danvers' care of them, making it hard for the narrator to develop an independent self. Once Manderley and its objects are destroyed, the narrator achieves a heightened sense of self. In *Rebecca*, the narrator's struggle to forget the past is suggested by the recurrence of Rebecca's ghost. Nietzsche argues that the power of forgetting is the only way to create a new happiness in the present. Memories of the past must not become "the gravedigger of the present" (7). One must "grow out of one's self, of making the past and the strange one body with the near and the present, of healing wounds, replacing what is lost, repairing broken molds" (7). Tuan suggests that "a past that no longer taunts is a sunny landscape that invites the lovers, when they are

not wholly engaged in the present or planning for the future, to stroll hand in hand, pausing here and there to honor a fond memory” (59). These comments suggest that through memory, if used wisely, freedom is approachable. I argue that memory is hidden within the depths of inanimate objects, causing subjectivity to be questioned and determined.

The end of *Rebecca* reflects deeper shifts within the boundaries of patriarchal structure. Manderley’s destruction represents the possibility of something “new.” This notion that a woman place is within the home is challenged by du Maurier, as she places Maxim and the narrator outside of a neo-Victorian setting. After the fire, the de Winters live a transient lifestyle, a bohemian type of existence. This shift benefits not only the narrator but also Maxim. This allows both of them to be free, to form a new identity, apart from expected social roles that clearly define men and women. Outside of strict gender boundaries, the novel shifts away from man versus woman, to a merging of the sexes, a utopian existence where men and women come to an understanding on a transcendental level, a notion that Woolf discusses in *A Room of One’s Own*. In this text, Woolf challenges traditional notions of subjectivity. For both Woolf and du Maurier, memory functions in interaction with domestic objects. The discussion then shifts from domestic objects, to what happens once women achieve this heightened sense of existence through them. If we look past the boundaries of patriarchy, what comes next?

Nina Auerbach suggests that, like Woolf, du Maurier’s “vision of relationships, especially family relationships, is unapologetically brutal” (14). In du Maurier’s work, the ability to “become a man without revering men or making a case against them”

seems to some critics, “unwomanly” (14), but her ability to tap into the minds of her male characters is an ability that resonates with Woolf’s oeuvre. Pinkney notes that “Woolfian androgyny involves a *dialectic* of symbolic and semiotic, of man and woman...hence Woolf never destroys the symbolic and its thetic subject” (author’s emphasis 189). Woolf’s notion of androgyny involves working within the symbolic order to transcend women to a heightened level of experience, an experience that stands outside of Father Time. This transcendent experience forms a new reality, a new subjectivity, outside of the inner spaces of the home, where women are free from the constraints of patriarchal time. These ideas are reflected in du Maurier’s writings in her struggle with two domineering identities: the domesticated housewife and the alter-ego, the “boy in the box” whom Auerbach refers to as Du Maurier’s “half-breed” (74). Both women writers seem to participate in this same philosophical notion, in which the androgynous mind functions as a formula for developing a writing-self versus a family-self and providing distinction between inside and outside spaces, even though du Maurier has never directly referred to Woolf’s theory on this subject.

Auerbach suggests that du Maurier identifies with the male figures in her life, unlike Virginia Woolf who “exhorted women writers to... ‘think back through our mothers’”( Auerbach 74). Furthermore, Auerbach explains that “in Daphne du Maurier’s case, thinking back through her fathers brought treasure and fruitful terror; thinking back through her mothers would have meant renouncing thought” (74). Even though Virginia Woolf did in fact suggest that we, as women, “think back through our mothers” in *A Room of One’s Own*, she also stresses the idea that in our minds, women and men form a transcendental unity:

It [our minds] can think back through its fathers or through its mothers, as I have said that a woman writing thinks back through her mothers. Again if one woman is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness...she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives....the obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to cooperate...And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers reside, one male, one female. (*A Room* 107)

Woolf suggests that in order to reach complete happiness and satisfaction, a spontaneous moment involving the elements of the self, a male and female representation of one's being, must come together in "natural fusion" (107). Woolf also suggests that even though the aspects of female characteristics predominate over the aspects of male characteristics in a woman's mind, the "woman also must have intercourse with the man in her" (108). As much as Auerbach suggests that Woolf held mothers responsible for creativity in women writers, the fathers had just as much power over the female mind. In the case of Daphne du Maurier, she carried an abundance of selves, including the infamous "boy in the box" (Auerbach 74). This entity is and is not who du Maurier really is. It is a persona she invents in order to segregate off that part of her which is masculine and oriented toward lesbianism. Auerbach states that du Maurier "tried to capture memories not her own: memories of living in a lost, charmed country, of being a man, of being a tender killer of women" (20). By hiding within this

masculine self she gained “power and privilege” by “submerging herself in great ancestral men” (Auerbach 20).

Auerbach suggests that the boy in the box was “that entity who fell in love with women while preserving the wife and mother—the incipient ‘Lady Browning’ and ‘Dame Daphne du Maurier’—from the tarnish of lesbianism” (74). The boy in the box was du Maurier’s half-breed “who is also Peter Pan” (74). Du Maurier’s zeal for writing came from her masculine side, while her feminine side influenced the nurturing, motherly part of her personality. She was obsessed with her family chronology and studied the psychology of her grandfather and father, Gerald du Maurier. Du Maurier’s fascination with her father led her to write most of her novels with him in mind. Richard Kelly suggests that she “perceives in her father” a “definite feminine strain” which she countered with “strong powerful yearnings as a youth to be a boy” (6). These internal struggles appear to be drafted into her writings.

In *Rebecca*, du Maurier illustrates an androgynous dynamic through the construction of the narrator’s subjectivity. The narrator is both childlike and masculine. The multiple lazy and carefree drives through the countryside that Maxim takes her on lead her to experience the giddiness of a “scrubby schoolboy” (36). As Maxim wraps his coat around her shoulders, she recalls to herself: “for I was young enough to win happiness in the wearing of his clothes, and this borrowing of his coat, wearing it around my shoulders for even a few minutes at a time, was a triumph in itself, and made a glow about my morning” (36). In this instance, the narrator steps into the identity of a boy, a giddy schoolboy who is in love with the man seated next to her. She seems to fit comfortably in this masculine-childlike-role. The narrator is comfortable being

“herself” in the space of the moving car along these drives in the countryside, because she is not confined to the domestic environment and typical roles that are otherwise expected of her. She is free to explore other parts of her identity, bending gender boundaries.

However, the moment of bliss ends abruptly as she focuses on the clock: “my only enemy was the clock on the dash-board, whose hands would move relentlessly to one o’clock” (37). Time is her enemy because she cannot stay in the moment dressed as a boy but must come to terms with her lack of womanhood: ““I wish I was a woman of about thirty-six dressed in black satin with a string of pearls”” (38). Of course Maxim objects to this notion because he wants a woman that he can control, not someone like Rebecca. But the narrator struggles with obvious lack of femininity because she feels more comfortable as the ‘scrubby schoolboy.’ It can be argued then that the narrator’s lack of feminine prowess makes her the hero of the novel. Maxim’s sister comments on the narrator’s simple nature: “of course we all expected a social butterfly, very modern and plastered with paint” (100). This statement illustrates the contrast between Rebecca and the narrator. In one instance, du Maurier shows Rebecca as the ‘modern’ woman, the woman who breaks the boundaries of femininity. But the narrator’s stark difference in dress and manner also show a deconstruction of feminine boundaries. The androgynous tendencies of the narrator show a subject with the capacity to experience a connection to masculine experiences and to escape the past of women’s social roles and spaces.

This notion of freedom from the past is echoed at the end of *The Years* when Eleanor watches a young couple step out of a cab:

...a young man got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed travelling suit followed him. He fitted the latch-key to the door. 'There,' Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they stood for a moment on the threshold. 'There!' she repeated as the door shut with a little thud behind them. (434)

In this passage, Eleanor imagines the young couple as lovers, with the freedom to write their own future. Woolf describes the lady stepping out of the cab wearing a "tweed travelling suit" (434), perhaps indicating that the woman has a job outside of the home and is mimicking male business attire. Eleanor notices the woman's attire and from that moment, her stare shifts to nearby houses which "wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity, and peace (435). The passage alludes to the self that experiences masculine and feminine traits, which together, form a liberating and peaceful experience.

Androgyny is an idea that Woolf experimented with, suggesting that masculine and feminine traits is the key to experiencing happiness. The text does not show why the couple "stood for a moment on the threshold" (434). Perhaps it was an intimate moment between them, a kiss or a smile, something wonderful that leads to Eleanor's final "There!". Moreover, the unity of the split self, male and female, may be what Eleanor is celebrating. Woolf suggests, in *A Room of One's Own*, that "one has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favour of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness" (107). The harmonious fusion of male and female elements within the mind presents a type of spiritual cooperation that Woolf deemed important in order for women to write freely. In *A Room of One's Own*, there is an explicitly parallel scheme perhaps alluded to here in *The Years*, wherein a

man and a woman get into a taxi, symbolizing an ideal androgynous union. In *The Years*, two people are getting out of a cab, whereas in this moment, Woolf sees two people getting into a cab, the reversal here still signifies the union between two people, regardless of whether they are stepping inside or outside of the cab. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf continues to note that her own experience observing “the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave [her] made [her] also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body” (107).

The similarity between the scene with the narrator and Maxim in *Rebecca*, the scene of the couple in *The Years*, and from *A Room of One's Own* suggests that androgyny, knowledge of the split self, is needed to experience freedom outside of the strict boundaries of the house. Each of these scenes takes place outside. The narrator and Maxim are in a moving car when she experiences a transcendental shift in gender. Eleanor, at the end of *The Years*, is outside of her apartment, viewing another couple getting out of a cab. Similarly, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf observes the reverse, a couple getting into a taxi. The three similar examples generate a belief that a fusion of the sexes is experienced “outside” of rigid political structures. In this context, the subjects become the objects of desire, a desirability that promotes genderless boundaries. The car in these scenes becomes the gateway to experiencing this type of weightless existence, moving between two locations and never settling on one.

Woolf experiments, in many ways, with the avenues in which freedom can be experienced and the passage from *The Years* should not be read with one interpretation in mind, but to include all interpretations of how Eleanor feels liberated through her moments of self-realization. Eleanor's last reflections in the novel exemplify freedom



not only from time's constraints but also from gender. She states that "there must be another life...not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people" (427). In order to "grow out of one's self," an escape from strict gender roles implemented by a dominating political past seems necessary.

Memory, and its deployment in fiction, proves to be a way for both du Maurier and Woolf to come to terms with their childhood obsessions. The environment around them helped them create rich and detailed prose. This attention to detail helped to develop theories on how the past functions not only their novels, but also in everyday life. No matter how one approaches critical analyses of their works, du Maurier and Woolf provide too much ambiguity in their writing for one to promote an absolute claim to how they viewed the world around them. What we can hope to achieve in comparing these two iconic women writers, is to enrich the conversation about them and to see old objects in new light.

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